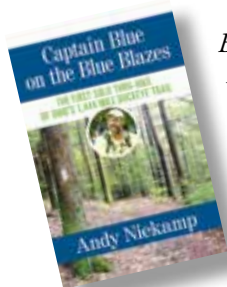


Captain Blue On The Blue Blazes by Andy Niekamp

The First Solo Thru-Hike of Ohio's 1444 Mile Buckeye Trail



Would I find the same adventure on the Buckeye Trail that a wilderness hike brings? Hiking 1444 miles around Ohio surely would be an adventure, wouldn't it? I was born in Ohio; I was raised in Ohio; I went to school in Ohio; I went to college in Ohio; I worked in Ohio, and Ohio is boring. Believe me, Ohio is not exciting. How could this be a great journey when Ohio is so boring?

Dayton's Andy Niekamp launched his 2011 hike anyway, even though, as most of our readers know, a trail that forms a complete circle of Ohio must necessarily include a lot of flat land in the north and a lot of civilization, too. But don't we also know that it utilizes numerous state parks and segments of the hilly Wayne National Forest? And readers of these pages have seen that long historic canal routes up and down each side of the state offer many miles of trail, too. I myself am a bit of a canal geek, so have enjoyed reconstructed canal locks near Napoleon on the west side of the state, and at the north end of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park on the east side and more canalside trail in the Zoar area. And anything historic pleases me; after all, it was near the Miami and Erie Canal in Defiance that Joan Young and I sampled a pork brains sandwich in an old Prohibition-era speakeasy. As Andy himself says, "The Buckeye Trail...is about discovering Ohio."

In truth there is a lot of road walking, but his journey took him up to the shore of Lake Erie in northeast Ohio and down to the Ohio River in the southwest in a giant circle from and back to Dayton. Because it was spring and early summer, he endured both cold and heat, and way more rain than he could have wanted. Some streams were at flood and he just waded across, hip deep. Apparently he started almost every day with wet boots. In fact, around Zoar and the Tuscarawas River flooding was so bad that roads and schools were closed and the trail route had to be cobbled out of safe alternatives.

The Buckeye picks up the North Country Trail near Zoar and the two stay mostly together from the middle of the east side, down across the south side of the state, and up north again to Napoleon in the northwest, about 800 miles shared. Along the east side the Trail goes through a rare 22-mile wooded stretch on American Electric Power (AEP) land, demonstrating remarkable good will after strip mining had left a devastated land with poisoned streams. AEP has restored 60,000 acres with 63 million planted trees, hundreds of campsites and ponds intended for recreation. Indeed, the company calls the area ReCreation lands.

In 2011 Captain Blue, his trail name, ran into parts of the southern route that just plain weren't well maintained, nearly whipping him by making everything extremely



Lisa Powell, Cox Media Group/Dayton Daily News

Captain Blue (Andy Niekamp) at the finish of his hike, in Dayton, Ohio.

difficult. With all the rain, chest-high soaking weeds and slimy descents made every mile sheer torture. However, our NCTA Board President, Ruth Dorrough, an end-to-ender with her husband Dan on the whole North Country Trail, cautioned me that Andy's hike was, after all, seven years ago, and that many improvements in maintenance had been made in the interim. So heed Ruth's happier assessment when you read THOSE chapters.

In late May Andy was persuaded by Andrew Bashaw, executive director of the BTA, to attend the annual meeting since he was nearby, something the author originally resisted since he had never before been involved in the organizational part of any trail despite four trips on the Appalachian Trail. Thus began Andy's eventual deep involvement in BTA affairs which is rare for a long distance hiker in my experience, and which thrilled me no end.

So hurray for Andy Niekamp for dedicating himself in a major way after his hike to ongoing Buckeye Trail projects and to the Dayton Hikers. As he says himself, "I want to contribute. I want to give back." ✨

Buy the book at BuckeyeTrailHiker.com for only \$15.

Book Review by Irene Szabo



Upper Falls at Hocking Hills State Park (two miles from Camp Oty'Okwa.)



Left: A reconstructed manually operated lock gate near the north end of Cuyahoga Valley National Park, along the Ohio and Erie Canal.

North Star SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Without your material, we cannot have a magazine, so we eagerly request your submission of pictures and text for every issue. Please send both to Irene Szabo at treeweenie@aol.com, or 6939 Creek Rd., Mt. Morris NY 14510.

Please do not embed pictures within your article, but send them separately as .jpg attachments. We will no longer accept embedded pictures. In all cases, please supply photographer's name.

Front cover photo candidates: prefer vertical format, and if digital, at least 300 dpi or greater than 3000 pixels, AND we are always looking for great cover photos! Inside pictures look much better with one dimension over 1000 pixels, too, preferably 2000.

Next deadline for Vol. 37, No. 2, is 1 April 2018.

Remember that 900 words equal approximately one page of dense text, so very few articles should exceed 1800 words in this size of magazine.

Thank you!

Your editor, Irene
(585) 658-4321



North Country Trail Association

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Photo by daughter and mother Erin Towsley

Grandpa and Mathew: Tom Walker and grandson Mathew on the NCT in the Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter territory in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This little guy was only 2-1/2 years old and walked 5 out of the 6 miles that we hiked that day. (He took a nap in the middle of the hike riding in a baby carrier on his mom's back!) He did well keeping up with the group as well!



Your Adventure Starts Nearby.

Come Visit Us!

The Lowell office is open to the public Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
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The North Country Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.

Our vision for the North Country National Scenic Trail is that of the premier footpath of national significance, offering a superb experience for hikers and backpackers in a permanently protected corridor, traversing and interpreting the richly diverse environmental, cultural, and historic features of the northern United States.