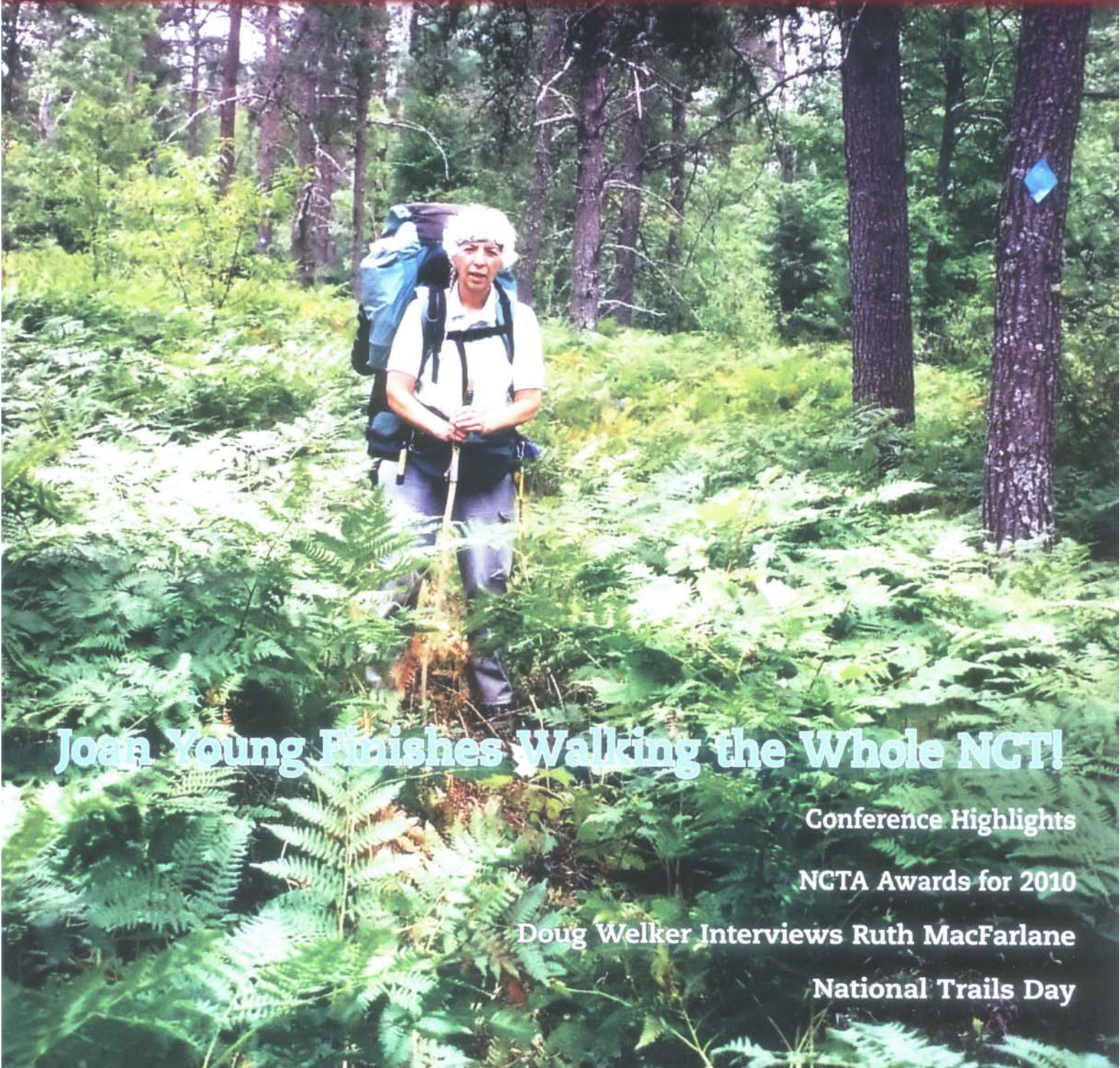


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Joan Young Finishes Walking the Whole NCT!

Conference Highlights

NCTA Awards for 2010

Doug Welker Interviews Ruth MacFarlane

National Trails Day



Kirk crossing the creek at the triple forks area, picture taken with a timer. The hill in the background rises up to form the ridge between the two main forks of Minister Creek.

Favorite Hike in Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest

Minister Valley, Forest Road 116 to Minister Road NCT
Map PA-01 Allegheny National Forest, South Segment

Story and pictures by Kirk Johnson

The section of the North Country Trail I am most familiar with is the 5.5 mile segment in the Allegheny National Forest passing through the proposed Minister Valley Wilderness Area, a 7,500 acre tract of stunning wild forest that has been popular with hikers and backpackers for decades.

Story Continued on page 19



Minister Creek runs close to, and parallel with the trail here.



The rock in the right foreground is an example of the conglomerate/sandstone sedimentary rock that is so common in the Allegheny National Forest. Also present in the frame are a number of Pennsylvania's state tree, the hemlock.

Favorite Hike in PA's ANF *continued from page 15*

Though I have been hiking this segment for nearly 15 years, the reason it has recently become so familiar is because five years ago I was privileged to become the formal adopter of the segment, clearing the trail of fallen tree limbs and other debris at least twice a year. I am grateful to NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter President Keith Klos for giving me the opportunity to do this work. This has been a fun way to experience the trail, get some exercise (a lot more interesting than sitting on the stationary bike at the YMCA for an hour!), and to become very familiar with every last foot of the segment. My equipment for this work is not complicated, just a fold-out Corona pruning saw, and some Corona hand-pruners plus sometimes a small bow saw.

The NCT trailhead on the west side of Minister Valley is located along Forest Road 116, about a quarter-mile south of Hearts Content Road. The trailhead on the east side of the area is located along Minister Road, about two miles south of Hearts Content Road. As you walk this segment west, about a mile from Minister Road the NCT intersects with the Minister Trail, a popular 6.6-mile loop that features well-known rock outcrop sites. On the west side of the valley, the NCT follows the edge of an area hit by a tornado in 1985. (This is the same tornado that went on to knock down approximately 800 acres of the Tionesta Scenic Area old-growth forest 15 miles to the east.) Saplings now dominate this area. As the NCT nears Forest Road 116, it follows an old logging railroad grade, used to transport timber around the beginning of the 20th Century.

Whether you start your hike on the west or east end of this segment, you will begin on flat terrain at about 1,800' in elevation. You will gradually drop down into the valley until reaching Minister Creek at a location popularly known as "triple forks," at approximately 1,400'. Though not an official Forest Service campground, due to the highly scenic nature of triple forks and an abundance of drinking water, this is perhaps the most popular camping spot along the entire 95-mile length of the NCT in the ANF. The aforementioned Minister Trail loop diverges from the NCT at triple forks, heading south down the west bank of Minister Creek.

The Minister Valley area was proposed for National Recreation Area status by Friends of Allegheny Wilderness in 2003 as the ANF began their Forest Plan revision process. The agency ultimately concluded that the area in fact qualifies for wilderness protection under the Wilderness Act of 1964 as a result of the revision process. It is now up to the U.S. Congress to pass a law to protect the area permanently in its natural condition as part of America's National Wilderness Preservation System. For more information about protecting wilderness in the ANF, check out www.pawild.org.

Wildlife you might expect to see while walking the NCT through here includes white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), fishers (*Martes pennanti*), and during the summer months a wide variety of migrant songbird species. So bring your binoculars and your camera when you go! You'll never know what you might get to see. ✨

Kirk Johnson is a ten-year member of the North Country Trail Association, and executive director for the Warren, Pennsylvania, based non-profit organization Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (www.pawild.org)