Trail Connectivity Plan Envisions a Protected Green Corridor, Improved Access to Nature

The Trail Conference is proud to partner with the Open Space Institute and the Orange County Land Trust on the Highlands West Trail Connectivity Plan, a long-term initiative to conserve open space and support accessible outdoor recreation in New York’s western Hudson Highlands region. The plan establishes a regional vision for recreation, conservation, and local economic development in a region that has seen increasing residential, commercial, and industrial development pressures.

Unveiled Feb. 22, the plan highlights a range of opportunities to permanently protect and enhance the landscape, working toward the creation of a connected, regional trail network. This green corridor will provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, protect critical wildlife habitat, and safeguard local watersheds. It strategically coordinates partners to identify, acquire, and protect parcels in eastern Orange County in a way that ensures permanently preserved routes for long-distance trails—the heart of the Trail Conference’s conservation efforts for decades. It is, in fact, the four major long-distance trails that converge in the western Hudson Highlands—the Appalachian Trail, Long Path, Highlands Trail, and Orange County Heritage Trail—that serve as the basis and inspiration for this expanded and enhanced network.

Ultimately, six state parks—from Storm King in the north to Sterling Forest in the south—would be connected through this plan. Spanning more than 93,000 acres, the area also includes Harriman, Bear Mountain, Gooseneck Mountain, and Schunnemunk state parks, as well as privately protected lands such as Black Rock Forest and Storm King Art Center.

The Highlands West Trail Connectivity Plan includes recommendations that will make access to outdoor spaces more widely available. Already, many recreational opportunities in the area exist within a one-hour drive or train ride from New York City. The plan proposes new trail connections that will link popular town centers, train stations, and bus stops to nearby state parks and protected lands.

“It’s easy to focus on building new sections of trail, but this plan demonstrates the type of big-picture thinking needed to make smaller projects into something greater than the sum of their parts,” says Peter Dolan, Trail Conference Trail Program Manager. “By connecting preserved lands and ensuring public access along them, we seek to create long-distance trails that open up brand new ways for people to connect with nature. Perhaps someday, thanks to this plan, residents of the Hudson Highlands will look at the Highlands Trail and Long Path with the same recognition and reverence that the Appalachian Trail enjoys.”

The Hudson Highlands West Trail Connectivity Plan is the product of more than two years of planning, meetings, and interviews. Stakeholders including elected officials, nonprofit organizations, and state and local agencies were consulted to develop a regional vision and identify opportunities for meaningful open space protection and trail linkages. It builds on the progress the Trail Conference has made over the last several decades preserving land from Sterling Forest east toward Storm King.

Proposed projects include new trail creation, realignment and safety improvements for existing trails; planning for new park and trail areas to help reduce crowding at more popular state parks in the area; and trailhead improvements at existing parks to better welcome and direct visitors. Information on these projects, the Trail Conference’s involvement, and ways to get involved will be posted at nynjtc.org.

Read the full Hudson Highlands West Trail Connectivity Plan at bit.ly/hwtcp.
Management of Metro Trails Transitions to NYC Partners

As the Trail Conference entered its centennial year, we reflected on the possibilities for our programs—including our involvement in the care of trails throughout the Metro (NYC) Region. New York City has been part of our history from the beginning, and ensuring that access to nature is available in the five boroughs is a priority for the Trail Conference. However, the needs and management of the Metro trails program has drastically evolved over the last century, pushing us to rework management of the region multiple times in an effort to keep the program strong. What is now best for Metro trails is to transition the program to our partners at the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC) and NYC Parks.

Since 2017, the NAC and NYC Parks have partnered as the Citywide Trails Team. This team is composed of environmental professionals who are dedicated to formalizing and improving New York City’s network of over 300 miles of nature trails. The Citywide Trails Team runs the Trail Maintainer subset of the city’s volunteer Super Steward Program, which Trail Conference maintainers already needed to complete to receive the certification required to work on NYC trails. The Super Steward program gives volunteers the independence to work on their own, lead other volunteers in projects and work trips, apply for mini-grants, network with other volunteers, and get a peak at the inner-workings of the NYC Parks system. Due to these restrictions and regulations, handing over management of Metro trails is a decision that helps to streamline the process of volunteer trail maintenance in NYC.

“The NAC has been an incredibly important partner in ensuring safe, enjoyable access to nature throughout New York City,” said Trail Conference Executive Director Joshua Howard. “While they were happy to continue an on-the-ground partnership with us, it became clear that our long-term involvement within the Metro requires greater responsibilities when he stepped down from his volunteer role.”

Unfortunately, in mid-2020, Mk had to step down from his volunteer role. Operating “with a world-class trail system in New York City,” said Elizabeth Jaeger, the NAC’s Deputy Director of Programs and Operations. “We’ll continue to support their efforts through this transition and are excited for the next evolution of our partnership in stewarding the lands of the greater New York metropolitan region.”

“The Trail Conference has always been a champion of stewarding nature in the New York-New Jersey region,” said Eliza Moore. “We’ve been thrilled to have them as a partner on the launch of trail formalization in New York City,” said Elizabeth Jaeger, the NAC’s Deputy Director of Programs and Operations. “We’ll continue to support their efforts through this transition and are excited for the next evolution of our partnership in stewarding the lands of the greater New York metropolitan region.”

The Trail Conference is already in the process of transitioning existing Metro volunteers fully over to NAC and the Super Steward Program. We will continue to collaborate with the NAC and the NYC Parks Stewardship Team on trail projects and workshops when needed. Light promotion of the program will continue on our website, and our Service Engagement Team will be directing any volunteer interest in NYC trails received by the Trail Conference over to the NAC.

For info on the Super Steward Program, visit naturalareasnyc.org/get-outside. Questions regarding the transition can be directed to our Service Engagement Team at volunteer@nynjtc.org.

Committed to the Best Care for Trails
For many years, trails in New York City had been considered part of our East Coast backyard. Now, as the area grew, the need for a dedicated donor to our challenges managing the specific needs of the Metro (NYC) Region was brought to the leadership of volunteer Mk Moore.

An Air Force veteran and retired clinical psychologist, Mk quickly demonstrated initiative and the ability to make managing both the trails of NYC and the volunteers eager to care for them. Unfortunately, in mid-2020, Mk had to step down from his volunteer responsibilities when he was called back to active duty. After his exit, it became apparent that the efficient management of Metro requires greater time and resources than the Trail Conference is able to dedicate to the region without such a strong presence in the role of Trail Chair. Given the circumstances, the Trail Conference determined that the Metro trail program is best served by a full transition to the NAC and NYC Parks. At a time when we are seeing unprecedented trail use and volunteer interest, this allows the NAC to do what they do best in the five boroughs while we ensure our other regions have the resources needed to meet demand.
**Working to Create an Inclusive Outdoors**

In January 2020, the Trail Conference Board approved the organization’s first formalized Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Policy. In June, we further acknowledged the need to make our organization more representative of the diversity of the region in which we work. A mostly white staff and volunteer leadership, we are missing the voices and experiences of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities as we attempt to accomplish our mission. Board, staff, and volunteers that resemble the faces of our region—encompassing all races, religions, genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, nationalities, and socioeconomic classes—allow us to better understand the needs of all trail users, particularly the challenges that stand in the way of safe, enjoyable access to nature. It allows us to better connect with people who are under-represented and to engage them more meaningfully in protecting the land they love.

The Trail Conference’s DEI Working Group, formed in July, is building our foundation for change, including defining organizational goals. The working group meets monthly to discuss the issues faced by various Board members, staff members, and frequent special guests. To better educate ourselves and help others understand what we are working towards, we have been putting a collection of resources at our fingertips to help us: [nynjtc.org/content/diversity-outdoors](nynjtc.org/content/diversity-outdoors).

The Trail Conference’s DEI Working Group includes a diverse group of Trail Conference staff members and our Board Chair are attending a new anti-racism training series designed and led by Yancey Consulting in partnership with the Dodge Foundation. This five-month collective journey designed to provide invaluable tools and a prioritized action plan towards our organization’s commitment to change into transformative action.

The Trail Conference has also formed an internal discussion group to create opportunities to increase awareness and build an inclusive culture.

**New more than ever, it is vital that we have healthy natural areas open and accessible for everyone to enjoy. The need for this has only become more essential for our self-preservation.**

*Howard*
Staff’s Role in a Volunteer-Powered Organization

The Trail Conference always has been, and always will be, a volunteer-powered organization. A volunteer’s time is a far more valuable commodity than volunteer work on the ground—it means volunteers in leadership roles; it means regional priorities and executing planning at the highest levels. In that case, it’s reasonable to wonder: What role do staff play in the organization? And why is it so difficult for someone to step in and cover vacant positions—after all, just because a volunteer’s responsibilities may change, other programs have to keep going. Increasingly, land trusts and other nonprofits that rely on volunteers to work in their parks find they need to step in and assume command. The more miles we cover, the more responsibilities need to be temporarily assumed by staff.

Our work as stewards of the land has expanded. Trail adoption and maintenance has always been the backbone of the Trail Conference’s work, and it continues to be our largest volunteer program. But as the nature of trail use changes, other programs have been created to address new needs. The Invasives Strike Force to address emerging threats to local ecosystems; Conservation Corps to provide a full-time workforce in response to heavy use; Trail Stewards to educate the ever-growing number of new visitors, and more. Each of these programs involves volunteers, but also requires dedicated staff management on the backend.

Modern insurance and liability practices place new burdens on the Trail Conference. All of these require regular reviews, renewals, and the negotiation of contracts with insurance providers. While staff members are never intended to replace volunteer roles, they do step in and cover vacant positions—after all, just because a volunteer’s responsibilities may change, other programs have to keep going. Increasingly, land trusts and other nonprofits that rely on volunteers to work in their parks find they need to step in and assume command.

The organization’s decisions and priorities are informed by the feedback received from our volunteers. In November 2020, we solicited feedback from our more than 2,000 volunteers. This input is critical to our programs’ health, and our volunteers’ responses inform the next year’s priorities and decisions. The organization solicits feedback from our volunteers through the latest Annual Volunteer Satisfaction Survey. For the full report, visit bit.ly/2tc26Survey.

Overall Satisfaction and Volunteer Program Progress in 2020

Overall volunteer satisfaction continued to be high at 96% in 2020. Dissatisfaction increased slightly (4% in 2020 vs. 2% in 2019) but respondents who were “very satisfied” increased by 9% in 2020 (77%) compared to 2019 (68%). Despite the pandemic, 38% of respondents perceived that the volunteer program improved in the last year. Additionally, those satisfied with staff support were increasingly “very satisfied” (73%) compared to 2019 (66%) and 2018 (63%). Overall satisfaction with staff support continued to be high at 93%. Volunteers specifically commented that they felt increased support in 2020. One of our biggest successes this year was our Digital Engagement Initiative. 96% of respondents who attended webinars found them to be useful and 94% want us to continue offering webinars.

Of those respondents who attended group events under our COVID-19 protocols, the vast majority (97%) felt comfortable. More volunteers “strongly agreed” that the Trail Conference widely articulates applicable policies and procedures in 2020 (59%) compared to 2018 and 19 (44%). Overall satisfaction was high at 90%.

Areas for Improvement Identified

Volunteer training and skills building is an area we will continue improving. 94% of those who attended a workshop reported the program continue and have online learning built out. Additionally, many volunteers continue to request more opportunities for growth and learning. We are evaluating how to refine digital learning and our catalogue of in-person workshop opportunities.

Many volunteers noted they feel connected because they don’t have a volunteer leader for their region or their current leader is not communicative. Recruitment to fill vacant leadership positions will be a key priority in 2021. We hope this will improve not only the disconnect felt by those with no leader, but also that these open positions will provide the growth opportunities so many are looking for. In addition to recruitment, we will also improve the onboarding and training of leaders, as this is not a sufficiently structured and streamlined process. A more robust volunteer onboarding process will set new leaders up for success and ensure they all know about the key features of the role, such as proactively and openly communicating with their team members.

Feelings of appreciation from the Trail Conference organization as a whole increased by 10.6% from 2019 (42%) to 2020 (53%), however this percentage needs to continue to grow so that all volunteers know just how much we value them. In response to 2019 survey recommendations, we had planned more social events and appreciation initiatives in 2020; however, due to the pandemic, we were unable to implement these events like we had planned. If conditions improve in 2021, we will be able to more safely gather in larger groups, we will revisit those plans. In lieu of in-person events, we will continue to find digital ways to convey our gratitude.

The Trail Conference staff provide the support that allows our volunteers to accomplish so much good work.

TRAIL WALKER • NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE 4 | Spring 2021 nynjtc.org
Bergen County Greenspace Permanently Protected

The Trail Conference is celebrating another conservation win in Bergen County, N.J., thanks to the efforts of our partners at The Land Conservancy of New Jersey (TLC). In February, TLC announced the purchase of 40 acres of undeveloped land in Mahwah from the New Jersey Department of Transportation. This key parcel—an important wildlife habitat and watershed—buffers 13,000 acres of county and state parkland that comprises the largest area of undeveloped land in Bergen County.

The Land Conservancy is thrilled to permanently preserve this remarkable property, one of the largest unprotected properties remaining in Bergen County, and add it to our Ramapo Mountain Preserve,” said David Epstein, President of The Land Conservancy. “We thank each of our wonderful partners whose patience and persistence helped make this critical preservation project possible.”

The deal was five years in the making, with assistance from the Trail Conference, NJ Audubon Society, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and committed donors. Purchased by NJDOT in 1991, the land was unused and leftover from construction of Route 287. In 2017, TLC sought to have the parcel deeded surplus and put up for public auction—a bureaucratic process that took two years. Additionally, TLC requested the clean-up of a half-acre section that had been used as a dumping ground for bulk trash. The week-long clean-up process, performed by NJDOT contractors and overseen by TLC, resulted in the removal of six dumpsters full of debris, as well as six old cars and 622 tires! Now, the entire tract is clean and green in perpetuity. TLC, funded in part by Green Acres and the Bergen County Open Space Trust Fund for this project, was the highest bidder at the auction in September 2019. Open space advocate, N.J. Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi, helped see the transaction to completion.

Precious wildlife habitats and scenic views will remain undisturbed thanks to the permanent preservation of this property. Much of the land is rugged terrain and difficult for visitors to navigate, though their recreation potential is being assessed—including a trail connecting Ramapo Mountain Preserve to New York State, through the village of Hillburn, into Harriman State Park. “The Trail Conference’s vision for land conservation has always been with the big picture in mind—ultimately, for the creation of green corridors that promote healthy eco-systems and sustainable recreation,” said Trail Conference Executive Director Joshua Howard. “When natural areas thrive, our connection with the land is that much more enjoyable. We are grateful to all our committed donors and valued partners like The Land Conservancy on making these acquisitions such as this one not only provides a safe haven for wildlife, it also opens up the possibilities for trail connectivity. And better access to trails improves the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.”

Volunteer COVID-19 Protocol Updates

Ask any outdoorperson, and they will probably tell you of a place they visited as a child that inspired their love of nature. We recall walking through meadows of wildflowers, climbing into towering tree canopies, or admiring a breathtaking view on a mountain peak. But for so many of us, the story becomes a lament about how these natural spaces are no longer what they once were. Too often, they are now degraded or overrun by invasive species.

One of the fond memories I had as a child, and now as a father, is packing GORP, a sandwich, and some water and enjoying a picnic with my family. Many of our volunteers have shared that learning how to identify and appreciate the details of the plants and animals they see along the trails has completely transformed the outdoor experience for them. It truly brings the respect and gratitude for our natural areas to a whole new level. Perhaps some of your favorite nature moments involved swimming in a pristine lake on a hot summer day. Now that lake, which was once so clear you could see straight to the bottom, is entirely covered in floating mats of water chestnut. The Aquatic Invasive Strike Force (AISF) spends their summer working to bring back to us what so many of us have lost: refreshing places to go for a dip, increased accessibility in lakes and rivers, and healthier habitats for our native fish and wildlife. You too can join the AISF Crew on a water chestnut removal day in July; leaving these treasured habitats in much better shape than you found them.

If you prefer to stay on land, but still want to get your hands dirty, the Invasives Strike Force and work trips starting this spring will also have a program to detect SLF swarm activity. Selected properties in northern New Jersey and the Lower Hudson Valley. Our Habitat Helpers volunteer crew takes caring for our environment one step further by growing, planting, and maintaining native habitats. Be on the lookout for volunteer opportunities in the coming months!

Spending just one day volunteering with us, and you can see what a difference a pair of hands and a positive attitude can make in restoring balance in our vital natural habitats. Interested in any of the above opportunities? Please contact us at invasives@nynjtc.org to learn more.

BRENT BOSCARINO BOSCARINO SERIES OFTEN SCIENCE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Walkill Puncheon Restoration Project Completes on Appalachian Trail in New Jersey

The West Jersey Trail Crew replaced 107 deteriorated planks identified as in need of replace-ment along the 1,600-foot-long walkway on the Appa-lachian Trail between Lake Wallkill and the Wallkill Wildlife Refuge near Vernon, N.J. Approximately 200 volunteers (the foundation on which the tread planks rest) were also replaced using sections of donat-ed utility poles.

While this highly technical or complex project, this extensive work has added many years of additional life to this important trail stretch, directly adjacent to the section of Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge slated for a new bridge and boardwalk some time in the years to come, pending final engineering and approvals. This Appalachian Trail project has been made possible by a grant from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) through funding from L.L. Bean. Without the support of L.L. Bean and their belief in this important work would not have been possible.

STEVE AARON

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The Trail Conference community faced the challenges of 2020 with determination and resilience. They provided inspiration and hope during a time when we desperately needed it. When parks and trails began to face record-high use with millions of people seeking respite outdoors, our volunteers, service members, and partners rose to the occasion—graciously, patiently working under the closures and restrictions that were put in place to keep everyone safe. We are humbled by such indomitable spirit.

2021 TRAIL CONFERENCE AWARDS

CELEBRATING OUR VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS

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The 2021 Trail Conference Awards honor those who have gone above and beyond. Without their incredible commitment to protecting trails and natural areas, issues such as blowdowns, unintended erosion, and the encroachment of invasive species would cut off the public’s ability to safely and enjoyably experience all the outdoors has to offer. We can play outside because they work so hard to provide that access for everyone.

During the virtual event, we recognized a number of outstanding individuals that exemplify the Trail Conference mission. It is with honor that we thank our volunteers and heroes. Congratulations to all honorees—and thank you!

THE MAJOR WILLIAM A. WELCH AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING PARTNER

Honors partners who have been strong advocates for and provided significant assistance to Trail Conference volunteers.

Rebecca Fitzgerald
Superintendent, High Point State Park & New Jersey Veterans Memorial State Forest (temporary)

Rebecca has been a strong Trail Conference partner since 1999. About six years ago, she encouraged Trail Conference volunteers to get involved with Lusscroft Farm, a subset within High Point State Park. In 2019, she and High Point Maintenance Supervisor Chris White (below), supported volunteers in reblazing the trails there. Rebecca helped write a National Recreational Trail Grant that provided funds for the blaze materials, as well as materials to repair several bridges. Rebecca is consistently and enthusiastically going out of her way to support the volunteers by pushing through approvals for projects, facilitating procurement and placement of bollards at trailheads, and providing indoor space for Trail Conference workshops (pre-COVID). Rebecca, Chris, and our entire crew work to ensure our volunteers do our possible.

Christopher White
Maintenance Supervisor, High Point State Park

Chris regularly goes above and beyond to support Trail Conference volunteers. In 2019, Chris and his staff made 1,500 trail blazes so that volunteers could reblaze all 13 trails of Lusscroft Farm. Chris’ gratitude to the volunteers is central to all his interactions with them. In partnership with Rebecca Fitzgerald (above), he and staff have constructed fence materials, made and installed bollards, removed significant blowdowns, and made repairs to the floating boardwalk on the Cedar Swamp Trail.

Nora Porter
Graphic Designer

Nora has designed Trail Conference books since 1998. She is very skilled, does excellent work, and is dedicated to the organization. While Nora is contracted to do work, she volunteers additional time to “go the extra mile” and help the Trail Conference with questions and requests that she simply enjoys. Nora has also been a pleasure to work with; our books wouldn’t be the same without her.

Steve Marino
Maintenance Supervisor, Wawayanda State Park

For over 20 years and across three parks, Steve has been a strong supporter of Trail Conference volunteers, particularly the West Jersey Crews’ efforts. Together with each park superintendent, he has made countless projects possible for the crew. In his current position at Wawayanda State Park and as a member of the group, Steve has passed his passion and expertise of the area to the crew.

The Dedicated Service Award honors long-time, dedicated volunteers who have demonstrated exemplary service to the trails and natural areas that surround them.

Herb Chong
Publications Committee Member

Over the past 25 years, Herb has supported his skill on projects ranging from trail construction to advocacy to cartography and guide book production. In addition to helping with our efforts to embrace newly developed GPS technology in the late ’90s, Herb oversaw the Trail Conference’s first digitally produced map in 2000, which covered the Northern Appalachian Trail. Herb has provided significant assistance to our volunteers in reblazing the trails and our volunteers do possible.

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is now known as Granite Knolls Park. By 2014, he had added another 4 miles of trail. Moreover, Tom helped set the stage for cooperation between mountain bikers and the park. Today, Tom continues to maintain 3.7 miles of trails in the park. He also volunteers with the Yorktown Trail Crew and removes blowdowns.

Peter Tilgner  
Trail Maintainer: Tenafly Nature Center  
Peter has single-handedly maintained the 7-mile trail system since 2005, which includes the Tenafly Nature Center for workdays in fall 2020, Sterling Forest, and additional 12 miles of trails in Schunemunk State Forest. Peter also recruits and trains other volunteers to maintain the trails at Tenafly and has worked with multiple Eagle Scouts to assist with the construction of bridges and boardwalks to preserve wetland habitats along trails.

Susana Van Niekerk  
Trail Maintainer: Stokes State Forest, Schunemunk State Forest, Sterling Forest, Club Trails Chair: Inter-State Hiking Club  
Susana has reliably maintained the Tinsley and Geology trails in Stokes State Forest for over 10 years, an assignment totaling 3 miles. Since 2016, she holds the position of club trails chair for the Inter-State Hiking Club and has enthusiastically led the maintenance of an additional 12 miles of trails in Sterling Forest and Schunemunk state parks since 2016. Susana’s passion and commitment to detail make her an outstanding asset to trails she supports.

THE NEXT GENERATION AWARD  
Honors volunteers under 25 years of age who have enthusiastically and passionately made a difference for hikers in the Trail Conference’s mission.

Maxwell and Nathalie Chow  
Invasive Strike Force Surveyors, Trail Maintainers; Ringwood State Park, Trail Crew Volunteers  
Max (16) and Nathalie (14) are two of the many who make time to volunteer because they have a deep connection to the environment. In fall 2019, they joined our Conservation Corps for workdays in Sterling Forest. When COVID-19 created a canceled 2020, they had a desire to take on long-term volunteer roles and became trail maintainers in Ringwood State Park.

forward to Max and Nathalie continuing to grow in their volunteer responsibilities.

THE PAUL LEIKEN AWARD FOR GOING THE EXTRA MILE  
Honors volunteers who have recently “gone the extra mile” and made a significant, noteworthy contribution in the last 12 to 18 months.

Carole Baighi  
Habitat Helpers Crew; Invasives Strike Force Surveyor; Appalachian Trail Natural Heritage Monitor  
Carole has devoted more than 100 hours per year as an ongoing volunteer for our Habitat伊orktown Trail Crew for the last couple years. With increasing activities limited due to the pandemic, our Habitat Helpers were unable to access the gardens for months. Once we were able to reinitiate limited work days, Carole has gone above and beyond participating in every work day. She was often the first to arrive and last to leave, working tirelessly to manage the garden. In addition to Carole’s involvement with Habitat Helpers, she is also an Invasives Strike Force surveyor and Appalachian Trail natural heritage monitor.

Don Cohen  
Trail Maintainer: Neversink Gorge, Minnewaska, Catskills; Club Trails Crew Member: Hudson Nor’Westers; Sawyer  
Don has devoted over 10 years of volunteering since he started volunteering. When he adopted a trail at the Neversink Gorge in Upper Minnewaska in 2017, he took on a particularly overgrown section and restored it. He regularly attends work trips at the Gorge, and his natural leadership has helped make these trips run smoothly. As a sawyer, he has cleared many blowdowns in the park, and after one storm, he responded to 35 blowdowns. In 2019, Don took up the charge of and beyond in his sawyer work. Despite the numerous storms that battered our area, including Tropical Storm Isaias, Don was always ready to grab his chainsaw and a sawmill of two to hit the trail. Alex devoted 296 hours to clear 240 blowdowns from July to December. Alex was also a key volunteer in the major loop blaze projects of 2020, which yielded five new trial loops in the Ramapo Mountains.

David Miller  
Trail Maintainer: Long Path, Sawyier  
Since David started as a trail maintainer in the Long Path in 2018, he has gone the extra mile, logging a minimum of 150 hours to his credit. He also coordinated work crews for the trip, including the following: clearing blowdowns prior to each work trip. Since David remained active for a long-time trail maintainer of the Tuxedo Mount Ivy Trail in Harriman State Park.

Jim Simpson  
Publications Volunteer: Editor  
Jim spent his time, creativity, and talent to serve as editor for the third edition of Walkable: Terrace Pond. For the third edition, authors Jane and Walt Daniels were faced with the challenge of having limited space to add new things to the book. Jim’s crew was instrumental in meeting the book’s length requirement. Jim researched, proofread, and wrote up pieces for the book. His background as a New York Times photojournalist resulted in photo captions that catch your attention. Jim’s ability to give tactful advice on wording and layout was a tremendous help in producing the new edition of the book.

Eileen West  
Invasive Strike Force Crew Member, Volunteer: Field Checker  
Eileen contributed in many ways to the production of the second and third editions of Walkable: Terrace Pond. For both editions, she checked trails and helped to ensure the new books would be accurate and up-to-date. For the second edition, she checked more than half of the locations (even after breaking her wrist)!. For the third edition, she devoted 172 hours to making site visits. Eileen also volunteered to coordinate PDFs to Word documents and proofread the final copy. Eileen’s willingness to work extra hours and her ability to collect reliable information made her an asset to the Trail Conference’s latest publication.

Loop Blazing Volunteers  
Alan Abramowitz, Alec Malyon, Chris Connolly, Hank Hafelfinger, John Moran, Keith Scherer, Malcolm Spector, Nick McKenna, Patricia Page, Richard Fuge, Wendy Durning, David Day, Dan Mott, Greg Bernet, James}

is now known as Granite Knolls Park. By 2014, he had added another 4 miles of trail. Moreover, Tom helped set the stage for cooperation between mountain bikers and the park. Today, Tom continues to maintain 3.7 miles of trails in the park. He also volunteers with the Yorktown Trail Crew and removes blowdowns.

Peter Tilgner  
Trail Maintainer: Tenafly Nature Center  
Peter has single-handedly maintained the 7-mile trail system since 2005, which includes the Tenafly Nature Center for workdays in fall 2020, Sterling Forest, and additional 12 miles of trails in Schunemunk State Forest. Peter also recruits and trains other volunteers to maintain the trails at Tenafly and has worked with multiple Eagle Scouts to assist with the construction of bridges and boardwalks to preserve wetland habitats along trails.

Susana Van Niekerk  
Trail Maintainer: Stokes State Forest, Schunemunk State Forest, Sterling Forest, Club Trails Chair: Inter-State Hiking Club  
Susana has reliably maintained the Tinsley and Geology trails in Stokes State Forest for over 10 years, an assignment totaling 3 miles. Since 2016, she holds the position of club trails chair for the Inter-State Hiking Club and has enthusiastically led the maintenance of an additional 12 miles of trails in Sterling Forest and Schunemunk state parks since 2016. Susana’s passion and commitment to detail make her an outstanding asset to trails she supports.

THE NEXT GENERATION AWARD  
Honors volunteers under 25 years of age who have enthusiastically and passionately made a difference for hikers in the Trail Conference’s mission.

Maxwell and Nathalie Chow  
Invasive Strike Force Surveyors, Trail Maintainers; Ringwood State Park, Trail Crew Volunteers  
Max (16) and Nathalie (14) are two of the many who make time to volunteer because they have a deep connection to the environment. In fall 2019, they joined our Conservation Corps for workdays in Sterling Forest. When COVID-19 created a canceled 2020, they had a desire to take on long-term volunteer roles and became trail maintainers in Ringwood State Park. We look forward to Max and Nathalie continuing to grow in their volunteer responsibilities.

THE PAUL LEIKEN AWARD FOR GOING THE EXTRA MILE  
Honors volunteers who have recently “gone the extra mile” and made a significant, noteworthy contribution in the last 12 to 18 months.

Carole Baighi  
Habitat Helpers Crew; Invasives Strike Force Surveyor; Appalachian Trail Natural Heritage Monitor  
Carole has devoted more than 100 hours per year as an ongoing volunteer for our Habitat伊orktown Trail Crew for the last couple years. With increasing activities limited due to the pandemic, our Habitat Helpers were unable to access the gardens for months. Once we were able to reinitiate limited work days, Carole has gone above and beyond participating in every work day. She was often the first to arrive and last to leave, working tirelessly to manage the garden. In addition to Carole’s involvement with Habitat Helpers, she is also an Invasives Strike Force surveyor and Appalachian Trail natural heritage monitor.

Don Cohen  
Trail Maintainer: Neversink Gorge, Minnewaska, Catskills; Club Trails Crew Member: Hudson Nor’Westers; Sawyer  
Don has devoted over 10 years of volunteering since he started volunteering. When he adopted a trail at the Neversink Gorge in Upper Minnewaska in 2017, he took on a particularly overgrown section and restored it. He regularly attends work trips at the Gorge, and his natural leadership has helped make these trips run smoothly. As a sawyer, he has cleared many blowdowns in the park, and after one storm, he responded to 35 blowdowns. In 2019, Don took up the charge of and beyond in his sawyer work. Despite the numerous storms that battered our area, including Tropical Storm Isaias, Don was always ready to grab his chainsaw and a sawmill of two to hit the trail. Alex devoted 296 hours to clear 240 blowdowns from July to December. Alex was also a key volunteer in the major loop blaze projects of 2020, which yielded five new trial loops in the Ramapo Mountains.

David Miller  
Trail Maintainer: Long Path, Sawyier  
Since David started as a trail maintainer in the Long Path in 2018, he has gone the extra mile, logging a minimum of 150 hours to his credit. He also coordinated work crews for the trip, including the following: clearing blowdowns prior to each work trip. Since David remained active for a long-time trail maintainer of the Tuxedo Mount Ivy Trail in Harriman State Park.

Jim Simpson  
Publications Volunteer: Editor  
Jim spent his time, creativity, and talent to serve as editor for the third edition of Walkable: Terrace Pond. For the third edition, authors Jane and Walt Daniels were faced with the challenge of having limited space to add new things to the book. Jim’s crew was instrumental in meeting the book’s length requirement. Jim researched, proofread, and wrote up pieces for the book. His background as a New York Times photojournalist resulted in photo captions that catch your attention. Jim’s ability to give tactful advice on wording and layout was a tremendous help in producing the new edition of the book.

Eileen West  
Invasive Strike Force Crew Member, Volunteer: Field Checker  
Eileen contributed in many ways to the production of the second and third editions of Walkable: Terrace Pond. For both editions, she checked trails and helped to ensure the new books would be accurate and up-to-date. For the second edition, she checked more than half of the locations (even after breaking her wrist)!. For the third edition, she devoted 172 hours to making site visits. Eileen also volunteered to coordinate PDFs to Word documents and proofread the final copy. Eileen’s willingness to work extra hours and her ability to collect reliable information made her an asset to the Trail Conference’s latest publication.

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our loop blazing volunteers set out with their paint brushes and hammers. They devoted over 500 hours through the pandemic and heat of the summer, blazing over 26 miles of trail to create these exciting new loops.

**THE HIT THE GROUND RUNNING AWARD**

Honors volunteers who have "hit the ground running" and made a strong impact within their first two years of service.

- **David Andrews**
  Ashokan Rail Trail Stewart
  David has been the Ashokan Rail Trail Stewart program in October 2019. He immediately began going above and beyond the call of duty. While working with staff to create a tracking and reporting process for obstructions, when there’s a trail issue, David proactively alerts others; for situations he can handle, like a downed tree or a turtle safely cross the trail, he’s on it immediately. David is fantastic at engaging and educating users to bike responsibly. In all, David’s commitment and passion for his volunteer role can put a smile on anyone’s face.

- **Stephen Howard**
  Welch Trail Education Center Volunteer
  Stephen was first introduced to the Welch Trail Education Center in September 2019. He quickly became passionate about it. On his first visit, he fixed a broken water heater and identified a list of projects to be done. Since then, he has restored 19 windows at his home shop and built and installed four custom fitted windows that could not be restored. He also built four new exterior doors and replaced custom fitted siding. His love for history and preservation of open spaces to create educational/training opportunities for organizations, parks and preserves. Stephen has served as a trail maintainer in New Jersey and was an early advocate for and dedicated supporter of the Welch Trail Education Center.

**THE RISING LEADER AWARD**

Honors volunteers who have taken on additional responsibilities with great enthusiasm over the last two years and demonstrate a commitment to the Trail. It is given to those who selflessly keep dedicating more time and energy to the Trail.

- **Robert Remillard**
  Trail Maintainer: Black Rock Forest
  Robert has been a trail maintainer at Black Rock Forest since 2019. He is always available, and he has been a strong advocate for trail maintenance and protection of our natural world.

**THE JAKOB FRANKE AWARD FOR CONSERVATION**

Honors volunteers who have advocated for and dedicated significant time and effort to land preservation and trail protection in the face of encroaching development, and who embody our value that conservation is a shared duty and that we must preserve the integrity of our natural world.

- **Clarence Putman**
  Chair of the Board and Founding Member: Long Path North Hiking Club; Trail Maintainer: Long Path
  Clarence has a passion for the Long Path and has dedicated over 10,000 volunteer hours to the project. He has helped to keep the Long Path clean and beautiful, tripping hazards, and removed countless hours to build, improve, protect, and maintain trails over 50 miles of the trail. Clarence’s efforts are an example of what the Long Path Club and the Catskills have been doing for decades to maintain this 206-mile trail.

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The Trail Conference's ability to carry out our mission is made possible through generous support from hundreds of individuals and foundations—outdoor lovers like you who care for the environment.

In an effort to reduce our paper impacts, our full supporter list will begin appearing in the annual edition of the Winter Trail Walker. Donations of $100 or more made in honor of or in memory of friends and family will continue to appear in each quarterly Trail Walker. Thank you for your generosity and passion for trails and natural areas—thanks for your support of the Trail Conference!

TRIBUTES
November 1, 2020 - January 31, 2021

In honor of Jonathan D Board
Sarah-Jane Corke

In honor of Tina Benrekka
Mel Minos

In honor of Robert Bonskowski
Ryan Murzick

In honor of Su-Yi O'Chong
Dr. Fang-Chun Chang

In honor of Brian Collins
Patricia Mazzone

In honor of Matt and Jane Danico
Frederick Gorty
Gary Haugland

In honor of Jakob Franke
Robert Segal

In honor of Nicole Heron

In honor of Kenneth H Malkin

In honor of Linda Malkin
Katja Mayer

In honor of David Miller
Kim Wither

In honor of Mishka Mullen
Daniel Muller

In honor of New Jersey Forty
Pike Elyony Club

In honor of Dana Dussapar

In honor of Glenn W Oleskak
Marius Mostovoy

In honor of Sarah Parmanlund
David Michielti

In honor of Joel Pantotty
Jane Busillo

In honor of Kenneth A Posner

In honor of Brian Reilly
Kasia Andel

In honor of Rebecca Schaffer
Brian Fanning

In honor of Donald L. Weise
Audrey Roca

In memory of Patrick Yuzawa-Rubin

In memory of John J Giuffrida

Peter Hecker

In memory of John and Mary Gallo
Audrey Curwin

Melissa Curwin

In memory of Bill Hecker

Peter Hecker

In memory of Chris Herrmann
Peter Herrmann

In memory of Jan G Leob

Robert Ambaras

In memory of Tim O'Keilly
Sonia Keating

In memory of Michael Joseph Puci

Nabila Latabe

In memory of David Woukle
Naula Gregston-Woolf

In memory of George Zvezda
Pat Yuzawa-Rubin

The Trail Conference's website will begin appearing at the top of each page to appear in each quarterly Trail Walker. Thank you for your support of the Trail Conference!
Two Trails, 113 Acres Permanently Protected Along Shawangunk Ridge

The Trail Conference recently acquired 113 acres of forested land in New York’s Shawangunk Ridge in Orange County. This property connects Gobbler’s Knob State Forest with the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area and allows us to move another section of the coaligned Long Path and Shawangunk Ridge Trail (SRT) off the road, away from homes and into the woods. Additionally, this parcel extends an already protected trail corridor to a length of 20 miles, permanently protecting both trails. The next step is to completely move the trail onto the protected land.

The SRT was built in 1992 and 1993. At that time, the trail crossed land of 30 different private properties between High Point State Park in Sussex County, New Jersey and Bear Hill Nature Preserve in Cragsmoor, N.Y., where it ended at the Long Path. Today, there are only a handful of landowner agreements, all south of Otisville, N.Y., that preserve the land. Taking advantage of these conservation successes, in the past 60 years, many volunteers, staff, landowners, and partners have been involved in the protection and preservation of this beloved, aqua-blazed trail. Thanks to these efforts, the Long Path has seen continued improvements.

In the past 30 years, the Trail Conference has worked tirelessly to preserve land to permanently protect the Long Path. Numerous partner organizations have helped with these efforts. There are now long stretches of Long Path trail corridor that are protected, but there is still a lot of work to do to preserve the entire trail and eliminate the road walks.

In 1989, the Trail Conference and its Long Path Committee urged Rockland County to designate the Long Path on the county map as a park. The county obliged, and long strides have been made since that time in similarly ensuring its protection as not only a trail, but also a green corridor. Today, the official Long Path stretches from New York City to John Boyd Thacher State Park in Albany County—all though there are two areas with long road walks. There is a 13.25-mile road walk in Orange County and a 12.3-mile road walk in Ulster County. This past year was happy to announce we currently have plans to address both.

In Orange County, the City of Middletown recently opened hiking trails in its reservoir watershed. Both the County of Orange and the City of Middletown are working to extend the Orange County Heritage Trail, a multi-use rail trail, and connect it with the watershed trails. The Long Path currently follows the Heritage Trail to New Hempstead. That is where the 13.25-mile road walk begins; it ends at the Shawangunk Ridge. We now envision continuing the Long Path on the Heritage Trail extension when it is completed. From that point we hope to route the trail through the reservoir trail system and then through Orange County’s Indigot watershed land, which will leave the trail about 1 mile from the Graham Mountain State Forest along the Shawangunk Ridge. Our next step is to get approvals from six different departments within three different government agencies.

In Ulster County, the Long Path reroute through the Verookkill State Forest and Sundown Wild Forest was recently approved. Trail construction will begin in 2021, led by Trail Conference friends Tahawus Trails. The Long Path through Schoharie, Albany, and Schenectady counties.

You can be a part of this conservation legacy by donating to the Trail Conference. Help protect the land you love today! To support the Land Acquisition and Stewardship Fund directly, write “LASF” in the special instructions box at nynjtc.org/donate or email Don Weise, Director of Donor Advising, for more information.

Keeping the Long Path Stitched Together

Since 1960, the Trail Conference has worked tirelessly to maintain, protect, and complete the Long Path. Over the past 60 years, many volunteers, staff, landowners, and partners have been involved in the protection of around 4,900 acres total along the Shawangunk Ridge. As a result of more than 20 years of conservation efforts, five new state forests have been created. Additionally, one state park and one wildlife management area are has been enhanced. We would not have been able to do this without the partnership of the Open Space Institute and the Orange County Land Trust.

Special thanks to Robert C. Ross for donating his legal services, expertise, and closing costs to making this land acquisition possible. Thank you to Run Wild, Inc. for raising funds for this conservation project. Thanks also to the Long Path North Hiking Club, which cares for the entirety of the Long Path through Schoharie, Albany, and Schenectady counties.

The Trail Conference recently acquired roughly 3,900 acres along the Shawangunk Ridge, where the Long Path and SRT coalign.

On-the-Ground Improvements

Long Path improvement projects in 2020 included:

1. Removal of more than 300 blowdowns by the Long Path Trail Crew, with assistance from the Long Distance Trails Crew. Work on the technical Upper Nyack Trail relocation at Hook Mountain by the Long Distance Trails Crew. This project provides a durable and scenic new route for the Long Path.

The Long Path offers a certificate and an end-to-end patch ‘rocker’ to anyone who hikes the entire length of the Long Path. The trip can be completed in one continuous trip or in a number of hikes over many years. The following people became end-to-enders in 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congratulations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jeff “Timman” Sargent finished on 7/4/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Walsh finished on 11/11/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenton Matthaef finished on 12/05/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark Rygiewicz finished on 9/20/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Ibbi finished on 11/11/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heather M. Post Ibbi finished on 11/11/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna Quell finished on 11/27/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeff Quell finished on 11/27/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob Taylor finished on 12/05/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jill Moretti finished on 12/05/2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylee Yang finished on 01/03/2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Contact Don Weise, Director of Donor Advising, for more information.
What You Need to Know About Mud Season

You’re familiar with spring, summer, fall, and winter. But do you know about mud season?

Mud season, a former Goulburn season at winter’s end (late March in our region) through mid-April (May) when trails are vulnerable to erosion and displacement due to a influx of water from snow melt and fluctuating temperatures. This is a sensitive time for trails, soil, and vegetation, especially at higher elevations in the Catskills. As responsible hikers and bikers, we should make sure to follow best practices to protect the land we love.

When should I visit the trails?

Remember to “walk or ride the freeze” and “skip the thaw.” That means you should aim to explore trails on colder days when the trail tread is frozen and skip the warmer days when the ground is thawing.

Why is this so important? The freeze-thaw cycle. On warmer spring days, snow melts and creates puddles. At night when the temperature drops, that saturated ground freezes. The water in the soil expands when it freezes, expanding the compacted tread soil. The sun warms up this expanded soil and creates mud. Muddy trails are vulnerable to being washed away, which can damage the durable trail surface. Be particularly mindful of your potential impact when temperatures are between roughly 30-40 degrees this time of year.

Understanding the freeze-thaw cycle and planning your trip accordingly is the easiest way to protect your adventure to prevent the spread of invasive species.

How should I prepare?

We can best be prepared with two things: gear and knowledge. Plan ahead, pick a trail based on the conditions, and prepare with gear to make it easier to adventure during mud season. You’ll be more comfortable while also being mindful of our impact during this sensitive time of year.

Waterproof Boots

If you come across mud on the trail, stay on the trail and test out those waterproof boots! A good pair of waterproof boots will keep your feet dry and ready for whatever conditions you encounter. Wear microspikes or crampons when going trails during mud season. If you do want to venture outdoors when it’s warmer—and muddier—the best choice is a trail with a hard-surface tread, like a carriage road or rail trail. Luckily, there are plenty of those throughout our region!

Picking Your Line of Travel

Stick to the trail + utilize trail features

Sometimes our instinct is to avoid the mud and travel either off the trail or on the edge of the trail. The muddy trail tread will recover better than the fragile vegetation stepped on off-trail, so be sure to travel through the middle of the trail. That vegetation serves as vital ground cover: preventing erosion and providing food and habitat sources for wildlife.

Walking on the edge of the trail can also encourage trail widening, which over years can cause trails to be 15-plus feet wide! Utilize trail features such as stepping stones and boards/punches. A little rock-hopping, anyone?

Getting to know about mud

As pre-announced in the previous Trail Walker, two new publications arrived over the winter and we are excited to get them into the hands of trail users!

The third edition of Walkable Westchester is completely revised and improved guide to more than 225 parks and trails in Westchester County. With the latest trail and park updates, and an upgrade to color maps and photos, this guide is the ultimate go-to resource for exploring all the great open space within the county. You can grab your copy today at bit.ly/wk-wk3 and also check out our money-saving combo of the new book with our 2020 Westchester Trails Map set.

The eighth edition of our Delaware Water Gap & Kittatinny Trails map, formerly titled just Kittatinny Trails, is our most significant update to the map set since 2009. Covering more than 325 miles of trails along the Kittatinny Ridge and adjacent Delaware River in three states, it includes new and improved elevation contour lines, revised streams, new trails, several trail updates, and many other additions and improvements. You can get your waterproof, tear-resistant print copy on our website at nynjtc.org/shop, and it is also available through the Avenza Maps app shop as a single map that combines the four section maps, learn more at nynjtc.org/pdfmaps.

For more information, please visit nynjtc.org/ member-club.

Our thanks to Hudson North Cider Co. for their generous support this year, as they train and work to support the environment, and donate $4,116 to the Trail Conference in 2020. By partnering with their distributors, they collectively donated 10 cents per gallon of cider sold. Through their Taps for Trails initiative, $1 per tap sold. Additionally, Hudson North plans to enter this year’s Taps for Trails events, trail clean-ups, and more. As they continue to grow within the local market, Hudson North plans to grow its mission as more cider and trail lovers will sign up and support the outdoors and their local trail network.

Check them out on Instagram or Facebook: @HudsonNorthCider.

Trail Science

Trail building is both science and art. Trail Coordinator Erik Mickelson documents both on his website, Trailism, Visit trailism.com for more information on frost-thaw cycles and the impact they have on our trails.
This easy, 5-mile loop hike in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area circles Blue Mountain Lake as well as the remote and scenic Hemlock Pond. And climbs to a rocky viewpoint over the Pocono Mountains. The route of the hike is shown on Map 121 of the Trail Conference’s new Delaware Water Gap & Kittatinny Trails Guide set.

From the northeast end of the parking area on Blue Mountain Lakes Road near the kiosk, head into the woods. In 40 feet, bear right onto a blue/red-blazed connecting trail that heads downhill. At the next intersection, proceed ahead on the paved road.

After crossing a culvert over a stream, the blue-blazed Outer Loop begins on the right, but continue ahead, now following the red blazes of the eastern leg of the Inner Loop. At an open grassy area, turn left and climb to Blue Mountain Lake, then continue to follow the red-blazed trail along the lakeshore. As you approach an arm of the lake, the trail bears right and heads away from the lake, soon reaching a T-intersection with a grassy woods road. Turn left onto the road, continuing to follow the red blazes.

In about 0.4 mile, turn right onto another blue/red-blazed connecting trail, which leads in 750 feet to the blue-blazed Outer Loop. Turn left onto the Outer Loop, which follows a long road. In another mile, the road curves left and passes through a hemlock forest.

At the next T-intersection, turn left onto a blue/green connecting trail, but in 60 feet, turn right onto a path that leads down to the shore of Hemlock Pond. After taking in the view of this remote pond, return to the main trail and turn left to follow the green-blazed Hemlock Pond Trail. In about 0.4 mile, turn right and follow the red-blazed Inner Loop along a crumbling paved road. Soon, you’ll notice Blue Mountain Lake through the trees on your left. At the end of the lake, follow the red blazes, which turn left, leaving the road, and descend on a footpath to the dam. Turn right at the dam and continue along the red-blazed trail to the next junction, then turn right and follow the blue/red blazes back to the parking area.