

# RIDGELINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE SUPERIOR HIKING TRAIL ASSOCIATION

FALL 2019



## Doing It Right: Principles and Design Standards on the SHT

**I** WAS NEW ON THE JOB at the SHTA two years ago, trying to get a handle on the best design and construction standards for the Trail that would withstand the increasing pounding, both from feet and from water, expected in the coming decades.

I was given a spiral-bound book produced by the Minnesota DNR: "Trail Planning, Design and Development Guidelines." Given I knew as much about hiking trail management as I knew about space flight, I was all eyes. And my eyes feasted on one

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# Doing It Right: Principles and Design Standards for the SHT

(continued from cover)

section of that book—the landscape architecture theory behind trail design.

The core principle these Guidelines speak to is that a trail is for people, after all: “Create sequences of visual, physical, and emotional responses that are pleasing to the trail user.” I think often of those pioneers who designed and built the SHT in the early days. My hunch is they didn’t lean on fancy landscape architecture theory to build the SHT 30 years ago. But they sure did “create sequences...that are pleasing to the trail user.”



▲ There are few sequences more stunning on the SHT than arriving at an overlook at the peak of fall. Photo @aaronwernimont

## PEOPLE, NATURE, FOOTPATH—AND WATER

What those founders could not have anticipated was the heavy traffic and extreme rain events the SHT now endures. Managing the trail for those phenomena is our obligation—to minimize or eliminate environmental impact of trail use. Even a relatively

benign human activity like hiking still damages the land and the water nearby.

The SHT is entirely built, and though we will have re-routes and new routes and new loops and spurs to add for years to come, the Trail’s “spine” is in place. What we do to honor that original fine design, and protect the land and water we pass through, and to “please the trail user,” is a compelling and profound responsibility. Taking action through our Trail Renewal Program has brought us to these guiding principles:



▲ “Safety First” means these dangerous steps have got to go. Nature provides plenty of its own tripping hazards.

**MAKE IT SAFE.** Much of the (mostly wooden) infrastructure you find on the SHT is well past its sell-by date. Some of it—the classic example being rebar sticking out of stairway timbers—is dangerous. So, our first principle, and priority, is to repair or remove built structures that could hurt people. We understand that while hiking is inherently risky—rocks and roots can trip you up—our built structures should not harm.

**MAKE IT DRY.** Mud is a notorious feature of the SHT. Some of that mud you can simply write off as “mud happens.” Much of it is the legacy of the original construction of the SHT, whose builders couldn’t have imagined the heavy use the Trail is getting, from water and from hikers.

Managing water is doubtless our most serious challenge. There’s a full spectrum of actions to deal with it, from the micro (drainage dips and swales) to the macro (rerouting the Trail, building bridges—or not). Whatever the technique or strategy,



▲ Mudholes like this one, on the Bear and Bear Lakes loop, are exactly what we aim to avoid through proper drainage, rerouting, or newly built structures.

the focus will be keeping water off the Trail and users on it. Example: fix mudholes that force Trail users off the trail and into the woods, only to create more mud.


**KEEP THEM HAPPY.** There is a Superior Hiking Trail only because of the good graces of private landowners and public land managers who accommodate a national scenic trail on



their properties. We are forever grateful to the access these landowners have given us. When a landowner or land manager brings an issue to our attention, we go on high alert. The public land managers have shown forbearance when we don't have the human power or the cash to fix something right away. (The U.S. Forest Service's patience with us at Pincushion Mountain, near Grand Marais, comes to mind.)

### KEEP IT ALL CONNECTED.

Our formal agreements with landowners and public agencies run the gamut, from long-

term leases and authorizations to rudimentary agreements that essentially allow the Trail to be there only until the land changes hands. And land is changing hands fast on the North Shore. We can't coerce a landowner to enter into a more formal and permanent agreement with us (in the form of a trail easement agreement), but it is our goal to permanently secure the Trail's route so it remains an unbroken and integral footpath from border to border. 

— By **DENNY CANEFF**

The Superior Hiking Trail Association is dedicated to building, managing, renewing and promoting the Superior Hiking Trail.



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## THANK YOU, DEAR FUNDERS



**Trailfitters has continued to partner with and support the Association, this time to the tune of \$10,000 for a new trailhead.**

Photo: @trailfitters

Nearly \$300,000 in two grants to evaluate sections of the SHT, build new trail, develop volunteer training videos, and undertake trail renewal projects.

■ **Whole Foods Co-op and Lärabar:** Over \$11,000 for the Duluth SHT generated by shoppers' "round up at the register" donations, plus a \$5,000 match challenge from snack bar maker Lärabar.

■ **REI:** Nearly \$12,000, determined by way of a vote for SHTA from Co-op members.

■ **Trailfitters:** \$10,000 to build a new trailhead on Lismore Road near Duluth.

■ **Minnesota Power Foundation:** \$5,000 for construction materials, plus another \$500 from their *Positively Powerful* volunteer program.

## November 14 is "Give to the Max Day" — Choose SHTA!

Over the last 10 years, GiveMN's "Give to the Max Day" has become Minnesota's largest single day of charitable giving. Last year, supporters like you contributed over \$6,500 to support SHTA's Trail Renewal Program on the philanthropic holiday—thank you! This year, we've set a goal of \$10,000, and we hope you'll mark your calendars for November 14 and consider a gift to continue to power our work on the SHT. Head to [bit.ly/GiveSHTA](http://bit.ly/GiveSHTA) to learn more.

PEOPLE.  
NATURE.  
FOOTPATH.



# FROM THE OVERLOOK



New gifts featuring custom SHT artwork can be found at the TIC or online at [shop.superiorhiking.org](http://shop.superiorhiking.org)

## BOTTLE, BUFF, AND MORE COOL STUFF

Many incredible artists roam the SHT for inspiration and share their fine work with our community. Local painter Adam Swanson is among these ranks—in fact, his “Superior Days” piece is featured on the cover of this issue of Ridgeline.

That fine work has also been captured and repurposed to enhance new products available in our Trail Information Center (TIC) and online store: a custom Buff, Legacy Bottleworks water bottle, and the “My SHT Map,” which gives you a place to track progress and experiences along the SHT. Find these products and more at [shop.superiorhiking.org](http://shop.superiorhiking.org), and use code “Superior” for free shipping on orders of \$50 or more through December 13th—perfect for holiday shopping!

Our Trail Information Center at the SHTA office in Two Harbors will close for the season on October 18 and re-open for the 2020 hiking season in April. Online orders are fulfilled year-round.

## PLATBOOKS, PARCELS, AND POWERFUL NEW TOOLS

SHTA launched several projects in 2019 to collect and organize crit-

ical information about the Trail and the land through which it passes in a digital format. Thanks to our IT partners Slalom, we now have a custom database tool (built pro bono), which we’ll use to track and quickly find the data we need to better plan and execute projects on the SHT.

With support from Minnesota’s Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund, we also hired an intern, Melody Morris, to solve technical GIS issues and populate the new database. Melody has poured over platbooks, explored four counties’ worth of online land explorers, and brought our records into this decade to ensure we’re moving into the next with accurate information.

## TOUGHEST TRAIL WORK YOU’LL EVER LOVE

We’re seeking a trail renewal contractor to work on the SHT in the Duluth area starting in 2020. Will it be you?

Your main tasks: plan and develop Trail renewal projects and complete those projects with help from volunteers that you lead. You’ll also be SHTA’s primary contact with private and public partners, including Duluth Parks staff and other agencies. Work will take place primarily from May to October, peaking in the summer months. Diplomacy is a must; comfort working with tools, knowing basic carpentry and landscaping acumen are also essential. SHTA will provide training on trail building and maintenance.

If you’re reading this and wondering, “Is this the job Larry Sampson had?” the answer is yes. Larry plans to wind down his work, continuing on as a volunteer. He’ll still grace the SHT in the Duluth area.

In this position, you’ll have the opportunity to keep the SHT one of the best urban hiking trails in the country and help us provide a resilient, memorable, and satisfying trail for its many users. Interested? Contact executive director Denny Caneff at: [dcaneff@superiorhiking.org](mailto:dcaneff@superiorhiking.org)



PHOTO BY LISA BYRNE

Do you have what it takes to lead trail renewal projects and volunteer crews in Duluth?



# 138 STEPS FORWARD, AND NONE BACK, ON THE DULUTH SHT



(CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) Minnesota Power's Positively Powerful volunteer crew spent a day on the Duluth SHT to help install new boardwalk at Spirit Mountain.

■ Volunteers from the Northern Minnesota Track Club help "grub" (remove stumps) from the new trail corridor at Brewer Park. ■ Uneven, sketchy steps + a widened, eroding path = an opportunity to build a safer, more sustainable route up the hill from Spirit Mountain.

**T**hree discrete Trail improvement projects in Duluth have been completed (or almost) and led ably by SHTA's trail renewal consultant Larry Sampson with dedicated volunteer crews.

→ **GETTING EVEN MORE LOOPED AT BREWER PARK:** The SHT, where it was routed on an old snowmobile trail at the west end of the Brewer Park Loop, was rutted from erosion and needed to be closed. To replace the decommissioned piece, trail enthusiasts rediscovered the original route in Brewer Park that had been planned and marked, but then abandoned. Long-time Duluth SHT fans Judy Gibbs and Bill Dryborough retraced their

memories and footsteps to rediscover the route, which now takes users past two stately white pines and then up a steep and circuitous path to the top of the park.

→ **SPIRITS ARE HIGH AT THE MOUNTAIN:** There are—well, were—some notorious muddy spots and messy boardwalk in the Spirit Mountain Recreation Area section of the SHT. Some new and much more solid boardwalk was constructed in there this summer, alleviating some of the chronic mud problems in that segment of the Trail. Meanwhile, over Enger Park way, other muddy stretches of the SHT were hardened with rock and gravel, and a sketchy stairway was removed.

→ **COUNTDOWN FROM 138 TO ZERO:** Duluth Trail users are all too familiar with the rickety stairway on a steep and heavily

eroded hillside on the east side of Spirit Mountain near Knowlton Creek. We aim to develop an entirely new route there this fall that will switch back and forth across the steep slope and eliminate most of the stairway. ⚡

## RULES REMINDER: Keep Your Dog On A Leash

It's the rule of the SHT—**dogs must be on-leash at all times**—and the law throughout most of the Trail. Skunks, porcupines, coyotes, and wolves all call the SHT home, but it's not just for wild animals that we ask you to do this; the enjoyment of other trail users and our continued access to private and public lands depends on you following this simple rule. "My dog is friendly" is not a substitute for a leash. **Bonus points:** Make the effort to bag your dog waste, and when you do, be sure to pack it out with you too.





## Over the course of many years as a volunteer with SHTA, Kris Nurmi did it all:

he constructed trail between Duluth and Two Harbors, adopted a section, built bridges, un-built bridges (Encampment River, we're looking at you), dug latrines, worked on some of the SHT's finest stonework, and guided countless hikes.

On top of all this, Kris was one of the first SHTA Volunteer Crew Leaders, a role he was perfectly suited for, as he warmly welcomed people to the world of trail maintenance and gently guided their work. Kris's skills, passion, and dedication have deeply impacted the Superior Hiking Trail and all who knew him. We are endlessly grateful for his many contributions to the Trail.

But beyond his legacy of work with SHTA, Kris will be remembered for the many moments we shared with him, enjoying his quiet kindness, humor, and excitement for being out there with us on the Trail. As trail development director Jo Swanson put it, "Kris was a friend to the Trail and a friend to all who hiked it. Words can't express how much he will be missed on trail projects and around campfires."

## KRIS NURMI

Kris Nurmi, a long-time volunteer, beloved member of our trail community, and friend to many of us—an "SHT Superman," as Zach Johns put it—passed away unexpectedly while leading a hike on the Trail in August 2019.



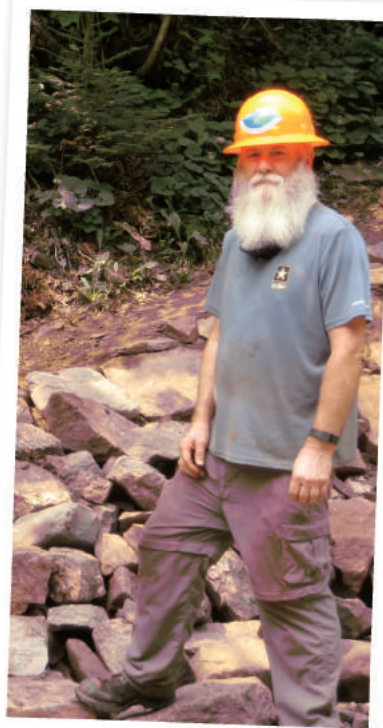
**Welcoming new folks to the SHT, through guided hikes and volunteer projects, was one of Kris's passions.** Photo: Nita Nurmi

*We send our sincere condolences to Kris's family and loved ones. He is already missed by us all.*

See Kris's obituary and a note from his wife, Nita, at [superiorhiking.org/superiorherotales](http://superiorhiking.org/superiorherotales)



**Kris put in hundreds of hours caring for the SHT. We will miss him dearly.** Photo: Rudi Hargesheimer



**Kris's legacy on the Trail—including projects like this stone staircase and water crossing at Crow Creek—will remain for trail users to enjoy for years to come.** Photo: Nita Nurmi



# TALENTED LEADERS TACKLE TRAIL IMPROVEMENT



**A talented group of volunteers helped VCLs John Storkamp and Todd Rowe build a sturdy boardwalk over the Diving Board Mud Pit.**

**T**his summer, talented Volunteer Crew Leaders (VCLs) Steph Hoff, Michael Loscheider, Kris Nurmi (who passed away recently—see page 6), Todd Rowe, and John Storkamp tackled three big trail improvement projects. Here's a brief overview of each project:

## ■ DIVING BOARD MUD PIT:

In June, VCLs John Storkamp, Todd Rowe, and their crew constructed a heavy-duty boardwalk over a deep mud pit near Crosby-Manitou State Park. The remote location, challenging terrain, and deep mud added complexity, in addition to learning a new construction method. Nearby landowner Diane Silver graciously granted permission for us to access her property to get closer to the site.

## ■ SUGARLOAF REROUTE:

A stellar effort from VCLs Steph Hoff, Michael Loscheider, and fellow volunteers who built nearly

1,000 feet of new trail and 90 feet of puncheon (boardwalk set low on the ground), at the request of a landowner. Despite flat terrain, we installed drainage at every opportunity to ensure sustainable, dry trail. New and seasoned volunteers gained experience and learned about the intricacies of building resilient tread.

## ■ LAKEWALK IMPROVEMENT PROJECT:

Another heavy-duty

boardwalk project, this one was built high off the ground to avoid spring flooding. Three planned work days weren't enough—VCLs Michael Loscheider and Steph Hoff rallied volunteers for two more days to wrap it up.

Our VCLs and I learned a great deal from these projects. My biggest takeaway? We must build structures to withstand heavy use and variable northern Minnesota weather. The structures we replaced this year did not fail due to age, but rather poor design and build quality. Similar structures elsewhere on the SHT will keep us busy for years to come.

We'll use this lesson to make the most of the time and resources we invest in the Trail, using quality materials and employing designs that meet national standards for sustainable trail. As stewards of this incredible footpath, it is our responsibility to do it right—for the safety and enjoyment of trail users and to protect the fragile ecosystems found along it. 

— By **TAMER IBRAHIM**



▲ Volunteer Gregg Westigard (left) watches as VCL Michael Loscheider (right) puts the final touches on the new boardwalk at the Hovland Lakewalk.

Photo: Steph Hoff



▲ You can thank Marie-Anne Westigard (left) and Bonnie Riley (right) for their help installing hundreds of feet of boardwalk to keep your feet dry.



Each year, the Superior Hiking Trail attracts thousands of visitors from all over the world. Support from SHTA members, donors and volunteers like you keeps the Trail one of the finest hiking and running destinations in the country.

➔ **138 STEPS FORWARD:** flip to page 5 to read about projects done, and almost done, on the Duluth SHT.



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## WHEN THE HUNT IS ON, STAY OFF THE SHT

Every year during firearms deer hunting season, most of the SHT (outside of Duluth) is closed to all trail users. Plan ahead for the closure—this year, it will be November 9-24—and wear blaze orange in the meantime, as other hunting activities may be taking place near the SHT. Stay safe, be prepared! Check our Trail Conditions page before you go for closures and updates at: [superiorhiking.org/trail-conditions](http://superiorhiking.org/trail-conditions)

## CHICKEN WIRE WILL NO LONGER ROOST ON THE SHT

### On the left,

you see what the Trail that connected the Lakewalk, along Lake Superior east of Grand Marais, to Hwy. 61, used to look like. Found not just here but elsewhere on the SHT is the notorious chicken wire, added to boardwalk to reduce slipperiness.

### On the right,

you see what new boardwalk will now look like—here, at the Lakewalk, and elsewhere on the SHT. We think it's an upgrade. See Page 2 for more about how we envision taking care of the SHT, exemplified by this project at the Lakewalk.

