



## President's Report

By *Chuck Vannette*  
WMI Chapter President

This year, volunteers from our Chapter had the privilege of being part of three successful bridge building projects. These volunteers took part in various ways, including going through the lengthy National Forest Service approval process, arranging for engineering studies, ordering materials, organizing work crews, supplying muscle during the builds, and preparing delicious food for our hard-working volunteers. Members

chipped in through their dues. I extend my gratitude to all of you.

We have built a tremendous resource and have a well marked trail through beautiful areas - something amazing to offer people who want to improve their physical health, find peace in a very busy and noisy world, and just have a great time.

I urge you to get out and experience what your fellow members have built. Better yet, take a friend, a neighbor, or a social group along to explore the trail.

In establishing connections between people and the trail, you can help build a second kind of bridge that

our chapter needs. As you know, many of our members are also working on building new trail closer to major population areas. Much of this work depends on establishing partnerships with local area land owners. The bridges that you help build can foster key relationships that result in new easements needed to complete the trail in Kent and Newaygo Counties.

By sharing your experiences, friends can benefit from the trail and may even choose to become part of our mission. Your efforts will surely snowball into increased use, membership, visibility, and new trail on the ground.

## Fall Trail Maintenance: A Family Affair

By *Alayna Boomgaard*

On a chilly Fall Saturday morning, my mom Sue, my Aunt Janet, my Grandma Gladys, my Grandpa James, my sister Anaka and I woke up bright and early, ready to hike and clean up my grandparents' adopted section of the North Country Trail. Their section stretches from Pierce Rd to 11-Mile in northern Newaygo County. This day would be extra special as, in addition to maintaining the trail, we would be celebrating my Grandpa's birthday.

Maintaining the trail is an easy task. We cut back branches, move fallen trees off the trail, and basically make the path clear for anyone who would like to use it. While my grandparents are the section adopters, my family likes to help out too. I have a lot of fun hiking the trail and it's a good way to enjoy the outdoors. I also enjoy seeing the



Left to right, WMI Volunteers Anaka Boomgaard (Sister), James Hoogterp (Grandpa), Alayna Boomgaard, Janet Syrek (Aunt), and Sue Boomgaard (Mom).

PHOTO BY GLADYS HOOGTERP (GRANDMA)



## Changes in the NCT Community

By *Andy Mytys*  
Editor

Living in Southeast Michigan, the North Country Trail (NCT) is just too far from my home for a day trip. I envy those of you who are able to frequently join in on the many trail building and hike-related events that the chapter hosts.

Logistics mean that I tend to be a long-distance, multi-day user of the trail. Thus, when I think of the "NCT Community," I envision fellow long-distance hikers and resources that are available to support my hike. I look for maps that outline the trail's current route as well as the location of reliable back-country water sources, local contacts that can shuttle me from my car to the starting point of my hike, information related to food drops, and maybe tips on local highlights that I should look for while

*continued on page 4*

*continued on page 7*



## Western Michigan Chapter Chapter Mission

The Western Michigan Chapter is responsible for developing and maintaining the North Country National Scenic Trail in Kent and Newaygo counties. Its range spans from the Grand Rapids area through the southern third of the Huron-Manistee National Forest.

### Board of Directors

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**due north** is published seasonally.

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All material may be edited for content or space constraints.

Newsletter Editor  
Andy Mytys  
[andy@followtheblazes.com](mailto:andy@followtheblazes.com)

## Calendar of Events

### Sign Up If You Go

Occasionally, outings have to be canceled because of unexpected events. Outing leaders strongly urge you to sign up for all events by sending an email to, or calling, the event coordinator so that we know how many people are coming and have a list of contact information should plans change due to unforeseen circumstances.

Remember that the latest information about any event listed here can be found on our Chapter Website at [www.northcountrytrail.org/wmi](http://www.northcountrytrail.org/wmi).

### Tuesday, December 6

#### Annual Chapter Holiday Party

Come celebrate a year filled with success!

- 6:00 p.m. for drinks and gathering; 7:00 p.m. for dinner
- Membership meeting and slideshow
- Each guest will order off the event menu
- The cost will be \$15/person or less, alcohol not included

We'll meet at the Timbers Inn Restaurant:  
6555 Belding Road NE (M-44)  
Rockford, MI

RSVP: Stephanie Black, (616) 675-7237

### Saturday, February 25

#### Annual Snowshoe/X-Country Ski Outing

- Meet at the [Birch Grove Schoolhouse](#) at 10 A.M.
- Coffee and pastries provided in the morning
- Hikers need not have snowshoes to participate
- The water at the schoolhouse will still be shut off for the winter so be prepared by bringing water
- Potluck meal around 2 PM - Please bring your own table service, beverage, and a dish or two to pass

For further details, contact Stephanie Black at (616) 675-7237

Would you like to help build the future of the Western Michigan Chapter of the North Country Trail Association? Why not join our Chapter's Board of Directors? We meet once a quarter to plan what needs to get done and how we're going to accomplish our goals, both from a long-term as well as a short-term perspective.

If you have an interest in participating on our Board or would like more information, please contact Chuck Vannette at [cvann30643@aol.com](mailto:cvann30643@aol.com) or (616) 456-9725.



## A Big Year for the Chapter

By Paul Haan

WMI Trail Manager

As the autumn skies start turning toward winter and the November winds begin to blow, I've been thinking about how quickly summer went and how numerous chores around the homestead are still hanging over my head. As I think about the trail, I realize that all the loose ends at home are the sacrifice paid for a summer packed full of BIG improvements on the trail in Kent and Newaygo Counties.

In short, two exceptionally scenic new sections of trail have been added, three sizable bridges have been built, and summer maintenance went off without a hitch. One of the two new sections of trail



WMI Volunteer "Windigo" Doug Boulee knows the rules - measure twice, cut once!

PHOTO BY CINDY SZYMAS



WMI Volunteers Larry Meyer (left) and Gareth Hickson work on the decking for the south approach to the Cole Creek Bridge.

PHOTO BY CINDY SZYMAS

connects the southern end of the NCT in the Manistee National Forest to the parking area at Croton Dam. The trail crew completed this one-mile section during two weekends in late March and early April. Late fall is a great time to hike this new trail, as it has high views of the Muskegon River through the trees and a nice southern exposure to take in the sun's warming rays.

The other section of new trail gives the Western Michigan Chapter its first toehold in southern Kent County and is on property owned by Schrem's Trout Unlimited. This scenic new path follows the north shore of the Coldwater River west of Baker Road (between 100 and 108 streets), ending at Tyler Creek. For now, the mile-long path is a dead end, but the hope is to connect this work with additional new trail in the area.

Because of the beauty of the area, this too would make a nice fall walk (wear your blaze orange!). Or wait until the spring and take in the large swaths of Virginia Bluebells that grow within a Michigan Nature Association preserve on the property adjacent to the trail.

During the summer, the Chapter once again held two mowing and more weekends. With increasing efficiency, all sections in need of mowing were addressed in three days instead of the usual four, allowing us to focus upon trail hardening at Bear Creek on the last day. One highlight of the first weekend was exploring the massive clear-cut near Seven Mile Road. While typically we hate to see clear-cutting along the trail, this particular cut was done by the forest service as part of a large-scale effort to restore

*continued on page 4*

*“A Family Affair” continued from page 1*

wildlife and spending time with my family while helping clean up the trail.

We arrived at the trailhead and, getting out of the car, we noticed the leaves were already starting to turn. Walking along the Bear Creek Bridge - the first of the four bridges found along this section - one of us noticed a frenzied splashing in the creek. To our amazement, we saw a school of salmon struggling to swim up the creek. The water was far too shallow for any fish but a minnow, yet even half out of the water these salmon were still fighting to get up stream. When three bikers came up the bridge we pointed out the salmon to them and they were really interested by the scene. After the bikers moved on we noticed that some of the salmon had already died.

We still had a full day of work ahead of us so we moved on. As we walked the trail, we periodically saw deer tracks. Taking a break from maintaining the trail, we meandered off the trail for a quick lunch break before heading off again. As we reached the end of our section, we sat down for a break and noticed a mass of plump white powdered mushrooms sprouting on an old cut down tree.

The trail is very scenic in this area. I would like to invite you to visit my Grandpa and Grandma’s adopted section of the NCT. You won’t be disappointed by the experience.

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*“A Big Year” continued from page 3*

the prairies and oak savannahs that once dominated the landscape in southern Newaygo County. A few beautiful prairie openings dotted the trail near Seven Mile Road in the past, but it will be spectacular in three to five years when the new cutting re-establishes the prairie. This will be a fascinating process to watch as the ecosystem heals itself with the help of



Left to right, WMI Volunteers Anthony Boone, Tom Birdsall, and Joe Weis guide a 3,400 pound stringer to the worksite.

PHOTO BY DOUG BOULEE

expert management from the forest service.

By far the biggest highlight of 2011 has been the building of three new, large bridges. The first to be tackled was Bear Creek, just north of Pierce Road in Newaygo County. The new 32-foot bridge replaces a shorter bridge that was much lower and closer to the creek. The old bridge was nearing the end of its lifespan, and the steep banks on either side were contributing to sedimentation washing into the headwaters of Bear Creek, which is spawning ground for salmon. On the first weekend, the old bridge was dismantled and carried out of the woods. Two weeks later, two days of work built a new bridge, which was finished with some trail hardening on the fourth mowing day this past summer.

The second bridge to be built was at Rattlesnake Creek, south of M-20. This 28-foot bridge spans the creek where past beaver activity washed out a former logging road. This bridge was built during two days in late July with the help of an American Hiking Society

“Volunteer Vacations” crew. Having the old logging road leading to the work site made this an easier build, as materials could be dropped off streamside and the heavy stringers could be placed across the creek by backhoe.

The last bridge was completed on October 30, and crosses Cole Creek north of M-20. Previously, the trail crossed Cole Creek on a large, twisted route, and like Bear Creek, included steep embankments that were dumping sediment into the creek. Now the trail crosses on a scenic 34-foot bridge. Due to the length of the bridge, this project required sizeable stringers to ensure the bridge would be rock-solid. Each of the two stringers were estimated to weigh about 3,400 pounds, and needed to be moved by hand about 75 yards to the bridge site. Thankfully, Tom Birdsall, who lives across the road from the Chapter’s Birch Grove Schoolhouse, came to our assistance. Tom is a former telephone lineman and knew how to move these beastly stringers into place using rollers, cables, pulleys, and

*continued on page 6*

# Volunteering for a Chapter Woodworking Project

## Building NCT Road Crossing Posts

By John Lawton

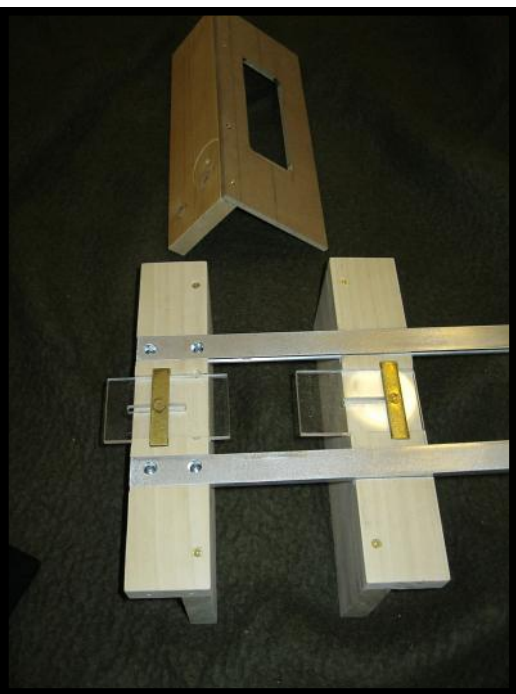
This past summer, I was contacted by our Trail Manager, Paul Haan. He asked if I had access to a CNC router for a trail-related project. Unfortunately, I didn't. I told Paul that I could probably figure out a way to get the job done using my existing tools, providing that the project wasn't overly complex. After reviewing Paul's plans for creating a series of wooden road crossing posts, I agreed to take the project on. Making the posts would be unlike anything I had worked on to date. I planned to create my own jigs in order to ensure the posts were of high quality, a task that would be both challenging and fun for me.

Using chapter funds, I purchased the materials needed and set up to make the posts in my garage. The project involved starting with fourteen 8-foot tall, pressure treated 4x4 posts, and turning them into markers that would identify both the trail and the road where each post was installed. Plans called for a decorative band and beveled (pointed) top, with a blaze and NCT shield on the street-facing side, and a blaze and street name on the opposite side. In addition, a backing had to be created that would attach to the post and serve as a place to mount an NCT shield.



WMI Volunteer John Lawton stands next to one of fourteen NCT Road Crossing Posts he made for the chapter.

PHOTO BY ANDY MYTYS



Custom jigs made by John Lawton for the NCT Road Crossing Post project. The top jig was used for routing 2" x 6" blazes into each post. The bottom jig held letter guides used to route street names along the center of each post.

PHOTO BY JOHN LAWTON

In general, the construction of the posts was not difficult. I was able to make the job easier on myself by planning out the work such that similar cuts would be made at the same time. This meant that my tools did not have to be re-adjusted multiple times. I started by routing a decorative band about three inches from the end of each post. To minimize the number of cuts, I clamped seven posts together, then clamped a straight edge to the posts, and finally made one cut across the posts. I repeated this process for each of the posts' four sides.

Next, I turned my attention to the creation of a beveled top. Using a technique similar to that used on the band, I cut a single 35 degree angle across the top of the seven posts. After doing this on each of the four sides, the beveled top was complete.

For the blazes, I made a jig (see photo) using a piece of tempered hard

board and a pine 1x4 that could be clamped to the side of the post. I also made a template for the 2" x 6" blazes that would be cut into the posts. I designed my template so that it would be centered across the width of the post when clamped down. This meant that, for consistency, I only had to worry about the vertical position of the blaze on each post.

With the template in place, I routed the blaze that hikers are familiar with into both the trail and street side of each post.

Next up was the routing of street names onto the posts. This required some thought, as I wanted to ensure crisp lettering that was centered along the width of each post, with a uniform vertical distance between each letter and number. I also wanted to make sure the name of the street began the same distance from the top of each post.

I purchased a set of letter and number guides at my local hardware store, so that I wouldn't have to free-hand the street names. I also picked up some aluminum channel that could

*continued on page 6*

*“Crossing Posts” continued from page 5*

hold the letter guides. Using some 1x4 scrap lumber, acrylic, and brass bar stock that I had in my workshop, I made a jig that would hold the letter guides (see photo). This jig allowed me to center the letters on the post, which would have been otherwise difficult as the letter guides were intended for horizontal use, and thus varied in width.

With the jig for the letter guides in place, I proceeded to route the street names onto each post, one letter at a time.

Attaching the NCT shields was next on my agenda. I needed to create a backer board that the shields could be attached to. Using one of the shields as a guide, I traced the shape of the shield onto a sheet of ½” plywood. Then, using a saber saw, I cut out the shield backer boards. I used a belt sander to quickly sand the edges of the backers. I noted that the NCT shield would only fit on the backers in one particular orientation, so I marked each of the boards to ensure that they were installed in the correct orientation. I used construction adhesive and four 2 ½” screws to attach a backer onto each post. I then sanded the back of the NCT shields to provide better adhesion, and attached the shields to the backers using construction adhesive, two ½” security screws, and two 1” security screws.

*“A Big Year” continued from page 4*

winches. Just setting the stringers took a full day, wrapping up after dark. Two weeks later, the trail crew was back for another two full days to deck the bridge, build the approaches and railing, and construct 100 yards of new approach trail.

As if this were not enough, dozens of Chapter volunteers spent hundreds of hours maintaining their sections of trail, John Lawton and Forrest Longworth (an Eagle Scout) built nearly twenty pairs of road crossing posts, Larry Meijer and Chuck Vannette spent a day cleaning up



Left to right, members of BSA Troop 345 (Ada and Cascade Townships) - Auden Rein, Patrick Donovan, Alex Christensen, Thomas Murray, Aaron Heldt, Brandon Basher, Kaj Hjelm, Zac Hoiles, and Alex Pavay pose alongside a newly installed NCT Road Crossing Post. The boys installed 14 of these posts by hand in the Lowell area, along various points where the trail crosses a road.

PHOTO BY RANDY HELDT

The last step was attaching a 6” piece of 2x4 to the bottom of each post. This would help prevent persons from easily pulling the post up from the ground, by providing additional resistance underground.

I dropped the 14 posts off in Lowell on my way to the Chapter's Fall Fun Day. They have since been installed by Boy Scout Troop 345, whose members hail from Ada and Cascade Townships.

north of Croton with their chainsaws after a windstorm blew through, and Chuck Hayden continues to lead enormous efforts in the Lowell area to talk with private land owners to get the trail built across southern Kent County.

Special thanks goes out to Sharon Schaafmeyer who on numerous occasions provided hot lunch to the hard-working trail crew. And thanks to Beth Keloneva who provided hot lunch when Sharon could not, and to Diane Chandler for supporting Sharon's efforts. I'd also like to thank Larry Meyer, Doug Boulee, and Jim Charvat,

The boys painted the blazes I routed into each post with Nelson blue boundary marking paint, a lead-free, durable, oil-based paint that's formulated for use on wood. Using manual post-hole diggers, they installed the road crossing posts at seven Lowell-area road crossings - Grindle Drive, Flat River Drive, Montcalm Ave, Covered Bridge Road, McPherson Road, Fallasburg Park Drive, and North Washington Road.

who have turned out for the majority of the workdays this year.

Additional special thanks goes out to the staff of the Baldwin District Forest Service who not only had the patience to work with a volunteer work crew, but who also lent engineering expertise, helped procure supplies, coordinated the AHS volunteers, provided prep work at the bridge sites, and worked right along side with Chapter volunteers.

Now, to get those leaves raked, the garage cleaned out, and the snow tires on the Jeep!

"Changes" continued from page 1

enjoying the trail. Current information, with respect to trail conditions and re-routes, is also appreciated.

Today's NCT community has less than one member for each of the trail's 4,600 miles, so it's not surprising that I've had to put in a little more effort in planning my hikes than those on other National Scenic Trails, such as the Appalachian Trail.

In an effort to improve the situation, I've made it a point to engage as many hikers as I can in conversations about the trail. "Do you know you're on the North Country Trail? It's the longest of the National Scenic Trails, stretching 4,600 miles from New York to North Dakota. Are you a member of the NCTA?... Wow, you're from Sparta? You should join the Western Michigan Chapter of the NCTA - it's local to you, and has more than 250 members that support the trail. They've got lots of neat projects and hikes that you can be a part of... Yeah, I've hiked to the Manistee River loop as well. What a beautiful area. Do you know that the North Country Trail is part of that hike too?"

I've been talking up the trail in this way for a long time. More often than not, I found that people knew the name of the local trail that there were on, but they didn't know that their boots were also planted on the North Country Trail.

In the past few years, however, I've noticed a change. More and more hikers not only know that they're on the NCT, but they can talk about other sections that they've hiked. They'll reminisce about getting lost in a thick and poorly maintained corner of the western UP, or about what a great time they had hiking the trail between lakes Michigan and Superior. Moreover, they've got plans to hike new sections of the trail - perhaps a hike across the UP, or one that covers the 1130+ Michigan miles. The exotic vacation they're talking about is along the NCT, not somewhere out in the Rockies, or down south.



Hiking along the NCT towards Eagle Lake, in Michigan's northern lower peninsula.

PHOTO BY ANDY MYTYS

I notice that the community is growing too. Increasingly, local chapters of the NCT have been able to support my hikes by providing shuttles, information on where I could safely park my car for a week, and even where I could get a \$3 shower after my hike. While the information might not be out on the Internet (yet), a few well-crafted e-mails to chapter leaders have really paid off.

This year, during an annual fall NCT hike that I take with a few friends, it rained. Now I'm not one to cry about the weather, as it usually gets better overnight. I also tend to be well prepared to handle whatever Mother Nature may choose to dish out. This year though, it rained for 36-hours straight, and the forecast showed no end in sight. Temperatures were not going to break 50 degrees during the day, and lows would be in the 30's. While we could have finished our hike, continuing on would have been less than fun.

We ended up spending a rainy night at the Pinney Bridge campground, along the Jordan River Valley segment of the NCT. The morning greeted us with more rain and strong gusts of wind. I met Kathy, a fellow hiker, and we got to talking. It turned out that Kathy's hiking companion, Debbie, was a

member of the NCTA as well, and that Kathy herself was from White Cloud. What a great time to interject the fact that she lives in the center of the Western Michigan Chapter's universe. We went on to talk about our respective plans for the day. Kathy and Debbie were looking for a ride to the trailhead, while we were planning on hiking to the trailhead and seeing if we could get a ride from there. Kathy suggested that we hike out together, and offered to drive us back to our car in Petoskey.

We graciously accepted her offer and, during our hike out, we continued to talk about the trail. I took the opportunity to talk about the chapter, its mission, and the great opportunities that members are presented with - meeting like-minded people, attending hikes, and the many ways that we can give back to the trail as volunteers. At the end of the day, our community had grown.

Kathy is now one of the newest additions to the Western Michigan Chapter's roster of members. I sincerely hope that she enjoys being a part of the chapter as much as I have.

Building our community... sometimes all it takes is a little walkin', and a little talkin'.

**North Country Trail Association**  
**Western Michigan Chapter**  
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U.S. POSTAGE  
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Grand Rapids, MI  
Permit No. 340



WMI Volunteers Joni Hernandez (left) and Pam Stonehouse work on the decking for the south approach to the Cole Creek Bridge.

PHOTO BY CINDY SZYMAS

**Save the Date!**

**Tuesday, December 6th**

**Join us for our annual  
holiday celebration.**

**Don't miss Larry Meyer's  
presentation on this  
year's successful chapter  
bridge building projects**

**Get a sneak preview of  
what's on the Chapter's  
agenda for 2012**

**Enjoy an evening with  
friends, old and new**

**See our "Calendar of  
Events" on Page 2 for  
additional details**