

# GITCHI-GAMI TRAIL RIDER

A publication of the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association

Spring / Summer 2015

## President's Message

### Reflections on 15 years of Annual Rides

For the past 14 years, volunteers from the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association (GGTA) have saved the third Saturday in August, putting in a long but fun day hosting our annual trail ride. This August 15 we will host the 15th Annual Ride, featuring loops on the Gitchi-Gami State Trail (GGST) and adjoining roads, once again beginning at Gooseberry Falls State Park.

In the Summer 2001 edition of this newsletter, I also penned the "President's Message" — what goes around rolls around? — and wrote that "We finally have some completed trail." It was only about one mile near Gooseberry Falls, but our good friend and supporter, the late Congressman Jim Oberstar, decided that we should establish an annual ride to promote the GGST and celebrate every mile completed. So, in addition to announcing our first "pavement on the ground," the newsletter invited everyone to join the "1st Annual Gitchi-Gami State Trail Lighthouse Ride" on August 18 of that year. That first ride — and annual rides for several years to come — was routed on rural county roads in the hills from Two Harbors to Silver Bay.

Billed as the "lighthouse to lighthouse ride," the first ride started at Split Rock State Park, proceeded six miles on the wide shoulders of Highway 61 to Beaver Bay (police escorted), then climbed for some miles to County Rd 2 and back to the shore, ending at the Two Harbors Lighthouse, from which riders were shuttled back to Split Rock. A shorter 12-mile "ceremonial ride" took riders to Beaver Bay and back to Split Rock on the highway.

The early rides varied from year to year, but always featured a route of at least 50 miles involving long hill climbs. The number of riders in those years varied from 150 to 225. The Second Annual Ride on August 17, 2002, was my first long-distance ride and, with the hills and strong headwinds, took me six-plus hours to finish. I remember sprawling on the grassy lighthouse grounds, exhausted and famished, but with a great sense of accomplishment, eating pizza and drinking a beer.

Jim Oberstar rode on several of the early rides. We would have a mass start. Just before the start, Jim would climb on a picnic table or truck bed and give a rousing and cheerful talk on the benefits of biking and bike trails, with maybe a few political asides. During the ride Jim would chat with anyone who rode up alongside him. By legislation he guided through Congress, he helped build bike trails throughout the country.

By the 6th Annual Ride in August 2006, enough trail had been built that we could offer a 20-mile out-and-back route entirely on the GGST, from the Twin Points rest area to Beaver Bay — as well as the challenging 55-mile route popular with strong riders regularly offered now. The following year, and every year since, the rides have begun and ended at the trailhead in Gooseberry Falls State Park.

This year's ride again features a choice of three distances — 28 miles out and back on the trail, 37 miles incorporating county roads and additional trail from Silver Bay to the West Road (with a half-mile of gravel road), and the 55-mile route.

Looking back at that 2001 newsletter featuring the first ride, it is sobering to realize that we hoped and planned then that the entire trail would and could be completed by 2011! However, as of this year, we have completed just short of 30 miles, with about twice that distance yet to be built to complete the trail between Two Harbors and Grand Marais. Your

board works hard to promote the trail and find funding for additional miles of trail, but increasing construction costs and changing legislative priorities at the federal and state levels have presented ongoing challenges.

Please consider becoming a member of the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association and riding with us on August 15. The broader our public support, the more likely it is that funds will be allocated for new trail miles.

~ Bill Blank  
President, GGTA

*Celebrate 15!*  
15 years!  
15 annual rides!  
≈ 15 × 2 miles completed!  
≈ 15 × 4 miles to go!  
August 15  
2015  
Join us!

## Gitchi-Gami Trail News & Notes

The fruitful partnership between the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association (GGTA) and the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) reached new heights when Michelle Pierson, ARDC Project Assistant, contracted with the GGTA to become our Executive Director. Our all-volunteer association will benefit greatly from her professional help, with the resources of ARDC behind her. See her profile on the back page.



Mark Rudningen, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Trail

Development Specialist, and Charlie Moore, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Specialist with the ARDC, represented the Gitchi-Gami State Trail (GGST) at the



A cathedral of birch on the GGST near Split Rock.

PedalMN Conference in Minneapolis May 4-5. PedalMN is a project of Explore Minnesota Tourism devoted to promoting bicycling in "The Bike State." Charlie presented the new interactive map tour that he created for the GGTA, which was very well received. Check out the link on our home page at [www.ggta.org](http://www.ggta.org).

### Gitchi-Gami Trail Association

PO Box 74

Silver Bay, MN 55614

#### Board of Directors

Bill Blank, President, Lutsen

Mark Sandbo, Vice President,  
Grand Marais

Nancy Mancini, Secretary/Treasurer,  
Two Harbors

Anne McKinsey, Editor, Lutsen

Bruce Martinson, Schroeder

Tom Peterson, Two Harbors

Robert Risch, Two Harbors

Mark Spinler, Grand Marais

#### Executive Director

Michelle Pierson, ARDC, Duluth



The GGTA was awarded a MN Lake Superior Coastal Program grant for the Gitchi-Gami Scoping Project. The purpose of the project, now underway, is to acquire accurate information necessary to complete the unbuilt sections of the GGST, about 59 miles. The scoping project will result in accurate measurement of existing trail and of proposed trail alignment, from which the GGTA and its partners — including the DNR, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), and the

ARDC — will be able to develop detailed estimates of construction costs and funding strategies. It will result in a realistic updating of the original trail plan and construction schedule conceived

in 1999 — under which the GGST would have been completed in 2011. The \$20,000 contract cost reflects \$15,000 provided by MLSCP and a \$5000 local match provided by the GGTA — your membership dollars at work! The scoping project is set to be completed by December of this year.



The ARDC, in collaboration with the GGTA, MnDOT, the DNR, and the Sawtooth Mountain Clinic, is conducting a first-of-its-kind bicycle and pedestrian monitoring project on the GGST this summer. Data on trail use collected during the project will assist trail stakeholders and partners with effective planning and management of the GGST.



A wetland permit was issued for the high-priority West Road project — to provide paved trail on the half-mile gravel road that connects the Silver Bay-Beaver Bay trail section to

Hwy 61 east of the Beaver River and trailhead. The Army Corps of Engineers will survey the site when vegetation can be identified. The timeline for construction has been extended into 2016.



Another high-priority project — connecting the Schroeder-to-Tofte and Tofte-to-Lutsen segments of the GGST through the town of Tofte, has been the subject of meetings of town

residents and officials in recent weeks, with planning assistance from the ARDC. The design project has been awarded a federal Transportation Alternatives Project (TAP) grant of

\$600,000 by MnDOT, with funding due in 2018. The planning process is awaiting recommendations by a landscape architect to be presented later this summer.



The Superior Hiking Trail (SHT) will share a portion of the GGST this summer because a private landowner withdrew permission for the SHT to cross the owner's property. The SHT detour will start at Gooseberry Falls and utilize the GGST for 2.1 miles to the Blueberry Hill Road intersection at Hwy 61 milepost 41.6 on Hwy 61. Hikers can then access the SHT about 1.2 miles up the Blueberry Hill Road from Hwy 61, or may continue another 2.4 miles on the GGST to the Split Rock River Wayside and the spur trail to the main SHT. Bikers are cautioned to keep an eye out for hikers, and vice versa. Pedestrians have the right of way over bicycle traffic.



Sign on Tofte's east side tells bikers how to get through town to the west side trail.

## 15th Annual GGTA North Shore Bike Ride Celebrate 15!

The 15th Annual Gitchi-Gami Trail Association (GGTA) North Shore Bike Ride will take place on Saturday, August 15, 2015, on the spectacular Gitchi-Gami State Trail (GGST) and connecting roads, with 28-mile, 37-mile, and 55-mile route options.

The recreational bike ride will once again begin and end in beautiful **Gooseberry Falls State Park**, located between Two Harbors and Silver Bay, on scenic Hwy 61. The **28-mile ride option** is entirely on the GGST, from Gooseberry through historic Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, continuing to the attractive new rest stop at the Beaver Bay trailhead, and returning on the trail. Because it is an "out-and-back" ride, bikers can turn around at any point to return to the starting point. The **37-mile option** follows Co Rd 4 north out of Beaver Bay, then follows Forest Rd 11/Penn Blvd into Silver Bay, returning on the trail between Silver Bay and the West Road in Beaver Bay. This route incorporates over half a mile on the West Road, a gravel road, to Hwy 61 just east of the Beaver River and the Beaver Bay trailhead, and returns to Gooseberry on the trail. The **55-mile option** follows the GGST to Beaver Bay and adds a loop north on Lake Co Rd 4 and the Lax Lake Road to Hwy 1 and the Eckbeck rest stop, to Hwy 61, to Penn Blvd and Silver Bay, back to Beaver Bay on Penn Blvd and Co Rd 4 (or via the Silver Bay segment), then back to Gooseberry on the trail.

**The ride begins at 9:00 a.m.** Riders are requested to depart by 10:30 a.m. Parking for the ride is in a lot inside Gooseberry Falls State Park. Vehicles will need an annual state park vehicle sticker or a daily vehicle pass. A daily pass will be provided by the GGTA as part of the registration fee, and is also good for entry to every other state park on ride day. Snacks and refreshments will be provided at rest stops and post-ride. Mechanical, emergency, and sag support will be provided. All adult riders will receive t-shirts, and younger riders will receive water bottles. All riders must wear helmets and agree to liability waivers.

**Registration can be completed by mail**, using the Registration and Waiver form on this page.

**Registration can also be completed online** (through secure PayPal payment) on our website, [www.ggta.org](http://www.ggta.org).

**The ride fee** for registration postmarked on or before August 1 is \$40. Registration thereafter is \$45. Registration for a child under 15 years old is \$5 with a paid adult.

**Members of the GGTA receive a \$10 discount from these prices!** All who joined the GGTA during 2014 or 2015 (and, of course, all life members) are eligible for the discount. A family membership entitles two adults to the discount. If you are not a member, and would like to support the work of the GGTA in building and promoting this North Shore gem, you can include your membership with your registration by filling out the membership form on the enclosed envelope. (You can use the envelope to return your ride registration whether or not you join the GGTA or are already a member.) Online, you can join the GGTA when you register for the ride, and you will qualify for the discount. Don't know if you're a member? You can contact us at [membership@ggta.org](mailto:membership@ggta.org).

**Questions?** Contact ride chair Bill Blank at 218-370-1003 or [annualride@ggta.org](mailto:annualride@ggta.org).

**HELP US CELEBRATE 15!**

### Registration and Waiver Form

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Registration by Aug 1: \$40 (\$30 for members)

Registration after Aug 1: \$45 (\$35 for members)

Children under 15: \$5 with paid adult

Circle shirt size: M L XL Second rider: M L XL

Ride options: \_\_\_28 miles\_\_\_ 37 miles\_\_\_ 55 miles

I agree by my entry into this event to accept its inherent risks, and absolve the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association (GGTA), its officers and employees, and all other sponsors, organizers, volunteers and associated entities, with their heirs and assigns, singly or collectively, of all blame or liability for any harm, inconvenience, injury, loss, or other misadventure suffered as a result of taking part in the GGTA North Shore Bike Ride.

Any qualified doctor or medical technician is hereby authorized to provide me medical treatment in response to an accident, injury, or illness during this event.

I give permission, without obligation or liability to me, for the use of my name, image or other record of my taking part in the GGTA North Shore Bike Ride for any promotional or publicity purposes.

I will obey traffic rules, heed officials' advice, and ride and conduct myself with due caution and respect, so as not to endanger anyone or disrupt the enjoyment of fellow cyclists, motorists or others. I agree to wear a properly fitted hard shell bicycle helmet at all times when riding a bicycle at this event.

My signature indicates that I have read this waiver and agree with its intent (**all riders must sign**):

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Under 18? Sign above, and have adult sign below:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Send completed Registration and Waiver form and check for ride registration (including membership fee, if any) in the enclosed envelope.**





## Gitchi-Gami Trail Association

PO Box 74

Silver Bay, MN 55614

### Meet Michelle . . .

Michelle Pierson is the new Executive Director of the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association. She is a Project Assistant in the Regional Planning Division of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) in Duluth, where she will now devote part of her time to overseeing the GGTA. Her expertise in planning, organization, and management will be a great asset to the GGTA, which has long needed an administrator to oversee its various functions.

With a board of directors strikingly devoid of Gen-Xers, Millennials, or other young people, the GGTA is fortunate indeed to be the beneficiary of her social media skills and technical expertise. Even before she accepted the Executive Director position, she had already designed the GGTA's new Facebook page. She regularly updates the page with information of interest to cyclists, trail proponents, and North Shore enthusiasts from a variety of sources, including her own excellent photography and videos. Her responsibilities at ARDC include maintaining Facebook pages for ARDC's Regional Planning Division, and other nonprofits with whom the ARDC partners — including Friends of the Skyline Parkway and the North Shore Scenic Drive Council.

Michelle was a Spanish teacher in another life — having taught in Cromwell, MN, and at Holy Rosary in Duluth prior to joining the ARDC in 2014. She has three children



Michelle enjoys a sunny spring day on the GGST.

— 8-year-old twin girls and a 4-year-old daughter. She says that “the wild places in Duluth and along the North Shore are my children’s playground.” She looks forward to biking on the GGST with her girls this season.

Michelle is also a hiking and running enthusiast, and plans to run in Grandma’s half-marathon this summer (her first).

She is raising five urban chickens in her Duluth backyard, named (by her girls) Henrietta, Willow, Chickie, Cutie and Stripy. Although she is passionate about active living and healthy eating, she admits to having a weakness for the famous “skizzles” at World’s Best Donuts in Grand Marais.

The GGTA welcomes Michelle, and we are excited to be working with her.