

WTA at Work

Sarah enjoying the heart of the Cascades while climbing Cathedral Rock on her day off



Trail Maintenance »

My First Volunteer Vacation **WTA's new intern gets a taste of mountain camaraderie**



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Sitting in a dark car, zooming away from the city toward the shadowy early-morning Cascades for my first Volunteer Vacation, I envisioned myself a lone bushwhacker, machete in hand on the side of a mountain—clearing trails with only nature to keep me company.

It didn't take me long after leaving the trailhead to realize that this Thoreauvian

portrait of trail work was complete hogwash. As I came to discover that week at Deep Lake, the purpose of trail work is to engage not only with the land, but with other people as well.

As a new yearlong volunteer in the WTA office, I was eager to get out and see what trail maintenance was all about. I had only just emigrated from Indiana, the land of cornfields and NASCAR, where the highest elevation stands on Hoosier Hill at a whopping 1,257 feet. So my weeklong at Deep Lake quickly became part trail-vocabulary school and part love affair with those dramatic craggy peaks that dominate the Washington landscape.

As the week progressed, I learned from my

colleagues' conversations the definitions of trail-related terms like "switchback"—words I had never had occasion to use before then. My crew leader would ask me to hand him a Pulaski, and I would hesitantly pick some tool up, hoping that I wasn't giving him a rock bar.

By the end of the week, though, I began to throw around terms like "culvert" and "tread" with much more nonchalance than I could have mustered if I had just read these terms in a manual without actually engaging them. When I returned to my house in Seattle on that last Saturday, my housemates were surprised to find me, smelly and smudged, standing in the living room chattering on about "scree" and "lopping."

That week I came to appreciate well-maintained trails—something that I had taken for granted before. On our day off a few of us decided to try to climb Cathedral Rock, a jagged peak with no real trail leading to its tip. This was probably the most intense hike of my life. We scrambled up loose scree fields and steep rock faces, moving at a painfully slow and cautious pace. As we descended the mountain, rocks slipping everywhere around us, I realized that if volunteers hadn't been creating and maintaining the trail that we were working on that week, it could be just as difficult to traverse as Cathedral Rock.

More than anything else I learned that week, however, I came to understand WTA volunteers as builders of wilderness community. I won't soon forget how, after dark one evening as we stood around in the clearing near our camp, our group of ten applauded for a PCT thru-hiker called Dewey, who was spurred on through the night by our clapping. I won't forget all of those conversations we had with hikers as we worked on the trails and all of the thanks we got for our work.

And I won't forget all of the bonding that occurred that week between the 10 strangers on my crew who had all happened to sign up for the same work party. Somehow, when people are in the wilderness together, I think they are able to release their inhibitions—let down their guards in a way that they can't do as readily in the rest of civilized life—and show themselves in a more vulnerable light

than they might otherwise. And this, I think, is the backbone of that grand invisible network of wilderness community.

Because what is a trail, after all, but a channel of communication—a way for people with a similar passion to connect with each other? Amidst great expanses of wilderness, a trail as I see it is a narrow corridor along which people can enjoy nature, yes—but along which they can also encounter other people. I've seen this sort of wilderness community in the trail magic that people leave for thru-hikers, and in the chance conversations between hikers traveling the same trail, and in the group bonding on WTA trips.

Eager to join in this wilderness community, I decided to talk to a few of WTA's more seasoned crew leaders about their own trail experiences. Each of them regaled me with great stories of wilderness community. Through these conversations, I've begun to understand how WTA volunteers give back to the same community in which they spend so much of their leisure time.



GARY ZINK

Taking a break, Gary Zink headed up the trail one day with a few other crew members to catch some mountain views. But as they rounded a corner, they ran into more than just mountains. Just ahead of Zink, two black bear cubs scampered across the trail, their mother following a few feet behind.

More scared than their human counterparts, who were merely amused by the sighting, the bears scrambled up some nearby trees. To avoid scaring the bears more than necessary, Zink and his crew left the cubs and their mother to their playground. "Had we had pictures," says

Zink, "that would have been outstanding, that would have been a smashing incident."

Zink helped maintain trails even before he knew WTA existed. In the late 1980s he saw a need for trail work and decided to do something about it; he started taking tools out with

Can't wait till summer for a Volunteer Vacation? Neither can we.

New in 2012, WTA will host springtime Volunteer Vacations. Watch wta.org for details.

him and working on trails solo. When he told the Enumclaw rangers what he was doing, they said, "Thanks, but you shouldn't be doing this by yourself. Why don't you join WTA?" And Zink said, "What is WTA?"

Now, twenty-two years later, Zink is a blue hat—though he doesn't let the color of his hard hat go to his head, so to speak. After his first weeklong trip, the crew leader noticed Zink's positive attitude and diligent work habits and promoted him to an orange hat. Zink said, "I've got a white hat that I'm wearing, what's wrong with that?" After years of crew leading, Zink now understands that hat colors on WTA trips "don't designate a badge, or a status symbol. All they designate is responsibility."

Zink leads numerous Backcountry Response Trips (BCRTs) for WTA and, now that he has retired, is sometimes out crew leading for 12 to 14 days a month. On Volunteer Vacations he is known to work through the day off. His hard work is partially motivated by his love of the outdoors, but he also likes to think of trail work as a patriotic deed; he sees working on the physical land of his country as a non-militaristic way of serving that country.

Zink, for one, has long appreciated the community aspect of trail work as well. "I like being with people, working with people, watching people," he says.

WTA assistant crew leader Scott Metzler contemplates his next move. Photo by Mason White.



SCOTT METZLER

One evening on a BCRT, Scott Metzler was sitting around camp at the top of a ridge with the rest of his crew when a fellow volunteer whipped a bag of popcorn kernels, a stove and a bottle of olive oil out of his pack and started popping popcorn. "We're sitting here at 5,000 feet," recalls Metzler, "no one in sight, and we're eating popcorn as the sun sets on this ridge."

For Metzler, meeting people who share his love of the outdoors is one of the perks of being a volunteer crew leader. "The quality of people who come out on these volunteer work parties is very high," says Metzler. "They're very motivated, and they all want to help out."

Metzler himself started volunteering as a

green hat with WTA six or seven years ago. He was introduced to crosscut sawing on the Dungeness River Trail a year or two later and found that he loved it. He loved that in this age of hypertechnology, of cell phones and Internet, that there were volunteers chopping down trees in the wilderness, using the same sort of saw that loggers used in the 1920s and 1930s.

Metzler—who jokes that he would show up to work in a horse and buggy if he could—was hooked on crosscut sawing. "You're doing something that people eighty or ninety years ago were doing the same way," he says. "It brings up a nostalgia, like this is the way things used to be."

So when asked if he wanted to be crosscut certified and become an orange hat, Metzler promptly responded that he did.

Since then, Metzler has become a staunch supporter of WTA's mission. As the government makes budget cuts, he explains, there is less that the Forest Service can do to maintain trails. When trails fall into disrepair, people tend to use them less, which then prompts the government to place trail maintenance as a lower priority. It's important, then, in Metzler's eyes, to improve access to the trails for everyone, "not just the few hardy souls who can scramble over or under anything."

By helping to maintain trails, Metzler hopes to broaden the wilderness community. Thinking of the many times when he has been sitting under a tarp, some 4,000 feet up, eating a hot meal in the rain, Metzler says, "You have to take the bad with the good. It's part of nature, and if you embrace other aspects of it, you accept that, too. You grow in some kind of weird way to like moments like that, too."

STEVE HERTZFELD

Steve Hertzfeld hiked out of Hart Lake with a youth crew and a few llamas in tow on the Fourth of July one year, just in time to witness the preparations for Holden Village's annual Fourth of July parade. Hertzfeld and his crew were waiting around in Holden for the bus that would take them to the ferry when Barbara Budd, their Forest Service contact, brought them all ice cream. First she said, "You guys could go check out the parade," Hertzfeld remembers. "And then she looked at us with our llamas and asked, 'Do you want to be in the parade?'"

So it happened that WTA stole the show at the Holden Village Fourth of July parade that year. Hertzfeld and his crew wore their matching WTA T-shirts and hard hats and carried tools, leading the llamas behind them. Most of the spectators knew who they were and



This photo of crew leader Steve Hertzfeld on a Volunteer Vacation deserves a funny caption. Send your idea to alyssa@wta.org.

clapped for WTA as they passed.

Hertzfeld started crew leading as an intern in 2005, soon after he had graduated from college. Since then, he has been crew leading Volunteer Vacations with WTA every summer and coaching rowing at Lakeside Academy in the winter.

Hertzfeld's main goal in crew leading is to educate people about maintaining trails. The work that volunteers do for the trails is good, he explains, but it's even more important to raise trail-maintenance awareness among hikers, who sometimes take trails for granted.

He leads some day trips with WTA, but prefers leading weeklongs because he personally gets more work done. On day trips, the new volunteers have gotten the hang of their work by one or two in the afternoon and can proceed without Hertzfeld's supervision, which means that he can work on his own project for only an hour or two before calling it quits and starting all over again the next day. On weeklongs, Hertzfeld enjoys having volunteers whose experience grows throughout the week, providing him with more time to work alongside the volunteers.

Hertzfeld also enjoys the sort of community that is especially pronounced in weeklongs. "You get to know people really well and get a good bond with the group," he says. "Essentially, you're like a family."♦

WTA's full 2012 Volunteer Vacation schedule will be released in early February. Amazing scenery and great trail projects, guaranteed.

Featured Trail Project »



Elise Evans

East Crater Trail

For around 10,000 years, thousands of Native people have traveled to the area known today as Indian Heaven Wilderness. WTA's trail maintenance crews have been visiting this place for only 15 years, and it's been only a few hundred folks, but our time spent here has been quite memorable. I imagine both groups enjoyed taking in the awesome natural beauty of this area, picking berries, meeting up with old friends and making some new ones, getting some work done, and coming back feeling better about life, just for having been there.

The **East Crater Trail** is a heavily used connector to the Pacific Crest Trail that also provides relatively easy access to the heart of the Indian Heaven Wilderness. The trail ends at Junction Lake, where WTA's Volunteer Vacation crews have worked to alleviate a chronic problem spot for the last few years. The original trail had been constructed too close to a seasonal stream, and each summer, without fail, this stretch of trail turned into a nasty muck pit. Our crews' mission was to construct turnpikes that would bring users out of the mud and onto a safe, dry trail surface.

Our crews peeled huge logs, "the biggest I've ever used" according to WTA assistant crew leader Lee Young's description, and moved them into place to create the stringers. To do so required thoughtful preparation, good communication, strong backs and sheer willpower. In this culturally sensitive area, with the potential for Native artifacts, we paid special attention to the location of our borrow pits, which meant that we often transported fill material for a significant distance. Volunteers carried in hundreds of buckets of rock and mineral soil to fill up the turnpike. The local Backcountry Horsemen (BCH) chapter also provided gravel pack support for a day. After much hard work, we met our goal of providing a durable trail surface for users to enjoy.

While we have constructed more than 100 feet of turnpike in the past few years, work remains to be done on this trail. And on the next trail over and then on the trail that connects to it. And so on and so on. If you haven't been to Indian Heaven with us, you haven't missed your chance.

Thanks to all who helped this trail restoration project to be a success. This includes the awesome volunteers who worked in the field, WTA's much appreciated members who help finance the work, the great U.S. Forest Service staff who provide technical support, and the BCH packers. When everyone works together, great projects are accomplished.♦

—Tim Van Beek

Hike It»

East Crater Trail

Gifford Pinchot National Forest

Distance: 5 miles **Gain:** 900 feet **High Point:** 4,900 feet
Map: Green Trails 365 Lone Butte **Best Season:** June to October

Trails in Demand

Will the Cape Horn Trail story have a happy ending?



Steve Payne

“Where rural culture meets urban expansion and private property abuts public lands, conflict blooms like fall mushrooms after an October rain.”

Once upon a time, a faint path meandered through the woods. This not-so-secret route took its wanderers through fascinating terrain, past an enchanting waterfall and up to a fabulous vista.

Though it was undeniably beautiful, this trail—the Cape Horn Trail—had some serious issues. It wasn't legal, wasn't safe and wasn't environmentally appropriate. Today, with Forest Service guidance, WTA volunteers are helping with many of the trail improvements to make this trail safer for hikers today and more sustainable for the future.

When the Forest Service officially adopted the Cape Horn Trail in 2010, it was a mere wisp of illicit trail. This fall, WTA volunteers closed another chapter in the story of the Cape Horn Trail when they completed a 30-foot-long footbridge. Acting something like fairy godmothers, the South Gifford Pinchot Resource Advisory Committee, National Forest Foundation, American Hiking Society, and Friends of the Gorge and many private individuals have all provided invaluable support, allowing WTA to complete a new reroute, improve and maintain much of the 7-mile route, and coordinate classes in trail design, construction and maintenance in just two years.

But for the full Cape Horn Trail story we have to look further back in time, a quarter century earlier. The impetus for the Cape Horn Trail is just as old as the legislation that created the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area in 1988. At that time, the Friends of the Gorge included the Cape Horn Trail in their proposal calling for 40 new trails in the Gorge.

Several other trails on that original list have

now been developed, including the Klickitat Trail and trails at Coyote Wall and Catherine Creek, but new trail development in the Gorge has never come easily. This is a diverse area, both biologically and politically. Where the wet western Gorge mingles with the dry eastern Gorge, unique habitats are formed, with rare plants and animals that deserve protection from human activity. And where rural culture meets urban expansion and private property abuts public lands, conflict blooms like fall mushrooms after an October rain.

Many of the Gorge's now-official trails have been preceded by the appearance of user-built trails, made through illegal construction in the case of Cape Horn, or simply by a multitude of hikers beating a path to desirable vistas, as at Hardy Ridge at Beacon Rock State Park. In most cases, the process has been plagued with controversy, and too often, progress has been made at a snail's pace. This is the pattern that has been set in the past twenty-five years. Given the prediction that this region will attract another 1.6 million residents in the next twenty-five years, the question becomes this: **how can the Forest Service, State Parks and Department of Natural Resources meet the growing demand for new places to hike in the Gorge?**

WTA's work at Cape Horn provides a clue. If we can leverage grant funds with volunteer time and expertise, we can help these agencies complete trail projects more quickly and efficiently. Our efforts to train volunteers through events like the Columbia Cascades Trail Skills College each spring boost not only WTA's capacity, but also that of our partners in the



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Kelly Butte Lookout Restored, *continued from* *p. 11*



Kelly Butte Lookout prior to restoration

shape of a pot.”

Sandor traveled to Washington from Alaska to attend the rededication ceremony. “Though returning to Kelly Butte is wonderful, the best part of all this,” Sandor said, “is seeing the dedication of volunteers and the wonderful partnerships made in the effort to restore Kelly Butte. It’s just ... wonderful!”

Restoring the lookout wasn’t easy. Adler and Clark and dozens of other volunteers toiled in both freezing cold weather and searing heat. Retaining the original wood of these old lookouts called for careful attention and meticulous care. They spent 140 hours restoring a door; the window sashes averaged twelve hours apiece. WTA volunteers contributed to this project by building a series of rock steps on the trail to Kelly Butte.

Now in his eighties, Sandor was unable to hike up to the lookout on that Sunday in September, but I stayed with him as he watched the summit closely—“I don’t know why, but I’ll be very disappointed if I can’t see the hikers up there! For some reason, it’s important to me.” The ridge suddenly bristled with the silhouettes of hikers ascending the steps to the lookout, and Sandor’s face beamed with excitement.

Volunteers like Bob Adler, Forest Clark and Ray Fischer, to name just a few, performed a great honor, not only to the romantic American heritage of fire lookouts, but to individuals such as John Sandor, Daniel Leen, and all the hikers who enjoy the history of these wonderful buildings.

Hats off to you, Bob Adler, and to all the volunteers who contributed many hours of loving labor to this restoration project.♦



Trails in Demand, *continued from p.16*

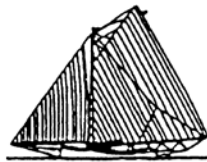
Cape Horn Conservancy, Pacific Crest Trail Association and Trailkeepers of Oregon across the river.

On the advocacy front, WTA can work closely with the Friends of the Gorge as they embark on their Gorge Towns-to-Trails campaign, a five-year effort to build the partnerships and funding base needed to develop a comprehensive new trail system in the Gorge. Nonprofits like the Friends and WTA need to work with agency officials and local stakeholders to reach consensus on where new trails should be—before the projects become mired with conflict during the environmental review process.

The recent discovery of the so-called Cruzatt Rim Trail reignited the conflict between trail advocates and environmental conservationists that stymied the development of the Cape Horn Trail years ago. This is tension that needs to be resolved before official trails can be created.

Given the inauspicious beginnings of the Cape Horn Trail, the hurdles it has overcome and the promising future it now has, many people hope that the work WTA and our partners have done here can serve as a model for better trail development in the future.

You don’t have to live in northwest Oregon or southwest Washington to enjoy the Cape Horn Trail—or to help out. Make it your New Year’s resolution to come down for one of our work parties at Cape Horn, or the equally lovely Catherine Creek, in 2012. Help us write the next chapter in Columbia Gorge history.♦



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