



Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the Northern Forest Canoe Trail?

A. The longest inland water trail in the U.S., the Trail extends for 740 miles across contiguous rivers, streams, and lakes, following Native American travel routes from Old Forge, New York, through Vermont, Québec, and New Hampshire, to Fort Kent, Maine. In addition to being a paddling route, the Trail celebrates the history of the Northern Forest. Paddlers explore both the natural beauty of the rivers and lakes as well as the communities through which the trail passes.

Q. Is the Trail complete?

A. The Trail was officially completed in Spring 2006, with thirteen mapped contiguous sections offering campsites, portage routes, trail signs, and access points along the entire route. Local community groups have played a crucial role in the Trail's development in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Québec and New York, and will continue to be stewards of the Trail in the future.

Q. Why is it called a canoe trail? Can it be kayaked?

A. Because the Trail follows Native American routes, the Trail is named after the traditional mode of transportation of the Native Americans of this area — the canoe. Today, the canoe is still the most versatile craft to complete the entire Trail; however, most of the Trail can be enjoyed with a kayak. With the appropriate design and skills, paddlers can kayak the entire route.

Q. Is there a guidebook and maps of the NFCT?

A. *The Northern Forest Canoe Trail* is a 320-page guide that provides route description, camping and portage information, and amenities in towns along the route. The guidebook is a companion to a series of 13 maps detailing the 740-mile Trail including access locations, campsites, suggested trips, and more. Maps can be bought individually, as state sets, or as a complete 13-map set. Guidebook and maps are available at outdoor specialty retailers, booksellers, and in our on-line store at www.NorthernForestCanoeTrail.org.

Q. Do I really have to paddle the whole thing?

A. Absolutely not. The Trail is perfect for a variety of paddling experiences, from a peaceful evening paddle to longer sectional expeditions and everything in between. The Trail represents more than fifty interconnected vacations, extending through an interesting diversity of waterways, landscapes, and communities. Paddlers of all abilities can find something on the Trail, as can visitors with even limited vacation time. We invite you to dip into the Trail as fits your needs, and to keep coming back to see what's around the next bend.

Q. What skills do I need to paddle the Trail?

- A. Many sections of the Trail are appropriate for novice paddlers. Most paddlers choose flat-water segments or paddle in a downstream direction rather than commit to a through-paddle. To complete the entire Trail, paddlers will need to muster all their paddling skills. They will need to pole upstream, descend rapids up to class IV, cross large, exposed lakes subject to wind and waves, and portage. Ultimately, there is a section of Trail to fit most anyone. Some sections are perfect for an evening paddle, others for an overnight or weeklong paddle. Some sections even attract those who wish to paddle from inn to inn.

NFCT recommends that all paddlers obtain appropriate maps and other local information prior to embarking on any paddling trip. If Trail visitors are new to paddling or to a particular area, they may also want to hire a guide or enroll in a class. Visit our website, call or email us, or contact one of the chambers of commerce along the Trail to find local guides and instructors.

Q. So, the Trail is like a water version of the Appalachian Trail?

- A. It is natural to draw similarities between the Trail and other long-distance trails — there are many similarities; there are also many differences. Both trails are long-distance trails that celebrate the outdoors and outdoor recreation. Both trails also require physical activity to enjoy them. Most people who use long-distance trails take one-day or short overnight trips. And like those other trails, most of those who seek to paddle the entire Trail will do so in section paddles. Very few people will paddle the length of the Trail in one trip because of the skills and time required to complete a through-paddle.

The Northern Forest Canoe Trail differs significantly from the Appalachian Trail in many ways — perhaps most significantly, in management. The Northern Forest Canoe Trail obtains access for campsites and portages through landowner permission rather than through land protection. Additionally, because it is a trail of navigable waters, the Trail flows through both developed areas and backcountry. It is a blend of community experiences and wilderness. The other significant difference from most hiking trails is that many sections of the Trail require a high level of skill to complete.

Q. Has anyone through-paddled the Trail?

- A. Yes! As of 2011, we have just shy of 40 people who have become certified Through-Paddlers (completing the entire Trail in one continuous trip) and there are paddlers out there today tackling the entire route. The first person to through-paddle was Donnie Mullen, an Outward Bound instructor from Northport, Maine, who paddled a 16-foot wood-canvas canoe, which he made himself for the trip. He left May 1, 2000 from Old Forge, New York and completed the 740-mile journey 55 days later in Fort Kent, Maine. Check our website news page for information about any recent or on-going through paddler treks.

Q. When is the best time to paddle the Trail?

A. The Trail has a seasonal nature due to natural and manmade fluctuations in water levels. In late summer, some sections of the Trail may be too dry to paddle. Paddlers also need to be aware of dam releases (we have informational links about water levels in our website's Members Only section). Generally, the water levels (and bugs) are more reliable in May and June, and the sun and warmth are more reliable in July and August. September and October often provide good paddling weather and better water levels than late summer.

Q. How is the Trail funded?

A. The Trail received some critical start up funding through National Park Service-administered federal grants. We have broadened our funding base from there to include state-level and foundation grants, corporate contributions, individual contributions, memberships, map sales and royalties, and revenue from our on-line store.

Q. How is the Trail managed?

A. It is a big — and exciting — project. In 2000, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail formed as a nonprofit organization to manage the Trail, with offices in Waitsfield, Vermont. We successfully engaged local communities along the Trail to help develop the Trail and rally volunteers. We have an Adopt-a-Segment Program that has the NFCT broken into 10-15 mile segments. These segments are associated with HUBs spaced approximately every 50 miles where maintenance resources can be accessed. If you would like to be part of this program please contact NFCT Trail Director Walter Opuszynski at (802) 496-2285 x2. We use feedback from our maintainers and land managers across the Trail to determine where to focus our Summer Stewardship Intern Crew. For larger projects we apply for grants or use our Trail Fund to access the needed materials and labor resources.

Q. Wow, this sounds great! How can I get involved?

A. You can help! We need volunteer and financial support. Major gifts from members, businesses, and friends are imperative in helping us reach the goal of sustaining this vital public resource into the future. The NFCT is a 501(c)3 charitable organization and all gifts are tax deductible. You can join online (www.NorthernForestCanoeTrail.org) or call our office (802.496.2285) for membership information. Donations, payable to the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, can be mailed to P.O. Box 565, Waitsfield, Vermont 05673. Contact info@northernforestcanoetrail.org.