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June 2024

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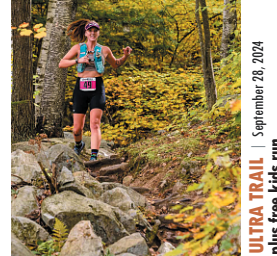
**UNDERDOWN TRAIL RUN & BIKE** | August 17, 2024

**ESSENTIAL GRAVEL BIKE** | June 1-16, 2024

**TIT GRAVEL BIKE** | June 22, 2024



**MIDWEST BIKEPACKING SUMMIT** | September 12-14, 2024



**ULTRA TRAIL** | September 28, 2024  
plus free kids run



**RED GRANITE GRINDER** | October 12, 2024  
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# PORT WASHINGTON WISCONSIN

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Party in Pardeeville With a Purpose

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Wilderness Inquiry

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Expanding Adventure Team (906)

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Balancing to Better Health

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Prep Now, Ski Fast Later

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# The Front Page(s)

## ABR Wants (One Of) YOU!



**T**he purported “**Diggins**” email wanting to ask me a question, asking me to call, and listing a phone number, landed in my spam folder. Gmail warned inside a blood-red banner: *This message seems dangerous. Similar messages were used to steal personal information. Avoid clicking on links ...*

The email, per Gmail, was too general and the sender’s email address was new, at least to me. Besides, who am I to receive an email from Jessie Diggins’ father (AKA, “Clay Diggins”)?

Not wanting ID-theft trouble or to bother a family likely oft-contacted by media and others, but also not wanting to ignore XC ski royalty, I reached out to Ben Popp to help me authenticate this email. The next morning, I received a text from Jessie Diggins’ father, AKA Clay, who indeed wanted to talk with me, providing details to prove neither the email nor his text was spam. (Thank you, Ben!) What a great talk we had! A true gentleman wanting to do for others and a ski foundation he had recently signed on as a board member, asking only that I help him spread the word about important news from ABR.

Clay Diggins’ next email, landing squarely in my regular Gmail in-box, said as follows, to share with all of you:

*In April 2025, Eric Anderson and Angela Santini will place their ABR ski trails property and business into a newly created nonprofit*



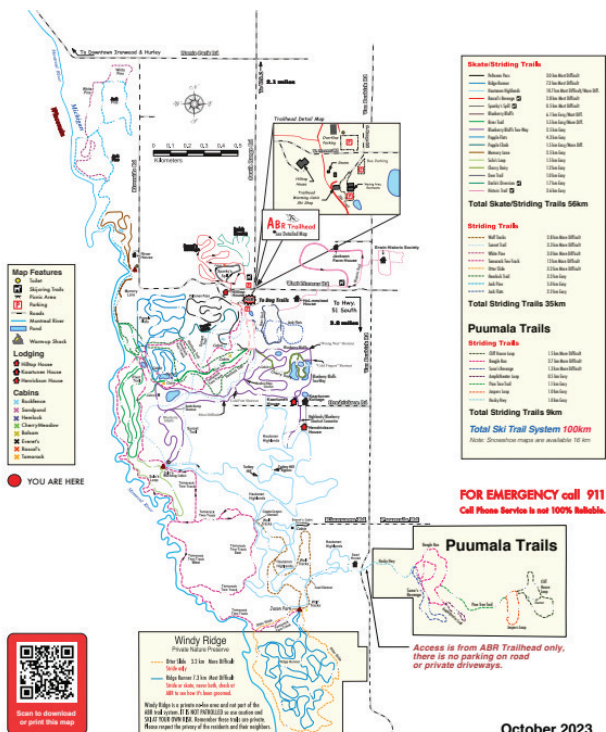
Eric Anderson and Angela Santini taking a break while skiing on Sunset Trail, one of ABR’s close-and-personal, expertly groomed classic trails. In April 2025, they will hand place this trail and all the rest meandering through 1,100 acres of pristine forest property into the Anderson Bluffs and River Trails Foundation.

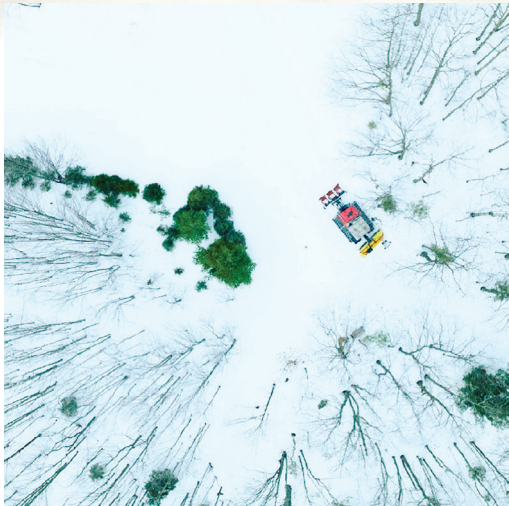
ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ABR.

foundation. The mission of the **Anderson Bluffs and River Trails Foundation** is to sustain ABR’s legacy as the Midwest’s premier Nordic ski destination for generations to come and connect ABR trails to the larger community.

Eric and Angela still live in the farmhouse on the ABR property where Eric grew up, and their roots in the area run deep. In 1995, Eric and his father, **Dave**, decided to share their beautiful property along the Montreal River by building ski trails. At first, the trails were modest, built by hand using a bow saw and axe. They called their trails exactly what they were: an **A**ctive **B**ackwoods **R**etreat. Word spread and, over time, equipment was added and additional property secured. Now spanning 1,100 acres, the property has a trail network winding through some 100K of pristine forest, today ranked among the finest ski destinations in the country.

Three things make ABR special. **First:** Its location in the Upper Michigan’s snowbelt. The town of Ironwood, just south of Lake Superior, averages 200” of snow, falling early and staying late, making for a long ski season. **Second:** Eric’s commitment to grooming excellence. For over thirty years, Eric’s reputation as a master groomer has grown; he is a sought-after resource regarding equipment and on-snow skills. **Third:** The trail network itself showcases the beautiful North Woods. With some of the finest classic single-track trails and wide skate trails, the property





Drone view of grooming operations at ABR.



Read about a possible new career for you and apply!

has something for every level of skier, with family-friendly terrain for children and newer skiers, alongside steeper trails that can challenge experienced racers.

With the area now an outdoor enthusiast's mecca, the community has embraced ABR trails as an attraction and a place to host special events for individuals, children, families, and teams. Throughout the Midwest, skiers flock to ABR each winter to enjoy the wonderful trails and all the area has to offer.

This is the backdrop that Eric and Angela found themselves in as they approached retirement and had to decide what to do with their property and business. They feel it's important to continue all that ABR means to the community. By placing ABR trails into a nonprofit, the **Anderson Bluffs and River Trails Foundation**, they are securing ABR's legacy for generations to come. This decision is significant for the local area and the entire ski community. Skiers everywhere can continue to make plans to visit, knowing the future of ABR trails is secure.

For some lucky Nordic person out there, here is Clay Diggins and the Foundation's truly cool message:

### ABR Career Position Opening:

**Title:** Executive Director Anderson Bluffs and River Trails Foundation, reporting to the foundation board of directors.

**Position Description:** ABR, one of the top cross-country ski touring destinations in the country located in Ironwood, Michigan, is transitioning to become a nonprofit foundation. The board of directors is seeking a dynamic individual to lead this newly formed organization. After decades of private ownership, the creation of Anderson Bluffs

and River Trails Foundation ensures that the legacy of ABR Trails will be preserved for generations to come. This is a unique opportunity for someone with a passion for the outdoors to play a key role in leading ABR into the future.

### But Wait — There's More!

Clearly, this is exciting stuff for any Nordic lover, but the position isn't about getting paid to have fun skiing the fantastic ABR trails. A special candidate is sought with the application process beginning here: [AndersonBluffsRiverTrailsFoundation.org/jobs](https://AndersonBluffsRiverTrailsFoundation.org/jobs). This will also take you to a PDF page listing the Full Job Description, where you can see if you qualify to become the ONE! If so, you can then send your resumé to [AndersonFoundationHR@gmail.com](mailto:AndersonFoundationHR@gmail.com).

And you can read more at [AndersonBluffsRiverTrailsFoundation.org](https://AndersonBluffsRiverTrailsFoundation.org).

Got your smartphone handy? Then point its camera at the provided QR Code to get to the information.

This is a career opportunity that can change a life in so many positive ways. Maybe you have the years of experience and know-how the Foundation is looking for and are ready to put your best ski forward. Of course, it will be the Foundation's task to decide who to select among the applicants.

To all those interested who apply, I wish you the best of luck. To Eric and Angela, I say thank you for all the amazing things you have done, creating a fabulous legacy that is ABR, and all that your hard work and enthusiasm have meant to so many as well as to the Ironwood community.

And last, to Clay Diggins: I never knew that Spam could turn out so good!

# silent SPORTS™

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Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan,  
Minnesota, Eastern and  
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Silent Sports™ (ISSN 1543-3005) is published monthly by Multi Media Channels, LLC, 970 Furman Drive, Waupaca WI, 54981. Vol. 40 No. 10 is dated April 1, 2024. Periodicals Postage Paid at Waupaca, WI and additional mail offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Silent Sports, PO Box 408, Waupaca, WI 54981; 715-258-4360 The contents of Silent Sports™ are copyright 2024 by Multi Media Channels, LLC.

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# PFAS Mysteriously Appearing

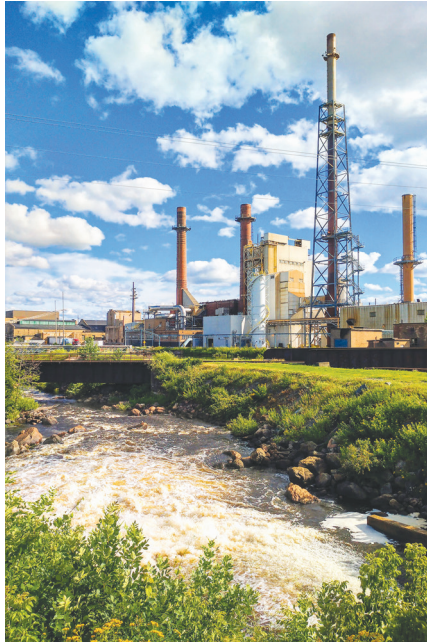
The alarm bells sounded in the small, northern Wisconsin community of **Stella**, with shock waves reverberating throughout the Wisconsin Lakes area and across the Midwest. The results of DNR testing of private wells showed that 49 wells had high levels of PFAS contamination with several testing 160 times higher than state standards during randomized statewide testing. How could an area known for clear, pure water with no major industrial complex have significant PFAS pollution?

"The results were a complete and utter shock," said Stella Chairperson **David Brunette**. "There was no industry out here. We haven't a clue where this stuff came from." Stella is located 10 miles east of Rhinelander.

According to a *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* article, the cause of the contamination remains a mystery. Some experts suspect that the PFAS may stem from the spreading of biosolids from the **Ahlstrom-Munksjö** paper mill in Rhinelander. Biosolids have been spread for years on farm fields surrounding the small town as an affordable fertilizer.

In 2023, a group of Stella residents filed a lawsuit against the Rhinelander paper mill which used PFAS in the production of its products and then sold the biosolids to area farmers. The suit maintains that PFAS have been detected in concentrations of up to 2,910 parts per trillion in their wells, which is 40 times higher than the state's drinking water standard of 70 parts per trillion. Those levels are also hundreds of times higher than proposed EPA drinking water standards.

In July, the Department of Natural Resources sampled sludge from the paper mill, the results of which also showed high levels of PFAS. Unsurprisingly, Ahlstrom's attorneys are fighting the claim, filing a motion to dismiss the plaintiff's cause of action. Chemical giant **3M**, which is alleged to have sold and supplied PFAS products to the Rhinelander mill, is also a



The sprawling Ahlstrom-Munksjö paper mill in Rhinelander is thought to be the source of the Town of Stella's well contaminations. PHOTO BY KERRY BLOEDORN.

defendant as is **Wausau Paper**, the former owner. Wisconsin currently has no standards for PFAS in biosolids and no federal regulations. Could this be the culprit of the Stella well contamination?

## Where Does it End?

The alarm bell sounded again and again across Wisconsin and other parts of the Midwest. **Marinette** and **Peshtigo** were the first two locations in Wisconsin to discover PFAS contamination. PFAS have now been found in French Island near La Crosse, WI; Minneapolis, MN; Ann Arbor, MI; Chicago IL; Gary, IN; and many other locations.

The earliest mention of PFAS in Wisconsin dates to around the mid-90s when toxicologists were testing birds and fish on the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. PFAS gained a lot of interest in the early 2000s in the Midwest due to contamination caused

by 3M in Minnesota, according to **James Zellmer**, Deputy Division Administrator of Environmental Management at the Wisconsin DNR. "We started looking more closely at PFAS in Wisconsin around 2017 due to the groundwater contamination caused by firefighting foam used at the **Tyco facility** in Marinette."

## What are PFAS?

PFAS, or per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, are a family of man-made chemicals used for their water- and stain-resistant qualities in products, including cookware, firefighting foam, rain gear, and ski waxes. The family includes 5,000 compounds, which are persistent, remaining both in the environment and in the human body over time. Because they are in so many things, they are all around us. The chemicals enter the human body through drinking water and have been linked to cancer, lower birth weights, altered hormone regulation, and harm to immune and reproductive systems. The immune system's impact is huge as it limits the body's ability to fight off viruses.

There are myriad ways PFAS and microplastics work their way into product streams, water resources, and eventually into the human body. The recently designed **NSF 53 filter** will remove most PFAS from drinking water, which has been incredibly helpful in areas where PFAS have been found.

Silent Sports enthusiasts will generally not be exposed to PFAS through paddle sports. The potential exposure risk to PFAS while swimming is much lower than the exposure risk from drinking water and eating fish. This is because PFAS are not readily absorbed through the skin and only small amounts of water are accidentally swallowed while swimming.

## State and Federal Regulations

The **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** has known about the health hazards of PFAS for decades but has failed to limit PFAS discharges into the air and



# Across the Midwest Landscape

water, or set cleanup standards. That will soon change as the EPA has proposed strict limits on six types of PFAS commonly found in drinking water.

PFAS will soon be designated as hazardous substances under the federal **Superfund law** which will also allow additional funding for research into these chemicals. PFAS know no boundaries and spread fluidly through water tables. This won't be cheap to remedy. According to the **Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism**, these rules would cost approximately \$1B annually to implement, but would deliver the same amount in avoided treatment for PFAS ailments.

Former Wisconsin DNR Secretary **Adam Payne** knows the importance of clean water. "The number one topic that comes up time and time again is the importance of protecting water resources," Payne said. "Access to safe, clean drinking water should be a right and not a partisan issue. Governor Evers and the legislature set aside \$125 million into a trust fund to provide grants to individuals and communities to test and address PFAS contamination."

While initially approved, that \$125M is *locked in a political struggle with the Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee, refusing to release it.* Both parties are wrangling over the spending mechanics. Evers said that the failure to reach a compromise on the issue during the legislative session has left thousands of Wisconsinites harmed by PFAS contamination without assistance as unusable water continues to come out of their faucets. "There's not one good reason why that \$125M the Legislature and I both approved to fight PFAS contaminants statewide should still be sitting in Madison today," according to a statement released by Evers. "Ensuring Wisconsinites have access to clean, safe drinking water should never be a partisan issue, which is why Republicans should have released these critical investments months ago."

**Minnesota** uses a coordinated approach developed by multiple state agencies to protect families and communities from PFAS. The blueprint identifies short and long-term strategies for preventing, managing, and cleaning up PFAS found throughout the state. Priority areas include research, new health guidance, drinking water and food protection, and tools for cleanup and prevention. Minnesota recently passed one of the strictest laws in the country so far. By 2032, almost everything sold in the state will have to be free of the chemicals.

**Michigan's lower peninsula** may have the highest concentration of PFAS contamination in the Midwest. With PFAS chemicals now documented in the Huron River, the city of Ann Arbor recently installed a PFAS wash-off station at the Argo Cascades, a popular tubing and paddling area according to Michigan Live. Make sure pets don't drink foamy water and rinse pets when swimming in areas where PFAS have been detected.

According to the Star Tribune, 3M pioneered the chemicals and used them for decades in products such as Scotchgard. 3M recently announced it will stop making any type of PFAS by the end of 2025. However, spokesman **Sean Lynch**, contrary to the overwhelming evidence, wrote that the EPA's proposed water rules "lack a sound scientific basis," and that the agency didn't show the rules "are necessary to protect public health or the environment."

## National PFAS Scene

The Midwest is not alone. The latest data shows 5,021 locations in 50 states and four territories are known to be contaminated. The **Waterkeeper Alliance** recently performed the most extensive testing of surface water in the U.S., finding 83% contained at least one type of PFAS. "When we began testing waterways, we knew that our country had a significant PFAS problem, but these findings confirm that was an understatement," noted **Marc**

**Yaggi**, CEO of Waterkeeper Alliance.

PFAS are now indelibly part of the natural resource landscape. The **Environmental Defense Fund** is working directly with businesses to introduce alternatives and identify where they are lurking in their supply chains.

## What Can You Do?

Experts tell us you can continue using these products as long as they are used correctly. For example, don't overheat your non-stick pan. Continue to use your outdoor rain gear but look for an alternative when it's time to replace them. Properly dispose of fluorocarbon waxes and other PFAS-impregnated products in a controlled landfill that protects against leaching.

For more information on PFAS and where they have been found in or near your area, please use the following links, which in turn have further, more specific and interactive links:

- [egle.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=bdec7880220d4ccf943aea13eba102db](https://egle.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=bdec7880220d4ccf943aea13eba102db)
- [ewg.org/interactive-maps/pfas\\_contamination](https://ewg.org/interactive-maps/pfas_contamination)

**Editor's Note:** *As an addendum provided by Michael McFadden, as of press time, the EPA just released new PFAS standards along with \$21B to support the issue nationwide. The new enforceable standard for PFOA and PFOS is 4 parts per trillion according to the agency. The Wisconsin standard is 70 parts per trillion but Wisconsin and other states will now have to comply with the new regulations. The new rule comes nearly 25 years after the discovery of PFAS in Cape Fear, N.C., stemming from a local DuPont plant contamination that caused illnesses in the community and in animals. 📌*



As part of GRiT, Sahara leads a pre-ride at Minooka Park.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WISCONSIN INTERSCHOLASTIC CYCLING LEAGUE / RUBBER DOWN PHOTOGRAPHY 2023.

# Celebrating Coaching Excellence

## Honoring outstanding contributions to NICA and the Wisconsin League

### Renee Griswold

*Editor's Note: Renee Griswold has been the Director of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Cycling League since 2022. A long-time bike commuter in Milwaukee, Renee Griswold found mountain biking in 2018 when her oldest son joined NICA. She then brought her non-profit management expertise, organizational skills and passion for youth development to the sport she loves. Renee thrives on seeing the positive impact riding mountain bikes has on student athletes, coaches and their families.*

**T**he Wisconsin Interscholastic Cycling League, a Chapter League of the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA), has been part of the NICA movement since 2014.

Utilizing mountain biking as a tool for youth development, over 15,000 dedicated volunteer coaches nationwide implemented programs aimed at fostering strong minds, bodies, character, and community among more than 25,000 middle and high school student-athletes. The Wisconsin NICA League boasts over 90 teams statewide, with over 1,000 coaches and nearly 2,000 student-athletes — all passionate about riding bikes!

NICA coaches are truly exceptional individuals. They undergo NICA's comprehensive coach education program to

equip themselves with the necessary resources to lead their teams confidently and competently. They willingly volunteer countless hours to inspire student-athletes to embrace cycling as a lifelong pursuit, all while fostering a positive, thriving community.

Annually, NICA recognizes outstanding student-athletes, coaches, and volunteers nationwide who embody NICA's core values. These awards celebrate individuals whose leadership and devotion to mountain biking have made a lasting impact on their team, league, or the NICA community as a whole.

Wisconsin takes immense pride in the fact that two coaches are being honored this year for their unwavering dedication to NICA and the Wisconsin NICA League.



Sahara with her WORS medals.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WISCONSIN  
INTERSCHOLASTIC CYCLING LEAGUE.

## Sahara Walker

Sahara is being honored with the prestigious **Distinguished Alumni Award**, a recognition reserved for former student-athletes who embody the core values of NICA beyond their high school years. As an ambassador for the mission of getting #MoreKidsOnBikes, Sahara exemplifies the spirit of NICA in various capacities, contributing to the promotion and celebration of mountain biking.

Eligible NICA alumni from any league and any year are considered for this award, and Sahara's outstanding commitment has earned her the recognition this year.

Sahara, a coach for the CamRock MTB team, has been involved in mountain biking since her days as an athlete on the team, transitioning to coaching in 2020 and into the role of a GRiT (Girls Riding Together) Mentor. Her upbringing included riding ATVs, which she believes honed her early MTB skills. Currently pursuing a mechanical engineering degree at the University of Wisconsin Madison, Sahara also competes for the Sunshine Brewing Company team in WORS (Wisconsin Off-Road Series), aspiring to compete collegiately someday.

Inspired by her younger brother's races in 2018, Sahara joined the team during her senior year of high school. After graduation, coaching provided her with a reason to keep riding and supporting her



Sahara, far left, with the CamRock Middle School Athletes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WISCONSIN INTERSCHOLASTIC CYCLING LEAGUE.

teammates in a new role. Her own journey involving overcoming medical conditions including POTS, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, MCAS, and Sjogren's Syndrome, adds depth to her story. She receives regular infusions scheduled around mountain bike practices and races, and meticulously manages her hydration while riding and racing.

Sahara finds immense pride and joy in watching athletes achieve their racing goals. Witnessing their determination through staging, the course, and to the finish line fills her with pride. She also

cherishes the pride her athletes feel in themselves upon completing a race. She recognizes her impact on the student-athletes, exemplified by moments such as when a middle-school girl asked her to ride with their group of friends at practice — a meaningful indication of her positive influence as a coach. Sahara aspires to be for them what her own coaches were for her: a supportive and inspiring figure in their cycling journey.

## Beth Ross

Beth is being honored with the esteemed

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Coach Beth playing the National Anthem at a WI NICA race.

**SRAM Coach of the Year Award**, a distinction reserved for coaches whose leadership and motivational abilities exemplify NICA's mission. This award recognizes coaches who provide student-athletes with the guidance and support to achieve both competitive and non-competitive goals, fostering a sense of camaraderie and excellence within their teams.

Among all licensed coaches nationwide in 2023, Beth's outstanding qualities and contributions set her apart, making her a deserving recipient of this distinguished accolade.

Beth has been deeply involved in

coaching with NICA since 2017, serving as the Head Coach of the Madison West MTB Team since 2020. Alongside coaching, she is a dedicated stay-at-home mom to her two daughters. Her husband also coaches with NICA.

In the past, Beth worked for Outward Bound, where she engaged in mountaineering, whitewater rafting, and rock climbing. The philosophy of personal development through outdoor adventure at Outward Bound aligns closely with NICA's mission, making her transition to coaching seamless. With a master's degree in counseling, Beth's prior work as a high

school counselor allows her to engage meaningfully with youth as well.

Initially unsure of what it meant to be a NICA coach, Beth was motivated by the opportunity to ride alongside her daughter during practices, bonding over their shared interest in mountain biking. Drawn in by the experience, she eagerly continued coaching.

Beth is passionate about NICA's culture and its emphasis on youth development. She finds joy in race season, relishing the camaraderie and diverse array of "race faces" at NICA events. Supporting student-athletes throughout their journey brings Beth immense fulfillment.

### NICA is Life-Changing

NICA has profoundly shaped Sahara's life, dividing it into distinct eras of "before NICA" and "after NICA." Through her involvement, Sahara has discovered passions, forged friendships, and found purpose. The NICA community has become her second family, and the sport her sanctuary. She never anticipated her ability to impact others, yet she now understands the significance of every cheer and gesture of support. Having experienced support herself and now offering it to others, Sahara recognizes the transformative power of kindness, extending far beyond mountain biking into all aspects of life.

For Beth, cycling isn't just about fun — it's about sharing adventures and witnessing others conquer challenges, celebrating

A promotional graphic for Waupaca Chain of Lakes. It features two photos: one of two cyclists on a gravel path and another of a kayak on a lake. The text "Find Your Path" is written in a white script font across the top. Below the photos, it says "from the chain to main" in a teal script font. At the bottom, there is a logo for "WAUPACA CHAIN O' LAKES" and the text "Play - Stay Shop - Dine" next to a red silhouette of Wisconsin with a white star.



Beth and her daughter in costume for Wild (Madison) West Weekend.

their victories in all forms. The unwavering support and encouragement of the NICA community have profoundly shaped her journey, bringing camaraderie and positivity into her life. Through NICA, Beth has discovered a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and joy that extends far beyond the trails.

These awards highlight the transformative impact of NICA and its dedicated members. Congratulations to Beth and Sahara for elevating the sport of mountain biking and empowering others to discover the joy of cycling and the camaraderie of the NICA community.

Join the Wisconsin Interscholastic Cycling League and experience the thrill of biking while embracing NICA's core values of Fun, Inclusivity, Equity, Respect, and Community. With outstanding coaches like Beth Ross and Sahara Walker leading the way, everyone is welcome to ride, thrive, and find their trail to success. For an outstanding video about Wisconsin NICA / High School Mountain Biking, check out: [youtube.com/watch?v=gQ5K\\_WPF0VU&t=152s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ5K_WPF0VU&t=152s). 🇺🇸



Beth on a GRIT ride at Nordic Mountain.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WISCONSIN INTERSCHOLASTIC CYCLING LEAGUE / RUBBER DOWN PHOTOGRAPHY 2022.

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Winona, MN



# The Early Years at Wenonah Canoe

## A Conversation with Mike Cichanowski



From the 1970s: The first catalog. (Editor's note: The catalog itself was twice as long to the right as is shown in the image, but because its length was a solid green, it was cropped for layout purposes.) ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE CICHANOWSKI.

MIDWESTERN FIBERGLAS PRODUCTS (We-no-nah) BOX 247 WINONA, MINNESOTA 55901



Using excellent strength and technique, Mike Cichanowski paddling with his youngest daughter, Heather. "I asked Heather about this photo. She thinks she was 13 at the time and we won that year. The race was in Bowling Green, Kentucky. [We're in a] two man canoe, mixers, which are set up for the big person in front and a seat way back in what we called a 'whale tail' to help trim the boat with the smaller paddles in the back. I think the photo was from a workout session here on the Mississippi River that summer."

### Brian Day

*Editor's Note: Brian Day has more than 30 years of experience working in the outdoor industry and writing about outdoor topics. His writing has been featured in Sea Kayaker Magazine, Adventure Kayak, Paddling Magazine, Paddling Business, The Boundary Waters Journal, and Mother Earth News. Brian lives in Winona, MN, and blogs at [www.kitchi-gami.com](http://www.kitchi-gami.com).*

Tucked into a bend in the Mississippi River a little over 100 miles downstream from Minneapolis lies the river town of Winona, Minnesota. Established in the early 1800s on a sandbar on the right bank of the river, Winona has grown from a frontier sawmill town to a regional manufacturing and shipping hub with a population of 26,000 people.

This quiet backwater town in rural Minnesota is the unlikely home of the largest manufacturer of composite canoes in the world: **Wenonah Canoe**. It's unlikely unless you consider that Wenonah's founder, **Mike Cichanowski**, was born here, and his passion for paddling drove him to build his company from a backyard shed to a global leader in paddlesports.

### From Youthful Paddling to Building

Like many paddlers, Cichanowski got his start in canoeing through the Boy Scouts. His local troop participated in an annual Explorers Canoe



In the 1980s on the way to nationals. Holy cow, that's a fleet! Cichanowski: "Every August we would go to Nationals with a load of boats: some sold, others to use and try and sell. About my trailers — At that time we were making our own. 6' high and 3' long; would hold 36 canoes. We were using a one-ton diesel van that had racks that would hold 6 to 8 canoes. Now we use one-ton, long Dooley pickups with extra fuel tanks. I have one leaving for Alaska next week. We deliver to every state except Hawaii; we sent a container to Denmark last week." In the trailer photo, you can see mostly racing canoes. Different size one man. Two man canoes, mixers which are set up for the big person in front, and a seat way back in what we called a whale tail to help trim the boat with the smaller paddles in the back.

Derby, a three-day race that ran from Red Wing to Winona. They used heavy aluminum canoes and homemade paddles. "We'd paddle all day, camp overnight at Camp Hok-Si-La in Lake City, and then paddle the rest of the way to Winona," Cichanowski said. "You raced in a 4-man team, trading off halfway through each day. Back then, we were trying to make slow boats go fast. We had these giant breadboard paddles. That's what everyone used. That's really how we got our start in woodworking. Making those paddles."

Cichanowski caught the canoe racing bug and competition would eventually push him to build his own, faster canoe. "There were all kinds of little races, regional races," he said. "We had one down on the Root River. Teams started showing up with canoes they'd built. The Minnesota Canoe Association had plans for stripper racing canoes you could build."

It wasn't long before Mike applied his woodworking skills to his first canoe project, a cedar stripper he built in a repurposed chicken coop in his parents' backyard. He earned money to buy materials working as a bagger at the Red Owl supermarket downtown. These were busy years. In addition to his studies and job, Mike took two trips to the Boundary Waters with his troop through the Charles Sommers Canoe Base and completed his requirements for Eagle Scout. He also began to experiment with composite canoes. "We tried to make a mold off a stripper. The first one stuck. It was a mess. But eventually, we got it right."

## Decisive Turning Points

With graduation coming up, Cichanowski started planning

a post-graduation trip that would start in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and follow a historic fur trading route from Northern Wisconsin back to Winona. He and his friends built two composite canoes out of the original mold and began sorting gear for the big adventure. The trouble was, his boss at the grocery store wouldn't give him the time off to go canoeing. "I asked him for three weeks at the end of the summer to do this canoe trip. He just wouldn't give me the time off. So, I quit. I guess that's really the last job I ever had."

The expedition loaded up an old, used station wagon and headed for Nelma, Wisconsin. They sold the car for \$12.50 and put-in on the Brule River, which joins the Menomonee River and flows into Green Bay. Their route took them down to Green Bay, up the Fox River, into the Wisconsin River at Portage, and down to the confluence with the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien. From there they paddled upstream on the Mississippi, returning home just in time to begin college classes at Winona State University. "We'd planned three weeks," Cichanowski said. "We just made it."

He enrolled in coursework toward a forestry degree. "I liked being outside, so I thought forestry made sense, but when I started taking the classes, I struggled. My friends were all studying industrial arts. Winona State was a teacher's college and they were going to be high school shop teachers and they were having a lot of fun. Well, I changed majors to Industrial Arts. Everything clicked after that."

Cichanowski continued to work with composites during college and soon established a small manufacturing company. It wasn't Wenonah Canoe yet, though. In the early days, the company was named **Midwestern Fiberglass Products** and he would take just about any work that came its way, including applying fiberglass linings to industrial tanks at local businesses. "We made dune buggy bodies. We did tanks at Peerless Chain. We had a big contract one summer at Froedtert Malt. With the malting process, it gets corrosive because of all the sugar. They have to shut it down and clean it once a year. We were in there for a month one summer, sandblasting and spraying fiberglass with a chopper



At the 1982 USCA Nationals. Cichanowski: "There were lots of race classes; different age groups: mixed, man and woman. One man, one woman, an adult child, etc, so all got to race a few different times. These were 3-day events. Most people camped out by the event by the river with their boats. Everyone wanted a faster canoe and a better paddle. There were a few other builder so it was competitive."

gun. When we were done, they wanted to send us to Milwaukee to work in one of their other plants. I guess we must have been the low-bidder. But I'd had enough of that; I said 'no way.'"

### Paddling Transition

Midwestern Fiberglass Products was taking these jobs and building canoes out of a small shop in a dilapidated building in downtown Winona. The rent was cheap but the building was old. When a wave of urban renewal money came through in the late 1960s, plans were underway to knock down his building along with the rest of the block. The group in charge encouraged Cichanowski to try for an SBA loan to build a new facility on the edge of town. He wasn't sure that the bank would give him the money but figured it was worth a shot. "Somehow, they gave me the loan. That first loan was \$61,000. We used that to build the new factory."

In 1970, just after his senior year of college, Cichanowski broke ground on a modest 7,500-square-foot factory on Bundy Boulevard. However, the new facility didn't guarantee success in the canoe business. "The thing people don't realize is it's a slow process to start a business," he said. "We were taking other work to keep the doors open. Making signs, geodesic domes, even dog houses. All the while we were trying to build a dealer network for canoes. And there's a lot to figure out. Like, how are you going to ship the canoes? You need a trailer. My first trailer was a single axle. Now we have rigs that hold 42 canoes. That doesn't happen overnight. It takes time."

### The Jensen Factor

Cichanowski's travels on the canoe-racing circuit and connection to the **Minnesota Canoe Association (MCA)** soon put him in contact with legendary racer and prolific canoe designer **Gene Jensen**. The two teamed up to bring Jensen's designs to a broader audience.

About some of Jensen's earliest designs, Cichanowski said it can be hard to keep track. "Gene was designing so many canoes back then. He would build one and give it to his friends to race and then design a new one for the next season. He always said, 'A designer can't test his own product' because he'd be biased. Gene wanted other people testing his boats."

Cichanowski said that there were a couple of things that accounted for Jensen's winning designs: "Gene was an accomplished racer, but he wasn't afraid of criticism. He'd give guys a boat to race, they'd tell him what they didn't like, and he would change it. That and he could build a wood strip canoe faster than anybody out there. Gene could whack out a stripper in a few weeks. For most people, it took months."

The United States Canoe Association is the governing body of open canoe racing in the USA. It has been around since the 1960s. It sets the rules and boat specifications that define age groups and what kind of boats are allowed to race. There are maximum lengths and minimum widths rules so a big part of the Wenonah and Gene Jensen quest was always trying to design a faster model. "Almost every year for about 20 years, we came out with new models," Cichanowski said. "A lot of different one-man hulls made for different-size paddlers; kind of like bike frames made for different-sized people."

One Jensen design that became synonymous with both Wenonah Canoe and the Boundary Waters started out this way.



**Gassing up the 12-dollar-and-50-cent station wagon. Two composite canoes made out of the original mold are secured atop the car that got the expedition to the post-graduation paddling trip starting in Michigan's UP.**

"We built up one of Gene's USCA cruisers," Cichanowski said. "Made it deeper and put the gunwales on backward. And that boat won [downriver whitewater] Nationals." Jensen came back the next year with a purpose-built downriver racer named the **Whitewater II**. Through the years, this design became a favorite of backcountry rangers in the Boundary Waters because of its efficiency and light weight. Demand was so great that Wenonah eventually reworked the mold and reintroduced this model as the **Minnesota II**. It remains among the most popular canoe models Wenonah produces today.

Another Jensen design played a role in introducing Cichanowski's daughters to the fun of canoe racing. "Wenonah has always been a family company," he said. "My wife, **Linda**, was a big part of the business and our daughters, **Heather and Amy**, got started in canoeing when they were young. We raced Adult/Youth under age 12 together and Gene designed a cruiser for us that would let the girls paddle in the back. You started them the first year in the bow and then moved them to the stern for the later years. We used that canoe to win Adult/Youth Nationals. Both daughters won in different years."

### Competitive to the Core

The competition of canoe racing drove innovations in construction as well as design. The challenge was to produce the lightest, stiffest canoe possible. "With a canoe, the most important thing is the design," Cichanowski said. "But after that, you need the right construction and then the lightest weight. You don't want the canoe flexing or twisting. That wastes energy."

Cichanowski said that stiffness comes from thickness. The trick is to add that thickness without adding weight. "Think about corrugated cardboard. If you've got two pieces of paper, that's not stiff. But if you separate them and put that corrugated piece in the middle, now you've got stiffness without weight."

Creating that kind of stiffness in a canoe requires some kind of core material. It took a lot of trial and error before Wenonah settled on a core made from a structural material called **Divinycell**. "You





**Cichanowski:** "When my kids were the right age, we started an Explore Post 007 with their friends. We took these kids all over the Midwest and to Nationals to canoe race. It was a canoe-racing post. We all had great times."

need something that won't soak up a lot of resin," Cichanowski said. "We tried honeycomb. We tried balsa. Balsa is actually really good, but it's hard to work with. We tried all kinds of cores before we found the right one."

That core was soon matched with an innovative new form of synthetic fiber woven by DuPont. **Kevlar 49** had a high tensile strength and was half the weight of similar-strength fiberglass. Wenonah developed a construction that bonded a structural core into a Kevlar hull under vacuum pressure. The result was a light, stiff hull that was surprisingly tough. Tough enough, Cichanowski believed, to stand up to the rigors of Boundary Waters tripping.

Boundary Waters outfitters were skeptical. At the time, they were renting heavy but durable aluminum canoes. "They didn't

want the Kevlar canoes," Cichanowski said. "I took a few up there and left them. I said try to break it. They couldn't. Pretty soon, I was driving trailer loads of Wenonahs up to the outfitters."

### Going Strong

Today, ultralight canoes made with Kevlar or similar aramid materials are the preferred canoes for backcountry travel in the Boundary Waters. Their light weight makes them easy to carry across portage trails and their stiff hulls help them glide effortlessly through the water. Despite their fragile appearance, these canoes have proven tough enough to hold up to the kind of abuse that rental clients or Scouts can dish out.

These days, **Northern Tier High Adventure**, the Scouting canoe base that introduced Cichanowski to the Boundary Waters, has replaced most of their heavy aluminum canoes with ultralight Wenonahs. "They've got the largest fleet of ultralight canoes in the world up there," he said. "Over 300 Wenonahs."

Through the years, Wenonah has been involved in all aspects of paddlesports, from sea kayaking to stand up paddleboards and outrigger canoes. But Cichanowski's central focus has always remained on the core of the business: Canoeing. He takes a family trip to the Boundary Waters just about every year and spends summer evenings paddling for fitness on the Mississippi near his home.

What keeps him going after so many years in the business? Cichanowski said that paddling has always been important to him, but there's something more. "Years ago, a magazine editor asked me to describe myself in three words. I thought about it for a minute and then said, 'Born to paddle.' I've just always enjoyed being in a canoe on the water. That's part of it. But it's more than that. You go all over the country, all over the world, and meet people who have Wenonahs, who want to meet you and talk about canoes and paddling. All these people out on the water in a canoe. And, to have a part in that? That's really something..."



**The first Wenonah Factory circa 1970s.** Cichanowski: "My building is the tall dark brick one in the middle. We used the first floor on ground level. The rest of the building was in shambles. The whole block was just waiting to be torn down."



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Training in less-than-ideal conditions will allow you to put those valuable lessons learned to work on race day. Here, the advantage goes to those runners already experienced in trail running during foggy conditions.

PHOTO CREDIT: COATES PHOTOGRAPHY.

# Trail Running Guidance: Part 3 — Being Opportunistic

*Editor's Note: This is the third of Andrea's Three-Part series on Techniques of Trail Running for the Advancing Trail Runner. Part One (April issue) covered core strength and plyometrics, Part Two (May issue) demonstrated paying attention to detail, and here in the June issue, Part Three provides key guidance on being opportunistic, to make your training schedule fit your life while efficiently increasing the variety and fun of your training. Keep all three articles at hand for review. You'll be glad you did!*

## Andrea Larson

**F**or athletes, including trail runners, who want to reach their full potential, a training plan is necessary. Although it seems like everyone and their cousin has a coach nowadays, a coach isn't necessary for people who are motivated to put in the training and have a good understanding of training principles.

Many people with coaches like that they tell them what to do, so they don't need to put the effort into constructing a training plan. Another top reason people pay for coaching is accountability. Ultimately, coaches can be a resource and sounding board for many aspiring runners, with a

plethora available thanks to technology.

After considering the benefits of a coach, I have opted to self-coach, which allows for more flexibility. After becoming a mother, balancing my priorities became more challenging than ever. Out of necessity, my rigid training plan evolved into a blueprint. Each week, I have a list of weekly key workouts. For instance: a long run, lactic threshold interval session, hill intervals, two strength sessions, and plyometrics with easy cross-training sessions to allow recovery between the hard workouts.

However, I shift the workouts around to accommodate my family and work schedule. Every workout has a purpose, whether

it's speed, distance, or recovery — with no junk miles. Intentionality squeezes the most out of the time and energy available to reach the next level.

How many of us wish we could rewind the years when we ran every workout at a similar, near-all-out effort for almost the same amount of time? This lack of variation not only provided our bodies little stimulus, but also the mediocre intensity wasn't intense enough to increase VO2 max. For me, I didn't recognize my problem until after I was worn down with my race times creeping up.

### Make the Schedule Yours

If you use this blueprint training method, be opportunistic so you don't end up guiltily forcing yourself out the door for a slog on a day when getting the quality workout, or sleep, is what your body needs. For parents, you can take turns sneaking out when the stars align during a child's nap-time for a long run, rather than pinpointing a long run on a different day. If you wake up early, seize the day and complete an important workout first thing in the morning before the day unravels.



**On a hot day, a romp in the woods may be more palatable than melting on pavement, and it also prepares you for your IRONBULL trail races (and elsewhere). If part of your training circuits include trail run practices involving uneven ground and sizeable rocks, you will be more than ready for the race while having fun mixing things up.**

PHOTO CREDIT: COATES PHOTOGRAPHY.



**As she prepared for the Kettle Moraine 100, Andrea Larson struggled in the final miles on a key long training run on the last section of the course. Andrea: "I wondered how I'd complete this section at the 100K mark on race day, then turn around and do it again to finish the 100-mile course. On race day, I was well-fueled and motivated, pushing through the section to set a new PR."**

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE HARTWIG, ORNERY MULE RACE DIRECTOR, PICTURED LEFT.

Often, long runs fit best into the week-ends. However, sometimes this ends up being after an easy or rest day. Especially during peak training cycles, when opportunities for quality sessions are at a premium due to the high training stress, consider beginning a long run with tempo or lactic threshold intervals, followed by an extra-long cooldown.

If you don't have children depending on you, you can use the flexibility to not only work around your other commitments, but also the weather. Rather than attempting to slog a quality interval session through fresh snow, swap that day for a cross-training day, cross-country skiing where your bucket will be filled gliding on fresh corduroy. During the summer when the only time you may have to work out is in the middle of the day, choose a long, easy adventure on the shaded trails rather than a road run on the hot pavement.

On the flip side, don't always avoid adverse conditions. The best way to prepare

for any possible weather thrown at us on race day is to prepare in a variety of conditions. Often, we learn valuable lessons we are thankful to know *before* results are on the line. Lessons I've learned have included realizing that my favorite shorts chafe terribly if I layer long pants on top on a brisk morning, my waterproof mitts are only waterproof for an hour in rain, and that forgetting to blow air back through the hose of my hydration bladder will cause it to freeze in a minute, although I can melt it if I put the hose under my jacket.

Capturing these lessons learned in a training journal provides a resource to reference years later. I'm often shocked at how muddled my memory of key metrics becomes (nope, my times during hill repeats last year weren't five seconds faster).

Not only does working out in adverse conditions provide lessons learned and physical adaptations (such as heat training), but it also offers a psychological advantage. Knowing you can trudge through mud in pouring rain for hours on a solo run empowers you when the rain begins on race day. You've been here before and gotten through it. Conversely, there may be times when you didn't conquer an adverse condition, but don't let that psyche you out if you find yourself in that potential situation again. For example, as I prepared for the Kettle Moraine 100, I did a

long training run on the last section of the course. I hadn't brought enough food and I was on the verge of bonking as I struggled through the final miles of the training run. I wondered how I'd complete this section at the 100K mark, then turn around and do it again to finish the 100-mile course on race day. Turns out on race day, I was well-fueled and motivated during that entire section and it was a non-issue.

### Every Moment Counts

To squeeze even more out of your run with little effort and no extra time, introduce form runs (see "Form Runs" sidebar) during cool-downs. These drills work different muscles and increase agility rather than slogging the final mile home.

Easy/recovery days can become cross-training days where you are able to mix up the grind by working on skills in other outdoor recreation pursuits (if you're reading this magazine, you likely have several), involve the rest of the family for an adventure, or meet up with friends for a social opportunity (plus you can still meet up for that beer afterward).

### The Big Day

There are so many great events to attend so be selective on which ones you choose. Consider: What excites you — running in a new place, the race-day atmosphere, or running with your running buddies? Evaluate your goals for the event before signing up to ensure you have the time and fortitude to work toward your goals. If you're not motivated by one race, then reconsider the event.

In the leadup to my "A" races for the year, I'd identify one or two capstone workouts such as my longest run, hardest interval session, or back-to-back challenging sessions during peak training load, just prior to tapering. Often, these are workouts I would never have dreamed of achieving a year ago or sometimes at the start of the training cycle. Typically, these workouts go well and provide a great confidence boost going into the big day. Conversely, when I fail to achieve my goal in the capstone workout, it is often due to my lack of preparation and a litmus test before the race.

Even if race day doesn't unfold the way I intended, which is often the case, I will

forever hold the pride of completing that workout, which will never be diminished. Since there are so many variables we cannot control on race day (weather, competitiveness of the field, course conditions), you should set multiple goals. If your only race goal is to hit a certain time, a pop-up rainstorm may throw months of hard work out the window in a matter of minutes.

Although races are great events to look forward to with the trail community, we don't always need to have a race on the calendar to challenge ourselves and enjoy the trail community. We can create our own adventures by exploring a new trail system or adding a twist such as trying to run all the streets in our neighborhood. For a new challenge, chase after a Strava segment or Fastest Known Time, or create your own challenge by setting a mileage, time on feet, or vertical challenge goal.

With or without a coach, you should establish your training goals followed by a plan to achieve them. Document your progress so you can evaluate and learn from what did and did not go well. Then repeat your iteration as you inch toward your bigger long-term goals. Take these opportunities and — make them yours! ♡

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## FORM RUNS

Form run (or running drill) ideas. Do about 15 seconds x 6 x 3 sets:

- Fast skips
- Skips for distance
- Skips for height
- Backward skips
- Backward running
- Butt kicks
- High knees

Grapevines (or carioca): A lateral, cross-over step combination. Check out: [youtube.com/watch?v=R3\\_Q\\_SulyM&t=37s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3_Q_SulyM&t=37s)

Straight-leg run

Additionally, 6 to 10 strides (running with good form and accelerating and holding a fast but not all-out speed for about 10 seconds) may be beneficial in the final mile or two of a run.

# Masters Endurance Athletes and Heart Health



## Bradley Bart, MD

*Editor's Note: Bradley Bart is a cardiologist at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and a Professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota. He raced cross-country skiing in high school and college, and continues to race as a Wave 1 Birkie skier.*

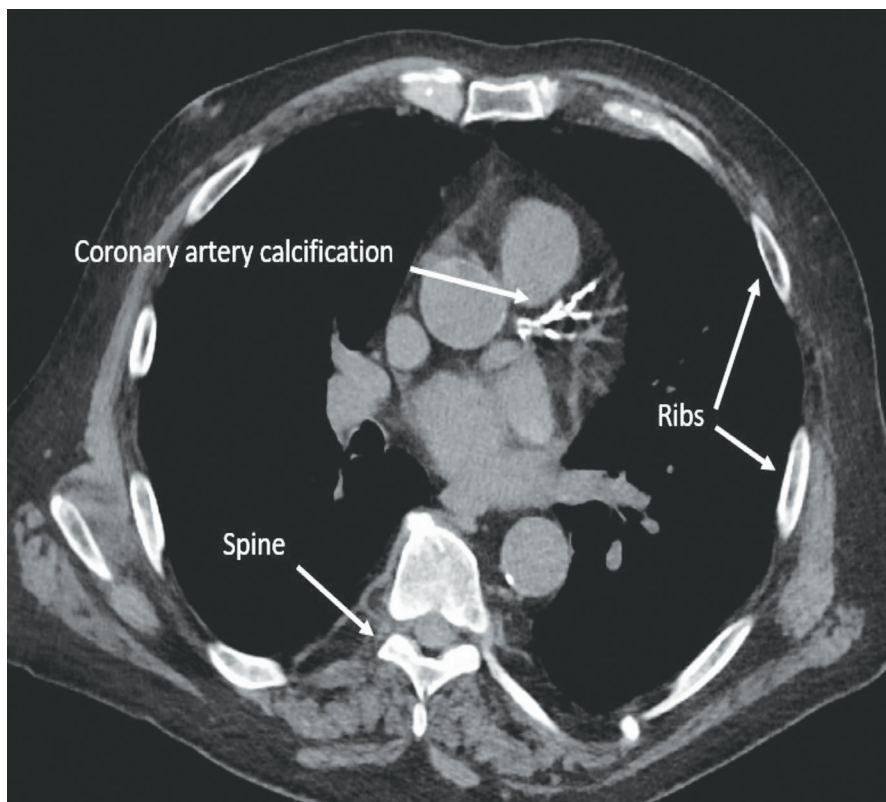
### "Am I Going to Have a Heart Attack?"

I performed CPR on a cross-country skier during the 2018 Masters World Cup in Minneapolis; sadly, this athlete died. After witnessing or hearing about such tragedies, many masters endurance athletes ask themselves: "Could this happen to me?"

We are repeatedly told that exercise is good for the heart. How can it be that an extremely fit endurance athlete can have a heart attack?

In general, more exercise is better. Current guidelines recommend 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of high-intensity exercise each week. Most masters endurance athletes exercise much more than that. However, massive hours of training can result in **athletic heart syndrome** — an enlargement of the heart sometimes associated with scarring of the heart muscle, and possibly coronary artery calcification and arrhythmias such as atrial fibrillation.

In this article, I'll address some common cardiovascular topics that endurance athletes often have questions about: Estimating the risk of having a heart attack; Coronary artery calcifications, and



X-ray image showing coronary artery calcification.

IMAGES COURTESY OF DR. BRADLEY BART.

Atrial fibrillation.

First, however — and most importantly — if you have heart disease or any symptoms such as chest discomfort, unusual shortness of breath, or sustained palpitations, talk to your doctor! The advice and information that follows only applies if you have no symptoms concerning heart disease!

### Estimating Your Heart Attack Risk

It is impossible to know when or if you are going to have a heart attack. There are risk factors that increase the likelihood of having a heart attack, such as

age, hypertension, diabetes, hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol), and tobacco use. Risk calculators (available online from the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology) estimate the risk of having a heart attack over the next 10 years. For example, using a risk calculator for a healthy 60-year-old masters endurance athlete who doesn't smoke, doesn't have diabetes or hypertension, and has a normal cholesterol level, the estimated risk of having a heart attack or stroke over the next 10 years is 7.4%. According to the American Heart

Association, 10-year risk falls into the following categories:

- Low risk: < 5%
- Borderline risk: 5 to < 7.5%
- Intermediate risk: 7.5 to < 20%
- High risk: ≥ 20%

*How is this information useful?*

Guidelines recommend taking a cholesterol-lowering medication (usually a medication in the class of drugs known as a “statin”) to reduce the risk of having a heart attack if you are at intermediate or high risk based on these risk calculators. If you are in the low-risk category, statins are not recommended because the likelihood of benefiting is low. If you are at borderline risk, like our example athlete with a 10-year risk of 7.4%, the benefit of a statin is uncertain, and it may be reasonable to treat or not to treat.

While guidelines are clear about when to take a statin, they don't comment on whether it's safe for a competitive athlete to do high-intensity interval training and racing. However, if you are in the high-risk category, I would recommend getting a cardiology evaluation, EKG, and a maximal exercise test prior to intensity training and racing.

These risk calculators generally do not take into account family history of heart disease. If you have a first-degree relative (i.e., a parent or sibling) who had a heart attack or needed a cardiac stent or bypass surgery before the age of 50 or 60, you should talk with your doctor.

### Coronary Artery Calcification

Calcification of the coronary arteries (CAC) indicates the presence of atherosclerosis, the presence of cholesterol buildup, and abnormal growth and scarring of the arteries. Calcification of the coronary arteries can easily be seen on a CT scan of the chest. If present, this calcification counts as an additional risk factor (or risk enhancer), increasing the likelihood of having a heart attack.

The absence of coronary calcification lowers the estimated risk.

The calcium score is reported in Agatston units (a

measure of x-ray density) and can range from 0 to several thousand. Some risk calculators incorporate a calcium score for a more refined risk assessment. One example is the MESA (Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis) risk score calculator. For example, the athlete discussed previously, with a 10-year risk of having a heart attack or stroke of 7.4%, would be reassigned to a different risk level depending on the presence or absence of CAC. If the CAC score was 0, the 10-year risk would move down to 1.9%. However, if the CAC score were 400, the 10-year risk would increase to 9.6%. This reclassification might have implications for whether or not you should consider taking a statin.

*Should I be tested for coronary artery calcification?*

Be careful here. Opening the door on CAC testing can sometimes increase anxiety and stress. It should only be done when the results provide useful information — something that you would act on. The following are some general principles.

If you are experiencing chest tightness or unusual shortness of breath, you should not get a calcium score; you should be seen by your doctor! *Calcium scores are only used for people without any symptoms or known coronary heart disease.*

CAC testing is most useful if you fall in the borderline risk category using a standard risk calculator. If your risk is low, you should not get a calcium score because you are already at low risk for having a heart attack and additional treatment would not be recommended. Similarly, if your risk is intermediate or high, you should *not* get a CAC test — you should be taking a statin to lower your risk of having a heart attack. However, if you are in the borderline risk category (5% to < 7.5%) like our example athlete, a CAC test may be useful. The absence of CAC would reduce your risk from borderline to low, and, in this case, taking a statin would not be recommended. In contrast, if there is CAC on a CT scan, your risk would increase from borderline to intermediate; in this case, statin therapy would be recommended.

*What should I do if I already got a CAC test and have coronary artery calcification?*

If you already have a scan showing the presence of CAC, you should use a risk calculator that incorporates the results of

your CAC score and treat with a statin if the 10-year risk falls in the intermediate or high-risk category (≥7.5%). Guidelines go a step further for competitive athletes and recommend getting a maximum exercise stress test and an echocardiogram before training and competing. This is because high-intensity training and competition may increase the risk of having a heart attack in those with coronary artery calcification. This may be due to the increases in heart rate and blood pressure that occur with intense exercise, increases in stress hormones, and increases in blood flow creating shear forces on the lining of the blood vessels. Other contributing factors might include inflammation, dehydration, and electrolyte depletion.

### Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation is an irregular heart rhythm that can be diagnosed with an EKG. The top two chambers (atria) beat very fast with rates of 400 beats per minute, while the bottom 2 chambers (ventricles) beat irregularly, often with increased rates of up to 180 beats per minute. See the provided examples of an EKG showing a Normal Sinus Rhythm and an EKG showing Atrial Fibrillation.

Atrial fibrillation can also cause symptoms of palpitations, weakness, and shortness of breath. Over time, atrial fibrillation can weaken the heart muscle and reduce the squeezing power of the heart. In addition, atrial fibrillation can lead to blood clots in the heart, and, if these blood clots embolize (leave the heart) a stroke can occur. Blood thinners are often used to prevent these blood clots from forming.

Masters endurance athletes may be at an increased risk for atrial fibrillation compared to non-athletes. This could be related to some of the structural changes associated with athletic heart syndrome, including heart chamber enlargement, scarring, stress hormones, and changes in the autonomic nervous system.

One study looked at all cross-country skiers who successfully completed the 90K Swedish Vasaloppet over a 10-year period. There were more than 55,000 skiers with 919 cases of atrial fibrillation translating to a rate of 17.9 per 10,000 patient years at risk. This risk was higher for those who were older, those with faster finishing times, and for those who completed more Vasaloppet competitions.



Another study followed more than 500 Norwegian Birkebeiner athletes over the age of 65 for 10 years. The results showed that 28.5% developed atrial fibrillation compared to 17.8% in a group of non-skiers from the general population.

New wearable technology such as smart watches can sometimes alert a person about the presence of an irregular heart-beat. The technology is not advanced enough at this point to reliably make the diagnosis of atrial fibrillation, so further testing is necessary using a twelve-lead EKG or an ambulatory heart monitor placed by a medical clinic to confirm the diagnosis.

#### *Should I be tested for atrial fibrillation?*

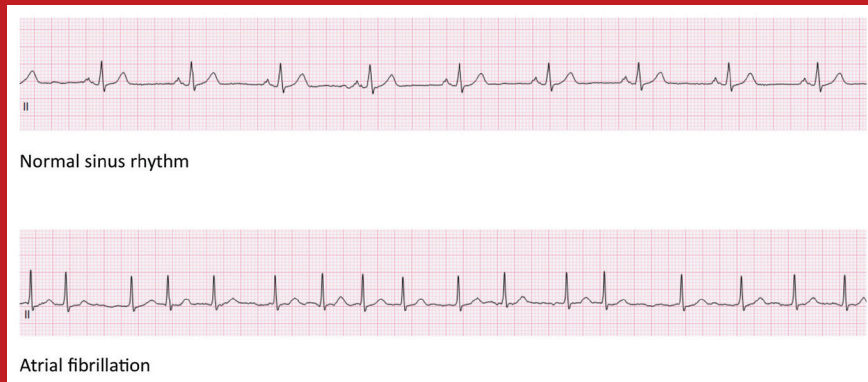
There is no evidence that testing for atrial fibrillation in someone who has no symptoms is helpful. So, if you feel fine, no testing is recommended. However, it may be useful to get tested if you have sustained palpitations or symptoms such as your heart pounding in your chest or beating irregularly.

An occasional feeling of skipped heartbeats is normal and does not require testing. However, if the feeling is sustained for minutes or hours, or associated with lightheadedness, chest pain, or shortness of breath, further testing would be useful. Not all palpitations are caused by atrial fibrillation. Some causes are completely benign while other causes (rarely) could be life-threatening. The only way to make a diagnosis is to get a medical-quality rhythm strip or EKG while the symptoms are occurring. If the symptoms occur every day, a 2-day heart monitor should capture the heart rhythm during symptoms and answer the question. If symptoms occur once every week or two, wearing a heart monitor for 2 to 4 weeks may be necessary.

When symptoms are less common, a diagnosis can sometimes be made using an implantable loop recorder. This is a small recording device, about the size of a grain of rice, that is implanted just under the skin below the collarbone. It can stay in for a year or more and can collect sample rhythm strips that can be reviewed in-clinic or wirelessly.

*If I have atrial fibrillation, will I have to take blood thinners?*

If you have atrial fibrillation, your doctor will calculate your risk of having a stroke.



**An example EKG showing a normal heart rhythm, top image, and an example EKG showing a heart rhythm in atrial fibrillation.**

All patients with atrial fibrillation are at a slightly increased risk of having a stroke. However, there are some risk factors that make having a stroke even more likely, such as diabetes and hypertension. If the annual risk of having a stroke is more than 1% or 2%, the usual recommendation is to start blood thinners. Blood thinners are well-tolerated if there are no underlying bleeding conditions. However, any trauma that occurs while taking a blood thinner can result in serious bleeding. Deciding whether a blood thinner is right for you would depend on the likelihood of having a stroke and the risk of bleeding. Your doctor can help you make this decision.

#### *Is there a treatment or cure for atrial fibrillation?*

Atrial fibrillation can often be eliminated — but not always. There are two general approaches to managing atrial fibrillation: rate control and rhythm control.

**Rate Control:** The rate control strategy makes no attempt to eliminate or prevent atrial fibrillation. Rather, heart-slowing medications are used to prevent the heart rate from going too high when episodes of atrial fibrillation occur. If you rarely have episodes of atrial fibrillation, it may not bother you much and a rate control strategy may be fine. However, if the symptoms of atrial fibrillation bother you or adversely affect your exercise performance, you may opt for the other approach.

**Rhythm Control:** The rhythm control approach aspires to restore a normal heart rhythm and prevent future episodes of atrial fibrillation. This is easier said than done. A normal rhythm can usually be restored by delivering an electrical shock to the heart. However, atrial fibrillation often

comes back, and antiarrhythmic medications are used to prevent this from happening. These medications sometimes have risks or side effects, but the advantages of maintaining a normal heart rhythm may be worth it.

Another approach to restoring and maintaining normal rhythm is an invasive procedure called an **ablation**. With ablation, catheters are placed inside the heart to heat up and burn the heart tissue that propagates the atrial fibrillation. It requires an overnight stay in the hospital and is increasingly being considered the best approach for eliminating atrial fibrillation.

Treatment decisions are challenging with atrial fibrillation. It is therefore important to meet with a cardiologist to review the options and weigh the risks and benefits of various approaches.

#### **Heartfelt Summary**

The health benefits of endurance training and racing are substantial. However, your risk of having a heart attack or atrial fibrillation is not zero. Estimating your risk of having a heart attack or stroke using one of the available risk calculators can be useful; screening with a CT scan to measure CAC may be useful, particularly if you are at borderline risk for having a heart attack or stroke (5 to <7.5% using a standard risk calculator).

You should meet with a cardiologist before high-intensity training and competition if CAC or atrial fibrillation are present. If you have a strong family history of early coronary artery disease or if you have any symptoms, you should talk with your doctor about additional evaluation or treatment that may be recommended. 💰



The author improves her balance ability on the take-it-anywhere GiBoard slackline simulator.



Nancy Hessert celebrates her 77th birthday by practicing balance on the RevBalance, a board that sits on an inflatable disc, roller, or half-cylinder.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MJ HESSERT.

# Training for Better Balance — In Sports and in Life

**M.J. Hessert,  
DO, MPH**

*Editor's Note: Last month, Dr. M.J. Hessert presented the behind-the-scenes physiology of balance, a vital part of the foundation of our health and sports performance often overlooked even among athletes. This article presents ways to improve our balance, for our silent sports and the quality of our lives. Dr. MJ is a Captain in the U.S. Navy and an emergency physician and aerospace medicine specialist. Aerospace medicine is a medical specialty that seeks to optimize human performance for pilots, astronauts, and aircrews as tactical athletes. Dr. MJ has learned to translate the strategies that optimize tactical athlete performance into everyday practices that terrestrial athletes can also use to their advantage.*

**B**alance is fundamental to our every movement. Without balance, there is no walking, riding a bike, or even sitting in a chair. Balance is crucially important but often taken for granted and therefore not the object of dedicated training.

While everyone relies on balance for safety in everyday activities, athletes stand to reap even bigger rewards from good balance. Athletes can gain a competitive advantage through better technique, more tricks (depending on the sport), greater efficiency, fewer falls, and fewer injuries. Balance training also helps to even out asymmetry between the dominant and non-dominant sides, train little-used stabilizer muscles, and speed recovery

from injuries. It strengthens the mind-body connection.

Balance training also improves memory and spatial cognition in older people. Please see last month's issue for a broad explanation of how balance works in the human body and why it is so important.

## **Safety Tips**

As with any type of exercise, safety is paramount. Balance training has an inherent risk because, to improve balance, one must challenge their balance. Challenging balance forces adaptation and improvement, but also carries the risk of falling. As a result, it is imperative to make balance exercises and the environment as safe as possible.

If you have a training partner or willing friend, enlist their help as a spotter. If there is no spotter available, do the exercises next to a table, chair, or railing that you can grab onto in the event of losing balance.

Practicing balance in a hallway can be useful because you can catch yourself falling forward or backward against the wall. A ski pole or walking stick with a rubber tip can provide extra support when needed. Carpeting, mats used for gymnastics/wrestling/rock climbing, or sand/woodchips outside all make soft landing surfaces. There is also safety equipment such as helmets, elbow pads, knee pads, wrist guards, and even undergarments with hip pads to use for injury prevention.

## **General Principles**

The science of physics as well as lived experiences illustrate that the higher the center of gravity, the more likely the object (or person) is to tip over. Likewise, a wide base of support has more stability than a narrow base of support. Movement of the limbs or body in one direction will require movement (dynamic balance) to reposition the center of mass over the base. Conversely, to stay in place



(static balance) while moving the limbs, one must counterbalance with the rest of the body or limbs. The dominant leg (or arm) is usually better at balance than the non-dominant limb.

Some athletes think they cannot afford to spend their finite training time dedicated to balance. A more pressing question is whether they can afford to not spend time on balance. A tweaked back or injury from a fall takes far more time away from the athlete's preparation than a small amount of regular training. The \*Vestibulo-ocular reflex begins to adapt to novel forces in as little as ten minutes, thanks to \*\*neuroplasticity. (\*Defined: an involuntary reflex that stabilizes the visual field and retinal image during head motion by producing eye movements in a counter direction; \*\*Defined: The brain's ability to change and adapt due to experience.)

Performing exercises that increase the complexity of the environment will improve balance. If you become motion sick while practicing balance, congratulations — you have successfully provided novel stimuli to train your brain and balance organs. However, you need not push it to this level. If you find yourself nauseated or dizzy, take a break and try again tomorrow. Your body will adjust and become desensitized to the stimulus. This is where the term "getting your sea legs" comes from.

### Training Balance Without Equipment

There are many ways to practice balance in your living room, yard, or gym without specialized equipment. Balance exercises can be done anytime and anywhere because they are low-intensity and adaptable. For example, doing whatever you normally do but while standing on one leg or on tippy toes is an easy way to initially hone balance skills. Likewise, doing activities with eyes closed — a few seconds at first and then longer periods — forces the vestibular and proprioceptive (your body's ability to sense movement, action, and location) systems to get stronger.

Since most head movement is in the horizontal plane, moving your head or holding it in a position you wouldn't normally choose challenges in a positive way. Yoga, dance, and Thai chi are excellent balance exercises that can be done almost anywhere. While many YouTube videos show myriad ideas for balance training with or



The FluidStance, with its bowed bottom, is made for multitasking such as working at a standing desk or washing the dishes while balancing, as Bryan Merlonghi does here.

without equipment, there are significant individual differences in the development of balance skills. This is why you should consider vestibular rehabilitation professionals who can identify these differences and provide targeted training unique to your situation. Many professional athletes use vestibular rehabilitation to maximize their athletic performance.

### Using Equipment to Improve Balance

Several types of balance trainers and specialized equipment exist for those who want to take balance training to the next level; this should include almost everyone, especially athletes. An unstable base of support forces the brain to interpret a wider variety of signals. From boards and beams to balls, slack lines, and free weights, there are a variety of fun, safe, and educational balance toys to try.

Many of these devices heavily employ and drill ankle proprioception, which is vital for excellent balance. Older readers may remember the Bongo Board. Invented

in the 1950s, it was a toy I used to ride on rainy days at the cottage in Minocqua, Wisconsin. While a quick Internet search will reveal many different types of balance trainers, I have a few favorites.

For everyday do-it-in-the-living-room, fun-for-the-whole-family balance training, I recommend the **GiBoard** ([giboardus.com](http://giboardus.com)). Made by Gibbon Slacklines, GiBoard is a small slackline trainer in the shape of a snowboard. There are no moving parts, nothing to set up, and it's very accessible. It features a grounded board with a strap spanning its upturned edges. While sitting in my living room, people gravitate toward this beautiful board and naturally want to give it a try. Then they don't want to get off of it.

The best boards for incorporating into a regular workout are the **Revbalance** ([revbalance.com](http://revbalance.com)) and **SkillBoard** ([skillboardusa.com](http://skillboardusa.com)). These boards feature a solid board on an unstable support piece such as a cylinder, disc, or ball. They come with interchangeable bases of support, lots of great exercise ideas, and tips to get started. There is plenty of room to increase the difficulty level or change the stimulus by trying a different shape or size of accessories under the board.

For board-sport enthusiasts such as snowboarders, skateboarders, and wakeboarders, the **Vew-Do board's rail and roller** mimic the feel of doing tricks. This feature is excellent for skill-specific training. Based in Michigan, Vew-Do ([vewdo.com](http://vewdo.com)) is a part of our midwestern Silent Sports community.

Finally, the **FluidStance board** ([fluidstance.com](http://fluidstance.com)) is an elegant way to train balance — and comfortably stand — at a standing desk while working. For busy

athletes who feel they cannot devote valuable training time to balance (and please re-think this), the FluidStance is purpose-made to multitask balance work and desk work.

At home, standing on a pillow can provide a bit of instability. Any kind of ramp will help develop ankle proprioception when standing on it at different angles. In the gym, standard equipment such as free weights, balls, and half balls can be easily adapted to balance training. For instance, try sitting on a stability ball or standing on a half ball while using dumbbells or kettlebells. Perform an exercise one-legged or with one arm at a time to improve balance. Also, any movement performed with a weight chest-high or higher challenges balance by raising the center of gravity. But of course, remember the provided safety tips whether starting out or experienced at the routine.

### Sport-Specific Training

Sport-specific balance training will develop athletes' balance and simultaneously provide more experience, strength, and skill in their preferred activity. For example, trail running and mountain biking on uneven terrain will spark balance adaptations in road runners and cyclists. Alpine skiers can ski the moguls or powder (or groomed terrain on one foot) for balance training. Gliding and sliding sports such as skiing and ice skating are excellent for balance, especially if it's challenging.

That said, balance skills are highly transferable from one setting to another. This makes balance practice a perfect opportunity for cross-training. **Dr. Charles Reese**, an otolaryngologist (ear, nose, throat specialist) at the Naval Aerospace Medical Institute, calls out racquetball in particular because it requires tracking a moving target (the ball) with the eyes across a featureless surface (white walls of the court) while running, cutting, and using hand-eye coordination.

### Simple Daily Ways to Incorporate Balance

People are more likely to perform balance training if they can easily incorporate it into their daily activities. A simple way to do this is to multi-task balance training into another daily routine. For example, standing on one leg while brushing your teeth or while in line at the store. Once



**Aaron "Airdog" Garrow attempts the challenging Skill Board in the alley – it moves 360 degrees. I reminded him that balance training is not a silent sport if you keep yelling, "Whoa!"**

that becomes rote, closing your eyes provides an added level of difficulty. Instead of the usual walking, consider hopping on one foot several times while you go down a hallway or up the stairs.

**Dr. Angus Rupert, MD, PhD**, a world-leading expert on spatial disorientation, recommends tipping your head slowly from side to side while driving. Changing the sight picture in this way forces the brain to reconcile unusual visual inputs with normal vestibular inputs. Thus, unusual head angle challenges the "system of systems" to sharpen and adapt. Of course, operating a moving vehicle has its own risks, so please use judgment in trying this technique.

### Miscellaneous Tips for Balance

A shoulder-width stance with a bend in the knees is best for balance. To a certain extent, speed also helps balance; many people have experienced this on a bicycle — going too slowly makes balance tricky while faster speeds aid balance until the bike becomes "squirrely." Fixing your gaze on a point in front of you is useful when possible. **Skateboarder Aaron "Airdog" Garrow** advised, "Look ahead and adjust your weight in *anticipation* of what's to come, rather than only correcting for what's under your feet."

There is conflicting evidence regarding whether \*diaphragmatic breathing aids balance, however, there is reason to believe it does. (\*Defined: A relaxation technique in which a person focuses on taking

slow, deep breaths using the diaphragm and expanding the belly rather than using the intercostal muscles to expand the chest.) Since diaphragmatic breathing is healthy and free, it's definitely worth a try.

Another free and easy option is going barefoot. Walking and other barefoot activities increase foot flexibility and strengthen the intrinsic foot muscles, which are mostly atrophied due to the percentage of time we spend in shoes. Of course, always be aware of surfaces and debris.

### The Aging Catch-22

When older adults feel that their balance is starting to fail, they may turn to avoiding the activities that would challenge them and thus improve their balance. This can become a vicious downward cycle. If this applies to you, employ the safety strategies above or look for a yoga or balance class geared toward elders. Exercise – including balance training – can be adapted to anyone willing to try.

Optimizing/treating medical conditions also improves balance. For instance, elderly patients who have cataract surgery are less likely to sustain hip and vertebral fractures from falls. Treatment for other conditions such as Parkinson's, stroke, and vertigo is also helpful. Medications and polypharmacy can impair balance, as can alcohol and other drugs. Talk to your doctor if you think medications might be a factor.

For athletes of all ages, injuries, especially lower extremity injuries of the knee and ankle, can wreak havoc on balance. A significant portion of physical therapy for lower extremity injuries involves targeted balance training. Optimum sleep, hydration, and nutrition all support the function of nerves, connective tissue, eyes, inner ears, and cognition, so treat your body right in addition to performing dedicated balance training.

Hopefully, this article has inspired you to take your balance to the next level. You never know what future injuries you'll be preventing but you *will* feel a difference while performing your sports and activities. Don't let pride or intimidation get in the way. Instead, grab a friend and try a balance training device at home or in the gym. You'll be glad you did, for a long, long time. 💰



Lisa Rippe enjoys the beautiful fall trail while completing the marathon distance at We Walk 2023.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WE WALK.



At We Walk 2010 (10K, half marathon, marathon, and 50K), Michael Gleisner (bib #1), Nick Karem (bib #2), and Richard Gleisner (bib #3) enjoy the competition, athleticism, outdoors, and health benefits of silent sports via race walking, all the while with their joints thanking them.

# Is it Past Time to Make Race Walking Your Next Silent Sport?

## Consider the following ...

### *Peter Dorsen*

**R**ace walking is a safe way to stay fit, prevent osteoporosis and joint injury, shed weight, and even reduce cancer risk. You can smell the flowers inside or out, four seasons of the year by simply walking out the door and—using this funky technique: one foot always on terra firma as you thrust your front foot straight at the knee, continuing so as your knee passes under your body while rotating your hips forward and back, staying as vertical as you can.

Another iteration of race walking is **power walking** ([uspwa.net](http://uspwa.net)). Twin Cities Race Walkers organizer and informal coach

**Bruce Leasure** compared the two as follows: “Race walking is running, with two funny rules: (1) No running — actually, no flight phase; that time when both of your feet are off the ground. This is the kinesiology definition of running versus walking: running has a flight phase while walking does not; (2) The knee of your lead leg must be straight from the moment your foot touches the ground until that same leg is vertical underneath you. Power walking is just like race walking, but you don’t have to follow rule 2.”

For an excellent video showing slow-motion imagery and power walking technique, along with health benefits, check out: [youtube.com/watch?v=erk4\\_3OuUIY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erk4_3OuUIY). For an excellent video explaining and showing

race/power walking comparisons, go to: [youtube.com/watch?v=7XtMbToKd88](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XtMbToKd88). And a great website on race walking, whether learning about the sport, competitions and clinics to attend, officiating, and more, please check out **Jeff Savage’s** [racewalk.com](http://racewalk.com).

As to getting into and learning the sport, Leasure said that power walking requires a scant two minutes for him to teach a newer walker. Typical speeds for local walkers are about 4 to 6 mph, translating to 15 to 10-minute miles, which is true for both race and power walkers. Also, calories burned per mile for both is about the same as running, which is dependent on the weight of the athlete, not on the speed.



Anita Macias-Matters competing in the 3000m race-walking competition at the USATF Masters Indoor Championships, 2024, Chicago, IL, 2024.

PHOTO BY RACHEL CHAPLA.



From We Walk 2023, marathon-distance finisher Paul David (bib #244 / ribbon & medal) celebrates with his support team of family and friends.

PHOTO BY A WE WALK VOLUNTEER.

This is great news for those searching for a joint-and-user-friendly. Also, the race events offer great options, from the beginner to the elite. A great example is the welcoming **We Walk! Marathon, Half, 10K, 50K**. Check out [www.walkmarathon.com](http://www.walkmarathon.com), which takes place in 2024 on September 28th. This is an event happening since 2009, and it's a great race to get started or show your elite pace.

### Walking Tall and Fast

Near 70, with a slew of well-deserved Minnesota and National race-walking gold medals in the 20K, **Anita Macias-Matters** laughed, "I've fielded water bombs, water guns, and plenty of hoots and hollers from passing cars, and mostly young kids on a training run on local back roads." Despite such challenges, this 5' 3" Minnesota Hall of Fame, USATF All American racer anticipates the upcoming July 2025 **Senior National Games in Des Moines**, aware that her three serious competitors are stiffer competition than most of the women racers a decade or two younger.

Anita is appreciative of the USATF Masters Indoor Championships and the friendly, instructive race-walking crowd, saying, "The good news is I did not DQ in the 2 races, the 1 mile and 3000 meters. Since there were only three women in my age division in both, I received a bronze medal for each. The bad news is that in order to keep my form legal, I purposely slowed my pace. My pace for the two events was the slowest I've ever walked in

a competition. The four USATF race walk officials were certified at National and/or International levels. This was my first time competing at a USATF National level and my goal was legal form and not speed. My experience at this USATF National competition reinforced my belief that master athletes support one another while still being competitive and striving to excel. USATF race walk officials are committed to the sport and in assisting athletes to excel. Examples include, (1) I came in last in my heat of the 3000 meters. Many of the competitors in my heat waited at the finish line for me and cheered me across the line. (2) Several of the race walk judges held an impromptu race walk clinic for me and two other race walkers who had questions about form. One of the race walk judges was particularly encouraging. She sought me out and told me she could see I was holding way back and that my form was fine and next time. "I should go for it."

The **Twin Cities Race Walkers (TCRW)** is managed by Bruce Leasure, Dave Daubert, Will Loew-Blosser, and Anita. "The four of us run the We Walk," Anita said. "Bruce and Dave are the race managers for all TCRW events and We Walk. Bruce is the go-to for assistance with learning or improving walking technique, and he oversees the TCRW group walks. Will manages the media and web site for TCRW events and We Walk." The first We Walk was held in 2009 in May on the Lake Wobegon trail, out of St.

Joseph, MN, and has continued annually in May at this location until 2017. Starting in 2018, We Walk has been held annually in September on the Dakota Rail Trail out of Mayer, MN."

Whether you're a loner looking for a challenging walk around a city lake or the high school track, just head out your back door for an aerobic workout no less challenging than an equivalent running pace. Perhaps you prefer company. You can join some welcoming **Twin Cities Race Walkers** for a group walk on Wednesdays, Saturdays, or Sundays in Minneapolis or St. Paul. Information, schedule, and locations available at [twincitiesracewalkers.org](http://twincitiesracewalkers.org). They welcome all walkers of any style, i.e. race walking, power walking, and even strolling.

Bruce Leasure said, "This sport is just a great way to get you out and moving; no expensive equipment, no app or technology, no gym membership, and just enjoy one of the oldest and simplest forms of exercise on earth. We meet several times a week. Power walking or race walking, I can teach you in two minutes."

Race walking has appeal for both the young and older set, minus the hazards caused by running's surface impact. Race walking on the flats combines the endurance of a long-distance runner with the attention to technique of a hurdler or shot putter. There are pick-up races with the club, or try the 10K, half or full marathon, or 50K We Walk Event on the last Saturday

in September. What better way to spend a fall morning, taking in crispy, colorful leaves and nature's aroma.

An elite race walker can go as fast as 4 minutes per kilometer for a half marathon. But unless you're a sucker for competition, who cares how fast you go? "You can push up your pace to a heart rate as fast as you can running," Anita said. "The average healthy and physically fit race walker can break 40 minutes on a 5K and 13-minute miles are quite respectable."

## Some Serious History

Race walking began as far back as the 18th Century as *pedestrianism* or so-called footman's races, sometimes over incredible distances such as 1,000 miles in 1,000 hours. The sport began in England as a betting game. The first woman racer, **Emma Sharp**, raced in 1894 at similar awe-some distances.

The "heel-to-toe" rule accompanied the 800m race walk at the 1904 Olympic Games initially as part of the decathlon. By the 1908 London Olympics, race walking stood alone as a separate event. It did not take long for the sport to spread globally, including overseas to the U.S. and Canada. In 2021, **David Tomala** for Team Poland won Gold in the men's 50K race walk at the Tokyo Olympic Games in a time of 3:50:08 while Team Italy's **Massimo Stamo** took Gold in the 20K in 1:21:05, confirming the worldwide appeal of the exhilarating sport and its competition.

## Shaking Off Race Walking's Shackles

The bias against women in sports, especially long-distance sports, had its impact on race walking competitions. In the Olympics, the women's first race walking event did not happen until 1992. Since then, international-level women's race walking has come a long way. We can expect an exciting development at the upcoming Olympic games in Paris this year. While men and women will compete separately in the 20K, the 50K, once traditionally reserved for men, will now be a mixed relay "In the quest for gender equality" — as was well-spoken by the Olympic Committee for Paris 2024.

Only National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) schools (see: [naia.org/landing/index](https://naia.org/landing/index)) offer race walking as a part of collegiate

track and field. During its race-walking heyday, the **University of Wisconsin-Parkside** campus in Kenosha, WI, had an active season-round race-walking club. Its coach, **Mike Dewitt**, a 1972 All American, had guided five walkers at Parkside to the Olympics ([USATF.org](https://www.usatf.org)). However, the University of Wisconsin has since moved to the NCAA, they no longer offer race walking as part of their track & field program, Coach Dewitt along with his son, Matt, are no longer associated with Parkside, and the race-walking club and its web page are defunct. In the USA, race walking has remained a minor sport when compared to other track and field events. This reality is sad for a sport that can be so accessible and beneficial for a lifetime, especially when considering that a 2002 study found a 41-percent decrease in hip fractures among perimenopausal women who race walked.

Anita Macias-Matters was on the first University of Minnesota Women's track team in 1974—as a long-distance runner; *thank you Title IX*. But she later became plagued by an overuse knee injury, stopped running and, for fifteen years, lost her fitness. "I gained 15 pounds," she said; that is until she spotted a poster for the **Twin Cities Race Walkers**. Fifteen years later, the rest is history.

Anita took to walking fast, soon competing in the local race walking events, cutting her teeth on race walking in local 10Ks. In 2019, she entered the National Senior Games in Albuquerque. In 2022, in Miramar, Florida, she race-walked the 5K event with seed times as fast as 33 minutes. "The field in the 65 to 70 age class may be small," she said, "but the competition is fierce. My Senior Master's peers are serious, focused, and supportive. I did the 5K in 37.5 minutes and was fifth." Anita earned the title of 2014 USATF Minnesota Race Walker of the Year, with eight Golds between 2010 and 2018 in the 5K. She said, "I think with senior and masters competitions, it's an older group who are comfortable in their skin."

Anita retired after a 31-year career with **Upward Bound**, a college preparation program for low-income high school students, and now runs a small antique business out of her home in Taylor Falls. When not training, she supports a program for patients with chronic pulmonary hypertension.



**Will Loew-Blosser at one of Jeff Savage's race walking clinics, with the photo taken by Jeff that he provides to participants to reference their race walking form.**

This is about a self-driven week of fartlek or distance race walking, or just enjoying an afternoon of a laid-back race-walking pace. "Race walking is meditation for me," she said. "It removes any chatter from my mind. Negative thoughts dissipate."

From the sport's humble beginnings as pedestrianism, then regularized as with other sports, race walking has evolved, leading from one of the oldest ways to get off the couch to incredible accomplishments. These include Japan's **Yusuke Suzuki** who, in 2015, broke the world record for the 20K race in 1:16:36 at the Asia Race Walking Championships in his hometown of Nomi, Japan. And consider this *mile-distance record*: In 2017, at the Diamond League meet in London, the lithe, 2-time British Olympian **Tom Bosworth** race-walked the mile in 5:31:08, breaking the previous record set 27 years before by 7 seconds. This confirms how such wizards of speed are in a totally different universe.

Among the slower-paced mortals, **Leasure**, said, "I'm happy with my pace. I love race walking. It keeps my knees injury-free. Most of all. I can keep ballroom dancing."

Race walking: Add it to your own repertoire. It may just be the Silent Sport that turns you on next. ☺



# So Near and Yet — Not Paddling-Far at All!

## The Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary

*Jody Henseler*

*Editor's Note: Jody Henseler has been paddling since the age of 4 when her dad made her a paddle because she was too small for any other. This helped build within Jody a strong passion, love, and respect for the water. Being drawn to water, wanting to play in and on it as much as possible, she has spent countless hours paddling craft, including home-built cedar-strip or restored wood-canvas canoes, across Wisconsin, Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and northern Minnesota, and most recently, finding the thrill of locating shallow-water shipwrecks in Lake Michigan. Jody has been stand-up paddling (SUP) since 2017 and has not looked back, finding freedom, adventure, fitness, and fun. She wants to share these great water sports, building a culture of others who love the water, making connections between different groups of people, young and old, igniting creativity, and sharing it all.*

During high water, which washes away the sand, the remains of this unknown shipwreck is exposed in front of the Rawley Point Lighthouse at Point Beach State Forest.

ALL PHOTOS BY JODY HENSELER.

## My Shadowy Moment in Lake Michigan

Paddling south from Rawley Point, I see the teal-green watery world mesmerizing below my paddleboard. The lake bottom is all sand and primarily flat, other than the succession of sand bars that lead out toward the middle of the lake. After paddling for a while, searching for any sign of something else in the water, I suddenly find the reward, the treasure. At first, she slowly comes into view; just a hint of a shadow. Then, a much larger, mirage-like wooden structure appears. It's unmistakable: A shipwreck — right here in Lake Michigan in just 14 feet of water, only 400 yards offshore!

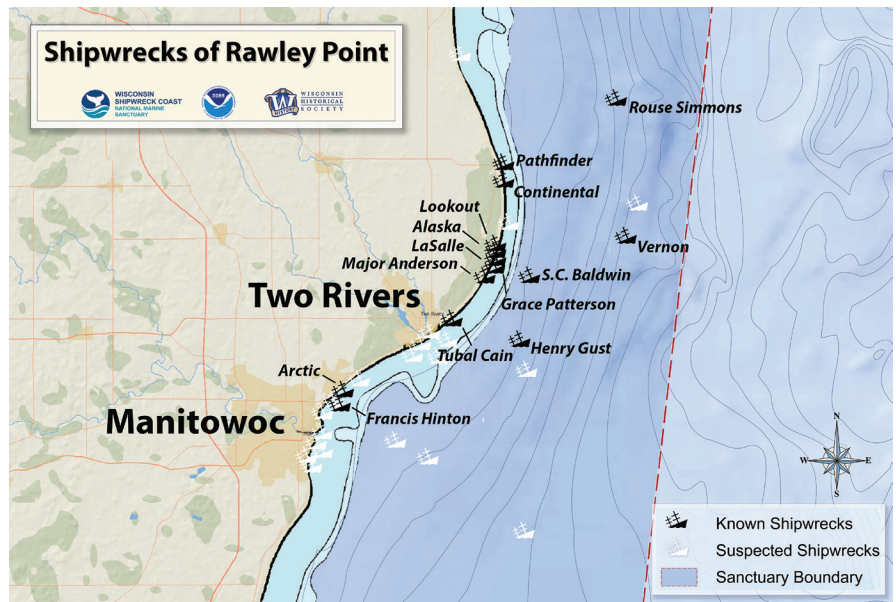
My breaths quicken, heart rate increases, and smile broadens while I paddle back and forth over the wreck. The shadowy details of the structure pull me in — I want to see more! Steadying the board just off the bow of the wreck, I pull out my mask, snorkel, and fins and get ready to slip into the water for a closer look.

The cold shock and excitement hits immediately, taking my breath away for a moment. I think, *Relax. Breathe. One breath and then two through the snorkel.*

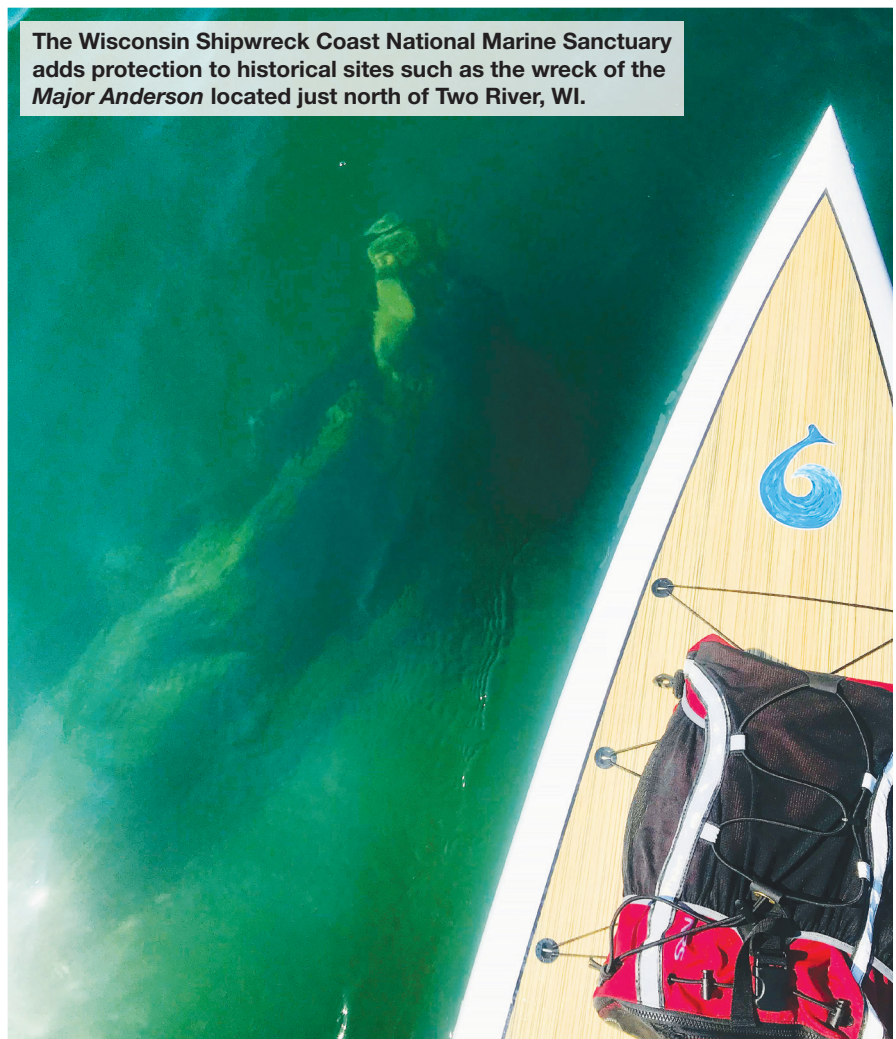
Swimming in a circle to get my bearings, I discover that most of what is around the wreck is flat and uniform, all except for this wooden structure jutting monstrosly out of the sand. Taking a closer look, keeping one hand on the board to steady and ground myself, I take in the wood's worn and bleached look, smooth-edged, with algae growing through the cracks, showing that it has been in its watery grave for quite a while.

### Making it Yours

This is Lake Michigan, just north of **Two Rivers**, in the recently established **Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary**. Designated in 2021, this National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Sanctuary covers the waters off-shore from southern Kewaunee County down the lake past Port Washington. This area of the lake holds the remains of many ships that went down during bad weather or misfortune while hauling people and freight during the 1800s to the early 1900s. It is our fortune, however, that a good number of the wrecks can be found in shallow water, easily accessible by paddleboard, kayak,



Shipwreck location map generated by Russ Green, Superintendent, Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary.





Located in just 14 feet of water, the engine of the *Continental* is always visible.

or canoe, and without the need for scuba equipment.

The quest often begins at Rawley Point, in **Point Beach State Forest**, as the launch for setting the paddleboard onto the lake. Look for perfect conditions: sunshine glinting and sparkling off the glass-like surface of the lake; low-to-no wave action for a number of days, allowing the ever-shifting sediment to settle and clear out the water column.

The area of the lake in and around Two Rivers holds a quicksand-like bed, ever-shifting, ever-exposing wrecks, but also covering them back up again, hiding them from view. This lake bed material shifts with the tides and storms, guarding, protecting, and preserving the history of this

Great Lake.

Some of the best luck paddling and finding the wrecks occurs in **late July through August**, which seems to consistently provide the best weather conditions. Preparing for the hunt ahead of time, you can log onto the Wisconsin Historical Society's website: [wisconsinshipwrecks.org](http://wisconsinshipwrecks.org). From there, you can search the waters you are interested in paddling to look for possible shipwrecks. The exact coordinates of specific wrecks are shared on the website, which you can enter into your smartphone's GPS. Use a **watertight case** and tether to be able to guide your paddleboard, kayak, or canoe to the ships' specific locations. Whether they are viewable on the day you paddle out to them is anyone's

guess, for it is up to Lake Michigan, her mood and the settling of her ever-shifting sands.

### Hunting the *Major Anderson*

A schooner that ran aground in 1871 during the great Peshtigo Fire, the wreck of the *Major Anderson* came as a result of her crew becoming disoriented due to the heavy, dense smoke in the air and gale conditions. Paddling south from Point Beach following your GPS to N 44° 10.928', W 087° 30.978', you will be rewarded with the wreck being uncovered.

The detail still observable on the bow is particularly impressive as it rises about 4 feet out of the lake bed. The sides of the ship jut out from the sand, beckoning to be followed. Continuing to swim the 153-foot length of the ship, you'll see no quagga or zebra mussels anywhere, indicating that it has not been exposed on the lake bed for long. The shifting sands do a great job of protecting the wrecks from invasive species.

Nothing on the interior of the ship is visible today; the sand covers and protects, and gives but a glimpse. Thoroughly intrigued, you'll no doubt vow to return another day, hoping that more of the ship will be visible.

### Pick Your Adventure

There are many Sanctuary shipwrecks for you to choose to explore. For example, on another excursion with some friends, I headed north from Point Beach to locate the *Continental*. This ship went down in 1904 during a blinding snowstorm. A wooden steamship, its compound steam engine can be easily seen as you look down from the surface of the lake, no matter what the sand does. It's quite impressive to paddle upon this ship and see that massive engine just below the water's surface. You'll not always be lucky enough to see the rest of the wreck, but return another day and maybe sweet mother Michigan will reward you for finding this treasured wooden ship.

Hunting and visiting these known shipwrecks off Rawley Point, Point Beach State Forest, and Two Rivers will become much easier in 2024. That's because this spring, the **Marine Sanctuary will be placing buoys at six of the shipwrecks**, making locating them a breeze. These buoys will help open this fascinating





**At 153 feet long, the side of the *Major Anderson* draws you into the murk. Dive in and take a closer look!**

world of archeological exploration and the search through history for nearly all, not just for daredevils or those with expensive equipment.

If you are interested in more land-based exploration, or when it's too rough to paddle, you can check out the **Rogers Street Fishing Village** where you'll find shipwreck artifacts and the **Wisconsin Maritime Museum** which recently opened a new shipwreck exhibit. Depending on the lake level, a couple of wrecks have been visible from the beach at times, so a lovely walk on the Ice Age Trail segment north of Two Rivers might bag you another shipwreck or two.

Along with your favorite paddling, there is so much to do, learn, and explore, in the water and upon land, including: Underwater Archeology; Details on the Shipwrecks; Research; and more resources. The list of shipwrecks that will be marked by buoys for easy location and shallow water views are as follows: Canal schooner *Tubal Cain* (1866); Schooner *Major Anderson* (1861); Schooner *Lookout* (1855); Canal schooner *LaSalle* (1874); Steamer *Continental* (1882); Schooner *Pathfinder* (1869).

Come see what you can explore and how to do so safely. It's all there waiting for you, so near and not so far at all! ☘

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**Orienteering checkpoints are orange and white orienteering flags hung in the woods that participants use a map and compass to find.**

PHOTO BY MATTHEW ALBRECHT,  
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# Introduction to Orienteering

## The Grown-Up, Silent Sports

## Version of a Scavenger Hunt

*Andrea Larson*

**E**njoy discovering hidden gems, walking through the woods, and mental challenges? Then orienteering may be a fun outdoor activity for you to explore. Requiring little more than a compass for gear, orienteering has few barriers beyond our minds. There's hardly a sport more open for all ages to enjoy alongside one another, yet undiscovered. Teams are often encouraged and are a fantastic way to be introduced to the sport, offering a memorable team-building and bonding opportunity with a loved one of any age. And you don't need to be a runner to do

well in the sport; many top racers hike the entire course.

With both in-person orienteering meets and permanent orienteering courses, we can enjoy the hit of dopamine triggered by finding a checkpoint in the woods alongside competitors, or on our own schedule without the stress of competition.

### **Lay of the Land, & Discovery**

Orienteering courses are unmarked except for numbered checkpoints that must be found, usually in order, using a map and compass. Unlike in geocaching, no GPS is allowed. The checkpoints are orange-and-white orienteering flags typically hung at eye level on trees, with a hole-puncher dangling there too. The racer

uses the hole-puncher to uniquely mark their scorecard, or an electronic punch (e-punch) used to verify that they reached the designated checkpoint.

Courses are 2 to 10K, with a set time limit. Typically, orienteering meets have courses of varying levels of difficulty and distance, including a shorter beginner-friendly course. Ultimately, the distance is determined by the route choice of the navigator and how much the racers get lost. Decisions have to be made: Whether to bushwhack down a brambly hillside or run twice as far on trails; Ford the icy creek or travel around on a bridge; Take the most direct route on a compass bearing or add distance by following a feature/handrail.

Teams usually show up and receive their map at the start. Typically, meets allow racers to begin anytime within the 30 to 120-minute start window, which allows participants to be spread out over the course; however, occasionally meets begin with a mass start and checkpoints may be found in any order (called a score-o). Meets aren't just limited to foot, but the event organizer may use different disciplines such as mountain biking (called a bike-o) or Nordic skiing (called a ski-o).

## Hurdles

Cost and gear certainly are not hurdles for this sport. Meet entry fees are usually less than the cost of two cappuccinos and a croissant from Starbucks, making sponsorships critical for maintaining a low barrier to entry. Beyond a compass and a whistle for safety, no specialized gear is required. Yet, newcomers often dismiss taking up the sport for fear of the unknown leading to getting hopelessly lost.

To debunk this fear, first, everyone gets lost. But when you do get lost, other racers are often willing to help newcomers. If you veer off course without a soul around, there are usually several roads or trails nearby that can lead a lost racer back to civilization. Also, meet directors usually provide their phone numbers on maps, and most courses have adequate cell phone coverage. Even if there's limited cell phone coverage, today's phones have



**Eyes on the prize! All ages participate at the Baird Creek Bumble (or Baird Creek Fall Fumble).**

PHOTO BY MATTHEW ALBRECHT, IMAGE STUDIOS INC., VIDEO PRODUCTION SPECIALIST; (414) 813-1040.

access to satellites to show location to guide someone to the nearest trail or road. And if all else fails, use your safety whistle.

The point is that getting lost and then finding your way is part of orienteering's fun and adventure. Getting "hopelessly lost" is just not part of the equation.

## Getting Started

Orienteering uses detailed maps that take hundreds of hours to create and field check, and must be updated every few years as vegetation changes, trails are modified, and buildings pop

up. Orienteering maps require some familiarization to fully exploit its benefits. Checkpoints are typically hung at a feature that includes a clue (control description) provided either on the map or on a separate clue sheet via symbols. For beginner courses, the event director usually will decipher the symbols. Common features can be manmade (trail intersections, buildings, bends in the road) or topographical (hilltops, edges of creeks, re-entrant junctions, spurs). Long pants and sleeves are recommended, especially for off-trail traveling.

A fast-settling compass is preferred for racers who need to save precious seconds. For those new to the sport, a basic baseplate compass is adequate and often available for loan at meets for beginners. Fast orienteers typically prefer a thumb compass. However, with the level of detail on orienteering maps, many racers are happy using a baseplate or wrist compass.

## Continuously Learning

Meets have courses with various levels of difficulty. White courses are considered beginner-friendly, with most or all checkpoints on or near trails. If you're unsure if you're ready to compete, volunteer to pick up checkpoints following the meet. The meet director will probably be excited to have your help and be willing to give you a one-on-one navigation lesson. Also, the time constraints are now lessened and you can reference your phone without disqualification. (Phones aren't allowed to aid

**For those racing as a team, you can divide and conquer on tasks such as divvying up punching checkpoints and navigating.**

PHOTO BY MATTHEW ALBRECHT, IMAGE STUDIOS INC., VIDEO PRODUCTION SPECIALIST; (414) 813-1040.



Andrea discovers a “boat” with her children (ages 5, 7, and 9) on Lake Elmo’s permanent orienteering course.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREA LARSON.



**Precious!** The joy of spending time with a loved one in the woods with no distractions is something we all need more of! The squeals of delight when finding a checkpoint, bonds strengthened through tackling the course, and the opportunity to instill a healthy lifestyle make orienteering this mom’s dream come true.

PHOTO BY MATTHEW ALBRECHT, IMAGE STUDIOS INC., VIDEO PRODUCTION SPECIALIST; (414) 813-1040.

with navigation; ultimately, in races, it’s an honor system.) After a handful of competitors pass through an area, you can often see remnants of a footpath as confidence markers, frequently (but not always) leading you in the right direction.

### Ageless

Orienteering’s mental challenges give even the oldest participants the opportunity to compete alongside athletic jocks in what is a lot like the adult version of a scavenger hunt. Conversely, young ones can nimbly scamper under deadfalls that adults have to negotiate, often painstakingly, around.

I have found that bringing along a slower companion allows me to take my time while reading the map rather than bolting

in the wrong direction. Ultimately, one step in the wrong direction means two steps just to get back to where I started, so taking my time allows me to complete the course faster with fewer mistakes. And don’t be surprised to be beaten by a better navigator that doesn’t run a single step!

### Weatherproofing

You can enjoy orienteering throughout the year; however, vegetation in summer may slow the speed of travel and require more precise navigation to spot checkpoints. Except when there’s abundant snow on the ground, early spring and late fall’s leafless conditions are ideal times to navigate, making that window before there’s enough snow to ski (yet too icy to rollerski

and sometimes run) much more tolerable.

Frozen swamps allow access to areas that may be a muddy (and buggy) slog during summer months. An important tip: Beware of *hand warmers interfering with your compass*. Consider bringing just one hand warmer during cold days for your non-compass hand.

### New Experiences

By orienteering, stepping off-trail, you may be pleasantly surprised to find a new experience in an area that you’ve visited many times before. Not only will you discover hidden gems by approaching a familiar trail intersection from a different way, but doing so may also make it appear completely foreign.

In kind, visiting the same area during different seasons or conditions may result in a new experience. And even advanced navigators will encounter brand new challenges in the dark. Or, returning to a meet with a new course in the same area may result in a different experience.

No matter your experience level, recording your track and analyzing it when you get back home allows you to learn from your mistakes. Talking to other competitors allows you to evaluate more efficient routes. More so, you can ask to tag along with a more experienced navigator (this is almost always allowed) and speed up the learning curve.

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## Make it Permanent

Permanent and virtual orienteering courses offer the endorphin rush of finding a checkpoint without the stress of a race environment. Additionally, they are great for honing navigation skills at your own pace. Permanent orienteering courses have posts with markers year-round with checkpoints.

For a fun outing with a friend (or to work on teambuilding with coworkers or your spouse), meet up at a permanent course. If you both want navigation practice, then rendezvous at each checkpoint, which is a great way to evaluate different routes to a checkpoint.

Although there is limited accessibility to in-person and permanent courses, we often frequent locations that we can still explore. Virtual orienteering courses are publicly available on apps such as [orienteer.co](#), or you can create your own. The learning curve is quite quick and provides you with the opportunity to spend more time with your eyes on maps. Plus, it provides more opportunities to look at various types of maps beyond specialized orienteering maps. For instance, in **CalTopo**, you can change layers of maps from OSM to USGS to aerial with a single click.

A huge benefit of learning on your own is that the app allows you to see exactly where you are versus the same map you printed and are holding in your hands. When you're not on the clock, you can also go back and redo a checkpoint in real time or compare alternative route options at your leisure.

Another huge plus of such apps is that they provide you with endless opportunities beyond the confines of orienteering courses. You can even practice navigation during hikes on marked trails, working on basic skills such as orienting your map in the direction of travel and thumbing the map, which is moving your thumb as you progress on the map to not lose track of your exact location while your eyes alternate between reading the map and watching the landscape.

If you're chomping at the bit to explore a park in a completely new way, check out upcoming meets offered by your local orienteering club or a permanent orienteering course. (See URL links, below.) Or head out on your own with your map and compass for a completely new "walk in the park."



**Why not add variety to your mountain biking enjoyment through orienteering as shown here at the 2023 Baird Creek Fumble, as welcomed by many event directors.**

PHOTO BY CHRIS RUGOWSKI, CHICKEN OR THE EGG PHOTOGRAPHY KENORTHEEGGPHOTOGRAPHY.COM.

If you end up enjoying orienteering, you may want to consider the multi-sport cousin of orienteering, **adventure racing**, which is longer and more gear-intensive; or a **rogaine**, not the hair-growth product but a longer foot course with checkpoints obtained in any order that are worth different point values.

### Orienteering Resource Links

The following links include event dates and permanent orienteering courses:

Badger Orienteering Club:

[badgerorienteering.com](#)

Chicago Area Orienteering Club:

[chicago-orienteering.org](#)

Illinois River Valley Orienteering Club:

[irvoc.org](#)

Minnesota Orienteering Club:

[mnoc.org](#)

Southern Michigan Orienteering Club:

[smoc-runs.com](#)

Wild Terrain Navigation:

[wildterrainnav.com](#) 🇺🇸

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# Not Just a Sports Story: Behind the Fox Cities Marathon

Ready, Set — Get Those Smart Watches Started — GO! Just the beginning of the adventure at the start line in Menasha.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FOX CITIES COMMUNITY FIRST MARATHON.

## Jessica Lisbeth

*Editor's Note: Jessica Lisbeth is the Copy & Content Writer for the Community First Credit Union. An avid participant in many of the Credit Union's community initiatives and partnerships, Jessica devotes much of her work to capturing the stories of team members, volunteers, and community members involved in the organization's commitment to giving. Most recently, she's been inspired to lace up her own running shoes for the American Cancer Society Sole Burner 5K, another local race sponsored by Community First each May, which raises funds to support cancer research.*

To feel alive.  
To honor a loved one.  
To prove the naysayers wrong.  
To stave off progressing illness.  
To begin a journey of self-care after decades of devoted motherhood.

These are just a handful of the thousands of personal reasons participants register for the **Community First Fox Cities Marathon** presented by Miron Construction — and it's just as founders **Gloria West** and **Maury Dresang** intended.

Thirty-three years ago, West and Dresang started a marathon with the mission to unite the people of Northeast Wisconsin in a journey toward health, wellness, and community — one step at a time. Today, the Fox Cities Marathon 3-day event has grown to encompass not only a full marathon, but a half marathon, relay, 10K, 5K, kids fun run, diaper dash, and health and wellness expo, all driven by one clear, unifying truth:

Everyone has a story.

### **Come One, Come All**

While Fox Cities Marathon participants give the race purpose, it's the volunteers, residents, and community partners who give it life.

Over 1,800 volunteers assemble to pull off race weekend, comprising of Community First Credit Union team members, community members, families, and even area athletic teams. Combined with the generosity of 50-plus sponsors, hundreds of spectators, and neighborhoods cheering from the sidelines, the event has truly become a cornerstone of the Fox Cities community.



You will experience the unique: Here, in Appleton, runners enter the CE Trail heading into the Combined Locks.

This is the magic behind welcoming 4,000-plus walkers and runners of all ages and abilities to share in the journey of reaching their personal goals. "Every participant comes to the start line with their own story," said CFCU Chief of Staff **Amanda Secor**. "We meet them where they are at and help them get where they want to go."

This continuity between Community First's mission as a financial institution and its role as the Fox Cities Marathon's title sponsor is what has made the event so unique. Sure, there are runners competing to break a personal record or qualify for the Boston Marathon, but for many, it's the *lack* of focus on elite athleticism that makes the opportunity so attractive. Here, every participant, and every story, matters.

### Living Out Their Name

As with most undertakings of this

magnitude, reaching the current level of diversity and inclusion involved a bit of trial and error. In the early years, race winners walked away with prize money, which often attracted runners from across the country and around the globe. Over time, however, the board and marathon staff began to feel a disconnect with the choice to host a community-inspired, community-supported event, only to send money outside of the community.

And so, the existing structure came to be. Several charities and organizations partner with the event to raise money for their causes, including **Girls on the Run** of Northeast Wisconsin local high school cross country teams. Even disabled participants have the opportunity to experience the glory of race day, thanks to **myTEAM TRIUMPH**, which provides volunteer athletes to guide the individual through the course and over the finish line with the use of specialized race equipment. Then, after

race weekend wraps up, the board selects organizations in the area that will benefit from the race proceeds. It's a change that, over time, has poured more than \$1 million back into local non-profits and schools.

"Now the race serves a dual purpose," Secor explained. "On one hand, the community benefits by way of donations collected from the race proceeds and, at the same time, we've broadened our participant base to attract people of all abilities and walks of life. How you cross the miles is up to you. What you do to make that journey is up to you, and it's our goal to make it just as meaningful for the last person in as it is for the first-place finisher."

Interestingly enough, maintaining a local focus hasn't deterred national participation. In fact, the **50 States Marathon Club** has chosen the Fox Cities Marathon as one of its 2024 reunion events. Not only will the event support the members'



Along the Appleton Newberry Trail beside the Fox River: There's joy in running within such views!



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[thepaavonurmim Marathon.com](http://thepaavonurmim Marathon.com)

journey to completing a marathon in every state, but it also gives Fox Cities Marathon organizers a chance to leave a lasting, local impression on out-of-state participants.

### Personal Touch

Providing that meaningful experience means no detail is overlooked. As Race Director **Julie Johnson** can attest, carrying that level of personalization throughout seven municipalities and three counties worth of trails and roadways is no small feat. "There is a lot of planning going on behind the scenes," she said. "From working with the various municipalities and local government to acquiring necessary permits, partnering with vendors, making sure our contributing staff have everything they need, marketing and communication efforts, and coordinating all the little, personal touches that mean so much to the participants."

For starters, each participant's first name is displayed on their bib, meaning even complete strangers can cheer for them by name, motivating them to keep going. Their back bib displays their reason for participating, a bonding experience that has forged mid-race friendships between runners and walkers alike. And every bib donned by Kids Run participants prominently displays the number 1.

But that's just the beginning.

Microchips attached to each participant's bib allow their family and friends to track their location and progress via the race app, as well as notify race personnel





All Together Now! In Menasha on the Trestle Trail bridge over the Fox River, where smiles abound.

when the participant has crossed the finish line so their full name can be announced for all to hear. Additionally, the **shoutout board** was introduced in 2023, a trailer-sized screen that broadcasts encouraging videos recorded by participants' families and friends. The video is triggered to play when the participant (and their microchip) crosses a specific part of the course.

Of course, there's the 12 x 12, 51-pound, brass "celebration" bell cast by Neenah Foundry waiting for marathoners to ring in their accomplishment after crossing the finish line. "You'll hear that bell ringing all afternoon," Secor said. "It's not a PR bell, it's a celebration bell. Every story deserves a celebration."

Want to be a part of the magic? Join us for the 33rd Community First Fox Cities Marathon taking place September 20-22, 2024. 🏆

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La Crosse,  
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Women's mountain bike group enjoying La Crosse area trails. So many smiles for so many great MTB miles.

PHOTO BY ANNA STINDT.



# La Crosse

## A Disneyland for Cyclists

*Kierstin Kloeckner*

When I was a little girl, my mom would bring me to La Crosse every year for my allergist appointments. We'd take the river road from Minneapolis south and I remember the views clearly, my face pressed against the window, in awe of the growing bluffs and coulees with raptors hang-gliding in the thermals above. Every trip down included a hike up **Grandad Bluff**, even when I was too young to hike the whole way; I'd be carried up the final push. Those visits set the stage for a life-long love of what I consider one of the most overlooked regions of the Midwest.

Fast forward to adulthood and La Crosse would lure me back for other reasons, one of which was cycling. My first bike tour brought me through here on the **Great River State Trail** and the **La Crosse River State Trail**, both of which are gravel rail-trails. Having my gravel bike, built by **Paul Reardon** at **Blue Steel Bikes** ([bluesteel-bikes.com](http://bluesteel-bikes.com)), located on the north side of La Crosse, allowed me to explore the endless driftless hills that would challenge any seasoned road cyclist. Supporting teammates who were racing in the omnium road races held annually proved the community loves bike racing. And now, I've fallen madly in love with the **ORA trail network** that offers some of the best mountain biking in the Midwest. Check out [ora-trails.org](http://ora-trails.org). Several of the ORA trails were built by **Josh Blum**, who I interviewed in a previous article (October 2021 issue, *Meet the Makers: A Look into the World Behind MTB Trail Building in the Midwest*). To top it off, the hiking on the ORA/Hixon trails has offered me views that have brought me to my knees.



Sunset view from the top of Grandad Bluff.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KIERSTIN KLOECKNER.



Selfie by Chris Stindt in front of the theatre that played the gravel film *The Last DAMn*. Stindt has ridden several DAMn races.

## Eyes on La Crosse

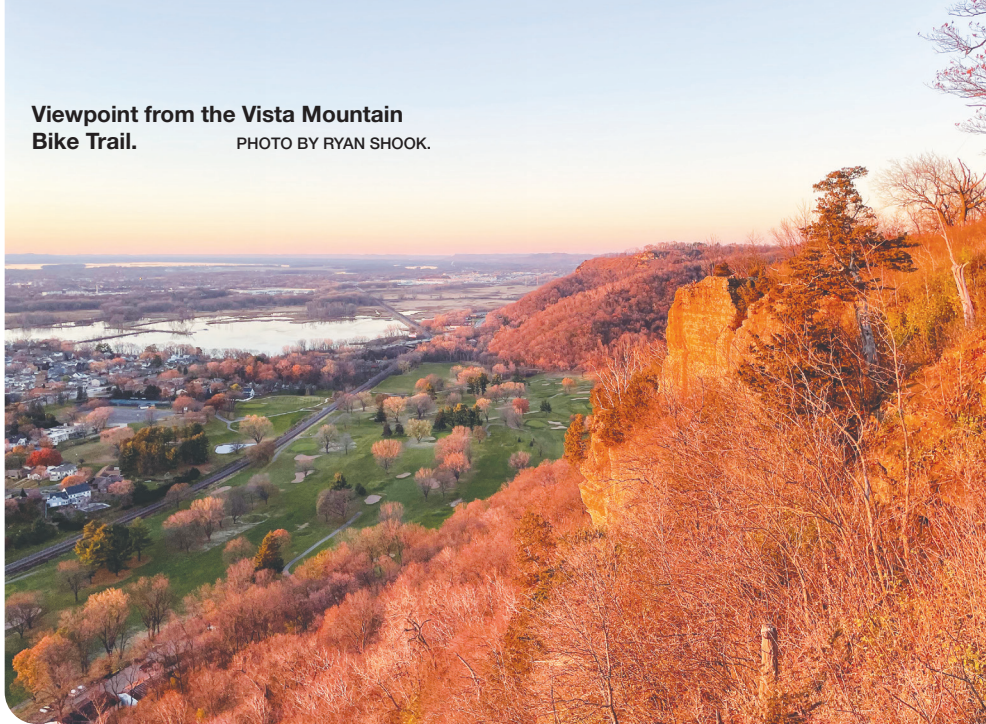
Since I live 2.5 hours away, I wanted to get a few locals' views on why La Crosse should be a destination for anyone living in the Midwest. **Chris Stindt**, an active member of the silent sports community, has not only run the omnium road races since 2017, but also brought **WORS racing** back to La Crosse. He works for the **Bicycle Federation** and helps coach **NICA** while being a competitive racer, husband, and father. To say he's in love with the area is an understatement. He explained that there is something in the area for everyone: hikers, trail runners, paddlers, road cyclists, and mountain bikers — and for all levels of those exploring the region.

**For road riders**, Stindt suggests riding up the iconic Bliss Road to the top of Grandad Bluff (where I went as a child). Just across the river in Minnesota, riders looking for challenging climbs can get a similar experience riding up Apple Blossom Road. For cyclists in search of a flatter spin, Stindt recommends Goose Island County Park, where they can enjoy new pavement and views of the Mississippi River and its backwaters. Also for road enthusiasts, the city paths now connect to hundreds of miles of rails to trails in two directions.

**For mountain biking**, Stindt steers those with strong lungs and legs onto the **Vista Trail** (which is a part of Upper Hixon on the ORA trails). In just over two miles, you'll gain 500 feet with some flow and a scenic overlook. **Twister Trail** is a loop that will showcase a lot of their original trails and those craving flow; or newer riders looking for less technical riding can head to the **Gateway Trails** near Grandad Bluff.

## Viewpoint from the Vista Mountain Bike Trail.

PHOTO BY RYAN SHOOK.



Kierstin on the Vader Trail at Upper Hixon; trail built by Rock Solid.

PHOTO BY RYAN SHOOK.

Stindt said that although La Crosse is still a work in progress on the roads, the city is putting in a good-faith effort to make improvements. They just received a federal TAP grant to help connect La Crosse to La Crescent in Minnesota, and the city is working on a long-term strategic plan, placing a lot of time into bike and pedestrian areas to improve safety and accessibility.

Almost all of these trails, except a few of the mountain bike trails, are multi-use for both hikers and runners, bringing the silent sports community together.

**Anna Stindt**, Chris' wife, is equally involved in the silent sports community. She and Chris work hard at finding a balance between keeping the kids and themselves active and healthy. Anna enjoys both road and mountain biking and says her favorite trail is **Quarry** in Upper Hixon and **Spring Coulee** for road riding, where, she said, "You're nestled between the bluffs and ride through the valley along a creek. It's trails and roads like this, truly in the Driftless region, that make you feel you're in a special place — often rewarded with beautiful views of the Mississippi or miles of bluff valleys, after conquering a climb. Many think you need to travel far distances to obtain gorgeous views or epic rides when we have so much to offer here in La Crosse."

Anna is also part of the local women's mountain bike group and shares that



**Anna and Chris Stindt with their children.** PHOTO BY ANNA STINDT.

"Women's mountain biking in La Crosse continues to grow each year. We have many strong women mountain bikers here. We brought a women's mountain bike clinic to our area a few years ago and that has really helped in the number of women mountain biking, which has also led to more NICA women coaches as well. From those clinics, weekly women mountain bike rides happen and [is responsible for the] creation of Women of ORA jerseys."

Anna said that the **Marsh Trail** is a great family option, adding, "The trail connects us to downtown where we can enjoy music in the park on Thursday nights or stop at a local ice cream shop downtown. Also, along the Marsh trail, we often see wildlife and stop to explore. Again, it makes you feel like you are out in nature when you are really in the middle of the city connecting from one side of town to another."

## Complete Package

**Randi and Erik Pueschner** are fifth-generation owners of **Smith's Bike Shop** in La Crosse, which opened in 1895 ([smithsbikes.com](http://smithsbikes.com)). The shop and its employees are extremely active in the community, from helping lead group rides to putting on events. During the week, you'll see the Smith's crew on a women's road ride on Monday nights, riding in the A-paced road ride on Tuesday nights, coaching the Adventure Team on Wednesday nights, valeting bikes at Moon Tunes on Thursday nights, and riding mountain bikes on Friday nights.

When I spoke with Randi, he, like everyone else I spoke with, raved about the same things. "People should come to La Crosse because we have it all," Randi said. "We have bluffs, rivers, and winding countryside all within miles of each other. Our topography offers challenging climbs and meandering descents, both for mountain bike and road riding. Our community embraces outdoor recreation and all it has to offer. After a day of exploring, whether you are biking, hiking, running, or paddling, our vibrant downtown is just minutes away."

As I continue to explore the La Crosse area more each year using different forms of silent sports, and with locals, I am finding what a gem I have close to home. So much so that I have considered making it a home base. I hope you find some of the magic I, and many others, have found in the Midwest River City of La Crosse. ☘

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An important part of the Start the Cycle experience is service to others and stewardship of the trails. Here, instead of riding by a trail hazard, instead, STC riders pose with a large branch they removed from the path.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF START THE CYCLE.



Kate Dohnal, right, Start the Cycle Board Member and Mentor, celebrates after completing the Ore to Shore with team member Abigail Ampe.

# Start the Cycle ... Of getting kids on bikes and toward a better life

Marquette  
County,  
Michigan



## Pamela Christensen

### Question?

What do you get when you mix mountain bikes, mentors, and youth from ages 12 to 17? There might be several correct answers, including some who may think such a combination could lead to pandemonium, disaster, or chaos. Anyone who immediately thinks that what can go wrong with this combination *will* go wrong has not seen **Laura MacDonald** and Start the Cycle (STC) in action. Volunteer Start the Cycle Executive Director Laura MacDonald

MacDonald is the Volunteer Start the Cycle Executive Director, a non-profit youth empowerment program that started in 2012 as a partnership between Child and Family Services, Marquette County Juvenile Court, Marquette County Youth Home, and dedicated volunteers such as MacDonald. The program was designed

by Juvenile Services of Marquette County Officer **Margaret Olesnavage** and others after her psychologist husband John suggested a biking program might be a way to reach youth who find themselves in need of more support.

The goal of the program was to support youth and encourage positive behaviors. School attendance, compliance with probation, completion of school assignments, social behavior, and the ability to work with court officials, educators, and parents were some of the early problems addressed. As the success of the program became evident, more youth were interested in becoming part of STC.

The application process has three steps. The first is a referral from an adult, who can be a parent or guardian, an educator, social worker, therapist, or any adult who feels the youth could benefit from a sense of belonging to the group. Once this referral is received, the youth is invited to apply for the program.



Volunteer Start the Cycle Executive Director Laura MacDonald, left, takes some time out to welcome a Start the Cycle team member, Cameron Cox.

Potential members must reside in the greater Marquette area, have an interest in biking, be physically able to participate in the program, be willing to adhere to all program policies and procedures, and attend all practices. The program's reach is mainly Marquette County but has included members from Alger County and as far

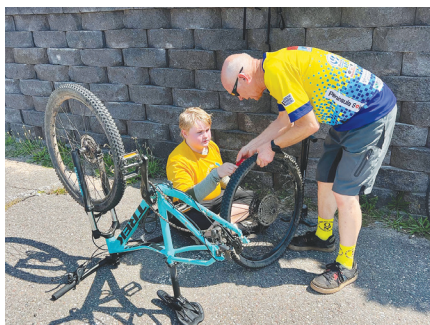
away as Schoolcraft County.

Applicants are interviewed by a committee that assesses their suitability for the program. Team members are once again told that they are required to meet program expectations and demonstrate improvement in specific areas. Start the Cycle provides a mountain bike and all of the equipment necessary for the training season. After each training session, riders receive a nutritional meal free of charge. If they accept membership on the team, they can look forward to an intensive program that rewards their success with their own mountain bike.

### Growing Strong

"Start the Cycle has evolved from those early days", MacDonald said. "We are more about building community than creating rules. We still have rules and expectations for team members, but we are more interested in demonstrating a sense of community and teamwork. We want to support positive outcomes. We work every session to demonstrate achievement and goals and how they positively impact youth. Each team member is different. Some need to work on school attendance or completing homework assignments; others need to develop social skills or to build trust. Recently, we have been assessing at the improvements STC makes in increasing social-emotional and psycho-emotional factors."

The program has also expanded from a spring and summer program, culminating in the running of the **Ore to Shore Mountain Bike Race**, to an almost year-round program that also includes snow biking (fat bike) and participation in the **906 Polar Roll**.



An important part of the Start the Cycle experience is learning bicycle maintenance. Here, a team member and mentor check out a tire before a ride.



The Start the Cycle Team Mentors, Jr. Mentors, and Team Members pose for a group photo.

Everybody involved in STC, including the eight Board members and mentors, are all volunteers for the program. At its monthly meetings, the Board strives to make decisions that result in success for all participants. To ensure the safety of all volunteers and participants, adults involved in the program must clear a criminal background check. They are also interviewed to gauge their suitability for the program and must attend the annual mentor training session before the season begins.

### Results that Matter

Team members are no longer eligible for the program after they reach the age of 18, but their affiliation with the program does not end at that time. If they desire to continue with the program, they can serve as junior mentors from the ages of 17 to 20. After they reach 21, they can advance to mentor status.

**Joshua Plattenberg** started as a team member in 2019 after moving back to the Marquette area. His mother encouraged his application and has been a strong supporter of the organization. Plattenberg served on the team for one year, as a junior mentor for two years, and now, at the age of 22, has graduated to full mentor. Plattenberg credits STC with improving many areas of his life. "I always liked the outdoors," he said, "but biking has changed me. STC opened up a new world for me. It improved my life and helped me develop strong connections with STC team members and volunteers. STC is my family now. I learned so many things from STC that I probably wouldn't have learned otherwise. I learned first aid and bike maintenance. It improved my balance and my diet. I use my bike for transportation

whenever I can, and I am motivated to get outdoors. It also developed my social skills and confidence. STC has had a big impact on my life."

Plattenberg has successfully made the transition from team member to adult mentor. He added, "At first, the hardest part for me is putting them in line and getting them to act their age; but then I remember how I acted at that age and understand the challenges they experience in the program."

### Go Yellow!

STC team members and mentors wear bright yellow jerseys with the organization's logo for practice and races. The yellow jerseys have made an impact on many Ore to Shore racers. "The Ore to Shore was more than a race," McDonald said. "In the beginning of the program, it was the culmination of training ... The real goal was to give youth a very visible goal, but winning was not the thing; finishing was the thing. More importantly, being a bike ambassador was the ultimate goal. We wanted racers to know that if they saw a yellow jersey, another rider was willing and able to help if needed."

Bike maintenance is one of the first things team members learn. It's critical to their success and the success of those with whom they ride. STC wants each team member to be versed in bike maintenance and first aid. They stress being prepared and keeping cool under pressure. Above all else, safety and service to others are engrained in team members at every opportunity.

Following the Ore to Shore or the Polar Roll, it is not unusual for racers to share experiences they had with STC members

in their yellow jerseys. Whether they have been injured, or had a flat or bike malfunction, they are quickly enveloped in the caring concern and comfort of the yellow jerseys. Many racers don't need help changing a tube or adjusting equipment, but the STC riders always stop to make sure, and often keep the racer company until the repair is made.

For some, this is above and beyond what they expect or what has happened in other races; but for all, the experience is a testament to the community built by STC. STC members look out for others even if it means they may not place in the standings or they end up finishing at the back of the pack.

"Ore to Shore race director **Scott Tuma** has been supportive of STC and lets us ride the course the week before the race," McDonald said, recounting a key moment that displayed STC-member learning and dedication. "STC invites the public and other area riding groups to participate in this training ride as a mock race-day experience. During this practice ride, we had a rider who suffered a serious bike accident. The STC riders did everything by the book. The rider said he was fine, but STC riders checked him over, made him stay immobile, did an assessment, and called 911. They found his emergency information and called his wife to tell her what happened. When 911 arrived, they extracted the rider. Upon arrival at the hospital, it was apparent that the rider suffered a concussion. If the STC crew had not followed their protocols, the outcome may have been more serious."

### Key Volunteering & Support

STC Board member **Kate Dohnal** volunteers as the group's mentor coordinator and is involved in the application and interview process. Dohnal follows the development of team members from beginning to end and is proud of the changes she sees in team members as the season progresses. "We are trying to assess outcomes," she said. "We can see how much team members change during the year. We can see them develop leadership, resiliency, and physical skills and improve during the year; but we want to quantify that. Collecting the data that demonstrates positive change and improvement is one of our goals for the 2024 season."

The organization does not have paid

staff, one of the things MacDonald and Dohnal feel would make a positive difference in the organization. They are able to achieve all they do thanks to dedicated Board members and a supportive community. The power to make positive change, community support, and the integrity of the program have proven that STC is ready to take the next step toward sustainability. With a growing annual budget of nearly \$70,000, the Board decided that working toward employing staff will be important for the growth of STC.

**Quick Stop Bike Shop in Marquette** has partnered with the organization since 2013. The shop provides all of the Trek mountain bikes used in the program through a cost-effective partnership with Trek. The **Noquemanon Trail Network** and **Sports Rack** also in Marquette provide the fat tire bikes used in the winter season. All helmets, gloves, bike pants, tools, pumps, and other gear are also supplied by the organizations.

"We couldn't do what we do without Quick Stop and Sports Rack, but the other bike shops in the area are always there for us," MacDonald said. "The local shops: **Downwind Sports, Lakeshore Bike, Love and Bicycles, and West End Ski and Trail** all step up when it comes to selecting and purchasing equipment, supplies, and the bike or bikes we raffle each year."

Another strong supporter of STC is the **West End Health Foundation** which provides funding for the purchase of bikes awarded to winners of the annual STC bike raffle. The raffle raises about \$30,000 each year for the club's annual budget.

The bike raffle started in 2019 and awarded one mountain bike to the winner.



Cliffs, forests, trails, and hills aren't the only scenery Start the Cycle riders encounter during their weekly training sessions. Sometimes they get to enjoy a waterfall.

The raffle has grown since then. This year, three bikes will be raffled. One prize is a Trek Fuel Exe 9.5 Deore and the second is a pair of Aventon Level 2 step through electric bikes. The first ticket drawn will have the choice of the Trek or a pair of Aventons. Raffle tickets are \$10 each and the prize drawing will be held during Marquette Trails Fest on Sunday, June 23, 2024. STC can be contacted at [info@startthecycleomt.org](mailto:info@startthecycleomt.org) or P.O. Box 815, Marquette, MI 49855.

Over the past 22 years, Start the Cycle has developed a blueprint for success. The lives they have shaped and the beneficial skills and habits they instill have changed lives. As Laura MacDonald says, "The community is the most important part of the success of STC. Donations, sponsorships, raffle ticket purchases, and volunteerism, we make it happen for kids in our community."

For more information, please check out [startthecycleomt.org](http://startthecycleomt.org).



Start the Cycle team members take in the scenery from the top of Sugarloaf Mountain near Marquette.

# The Trail Systems of Traverse City

## Cyclist-Friendly and a Silent Sports Biking Destination



With the addition of boardwalk bridges on the south end of the lake, the 4-mile loop of Boardman Lake was completed.

PHOTOS BY DAVE FOLEY.

### Dave Foley

Some refer to Traverse City as “Traffic City.” If you’ve tried to move about this town during Cherry Festival or worker commute times, you can see there’s some truth to that description. Having the Boardman/Ottaway River flowing through town and the city’s location on Traverse Bay further limits the options for roads.

To address the traffic problem and lack of bike lanes along Highway US 31, a group of avid cyclists in 1991 began working to remedy the situation through a network of bike trails, much of it following the 19th-century roadbed of the former Chicago and West Michigan Railway. This became the **Traverse Area Recreational Trail (TART)**, a 10.5-mile, non-motorized paved urban trail that extends from the west side of Traverse City (M-22) to Acme (M-72).

Sections of the TART see hundreds of thousands of users annually. **Betsy Boyce**, who lives on the east side, rides 6 miles on the trail to her west side workplace in the Traverse City Commons. “I love getting outdoors before work and sometimes when traffic is bad,” Betsy said. “I can get crosstown faster on my bike than in a

car. The commute not only provides exercise but a time for transition from work to home.”

During the tourist season, when downtown parking spots are hard to find, visitors to the city will discover that parking at a commuter lot at the edge of town and then biking into the city offers a great alternative to driving.

### More to Offer

To tie more of the city into the TART Trail network, the 2-mile **Mall Trail**, running from the Grand Traverse Mall into downtown, was established. Another trail runs from the Traverse City State Park along 3-mile Road to South Airport Road. Within two years, an extension will run from Hammond Road along 3-Mile to South Airport Road providing options for students at several schools.

Adding bike lanes and creating routes within the city have made the town more biker-friendly. Since 1995 each June during **Smart Commute Week**, folks are encouraged to leave their cars at home and walk, ride, carpool, or take the bus to get around. Free breakfasts are provided at several locations.

The trail network also connects the 25K **VASA Ski Trail** and the 15K singletrack fat bike trails, as well as links the 17-mile Leelanau Trail that runs north to Suttons Bay. On the east side, the TART



North extends north to Acme and plans are in the works to link to the Little Traverse Wheelway, which runs between Charlevoix and Petoskey.

Currently, you can explore 21 miles on the **Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail** within the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore. A fund-raising plan is nearing completion for financing the development of the 6 miles needed to connect the southern boundary of Leelanau County to Good Harbor Bay at the northern end of the National Lakeshore.

With the 2022 completion of a bridge over **Boardman Lake**, runners, cyclists, and walkers can now make the 4-mile circle of Boardman Lake. Much of the east side of the trail is in the woods with nary a house to be seen. The trail, which is paved except for a brief section of hard-packed gravel, goes over several boardwalks as it approaches South Airport Road. On the west side, it runs along the lake passing large iron sculptures created by Cadillac artist **Dave Petrokovitz**.

In November 2023, two more miles were added to the trail to take the TART from Bunker Hill Road north to the Meijer's in Acme. This sets up a planned connecting trail to Elk Rapids.

On the west side of town, the **Buffalo Ridge Trail** is currently an almost 1.5-mile pathway connecting The Village at Grand Traverse Commons to Traverse West Middle School and the YMCA, passing by the TBA-ISD main office and conference center, the historic Barns Park, and the Botanic Garden. When the route is completed, the proposed 4.5-mile trail will connect the west and southwest areas of Traverse City.

Those with mountain bikes or fat bikes might like to sample the 41.6-mile loop which follows the perimeter of the TART Trails network. Starting in town at Hull Park behind the Traverse City District Library, the trail connects the Boardman Lake Trail, Boardman River Trail, East Creek Reserve Trails, Brown Ridge Quiet Area, Muncie Lake Pathway, North Country Trail, VASA Pathway, and the TART trails back to Traverse City.

This summer, the Grandview Parkway, Traverse City's main thoroughfare through the city has been under construction, creating major traffic problems. To meet this challenge, TART has developed a series of effective detours for cyclists.

The TART Trails website, [traversetrails.org](http://traversetrails.org), has detailed information and maps of the trail system.

Whether you take advantage of the TART Trail crosstown path to avoid traffic or use your bike to explore some of the more scenic offshoots, you will find that Traverse City offers some of the best cycling to be found in northern Michigan. 🚲

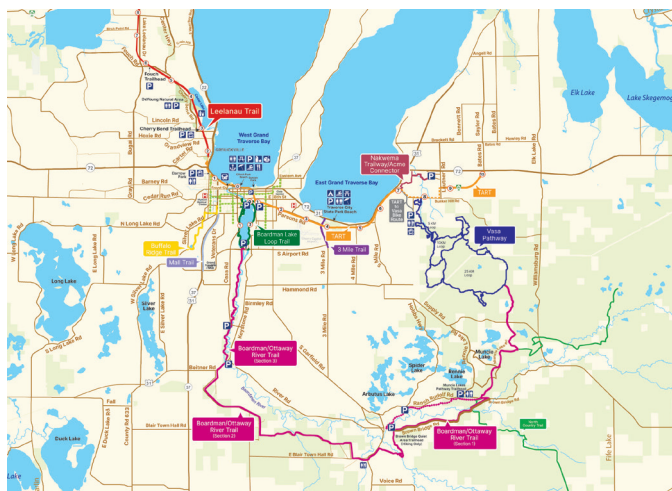
**Bridges have been built that enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross the river without having to deal with automobile traffic.**



Trees along the north end of the trail by Boardman Lake offer added beauty and shady sections.



The TART Trails provide an alternative to having to walk on city sidewalks in residential neighborhoods.



Traverse City area trails, courtesy of [traversetrails.org](http://traversetrails.org).

## A deeper appreciation for those who came before us

Tossing in my mummy bag with the leaky camp mattress gone totally flat, I found myself on hard, cold ground as October temperatures in the Desert Southwest dipped into the low 20s. But rather than fighting to fall back asleep, I chose to rise before dawn.

Poking my head out of the tent, I immediately knew it was a good call. While the sun had yet to creep atop the 500-foot mesa, light was already spilling into **Chaco Canyon**, turning the west-facing sandstone walls into a vivid technicolor display. The palette grew richer by the minute, from light pink to deeper shades of red. In the eastern sky, Venus shone brightly, a lone star in the fast-spreading daylight of northwest New Mexico.

Breathing in the chilly air, I marveled at the moment, imagining how those who called Chaco Canyon home some 2,000 years ago must have enjoyed these sunrises daily. Their multi-story stone kivas, the door openings lining up precisely with the cycles of the sun and moon, suggest an advanced culture living in harmony with the natural world.

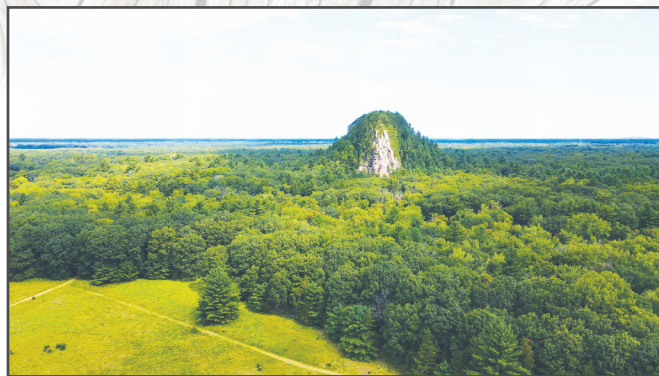
Somewhere between four and twelve million people lived in what's now called the United States when Europeans found their way to the New World in the 1500s. Up to 40 million more may have lived in Mexico, the Andes, and Central America when the Spanish began to spread across the region. Unfortunately, my public education in Madison largely began American History with Christopher Columbus, moved quickly to the Pilgrims, and on to 1776, ignoring centuries of indigenous people who were already here raising families, establishing communities, and trading with neighbors.

I'm told public school curriculums today present a far greater appreciation of those who lived in these parts long before **Father Jacques Marquette** and his fur-trading sidekick, **Louis Joliet**, paddled from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi via the Wisconsin River. But it took a soul-changing visit to Chaco Canyon for me to fully develop a deeper appreciation for those who came before.

Now when I hear the recorded disclaimer before Broadway shows at Madison's Overture Center, noting the flashy concert hall rests on ancestral lands of the **Ho-Chunk Nation**, I think, *Damn straight, we took this land from these folks and just acknowledging that fact isn't enough.*

When I read about the **Lac du Flambeau dispute** in northern Wisconsin over road access to white-owned lakefront fishing cottages, I fully sympathize with those who've watched their homeland waters turn into playgrounds for jet boats and water skiers.

It's easy to appreciate indigenous history at well-preserved places such as **Mesa Verde**, **Hovenweep**, **Bandelier**, and



The Roche-A-Cri Native American site near Friendship, Adams County, Wisconsin, with ancient petroglyphs dating before 900 AD. They consist of Oneota rock art, mostly petroglyphs resembling birds, canoes, and geometric designs.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WISCONSIN DNR.

countless other sites in the Four Corners region of Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. We're not so lucky in Wisconsin where weather, time, and cultural insensitivity have wiped out many traces of **Woodland peoples** who moved here as the great ice sheets began to recede 12,000 years ago.

But there is still much to be found.

Effigy mounds remain clearly visible throughout the Madison area. While many have been lost to farming and development over the past 150 years, striking examples remain in the **Yahara River basin** and its chain of lakes, including Picnic Point, Governor Nelson State Park, and the ridge overlooking Vilas Park. The recent discovery of two ancient dugout canoes rescued from the bottom of Lake Mendota has added a new chapter to the history of the mound builders.

At **Aztalan State Park** in southeastern Wisconsin, visitors can experience an ancient Mississippian culture settlement that flourished over 1,000 years ago. Their trading network reached from the Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast based on the artifacts uncovered in the massive earthen mounds found there.

And at **Roche-A-Cri State Park** in central Wisconsin, there's a 300-foot-high rock outcropping featuring Native American petroglyphs and pictographs dating back centuries.

While these sites maybe don't rival Chaco Canyon for sheer drama, they're just as important, recognizing that humans were thriving in the Midwest long before it was written down in the history books. You only need to use your imagination and breathe into the moment. ☞

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