

Fall 2020

# GITCHI-GAMI TRAIL RIDER

A publication of the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association

Photo: Christian Dalbec

## BUILDING BRIDGES

**"Bridges become frames for looking at the world around us."**

*~Bruce Jackson*

The 2020 cycling season is now largely behind us, as temperatures drop and snow begins to fill the forests, cover the landscape, and coat the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. While the start of our season saw many changes to events and to travel, we were still able to continue construction of 3.5 miles of new trail from Grand Marais to Cut Face Creek State Wayside. And as we learned more about COVID-19, we found that the great outdoors was to become a healing balm in a tumultuous world.

We are thrilled with the trail progress in Cook County this year. While there wasn't enough time to lay the bituminous surface, the stunning bridge over the Fall River was installed. The trail in this area and the bridge are ADA compliant, making it possible for persons of all abilities to view the falls and cascades, previously accessible only from a steep, rocky path.

The completion of this trail segment is the first phase of our future plans to connect the community of Grand Marais with Cascade River State Park, and eventually to bridge the gap between Grand Marais and the longest stretch of trail beginning

at Gooseberry Falls State Park.

The GGST is in itself a bridge: bridging one North Shore community to the next, bridging one state park to the next, bridging residents of and visitors to the North Shore with our shared natural treasures and local amenities. We are pleased to work alongside the Minnesota Departments of Natural Resources and Transportation, and alongside city and township leaders, bridging connections among stakeholders.

You are a bridge in this process, too. Your support and membership in the GGTA help us advocate for this trail, and when you tell your legislators that this trail is important, and that it deserves to be funded, you help build coalitions that will advocate for the future of this treasure. We look forward to 2021, when, with your help, we can continue to build bridges.

*~ Bruce Martinson  
GGTA President*



## Trail Coordinator's Report

As I write this, the Northland (and Gitchi-Gami State Trail) are being covered by a blanket of fresh autumn snow. I can't think of a more fitting symbol for 2020—an interesting, yet very challenging, year! But despite the challenges we've faced, there have been a few positive outcomes from the change in "normalcy." In terms of visitor recreation on public lands, anecdotal evidence suggests that people are turning to our parks, trails, forests, and other public lands and waters in far greater numbers and for longer periods of time throughout the year than in years past. The Two Harbors DNR Office has also fielded more calls this year from the general public, who have reported concerns or have shown interest in the management of our public lands. Many people are once again reconnecting with nature and the great outdoors, a promising trend.

In trail development news, KGM Contractors and SRF Consulting Group have made excellent progress on construction of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail in Grand Marais, and we're much closer to being able to open another 3.5-mile segment connecting the existing trail to the Cutface Creek Wayside. Asphalt paving for this project will be taking place in the spring, and the trail should be ready by the middle of 2021. Additionally, Redstone Construction completed assembly of the new timber-through arch bridge over the Fall River. This is the first of its kind that the DNR has put into service—sure to be a popular rest stop for trail users on long or short treks.

Looking ahead, we'll be focusing our development efforts in Tofte and Lutsen, as trail design and engineering processes continue in the background. I hope that you remain safe and healthy into the New Year and look out for others continuing to do the same.

~Oliver Liu

DNR Area Specialist & GGST Trail Coordinator



## Executive Director's Report

This year has seemed to carry with it many opportunities to look at managing expectations. We started 2020 thinking grandly about participating in a new bike expo, seeking bonding funds in the Legislature's bonding bill, launching a new partnership program with the DNR for trail volunteerism, seeking to grow our volunteer board membership, and celebrating our 20th Annual North Shore Bike Ride. But 2020 and a global pandemic had other ideas.

While we were not able to participate in a bike swap/expo, we hope that the ideas we brainstormed will carry over to future times when gathering together will be safe. And while we weren't able to partner with the DNR to launch regularly scheduled volunteer events to right and stain fence posts and remove invasive species along the trail corridor, these ideas may also come to fruition as soon as it is safe to do so. Other positive developments this year include interest expressed by several people in learning more about our board membership and roles, and we are excited that new people will bring new skills and new energy to our organization. The GGTA Board has been meeting via Zoom since March, and while we miss the camaraderie of being together in person, our board members hail from all along the North Shore and around



The Westbergs on their Alterna-Ride in August

the state, and virtual meetings have made attendance easier. We saw this too in our Annual Meeting in May; a virtual meeting meant more people could participate.

Of course, we also had to retool our annual supported, fundraising ride. In place of our registration tables and rest stations, we invited folks to bike any distance, anywhere, and send us a photo, and we'd send out a sticker in the mail as a reward. We are happy to report that more than 65 people participated in our "Alterna-Ride." And we are looking forward to planning our 21st annual ride on August 21, 2021. Doesn't that line up nicely? We hope you'll mark your calendar and join us then—in person, we hope!

~ Michelle Pierson

GGTA Executive Director

## ***Your Membership Dollars at Work!***

The Gitchi-Gami Trail Association is a small 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a very modest budget. The vast majority of our contributions come from individual and family memberships, business memberships, and small donations, which pay for the day-to-day operation of the GGTA. These contributions permit us to promote and advocate for the trail and communicate with members and supporters, as in this newsletter.

Many of you choose to add additional contributions to your membership dues, completing the line on our form that says "For trail maintenance." Your dues have made a real impact over the years, allowing us to make contributions to the DNR and other partners for trail maintenance equipment, signage, and more. We anticipate that the way we will next use your contributions is to help improve the safety of the crosswalk in the City of Beaver Bay. If you have biked in this area, you know the trail crosses the road near the City Hall, Lemon Wolf Café, and the Mobil Station. This summer saw an uptick in trail users on the GGST, and also saw an increase in motorists using the North Shore Scenic Drive/Hwy 61 as part of their way to find socially distant adventures. This resulted in some trail users bringing to our attention, and to the attention of the DNR and MnDOT, that motorists often do not yield to bikers and pedestrians at this at-grade crossing.

GGTA members were able to join meetings with staff from the DNR, MnDOT, and officials from the City of Beaver Bay to evaluate potential improvements to this crosswalk. One way MnDOT is already helping out is by "goal posting" the crosswalk with signs on both sides of the highway, and on both sides of the sign posts. Next spring, the goal is to work together to enhance the safety of this trail crossing by narrowing the distance cyclists and pedestrians have to cross, adding in-road signage saying that it is state law to stop for people in crosswalks, and increasing enforcement efforts. The GGTA has pledged to provide funding for this project to purchase some of the signage. We intend to do some observation and surveying of trail users next summer to help guide the partners toward a permanent solution. If you use this trail crossing next year, we'd like to hear from you about your experience. And please know that your membership dues and financial support will help the effort to improve safety in this area.

Thank you for choosing to support our work. Your individual, family, lifetime, and business memberships help us build momentum for more trail, and your extra dollars help us put money back into maintaining and improving the trail miles we have. ~ Chad Pierson, GGTA Treasurer



### **Gitchi-Gami Trail Association**

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The 2020-21 school year is well underway, and for many students and teachers it is a year like no other. With masks at the ready, and social distancing protocols in place, students at Silver Bay's William Kelley school were able to celebrate learning trailside again this fall. The day-long field trip involved lessons on bike safety, trail etiquette, and bike maintenance, and a 20-mile round trip ride from their school to Split Rock Lighthouse State Park. At the park, students participated in science lessons and ate sack lunches al fresco. One student was overheard saying: "This is the best day of school in my WHOLE life!"

Right on, and ride on!

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Remember the GGTA when you  
**give** TO THE **MAX**   
**Nov. 19, 2020**