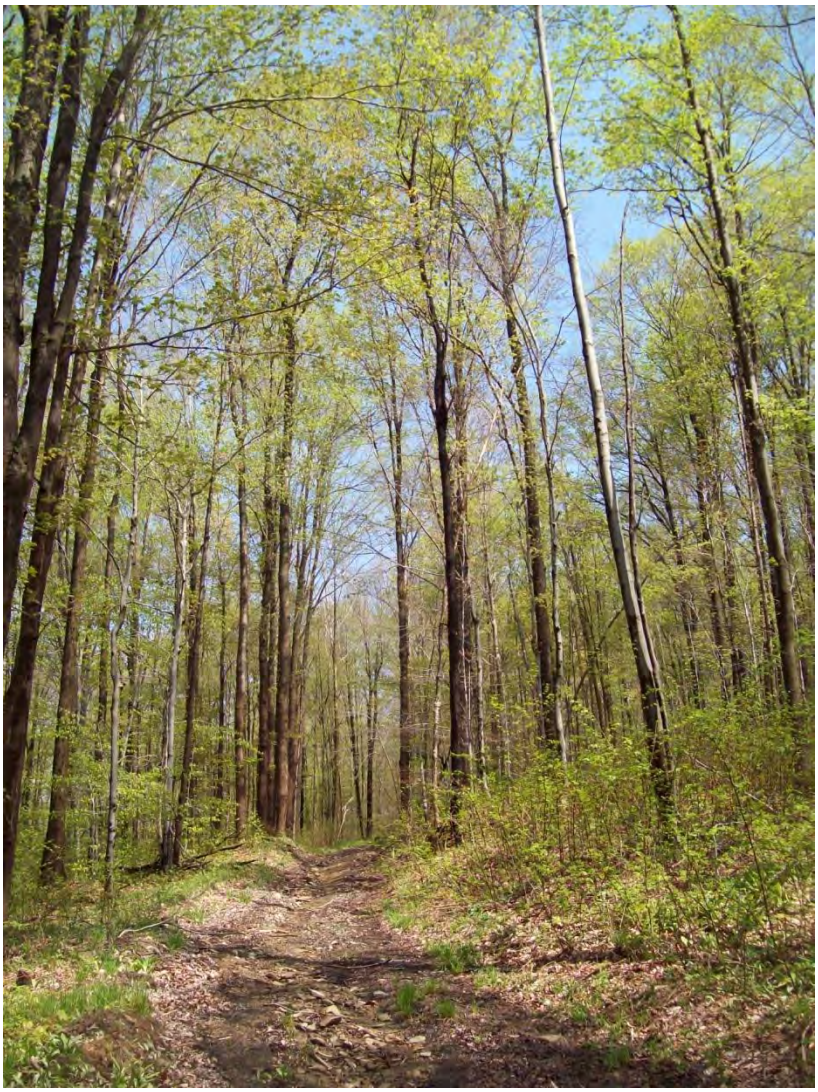
Interpreter's Guide to the Finger Lakes Trail

Ellicottville to Portageville

By: Jennifer Maguder



Introduction

During my freshman year of college, I got into backpacking. I didn't have an appropriate backpack, tent, sleeping bag, stove, or a bunch of other stuff I'd need to be a backpacker, but that didn't stop me from dreaming. I devoured books about long distance trails like the Appalachian Trail and Pacific Crest Trail. I wanted to know what backpacking was like, so I convinced a friend to take me backpacking for a few days in New Hampshire. I loved it even though we had trouble finding water, our bear hang hardly made it off the ground, and I nearly froze at night. Despite these problems, I knew backpacking was a skill that I could build with a little practice. On my way home, I wondered about long distance hiking opportunities in New York State, much like Wallace Wood, the father of the Finger Lakes Trail (FLT), did on his trip home from New Hampshire in 1961.

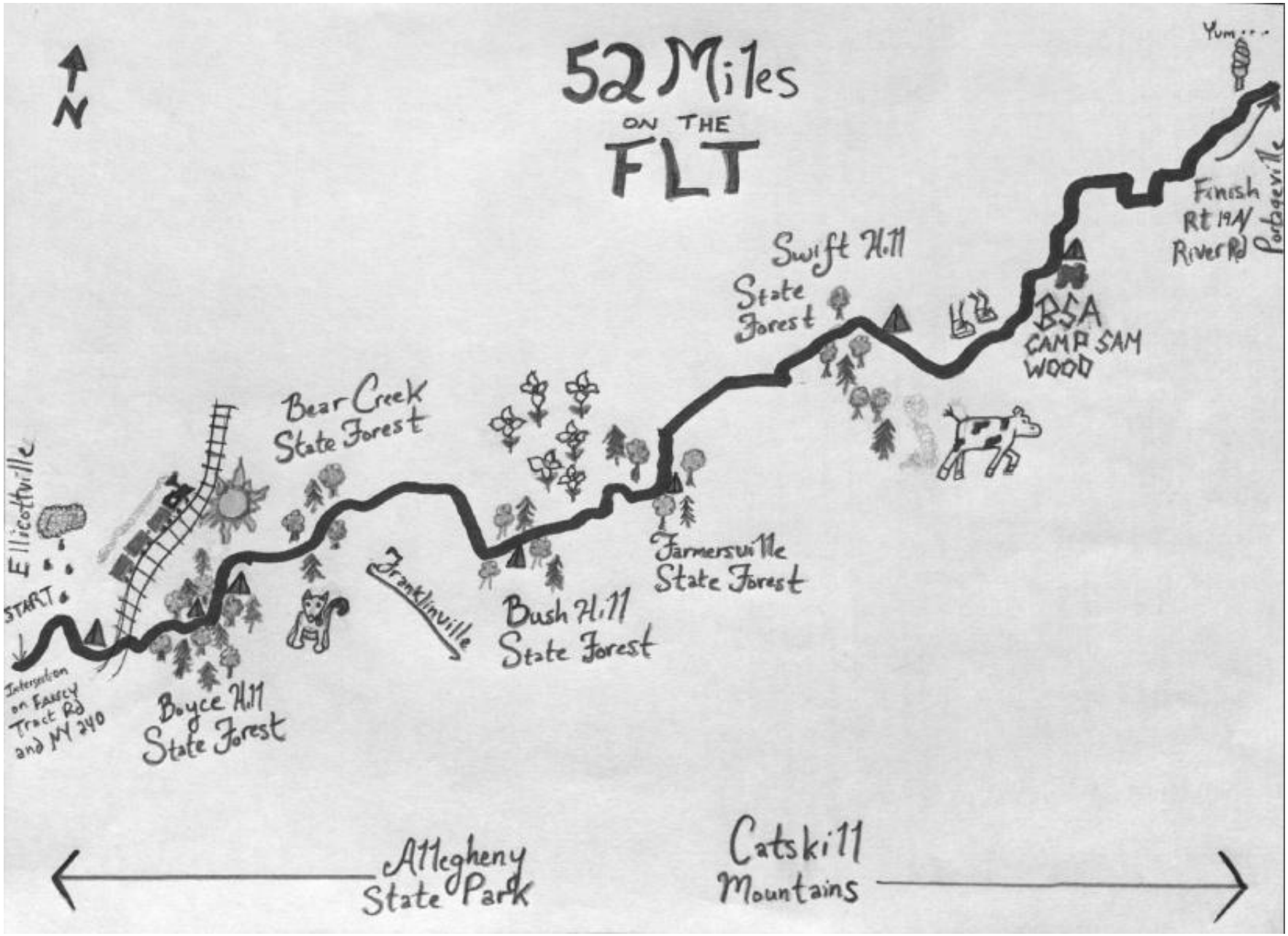
My curiosity about backpacking in New York, my home state, triggered a memory of the Finger Lakes Trail in Letchworth State Park, where I'd hiked often as a kid. I remembered the yellow blazes on the oaks and maples near the Mt. Morris Dam and reading a sign that read something like "Mile 22 of the Letchworth Branch of the FLT". I also remember thinking that anyone who hiked that far was crazy!

A quick google search showed me that the FLT existed outside of Letchworth. In fact, there was 958 miles of the FLT in New York just waiting to be hiked! This interest led me to the Finger Lakes Trail Conference website, fltconference.org. I quickly bought the FLT maps and guide offered there. I didn't know when I'd hike it, but knew I would!

Realizing the guide by A. Preus, J. Dabes, and E. Sidote was only 44 pages long, I went back to searching for guides about natural history, how the FLT came about, and the experience of hiking the trail. I could hardly find anything. There was a gap in the literature representing the FLT. This only strengthened my obsession. I felt that knowing something about the trail I wanted to hike would make the experience more valuable and enjoyable.

Think about the experience of diving into deep water. If the water is the deep end of a swimming pool, you can see the bottom and know the depth, which is likely written out clearly on the deck. You can take a dive without worrying about smacking the pool's bottom. If it is a lake, you might be more careful about diving in. You don't know what to expect, so you wade in first and hope there are no leeches attached when you come out. Going hiking without having looked into a trail adequately is a lot like diving straight into a lake. It's taking a chance. As exciting as taking a chance can be, I want to get the most out of the experience of hiking the FLT, so I've thoroughly researched a few things that one should know about the trail before hiking it. I've looked into the natural history, history of the trail's development, points of interest, and back packing ethics that are helpful to know while hiking the Ellicottville-Portageville section of the FLT. For my capstone project, I created my own guide to share the information I learned. It is my hope that reading this guide will make hiking the FLT like diving into clean, clear swimming pool!

My interpretive guide to the Ellicottville-Portageville leg of the FLT is divided into five sections. They cover planning and packing, animals, plants, FLT history, and backpacking ethics. Each section begins with a personal experience of hiking the segment of trail. Hiking the Finger Lakes Trail is an adventure! I hope my interpretive guide makes for an interesting read and gives an inside peek at hiking this long distance trail.


52 Miles
ON THE
FLT
N
Yum...
Finish
Rt 19A
River Rd
Portageville
Swift Hill
State
Forest
BSA
CAMP SAM
WOOD
Bear Creek
State Forest
Ellicottville
START
Intersection
on Fancy
Tract Rd
and NY 240
Boyce Hill
State Forest
Franklinville
Bush Hill
State Forest
Farmersville
State Forest
Allegheny
State Park
Catskill
Mountains

Section 1

Plan your adventure.

I look down at my hiking boots and try to decide if I want to run 10 miles on dusty roads in 90°F heat in them. I don't want to, but might have to. My mom is giving me *that look*. *That look* is not only asking "are you serious", but also "what were you thinking, why did I decide to do this with you, and how dumb can you be?"

"I'm sorry I left the key in your car on Fancy Tract Road," I said. "I'll run back and have the key in an hour and a half," I added optimistically. My mom just snorted. She was hot and we'd just hiked 10 miles. She was excited for an air-conditioned car and dinner waiting for us at home. She'd been a trooper all through the day and a real joy to hike with. This predicament was just a little too much.

We'd planned out our adventure well. During our day-hike on the Finger Lakes Trail we'd go from the intersection of NY Route 240 and Fancy Tract Road to the beginning of Bear Creek State Forest. One car was left at each end. We hadn't run out of water or food. We hadn't taken a wrong turn. We hadn't dressed improperly. The problem was that I made a mistake right from the beginning by locking my car key in my mom's car back on Fancy Tract Road. Now we were at Bear Creek State Forest, looking at my Jeep, but unable to get inside. My key was 10 trail-miles away.

Deciding I couldn't run ten miles in boots in 90°F heat, I called my dad to pick us up. Sheepishly I explained what I had done. He didn't seem angry, fortunately. He jumped in the car to come pick us up. With the difficulty of finding these places, I expected him to arrive in an hour and a half. I looked back at my mom and she gave me *that look* again. I couldn't stand getting *that look* for 90 more minutes, so I wracked my brain for another alternative. That is when I noticed a man doing trail work on the Finger Lakes Trail in Bear Creek State Forest.

The man didn't look particularly intimidating and he had a beautiful husky watching him while he worked. I'd been on a trail crew in the Adirondacks for about a year just previous to my FLT adventure. I felt comfortable around people who worked on trails. This gave me the confidence to say hello and tell the guy about our predicament. My mom could see where I was going and looked on in silent discontent.

The trail-worker's name was Kirk and he volunteered to maintain a section of the FLT. Yes, he knew where Fancy Tract Road was. No, he wouldn't mind giving us a ride there to get to my mom's car. I called my dad and told him he didn't need to come get us.

We loaded into the back of Kirk's car. Kirk and I chatted happily about the FLT while he drove. My mom, who is allergic to dogs, sat silently with Kirk's husky, Scarlet, in her lap where the dog had chosen to settle. She was still giving me *that look*. I hadn't failed to notice that before my mom got in the car, she texted the license plate number to my dad.

Twenty minutes later or so, Kirk dropped us off cheerfully at my mom's car. I thanked him as my mom brushed husky fur and mud off her pants.

"That wasn't too bad," I said when Kirk drove away. My mom just replied with *that look.* As I retrieved my key from the door panel of my mom's car, I wondered if she'd still be up for hiking with me again tomorrow.

Despite our good planning, I still made a silly mistake. These things will happen. Truly, we are only human. Going into a long distance hiking endeavor requires excellent planning. One should have an idea of what to bring, where she/he will camp at night, whether or not there is water nearby, what places along the trail are interesting land marks, and how much mileage

she/he will travel each day. Although unexpected problems are sure to arise, it is important to have planned ahead as well as possible to minimize the potential for difficulty on the trail.

Included in this section are three lists to help in the planning process to avoid getting *that look* from your hiking companions. The three lists include: A Packing List For Multi-day Hiking, Camping Locations By Mile, and Points of Interest By Mile.

Packing List for a Multi-day Trip on the FLT

10 Essentials:

- Map/Compass
- First Aid Kit
- Whistle
- Knife
- Water/Filtration System
- Food
- Rain Gear
- Head Lamp
- Emergency Space Blanket
- Matches/Lighter

Recommended Items:

- Backpack
- Backpacking Tent
- Biodegradable Soap
- Campstove
- Carabiner
- Cup
- Deodorant
- Dishes (light weight bowl and plate)
- Duct Tape
- *End to End Guide* by Preus, Dabes, and Sidote (2013)
- Emergency Cash
- Extra Batteries
- Extra Zip-lock Bags
- Hiking Boots
- Insect Repellent
- Moleskin for Blisters
- Nylon Cord (50' for bear hangs)
- Personal Identification
- Quick-drying Towel
- Sandals (to wear at camp)
- Sleeping Bag
- Snacks
- Stove Fuel
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Tooth Brush/Paste
- Trowel
- Utensils
- Water Bottles/Hydration System
- Water proof Stuff Sack (food storage)

Clothes for Warm Weather

- Bandana
- Hat
- Quick-drying Pants or Shorts
- Synthetic Long-sleeved Shirt
- Synthetic T-shirt
- Synthetic Underwear

Clothes for Cold Weather

**Note: nights can get chilly. Even if you're hiking in summer, make sure to bring some insulation layers.

- Cold-weather Hat
- Fleece or Synthetic Jacket
- Gloves
- Synthetic Base Layers (pants and shirt)
- Synthetic Long-sleeved Shirt

Optional Items:

- Books
- Camera
- Cell Phone
- Fleece Sleeping Bag Liner
- Gaiters
- GPS
- Ibuprofen
- Lip Balm
- Toilet Paper
- Trekking Poles
- Watch

Camping Locations by Mile

****Note – you can camp anywhere on state land as long as it's at least 150 feet from a trail, road, or water source. On private property, camping is at designated sites only.**

Miles from Junction NY 240 and Fancy Tract Road:

3.6 – After leaving Fancy Tract Road the second time and entering the forest, follow blue blazes (trail markers) to bivouac area. Reliable water downhill, picnic table, grill and fire ring. A bivouac area is a temporary campsite with no structures to protect campers from the elements.

6.9 – Boyce Hill State Forest lean-to. Fire ring, picnic table, bench, open air privy. Nearby stream for water.

7.6 – Bivouac area near the east edge of Boyce Hill State Forest. Bench and fire ring under red pines next to pond.

20.2 – Bivouac area in pines east of Peet Hill Road. The water source is an old Civilian Conservation Corps cistern next to the FLT. The cistern is a poor water source according to Preus et al., 2013.

24.9 – Bivouac in Farmersville State Forest, reached 0.4 miles after entering the state forest from the western edge. Only seasonal water near bivouac.

38.2 – After road-walking from Ballard Road to Rodgers Road, re-enter the forest, walk roughly a mile, and watch for blue blazes. Following the blazes ¼ of a mile leads to the Marge Hinz Campsite, with a picnic table, spring, and outhouse available.

45.6 – In Boy Scout Camp Sam Woods, bivouac area, outhouse, and lean-to near pond.

55.3 – Hesse Lean-to with stream downhill. This is beyond the mileage of this guide, but it seemed logical to include.

Points of Interest by Mile

Miles from junction NY 240 and Fancy Tract Road:

1.3 – Junction with the Conservation trail leading through the Buffalo area to Niagara Falls.

7.6 – Pond in Boyce Hill State Forest. On a calm day, the surface of the pond reflects the sky and the red pines in the surrounding forest.

12.5 –The trail crosses Bear Creek. There is no bridge, so at times of high water this can be an adventure.

17.2 – Kingsbury Hill section closed. As of 12/17/14 this 2.9 mile section of trail is closed by the landowner. Check with the FLTC for the current status of this section.

22.5 – Major clear-cut off to the side of Stebbins road. Luckily, the trail does not go through it.

34.5 – Walk the Buffalo and Susquehanna Railroad bed. The tracks are removed, but the FLT follows the graded bed for just under a mile until turning into the woods on the left, marked by large cairns.

35.8 – Enter Higgins, an Amish community. It is "picturesque with no facilities" (Preus et al., 2013). Look for roadside baked-good stands!

45.6 – Pond at Camp Sam Wood just before reaching NY Route 19.

52.0 - Detour to Letchworth State Park. At Route 19A the trail crosses the Whisky Bridge while an FLT branch trail connects to Letchworth. A visit to Letchworth is worth one's time. It is frequently referred to as the "grand canyon of the east" and offers stunning views of the Genesee River gorge. **Note: As you are passing through Portageville on this detour, consider a stop at the gas station where Route 19A intersects with Church Street. The gas station doesn't look like much, but the soft-serve ice cream is the best I've ever had.

Section 2

Go toe-to-toe with the wild inhabitants of the Western New York woods.

As we got out of the car on Fancy Tract Road, the clouds above released a fresh batch of rain drops. I considered putting on my rain jacket. Deciding it was too warm, I stowed it in my pack. Turning my head towards my hiking buddy, I took in the sight of a 50 year old woman hidden beneath a big blue poncho, trying to squeeze an umbrella into her bright green, child-sized, waterproof back pack. My mom was apparently more worried about the rain than I. *At least she's well prepared*, I thought.

After locking up the car and squeezing the tiny backpack onto my mom we eagerly marched down the trail. The excitement quickly drained away as it became obvious the trail was a mud pit. I tried to keep my boots from getting sucked off my feet. Halting before every puddle, my mom appeared to be trying to find a way to levitate across. Her white New Balance sneakers may have been a poor choice of foot wear, she seemed to realize.

As I waited for my mom to navigate the next lagoon, I studied the mud beneath my feet. It was covered in tracks. Not my tracks. Deer and coyote tracks stood out right before my boots. At that moment, I realized I was literally standing toe-to-toe with the inhabitants of the western New York woods. Being out on the Finger Lakes Trail had taken me out of the land of cars, fast food, and people and dropped me into nature's domain. Here the trail allowed me to enter the home of my more wild neighbors.

Many species call the woods of western New York home. Ten animals one might encounter on this section of the Finger Lakes Trail include:

1. American Toad (*Bufo americanus*)
2. Barred Owl (*Strix varia*)
3. Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)
4. Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*)
5. Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)
6. Coyote (*Canis latrans*)
7. Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
8. Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)
9. Red Spotted Newt (*Notophthalmus viridiscens*)
10. White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

American Toad
Bufo americanus

The American toad is widespread and abundant in the northeast. If you see a toad hopping across the path, compare the color of the toad's back to the color of the ground to see if they match. The color of the toad varies from gray to olive to brick red and frequently bears similarity to its habitat.

Photo credit: Claire G. Nellis

American toads breed in shallow pools and streams. The vocalization of the American toad is a long musical trill that can be heard bringing the night to life. Individual calls can last from 6 to 30 seconds (Conant, 1975).

I remember chasing toads as a kid. They walk more than hop, making them much easier to catch than frogs. I used to bravely announce I was going to catch toads when we saw them, but then always felt squeamish for a moment right before closing it in my hands. Somehow the thrill of catching the toad always trumped my fear of how cold and clammy it would feel.

Now when I see a toad I usually force myself to leave it alone, no matter how big it is. I know they are sensitive to many man-made chemicals (such as soap) that may be on my hands. Although it is easy to catch toads, they deserve respect. They are still wild animals and certainly become stressed when man-handled. Ever had a toad pee on you? It's pretty unpleasant. If they don't like being picked up, their bladder will let you know really quickly!

Barred Owl
Strix varia

The barred owl is gray brown and 17 to 24 inches tall when mature. It has big, moist, brown eyes and a pattern that looks like bars running lengthwise across its chest (Peterson, 1980). The wingspan of the barred owl is roughly 42 inches, which is wider than an average doorway! They are nocturnal hunters and prey primarily on small mammals, like mice (Sibley, 2003). Barred owls sit at the top of the food chain in northern forests.

While tucked away in your sleeping bag, keep your ears focused on the sounds of the night. If lucky, the call of the barred owl might give its location away. The vocalization of the barred owl seems to be asking, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?"

Barred owls tend to inhabit both deciduous trees and evergreens. Older forests are more likely to be home to these owls because larger trees are easier to roost in (Barred owl, n.d.).

At Letchworth State Park, very close to where the FLT crosses Portageville, my family succeeded at communicating with a barred owl on one lucky occasion. We went out into the woods late at night and were walking through a forest dense with norway spruce. It was so dark we were feeling the trail out with our feet inch by inch. Our goal was to find a barred owl. For this reason, we didn't dare turn on our flashlights for fear they'd scare the birds away. My mom had a silly little recorder with her that played barred owl calls. I really didn't think it would work because the recording sounded like a quiet, little robot-owl. Despite my doubts, my mom continued playing the call into the summer night. I was absolutely shocked when a living, breathing barred owl responded to the electronic call from right above our heads. "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" it asked bravely from the trees. The owl entertained us by responding to the call for several exchanges before flying away. We were finally able to figure out where it was when we saw its shape separate from the forest and blot out the stars with its enormous wingspan for a couple seconds. After that the owl disappeared as though it had been a shadow all along.

Black-capped Chickadee
Parus atricapillus

The black capped chickadee is a small bird, 4 ¾ inches to 5 ¾ inches with a black head and bib and white cheeks. It voices two common calls. One is a clearly enunciated *chick-a-dee-dee-dee* and the other is a whistle that sounds like "fee-bee", the first note higher than the second (Peterson, 1980). The black capped chickadee has an 8 inch wing span and only usually flies short distances between trees (Sibley, 2003). They are like acrobats in flight, making quick turns, bouncy climbs, and twisty descents (Black capped chickadee, n.d.).

Black capped chickadees can be found all over the FLT. They'll hang out in a dense forest, on the edge of ponds, or on private property where they have easy access to a feeder. While hiking, I saw more than a few! All you have to do is keep your eyes and ears open to notice these wild inhabitants of western New York.

Beaver
Castor canadensis

Have you ever found a stick near a body of water with all the bark neatly stripped off? The first time I found one of these I had no idea it had been done by a beaver. I actually thought a person had done it with a knife and then left the stick behind. The friend I was with just laughed at me when I voiced this opinion aloud. Little did I know what a wetland engineer a beaver can be!

Now I know that they build dams across streams to control flow and build partially submerged lodges for shelter. Beavers live in lodges with family groups comprised of adults, yearlings, and kits. Beavers can weigh up to 60 lbs! Their huge front teeth are chestnut colored and used to gnaw through bark and wood to take down trees. Beavers are chiefly nocturnal and prefer to feed on the bark of aspen, poplar, maple, willow, and alder (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976). Beavers have unique anatomical structures called castor sacks that contain a fluid known as castoreum. It contains many different chemicals and smells terrible. Beavers use castoreum to mark their territory (Muller-Schwarze and Sun, 2003).

Look for beaver chews like the one pictured above to see where the beavers are active. Considering their nocturnal nature, you're unlikely to see a beaver during the day. However, these chews can give you a hint about just how busy the beavers have been.

Blue Jay
Cyanocitta cristata

The blue jay is a notoriously intelligent, loud, blue bird. Both sexes have the same coloration. Blue jays make noises that range from harsh slurs to musical notes and also mimic the calls of red-shouldered and red-tailed hawks (Peterson, 1980). The feathers of the blue jay are iridescent, meaning their colors seem to change when viewed at different angles. A black feather found on the trail might turn out to be blue if held up to the light.

Blue jays feed on insects, acorns, and other seeds (Sibley, 2003). The canopy of the woods around the FLT occasionally echoes with the harsh cry of the blue jay. They prefer forest edges, so areas that border roads or farmland are good places to look for these birds. Be warned that blue jays are known to steal and cache food (Blue jay, n.d.). They are smart enough to grab it while you're not paying attention!

Coyote
Canis latrans

Have you ever heard eerie howling at night while camped out in the western New York woods? At first, it probably made your skin crawl and made it very difficult to close your eyes. I remember being with my cousin the first time he heard coyotes howling at night. His response was to take protective measures and sleep with a pocket knife clutched to his chest!

My cousin may have over-reacted a bit, but it does make sense to be a little wary of coyotes. They bear a close resemblance to their larger relatives, wolves. In horror movies and children's stories alike, we are shown the damage that can be done by the dagger-sharp teeth and

powerful jaws of a vicious wolf. The sound of a coyote howling in the night stirs up the fear of wolves that popular culture has been drilling into us since childhood. If you can manage to ignore those fears, hearing a pack of coyotes running wild in the night can be a beautiful thrill. With a little luck, you might experience this thrill while backpacking the FLT! If you do, there's no need to worry. In reality, the coyotes are probably more scared of you than you are of them.

The coyote looks like a medium-sized dog with gray or reddish-gray fir. They can weigh up to 50 lbs. In the dark, their eyes shine greenish gold. Coyotes are chiefly nocturnal and hunt small rodents, rabbits, and larger prey such as deer (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976). Along with the barred owl, the coyote is one of the top predators in the northeast.

It is unlikely that you will come across a coyote while hiking. However, you know they're there because of scat and track evidence. Scat like the picture above was likely left by a coyote. Domestic dogs don't have so much fur in their scat! The tracks that look like a medium sized dog's paws are possibly coyote tracks – especially if there aren't someone's footprints walking parallel to them. Coyotes are known as "perfect steppers" because of the way they step in the same spots with both their front and back paw to save energy in deep snow or mud. Having a perfectly straight line of tracks is another way to tell the difference between coyotes and pets because domestic dogs usually aren't as concerned with energy efficiency. As a result, their back prints might not land perfectly on top of their front ones.

Gray Squirrel
Sciurus carolinensis

The gray squirrel is common throughout forests of the eastern United States. We see them all the time in our backyards, possibly even sneaking seeds from the bird feeder. We take them for granted and sometimes call them pests, but gray squirrels are still wild animals.

The gray squirrel is known for hiding food in numerous, widely spaced caches just below the ground surface. This behavior allows gray squirrels to remain active throughout the winter. They also tend to leave midden piles behind where they eat. Midden piles are heaps of the scraps from food an animal didn't want. I saw a lot of piles of pieces of pine cone and piles of acorn shell along the FLT, showing where these guys have been and what they're eating.

Although it usually looks like gray squirrels are fighting when they chase each-other up and down trees, they are very social animals. Their social structure favors individuals who get along with family members. Gray squirrels can live up to 12 years in the wild, though they often die before reaching adulthood (Steele and Koprowski, 2001). They nest in holes or build leaf nests usually 25 feet off the ground (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976).

Gray squirrels are common inhabitants of the forests around the FLT. I saw them frequently climbing from tree to tree overhead and darting across the trail. They are loud animals. They make a snickering noise that is hard to miss once you know where it's coming from!

Raccoon
Procyon lotor

Raccoons are recognized by a black mask around their eyes and alternating rings of black and white on the tail. They are primarily nocturnal. Raccoons are omnivorous and will eat nuts, grains, insects, frogs, crayfish, bird eggs, and nearly anything available. I've been at several campfires where raccoons skirted right under camp chairs to reach unattended marshmallows! They don't hibernate but den up in hollow trees, logs, rock crevices, or ground burrows during cold spells (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976).

Since healthy raccoons are active at night, you are most likely to recognize them by a pair of yellow eyes reflecting the light of your headlamp before scurrying away.

Improper storage of food in campsites on the FLT might elicit nightly pillaging by raccoons. They can be vicious when trying to raid for food and will hiss or bite. Raccoons are also known to carry rabies. Make sure to avoid potentially dangerous encounters by storing food in a bear hang (see section 5 for instructions).

Red Spotted Newt
Notophthalmus viridiscens

The red spotted newt has a complex life history. Red Spotted Newts begin their lives in the water, first as eggs, then tiny swimmers. As adolescents, they strike out on their own, climbing out onto land and exploring (Red spotted newt, n.d.). Red efts are bold, especially after rainstorms, and may be seen walking about the forest floor in daylight (Conant, 1975). They stay in this (eft) stage for 3-5 years. As adults, they settle down and move back into the water, raising young of their own (Red spotted newt, n.d.). The adults live underwater, are normally olive green and 2 7/8 to 4 inches. They prefer ponds with good water quality and may remain active all winter underneath the ice (Conant, 1975).

Red spotted newts have an incredible internal compass. Even in lab experiments where there are no landmarks, they have proven their ability to return to specific locations. Scientists believe they are in tune with the magnetism of the earth. Red spotted newts don't need a map to know which way to go to get home. They use this instinct to return to the pond they were born in to mate as adults (Red spotted newt, n.d.).

Watch out for red efts making their way across the trail. They aren't very fast, so you have a good chance of seeing one while hiking. Although red efts are small and harmless, remember that they are still wildlife. It is important to show them respect. If you are going to pick up a salamander, make sure you don't have any soap, lotion, or other man-made chemicals on your hands. Products such as these could be poisonous to them! If you are unsure of what's on your hands, don't touch them. In fact, red spotted newts are very poisonous to humans, so please don't lick them (or put your hands in your mouth after touching one) for your own safety (Red spotted newt, n.d.). Many red efts will cross your path if you keep hiking. I was lucky enough to see a few on the FLT on a rainy day in May!

White-tailed Deer
Odocoileus virginianus

The white-tailed deer is the most common member of the deer family in North America. There's a good chance you've seen them in the backyard nibbling your shrubbery! Females can weigh up to 250 lbs while males can weigh up to 400 lbs. White-tailed deer are browsers, meaning they eat twigs, shrubs, acorns, grass, and herbs (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976). This is different from grazing, as cows do, because of the components of the diet other than grass. Deer thrive in northern hardwood forests like the ones you come across on the Ellicottville-Portageville section of the FLT because of the abundance of food to browse. Just look at a young maple or yellow birch sapling next to the trail and try to count how many twigs there are on a single branch. Each one could be a bite for a hungry deer!

The vocalization of white-tailed deer is rarely heard. They will snort when alarmed or when they have smelled humans. White-tailed deer can run 35 to 40 miles per hour and jump 30 feet (horizontally) (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976). The hoof-print of this species of deer is approximately 2.75 inches long. Other signs of white-tailed deer activity are nibbled twigs and peeled bark a couple feet above the ground (Bang and Dahlstrom, 2001). The most commonly accepted theory about why male deer need antlers is to defend their place in the white-tail hierarchy. They must fight with other males to determine

who is dominant. A deer's antlers are known to be the fastest growing bone on earth. They are shed each winter and re-grown each summer in preparation for fall mating season (Bauer, 1993).

Look for hoof prints in muddy sections of trail to identify the presence of deer. On those rainy days where the deer might be hiding away, this is how you'll know they're around.

You might not realize how often you are standing toe to toe with the wild inhabitants of the woods while you're hiking the FLT. While many of these animals are hard to catch a glimpse of, you know they are there by other evidence. Being attentive to scat, tracks, feathers, bite marks, midden piles, and calls can show you just how populated the forests are.

Section 3

Be amazed by the plant community of home.

As I child, I usually had the opportunity to hike in the woods once or twice a year. I got used to seeing the trees and understory plants. I had an appreciation for them, but could not name them. All trees with needles were pine trees. Unless a deciduous tree was a maple, oak, or horse chestnut, I was aware that it was there and nothing more.

Many of the understory plants and trees I saw while hiking the Finger Lakes Trail were the same ones I'd seen while growing up. Perhaps you had the same experience. I accepted the trees to be a simple component of the western New York woods. As I child, I had been taught in school about different biomes. There was tropical, desert, tundra, savannah, grassland, forest, fresh water, and salt water. I just assumed that since I lived near a forest, my forest was a "normal" forest. I believed that it had pines, maples, and oaks because it was a forest. I found wonder in the forest by climbing trees and chasing toads. The plants themselves were just part of the forest, after all.

Since then, I've worked a couple naturalist jobs and taken a course on the biology, ecology, and identification of trees. My knowledge of things with needles and leaves has grown enormously. Now when I step out in the woods, the plants I see have a meaning. They represent a particular place, soil type, history, and climate. I found the plants in the woods of western New York are different from those of the south, the coast, or the north.

I was amazed by the flowers, trees, and shrubs from the first moment I started in on the Finger Lakes Trail on a rainy morning in May. I was hiking through a hardwood forest. The beech, yellow birch, oak, maple, and ash told me that. Ferns were everywhere along the edge of the trail. Not just one kind of fern, either. There were maiden hair fern, sensitive fern, cinnamon fern, interrupted fern, and wood fern. An occasional flower (or many flowers in some cases) poked out of the leaf litter, lighting up the forest floor like Christmas lights on a fir. I came across fields of white trillium and trout lily. Luckily poison ivy was just beginning to come up for summer, so as I examined the flowers it was easy to pick my way around the three-leaved beast.

The plants I was looking at on the FLT were the plants of my home. I'd played among them as a child. However, my trip on the FLT showcased a wonderful variety of the trees and flowers in the woods of western New York. During my hike, I felt just like a child, running from plant to plant. I was amazed by the plant community of my home.

A sample of trees, ferns, and flowers to look for on the FLT includes:

Trees:

1. American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)
2. Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)
3. Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*)
4. Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica)*
5. Norway Spruce (*Picea abies)*
6. Red Pine (*Pinus resinosa*)
7. Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)
8. Tamarack (*Larix laricina*)
9. White Oak (*Quercus alba*)
10. Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*)

Understory

1. Barren Strawberry (*Waldsteinia fragarioides*)
2. Indian Poke (*Veratrum viride*)
3. Maiden Hair Fern (*Adiantum pedatum*)
4. Partridgeberry (*Michella repens*)
5. Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*)
6. Sensitive Fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*)
7. Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)
8. Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*)
9. White Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*)
10. Wood Horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*)

Trees

American Beech
Fagus grandifolia

American beech is a large deciduous tree with bark the color of elephant skin. It often retains pale straw-colored leaves through winter. The buds are uniquely pointy and slender, resembling miniature cigars (Sibley, 2009). A dozen or more saplings might sprout from the roots of one mature tree, resulting in clones throughout an entire stand (Eastman, 1992).

Beech trees throughout the northeast are battling a disease called *beech bark scale*. It is a result of a tiny, sap sucking insect colonizing the tree and bringing with it the spores of *Nectria coccinea*, a fungus that destroys the bark of the tree. The fungus causes the beech bark to pit and crack, making it easier for other parasites to enter the tree (Wessels,1997). Look for abnormalities in the smooth bark of beech trees while hiking to determine whether or not they have been affected by beech bark disease.

American beech is a member of the Fagaceae family, which has its ancestral roots in the tropics. Trees in the tropics must deal with other smaller plants, called *epiphytes*, growing all over them. If you've ever put up a Christmas tree with too many ornaments on one side, you know how a tree can topple under an imbalance of weight. A heavy covering of epiphytes is like a heavy covering of ornaments; sometimes trees in the tropics crack or fall under the weight. An adaptation of tropical trees is smooth bark, which is meant to thwart the ability of epiphytes to grow on them. Even though American beech grows all the way up to Quebec, where epiphytes are certainly not a problem, it still maintains the smooth bark that is ingrained in its genetics (Wessels, 1997). Watch for the smooth, light gray bark of American beech along the FLT mixed with stands of sugar maple and yellow birch.

Eastern Hemlock
Tsuga Canadensis

Eastern hemlock is an evergreen with flat needles that are small (only ½ inch long) and grow in two ranks on the sides of the twig. Cones of eastern hemlock are also small, at about ¾ an inch (Sibley, 2009). This tree is a shade tolerant species and is frequently found amongst a dense overstory. In fact, eastern hemlock is known to be one of the most shade tolerant trees in New England. Look for these trees in the shady, wet areas near streams. Near Camp Sam Wood my sister

and I noticed a lot of hemlocks alongside the trail, hiding us from the sunlight. Historically, Native Americans drank tea made from steeped hemlock needles and hunters applied hemlock bark to their bodies to reduce human odor (Eastman, 1992).

Hemlock Wooly Adelgid
Photo credit: Chris Evans, Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, Bugwood.org

Wooly adelgid is a minute insect that sucks the sap of hemlock trees. It is attracted to the bark of the twigs. Wooly adelgid is a problem for hemlock trees in the northeast because they can become infested and may die once this happens. Wooly adelgid is an invasive species from Asia that was first reported in eastern North America in 1951 (Forest Health Protection, n.d.). It has since been migrating northward (Wessels, 1997). There is a potential to see the effects of wooly adelgid while hiking the FLT. It can be identified by the appearance of little white puffballs on the branches of hemlock (Wessels, 1997). It is possible to treat infestations of wooly adelgid, so if you see anything that looks like the photo above, call the DEC's forest pest hotline at 1-866-640-0652 or email Sharon Bachman at sin2@cornell.edu to report it.

Eastern White Pine
Pinus strobus

Eastern white pine is the only five needle pine west of the Rocky Mountains. In the way that we have five fingers per hand, white pines have five needles per bundle. Each twig has many bundles on its end. Check out the picture of an eastern white pine twig laying next to my cell phone for scale. The needles are about 4 inches and the cones are about 5 ½ inches long (Sibley, 2009).

The ordinary life-span of eastern white pine is 250 to 300 years but frequently doesn't reach that age due to the high timber value of the wood (Eastman, 1992). Eastern white pine is very tall, often over 100 feet. Still, these are dwarfs compared to the old growth white pines that used to characterize the area. Early colonists of New England recorded the heights of some white pines to be up to 220 feet (Wessels, 1997).

Giant eastern white pines used to be a regular sight in the northeast before 1654, when the British navy started cutting them down for use as ships' masts. By the mid-nineteenth century almost all the easily accessible giants had been cut

down (Wessels, 1997).

The eastern white pines along the FLT will still be recognizable by their size. The only conifer comparable in height to the tallest of these trees is the eastern hemlock. These can be told apart by the difference in needle length.

Green Ash
Fraxinus pennsylvanica

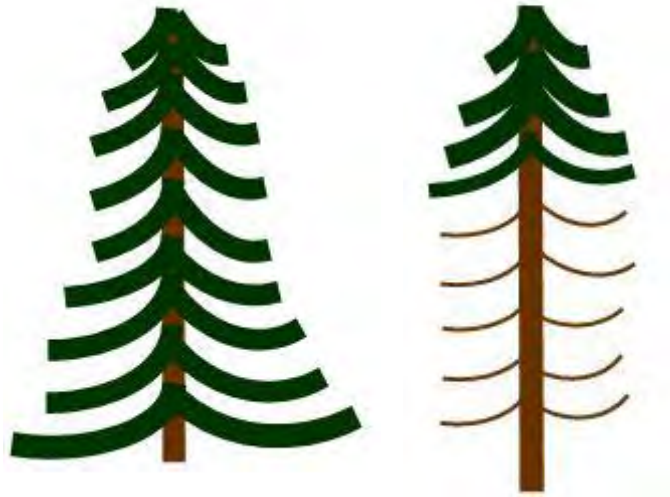
Green ash is scattered across the Ellicottville-Portageville section of the FLT. It does not dominate anywhere, but can be found in at least Boyce Hill State Forest, Farmersville State Forest, and on the private land off Fancy Tract Road. Green ash is much hardier than its cousin, white ash. A swampy area or stream bank will suit green ash just fine, whereas white ash only survives on the best of sites (Wessels, 1997).

The tight ridges of green ash bark make it stand out amongst other hardwoods. The leaves of this tree are compound, meaning they have a stem with multiple leaflets attached. Since green ash can reach about 70 feet in height as it competes for sunlight within the forest, you probably won't see the leaves up close unless it's autumn or you're very lucky (Seiler et al., 2015).

Norway Spruce
Picea abies

Norway spruce is a large conifer that can grow up to 120 feet tall (Seiler et al., 2015). Although white pine and eastern hemlock can reach similar heights, the massive pine cones of Norway spruce set it apart. The cones I found in Boyce Hill State Forest are more than twice as long as my car key!

Norway spruce needles are ironically tiny – only ½ to 1 inch long (Seiler et al., 2015). If you look closely at the image above, you can see a Norway spruce bough tucked underneath the pine cone. The branches of Norway spruce tend to grow with a curve to them so the tips are pointing nearly skyward. A lot of the Norway



The tree on the left shows the form of an open-grown Norway spruce. The tree on the right shows the form of Norway spruce you'll find deep in the forest.

spruces you'll see along the FLT don't have needles on their lower branches. You'll find these trees where there's a dense overstory and not much sunlight penetrating to the forest floor. A Norway spruce grown in the open will have a more full form and branches all the way to the ground.

A few miles of Boyce Hill State Forest are dominated by Norway spruce. Look out for pointy dead branches on the lower parts of the trees as the FLT winds around them!

Red Pine
Pinus resinosa

Red pine is identified by its long needles in clusters of two, reddish bark, and tall, straight trunk. This tree can live for more than 300 years and can grow as much as a foot per year until age sixty or seventy (Eastman, 1992). Red pine was once the most important timber pine in the Great Lakes region (Sibley, 2009). Some samples of red pine grow along the shore of this pond in Boyce Hill State Forest. The tall conifers in the background are mostly red pine.

You might notice that the red pine grows in close, neat rows in some places along the FLT. The pines in the picture from Boyce Hill are a perfect example. They grow this way because this area started as a plantation, similar to many other places around New England. Red pines were planted between 1930 and 1960 in response to a fungal epidemic that was damaging white pines at the time. Since red pine is a poor competitor, it is unlikely to grow in such robust stands except where the soil is thin, acidic, and unsupportive of other types of trees (Wessels, 1997). Since the soil in Boyce Hill State Forest runs adjacent to good farmland, it is likely that people put a stand of red pine there on purpose.

Sugar Maple
Acer Saccharum

Sugar maple brings a lot of money to the economy of the east. It is prized for its sap which can be boiled down to maple syrup. In autumn, sugar maple is one of the most striking trees in the northern hardwood forest due to the intense sunshine yellow, flaming orange, and crimson red of its leaves (Sibley, 2009). The red in leaves is caused by the presence of anthocyanin, a pigment produced by leaves with high sugar content (Kricher and Morrison, 1988). The fall coloring alone causes "leaf-peepers" to flock to the northeast in September and October, stimulating the economy through tourism.

In several places along the FLT between Ellicottville and Portageville the trees have blue tubes running in and out of them. Although picturesque, tapping trees for sap is not always done with individual buckets, a horse drawn sleigh, and snowshoes. These blue tubes connect one maple tree to the next and run sap downhill, where it is collected in a large catchment tank. When there are many maple trees tapped in one area, this method is much more efficient than collecting individual buckets. Sap is mostly composed of water, so a lot of it is needed to make syrup. The ratio is roughly 40 gallons of sap to 1 gallon of syrup. Now you can probably see why efficiency is on the minds of sap collectors along the FLT.

Tamarack
Larix larcinia

Tamarack, or American larch, is our only deciduous conifer with small ½ inch cones. It has soft, bright green needles in spring and summer that turn gold before falling off in autumn (Sibley, 2009).

I was surprised to see this tree on a logging road near the edge of Boyce Hill State Forest. In my experience, tamarack is often out-competed where the soil is of decent quality. The overwhelming presence of farms in that area indicates the soil is probably not poor. Perhaps the disturbance of the road allowed tamarack to maintain its place amongst the red pine, white pine, and hemlock on the edge of Boyce Hill.

White Oak
Quercus alba

White oak is a deciduous tree that commonly grows to about 80 feet in height, but is reported to have reached 182 feet. It is common in rich moist or dry soils (Sibley, 2009). White oak may live to be 500 or 600 years old. Oaks are seldom blown over due to their deep roots. White oak wood is favored for furniture and flooring (Eastman, 1992). While oaks were frequently visible along the Ellicottville to Portageville section of the FLT, they stood out in Farmersville State Forest where the trail occasionally split to circumnavigate particularly large trees.

Yellow Birch
Betula alleghaniensis

Yellow birch is easily distinguished by its golden bronze peeling bark. It's a deciduous tree that often grows to 60 feet in height (Sibley, 2009). Yellow birch is an indicator of the Northern Hardwood Forest and commonly grows in association with sugar maple, American beech, eastern hemlock, eastern white pine, and red pine (Krichner and Morrison, 1988). Because it often germinates on rotting stumps, yellow birch displays a stilted growth form. The twigs of yellow birch have the odor and flavor of wintergreen (Eastman, 1992). This large stilted birch was seen on the FLT near Ellicottville.

Understory

Barren Strawberry
Waldsteinia fragarioides

Barren strawberry has strawberry-like leaves with yellow flowers. However, it lacks the runners and its fruit is not an edible berry (Peterson and McKenny, 1968). It is an early flowering plant, blooming from April to June (McGrath, 1981). Barren strawberry has been found to grow primarily in rich upland soils, with deciduous cover and some sunlight. However, it can survive in a variety of habitats, so it is not a good indicator of environmental conditions. For this reason, barren strawberry can be considered a generalist species (Hill, 2003).

Indian Poke
Veratrum viride

The leaves of Indian poke are heavily ribbed and prominent in early spring. The flowers are star shaped and yellow-green. The plant will grow to be greater than 2 feet tall (Peterson and McKenny, 1968). It is also known as false hellebore.

I saw this plant several times along the Ellicottville – Portageville segment of FLT. Most memorably, they were numerous on sunny stream banks. It's hard to miss indian poke if you're looking for it, since it stands out amongst the other understory plants due to its size.

No matter how tasty it may appear, indian poke is poisonous if ingested. Eating its leaves causes nausea, vomiting, cold sweat, low blood pressure, and a low heart rate (Bechtel et al., 2010). All of these conditions could put you in a life-threatening condition in the backcountry.

Maiden Hair Fern
Adiantum pedatum

Maiden hair fern grows in areas with rich soil and lots of shade. When my eyes locked onto this fern while hiking the FLT near Portageville, I got really excited because I find it about as often as it snows in New York on the 4th of July. It's a fairly uncommon plant, so seeing it immediately gives you x-ray vision into the soil and the geology of the place. It only grows in areas with limestone bedrock, where the soil has a relatively high abundance of calcium and a pH that is close to neutral, so neither acidic like lemons nor basic like soap (Wessels, 1997).

The leaves occur in flat fronds and each leaf has sub-leaflets (tiny leaves of its own). The stalk divides into two branches that curve towards each other. In early spring, you may see wine-red fiddleheads emerging from the forest floor (Cobb, 1963). 'Fiddlehead' describes the shape of the shoot that is coming up. The curl of the tiny fern literally looks like the scroll end of a fiddle.

Partridgeberry
Michella repens

Patridgeberry is a small creeping plant (McGrath, 1981). The leaves of partridgeberry are evergreen, tiny and paired. The flowers are pink or white and the fruit is a single red berry (Peterson and McKenny, 1968). A tea made from the leaves was once used by Native American women to induce labor (McGrath, 1981).

Patridgeberry grows in the shade where the soil is moist and covered in leaf litter (Stritch, n.d.). You will encounter it beneath the thick hardwood canopies of the forests along the FLT.

Poison Ivy
Toxicodendron radicans

Poison ivy grows along the Ellicottville to Portageville section of the FLT. Poison ivy comes up in spring with small red leaves. In summer it can become climbing vines with large leaves. In fall, poison ivy dies back and loses its leaves. In all three seasons, the saying "leaves of three – let it be" applies. As the saying implies, poison ivy has three leaves. They can be smooth or notched. Breaking these leaves or the plant's hairy vines can result in the release of oil called *urushiol* that causes rashes and blisters when it comes in contact with skin. Make sure to wash boots and clothing that has come in contact with poison ivy with something that breaks down the oil before touching it (On the Trail, n.d.).

At left: poison ivy in spring

Photo credit: Rob Routledge, Sault College, Bugwood.org

At right: poison ivy in summer

Photo credit: James H. Miller & Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, Bugwood.org

Sensitive Fern
Onoclea sensibilis

Sensitive fern is sturdy with broad triangular leaves that tilt upward and backward. It grows in wet places in shade or full sun. Sensitive fern fiddleheads (the sprouting form of most ferns) are pale red in early spring. Sensitive fern dies with the first frost of autumn and leaves the tall, dark, beadlike fertile spikes (Cobb, 1963).

The FLT crosses many small streams in western New York. Look for sensitive fern near these intersections.

Skunk Cabbage
Symplocarpus foetidus

Skunk cabbage is 1-3 feet tall, has broad leaves, and smells bad. Look underneath the leaves for a pod-like component called a spathe, which contains its tiny yellow flowers. These are known to be some of the first flowers of spring. They are pollinated by carrion flies, which are appropriately the first pollinators to be out in the spring. The flies are attracted to the stink of skunk cabbage, which mimics the odor of rotting meat (Skunk cabbage, n.d.). It grows in woods with wet soil (Peterson and McKenny, 1968). Admittedly, I wouldn't have noticed skunk cabbage on the FLT if it hadn't been for the strong odor occasionally wafting across the trail.

Trout Lily
Erythronium americanum

Trout lily has a solitary flower with yellow petals and mottled basal leaves. The mottling of the leaves is reminiscent of the pattern of colors on a trout; hence the name. The plant grows 4-10 inches tall (Peterson and McKenny, 1968). Look down at your feet while hiking the FLT in the spring, and you'll see beautiful yellow trout-lily. (Also called Turk's Cap for the recurved petals which follow the sun.) Hike the same trail a few weeks later and the flowers and leaves will be gone! Trout lily is an ephemeral flowering plant, meaning that it flowers early in the season, before the trees have leafed out. Once the tree leaves emerge, the forest floor becomes too dark for these sun-loving plants, and the flowers and leaves disappear, only to emerge again next spring. Trout lilies primarily reproduce by budding and can form vast colonies this way. Some of such colonies may be over a century old, older than many of the overstory trees (Eastman, 1992).

White Trillium
Trillium grandiflorum

White trillium flowers carpet the floor of some eastern forests in spring. White is a hard color for plants to maintain; it takes a lot of energy. It's a color for early season flowers because it reflects a lot of light back. This makes white flower petals a warm place for pollinators to hang out on a chilly morning. To be more energy efficient, the flower turns light pink after two weeks. It is a perennial that does not produce a full flower until at least 6 years of age. From then on, the plant will flower annually in a stable habitat. A white trillium seed must lay in the soil for two winters before producing a shoot (Eastman, 1992). Flowers are 2-4 inches wide and the plant grows up to 18 inches tall. White trillium is a member of the lily family (McGrath, 1981).

If you hike the FLT in May, there's a good chance you'll luck out and see white trilliums that are too numerous to count. I was amazed by the dominance of white trilliums in the understory of Bush Hill State Forest, where the forest floor was so covered with white petals it could have been a trillium plantation!

Forest floor covered in white trilliums near Kingsbury Hill Road.

Wood Horsetail
Equisetum sylvaticum

Wood horsetail is emerald green with lacy downward drooping branches that grow on the upper 2/3 of the stem. Fertile stems have cones at the tip. Horsetails are common in rich, moist soil like we see frequently in the Ellicottville-Portageville section of the FLT (Cobb, 1963).

Silica is a compound composed of the elements oxygen and silicon that accumulates in the tissue of horsetails. The silica in horsetail is being researched due to the medical interests in using it to combat osteoporosis (Law and Exley, 2011).

It's fascinating to see the variety of trees, ferns, and flowers that grow along the trail. When you take a closer look at the plant community you've hiked amongst many times before, it's interesting to notice new species. Although these plants represent the plant community of my home, I was still amazed by how many species are out there. When hiking the FLT, any day can be an adventure as long as you know where to look!

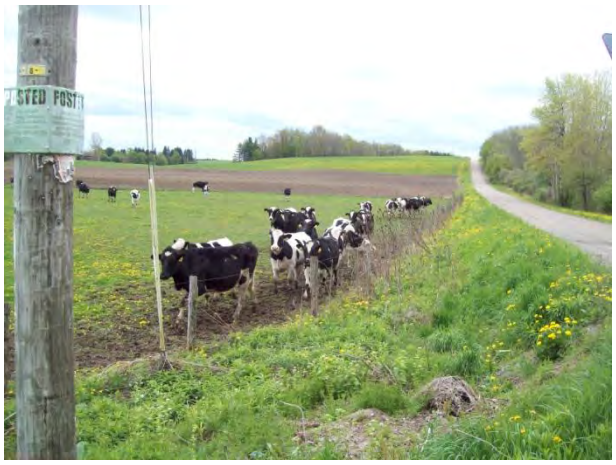
Section 4

The History of the Finger Lakes Trail is Still Being Made.

My sister, Jess, and I were walking along Creek Road just outside Higgins, an Amish community. There was nothing but cows, fields, and an occasional farm house in sight. We were hiking the FLT, chatting, and enjoying the beautiful day.

One by one the cows in an adjacent field started lifting their heads to inspect us. Eventually one cow decided to wander closer to get a better look. Jess looked back fearfully. She is a 17 year old suburban girl who had rarely been this close to a cow in her life. Jess cut me off mid-sentence with "Jen. Jeeeeeeen. JEN! Look!"

I turned to look at the cows just as Jess took off running down the road. The one curious cow had somehow started a stampede. The whole herd was thundering towards us. I wondered if they'd stop at the barb wire. Jess obviously didn't think they would. She sprinted across the dusty blacktop along the edge of the fence. I stood still to take a picture and immortalize the moment.



Left: cow stampede. Right: Jess nervously poses post-stampede.

The cows ignored me and continued chasing her. After about 15 seconds, Jess realized the cows were not going to break through the fence and she returned to walking. However, she remained nervous as long as the cows were in sight.

Very shortly after the cow debacle, we were passing a farm house. With Jess focused on the cows nearby and me focused on the next white blaze, we failed to notice the "beware of dog" sign in the front yard. We didn't even have time to run when a dog shot out of the yard. It sprinted up to us, planted its paws, and started barking. A woman was hot on its tail. She quickly reigned in the dog and it quieted down.

"Sorry 'bout him! Didn't mean to scare ya!" the woman said. She was pretty, blond, youngish, and seemed sincerely apologetic.

"We're alright," I said, giving a smile.

"What are you ladies doing out here anyway?" the woman asked.

"Hiking the Finger Lakes Trail."

"You're pretty far from the Finger Lakes," the woman said, looking at me skeptically.

"The Finger Lakes Trail is a long distance trail that starts in Allegheny State Park and ends in the Catskills. It happens to pass right by your house," I said and smiled some more. Jess gave me a look that said *you sound creepy*.

"Hmmm I've never heard of it. This is a strange place for a trail, isn't it?" the woman said, tightening her hold on the dog. "I mean, usually they're in the woods."

"Most of the trail is in the woods, but sometimes it has to go through fields or follow roads to get to the next forest," I told her and shrugged.

"I see. Well, I hope you have a good hike!" the woman said. I took that as the cue to leave and Jess gladly followed suit, this time trying to keep her eyes on the dog and the cows at the same time.

"Thanks! Have a good day!" I called behind me.

During the four days it took to hike this section of the FLT, I hardly saw anyone else. None of the other people I saw were fellow hikers. It became clear to me that other than those who hike the Finger Lakes Trail, very few people know about it. It's a well kept secret.

As of 2013, only 342 people had hiked all of the FLT (Preus et al., 2013). Although construction started in 1961, the trail wasn't completed until 1992 (Lyons, 1999). Furthermore, the FLT wasn't accurately mapped until 1996 (Reimers, 2002).

The Finger Lakes Trail doesn't have anywhere near the popularity of some other long distance trail systems. As of 2014, 3,231 people have completed the Pacific Crest Trail in the western United States (2,600 milers, 2014). By the end of the hiking season in 2014, 14,485 people had completed the entire Appalachian Trail (2000 milers, 2014).

Amazingly, these trails do not simply come to be. Despite the lack of popularity, the FLT is the work of many hands over many years. As each trail is constructed, a story is told and history is made.

The Story of the Finger Lakes Trail

Wallace Wood is sometimes referred to as the father of the Finger Lakes Trail. During the summer of 1961, he was hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and reading about the Appalachian Trail and geology of the Finger Lakes region. Notions of these three things intersected in Wood's mind while riding the bus on his return to Rochester from New Hampshire. As a result, he wondered about the feasibility of a long distance trail across New York. Soon after, Mr. Wood presented the idea of the FLT to the Genesee Valley Hiking Club (Wood, 1974). In November 1961, a meeting of 12 people was called to further discuss the idea of a long distance trail in New York (Reimers, 2002).

(Baker, 1966).

Officers and members of the Board of Managers pictured after the May 21, 1966, meeting at Chanticleer Motor Lodge, Geneva. From left, first row, are Paula Strain (President), Helen McBride, Frances Jacobi and Wallace D. Wood. Next two rows: Carlton Wright, John Beverage, Charles Embree, G. Frederick Mohn, Gary Klee, Ervin Markert and Ralph G. Baker.

(Vyverberg, 2009).

The first annual meeting of the Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC) was held at Keuka College in March of 1961. Approximately 100 people attended. At the meeting, FLTC membership classes and annual dues were discussed. Board members were voted for and Wallace Wood was elected the first president of the FLTC. Back then, the FLT was called the Finger Lakes Trailway (Reimers, 2002; Wood, 1974).

The second annual meeting of the FLTC was held at Camp Duffield in western New York in May of 1963. The purpose of the conference was established at this meeting as "promoting, planning, construction, and maintenance, directly or through other organizations and individuals, of a continuous footpath…across part of New York State in a generally east-west direction south of the Finger Lakes with or without lateral extensions north or south of the main east-west part," (Reimers, 2002). In short: come hell or high water, they were going to build a trail across New York from east to west.

Over the next couple years, the path for the trail was scouted on foot and by plane. Meanwhile the Finger Lakes Trail was gaining widespread support. The FLTC had accepted sponsorships from the Cayuga Trails Club, Foothills Trail Club, Genesee Valley Hiking Club, the Adirondack Mountain Club Onondaga Chapter, and Cornell University Outing Club (Reimers, 2002). Wallace Wood's dream was becoming a reality.

Interestingly, as of 2010, there were plans for the FLTC to replace the Tamarack Lean-to in Cortland County on the eastern edge of the Finger Lakes region (Catherman, 2010). In 1965, it was the first FLT lean-to constructed. A cornerstone was laid. This is a rarity for lean-tos. A local radio broadcaster that was reporting the cornerstone-laying ceremony described it as "perhaps the first time in the history of the world that a cornerstone was laid for a lean-to"

(Reimers, 2002). The cornerstone contained a Cayuga Trails Club emblem, and FLTC emblem, the October issue of the club's newsletter *Cayuga Trails*, two 1964 pennies, some trading stamps, and orange and white flags used to mark the trail (Reimers, 2002). The construction of the Tamarack Lean-to put into motion the plan to eventually have lean-tos all throughout the FLT system, spaced a day apart (O'Connor, 1966). As of 2010 there were 28 lean-tos across the FLT (Fun Facts, 2010). This might fall a little short for some hikers, considering that the trail is 558 miles long. If one wishes to spend 28 nights on the trail, they might spend 29 days hiking it. This means one would have to average 19.2 miles per day and sometimes do more because, of course, each lean-to isn't exactly 19.2 miles apart.

Tamarack Lean-to in Danby State Forest. Left: Photo by Kirk Doyle in 2009. Right: Photo by Ralph Baker published in 1966.

Intersection of the Conservation Trail with the Finger Lakes Trail near Ellicottville, NY.

Branch, spur, and loop trails were added to the FLT throughout its history (Reimers, 2002). These trails make the FLT more accessible from across the state. There are currently 400 miles of spur and loop trails besides the main trunk of the FLT, making the entire system 958 miles long (About the Finger Lakes Trail, n.d.). The first branch trails date back to the 1950s and 1960s, before the Finger Lakes Trail was conceived. In 1960, all 12 miles of the Interloken Trail between Cayuga and Seneca Lakes was completed in one month by 72 Boy Scouts, leaders, and members of the Trumansburg Rotary Club. The Conservation Trail, running from Buffalo, NY to Allegheny State Park

was completed in 1962. In June of 1962, the Bristol Hills Branch trail was added to the FLT system. It runs 55 miles and crosses Keuka Lake in Steuben County (Reimers, 2002). In 1967, the opening of the Onondaga Trail was celebrated by the Onondaga Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club. Today the Onondaga Trail connects with the FLT just south of Cazenovia Lake, south west of Syracuse, NY. In 1970 a spur trail was added to connect the FLT to Buttermilk Falls State Park near Ithaca, NY.

The Letchworth Branch, which can be picked up in Portageville, NY, was added in 1980. In this beautiful section, hikers may follow the Genesee River Gorge for 25 miles through Letchworth State Park to Mt. Morris where the Finger Lakes Trail Conference Center is located (Reimers, 2002). The Queen Catherine Marsh Loop was added in 1985 south of Seneca Lake near Watkins Glen. The trail runs around and through Queen Catherine Marsh, a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Fish and Wildlife Management Area.

In 1992 another new loop on the FLT system was designated, referred to as the Abbott Loop in Danby State Forest. It is named after Cliff and Doris Abbott who started scouting and flagging the trail in November 1988 (Reimers, 2002). In 2010, new loops were added on the property of Bina Robinson in the town of Swain in Allegheny County. Ms. Robinson has lived on the land since her family ran a ski hill there shortly after World War II. She encourages the building of loop trails on her property because she thinks the public would enjoy exploring there (Szabo, 2010).

The building of the FLT is a constant process. All groups and individuals that build and maintain the trail are volunteers (About the Finger Lakes Trail, n.d.). The volunteer crew was 1,400 people strong as of 2012 (Harnisch, 2012). There are 15 organizations as well as 60 families and individuals that sponsor the trail. There are currently 700 private landowners that allow FLT hikers to cross their land (About the Finger Lakes Trail, n.d.).

Despite all the support, I found in my experience that some sections of the FLT between Ellicottville and Portageville had no trail at all. This was especially a problem where the trail skirted private land. In these areas I was leap-frogging one white blaze to the next. Furthermore, there are some rather long sections of road walking on the FLT. For example, during my FLT excursion to prepare for this project, I walked about 6 miles of roads in one day, while the total daily mileage was only about 12 miles.

However, the FLTC is constantly acquiring more land and re-routing the trail to keep it in the woods. The history of the FLT is still being made. Right now, the experience is made more interesting by encounters with cows, dogs, and human life outside the trail. Hopefully that excitement is retained as the trail grows, changes, and its story gets longer.

At the Finger Lakes Trail Conference Center in Mt. Morris, this sign proudly directs hikers from the front lawn.

Section 5

Don't Trash Nature

In Boyce Hill State Forest near Ellicottville, the woods open to a small pond. Sunlight dances on the clear water near the shallow edges of the pond and gets lost in the depths of the dark green center. On a calm day, the surface is smooth and it reflects the sky and trees nearby like a mirror. Red pines line one edge of the pond, standing straight, tall, and hiding a small campsite beneath their branches. The site is merely a bench, a fire ring, and some open space on the ground, but it embodies a type of simplistic perfection.

As I hiked the Finger Lakes Trail with my mom on a hot May afternoon, I came across this pond. We took pictures and enjoyed the serenity of the place. When we came upon the campsite, my mind went where I imagine the minds of many people go when they see it. I wanted a camp-out with my friends. I could envision a bright moon, a blazing campfire, roasting marshmallows, and retiring to our tents in the early hours of the morning.

Pond in Boyce Hill State Forest.

Coming up close to the campsite, I realized it had been well used for the purpose of late-night revelry. I was instantly turned off to the site. Beer cans littered the ground and all low-hanging branches were missing, evidently broken off in the quest for firewood. Most of the understory vegetation was gone as a result of constant stomping and soil compaction. While looking around in disgust, I pulled out my map. A quick glance at it proved my guess was right. We were within less than a mile of the road. The site was easy access to anyone. Evidently it was close enough for someone to carry a 30-rack there.

My mom and I thought about ways we could take the cans with us but couldn't do much considering the fullness of our packs and the miles to our car. We were forced to leave them.

I felt really disrespected by whoever left the cans and tore the branches from the trees. I have no objection to people having fun out at the campsite, but the ethical thing to do is leave it how it was upon arrival.

Imagine you have checked into a hotel after a long day of travel and look forward to the comforts of a nice room. You're stumbling tiredly through the hallway holding heavy bags and the only thing on your mind is a quick, efficient transition to bed. After struggling with the key for a moment, you open the door to find the room trashed. There are bottles and food all over the floor. It appears someone tried to set a chair on fire in the corner. The previous occupants didn't bother to flush used toilet paper but rather tossed it on the ground. They also relieved themselves (quite obviously) in the shower. They walked on the bed wearing muddy shoes and hammered several nails into the wall, the closet possibly having not been large enough. It's appalling! You're tired and annoyed that someone lacked the ethical judgment to respect the hotel's property. Angrily you stomp down to the desk and state the problems with your room, expecting

a new room assignment and perhaps a free breakfast in the hotel restaurant for your trouble. Instead you are instructed that the hotel does not have a cleaning service and that you must either deal with the room you got or leave. The next hotel is quite far away and you feel too tired to travel anymore. You will either have to sleep in your car on the street or make do with the room. As you take your pick, you silently curse the last people who used your room for leaving it such a mess.

This sounds quite crazy, unless you substitute the word "hotel" for "lean-to". I think of a campsite like a hotel room with no maid to clean up. There's a simple expectation that one should avoid trashing nature like a rock band trashes a hotel room. Since there's no maid, you take responsibility for your own mess. Respecting other campers means merely leaving the places you stay better than how you found them.

I'm talking about outdoor ethics. Ethics are moral principals we must uphold in all parts of life, hiking included. In the outdoors, there is frequently nobody around to govern us but ourselves. We choose to do things the right way because it is the right thing to do. We have to take responsibility for our impact on the earth and minimize it where possible.

According to the FLTC, following these rules will preserve the FLT system for years to come (About the Finger Lakes Trail, n.d.).

1. Respect private property and stay on the trail
2. Travel in groups of 10 or fewer people
3. Share shelters and campsites with others
4. Camp or build fires only in designated areas
5. Cook on campstoves if possible
6. Use wood only when necessary for fires
7. Use dead wood
8. Do not cut green wood
9. Purify all water you use
10. Take all litter back home.

These basic ten rules provide a strong base of outdoor ethics to guide FLT hikers. All of them seem very reasonable and straightforward to me. They coincide with the Leave No Trace principles I have learned to apply in the outdoors. Hiking the FLT is a great opportunity to get familiar with the Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and practice them as you hike.

LNT programs started in the western states in the 1970s in response to increased numbers of Americans visiting the wilderness. With more visits came higher levels of impact. People were destroying the places they came to see. Since then, LNT outdoor ethics have come closer to being common knowledge amongst outdoors men and women. The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics now works to teach as many people as possible about how they can respect the wilderness and keep their level of impact low (McGivney, 2003).

The principles of LNT are: plan ahead and prepare, travel and camp on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, minimize campfire impacts, respect wildlife, and be considerate of other visitors (Pokorny, n.d.).

Plan Ahead and Prepare

General tips for this principle according to McGivney, (2003):

- Bring proper equipment in case of harsh conditions.
- Carry a map and compass and know how to use them.
- Carefully plan meals to have enough to eat while minimizing food waste.
- Plan trips around times of heavy use.
- Utilize modern equipment, such as backpacking stoves and a lightweight trowel to help minimize impacts.

By reading this guide before setting out on the trail, you are already making headway on this principal. The FLTC doesn't say to plan ahead and prepare explicitly in their 10 rules, but we can infer from the rules that trail developers expect you to be prepared. Rule 9, purify all water you use, infers that you have planned ahead and brought a water purification system with you, such as iodine tablets or a filter. Furthermore, you should check with the FLTC before heading out on the trail to learn about environmental concerns (such as snow or wind storms) or trail closings.

Preparing for the hike.

Being properly prepared can prevent you from having to make unnecessary impacts on the land while you hike. For example, if you research designated camping areas on the FLT before you set out for an overnight hike you will likely be able to avoid having to disturb new areas of the forest floor while you search for a suitable tent-site. Before going hiking, make a check-list and lay out gear before packing it up. This ensures you have thought through the hike before hitting the trail. See section one of this guide for more in-depth resources to help plan your FLT hike.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

General tips for this principle according to McGivney, (2003):

- Stay on designated trails.
- Walk single file in the middle of the path.
- Camp at designated sites when possible.
- Be mindful of streamside vegetation by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.

The FLTC stresses these points in their rules. They tell hikers to stay on the path and camp at designated sites. Durable surfaces are those that are least likely to show signs of your use. The path is well-worn in most sections of the FLT and is the most durable surface one can walk on. Although muddy at times, it is better to walk straight through the mud on the path than widen the trail by walking on the forest floor next to it. Widening the trail simply widens the area of impact, and the muddy footpath gets wider and wider. Similarly, designated sites are already heavily impacted. The ground is compacted from other pairs of boots walking across it. By using these sites, the impact is concentrated and new campsites do not have to be made. Luckily the FLT is heavily equipped with trail markers and designated camping spots!

Muddy trails near Fancy Tract Road.

Dispose of Waste Properly

General tips for this principle according to McGivney, (2003):

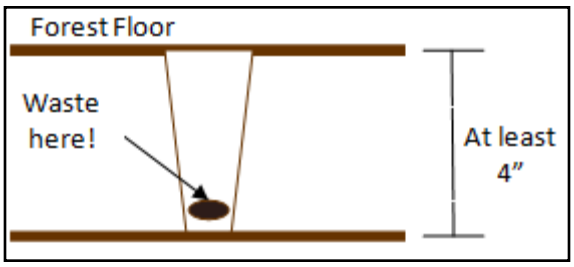
- Pack out what you pack in.
- Keep gear organized so you don't accidentally leave something behind.
- Do not bury trash because wildlife will dig it up.
- Do not burn trash because it degrades air quality and attracts wildlife.
- Use established bathrooms when they're available.
- When there are no facilities, dig a cathole 4-8 inches deep that is at least 200 feet from water, camp, or trails.
- Pack out toilet paper. If you do not feel comfortable with this, bury it in your cathole.
- To wash yourself or dishes, carry water at least 200 feet from its source and use small amounts of biodegradable soap.
- Strain dishwater then scatter the waste if you do not feel comfortable packing it out.

All the FLTC has to say about this is "take all litter back home". It seems simple but is actually complex when you think about everything that can be considered "litter". Toilet paper is litter. Food scraps are litter. We ask ourselves, "is packing those things out sanitary?" We are fearful about carrying these things with us. However, while we are nervous about our own waste, we are more nervous about the waste of others. Nobody else wants to see it left behind. Removing food scraps and used toilet paper might not seem glamorous, but respecting the wilderness and other visitors is the right thing to do.

Planning meals so that there is minimal waste is helpful here. Also, bringing extra zip-lock bags can make packing out toilet paper and food scraps more reasonable. These things might require some time to grow comfortable with. That's okay. Just do your best to leave the trails and campsites clean behind you.

Removing water from the stream to wash is cumbersome, but consider the people and wildlife that might be using the water downstream from you. If you put yourself in the shoes of the person downstream, you can see why keeping water sources from being polluted is very important. You probably don't want to drink someone else's soap or body fluids.

Digging a hole to go to the bathroom seems like a foreign idea for some. When you think of someone who digs a cathole, you might think of that crazy, adventure obsessed friend of yours who is now hiking in Colorado, or was it California? The fact is that anyone who spends longer-than-they-can-hold-it in the woods should know how to dig a cathole. Nobody wants to smell or step in your poop. It's really simple to confine it to a cathole. Just digging a 4-8 inch-deep hole that is at least 200 feet from camp, the trail, and water sources satisfies the LNT requirements. A trowel is meant for hole-digging in the back-country, but if you don't have one a stick works just as well. Make sure to keep the soil you've removed in a pile next to the hole so you may fill it in when you're done. Actually pooping in the hole might take some practice, but until then sticks are a wonderfully useful tool for moving things you'd rather not touch. Test it out. Chances are you'll be pretty proud of yourself the first time you use a cathole! See figure at left.



Leave What You Find

General tips for this principle according to McGivney, (2003):

- Clean off boots and gear before entering the woods to avoid introducing invasive species.
- Take home memories and pictures instead of souvenirs.
- Avoid altering campsites permanently.

The FLTC doesn't say anything specific about this topic in their rules, but that doesn't mean it is not important. The FLT winds through historical sites, private property, and scenic state forests. In all these places, it is best to leave interesting items where they are found. For example, say you see a lovely red trillium beside the trail. You think about how nice it would look attached to your pack. However, after just a few hours the flower will wilt and you'll discard it. The true excitement is in the moment of finding the flower. Rather than taking it with you, leave the flower where you found it and snap a quick picture to remember it. This way the next hiker who comes through will also experience the excitement of seeing the deep red of the trillium standing out on the forest floor.

Red trillium

We also have to be aware of accidentally taking home souvenirs we don't want. There is a constant fear of introducing invasive species to our forests. This is why you might see bumper stickers that read "don't move firewood. It bugs me!" If you recently went hiking somewhere far from home, be wary of hitch-hikers. Giving the bottoms of your boots a quick rinse before hitting the trail can help prevent the spread of invasive species.

Avoiding altering campsites permanently extends beyond taking souvenirs from them. It also means you should avoid tearing limbs off trees or burning pieces of structures. I've actually

seen parts of picnic tables sawn off and burned. All of the campsite should still be intact when you leave.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

General tips for this principle according to McGivney, (2003):

- Use a stove for cooking or a designated pit for campfires.
- Use only small sticks easily gathered from the ground to make a fire.
- Do not cut or break branches off trees.
- When vacating the site, make sure the fire is completely out.

The FLTC is concerned about the demonstration of this principal on the FLT. There are five rules devoted to campfires:

1. Camp or build fires only in designated areas
2. Cook on campstoves if possible
3. Use wood only when necessary for fires
4. Use dead wood
5. Do not cut green wood

Campfires are a wonderful nightly ritual that a hiking trip might seem lacking without. However, campfires are a practice that sincerely leaves a trace upon the landscape. Using good judgment when collecting wood and keeping campfires small are important here. Especially with readily available lightweight backpacking stoves, it's not necessary to make a campfire every night of a multiday hiking trip.

Especially when conditions are dry, forest fires are a real danger. Making a campfire that is too large or leaving a fire unattended could allow the blaze to get out of control. You don't want to be the person responsible for setting the forest on fire, do you? Keeping fires small and putting them out completely before leaving are the best ways to protect your pride and keep campfires from getting unnecessarily destructive.

Respect Wildlife

General tips for this principle according to McGivney, (2003):

- Observe wildlife from a distance.
- Don't feed animals, even if they beg.
- Avoid dropping food scraps or throwing peels in the woods.
- Store food and trash properly.
- Hang food in case of bears.
- Keep pets controlled so they do not disturb wildlife.

According to National Geographic, the range of the black bear spreads across much of the Finger Lakes Trail (Black Bear, n.d.). Check with the FLTC about bear reports in the specific areas you will be hiking through. If bears have a known presence, it is imperative to keep watch over dogs and hang food at night. Food should be hung far enough from the trunk that a bear cannot get it by merely climbing the tree. At least 50 feet of rope, a carabiner, and a water proof stuff sack should be included in your pack to do a bear hang. A bear hang should be at least 100

feet from your camp to ensure the bears don't bother you if they smell your food (McGivney, 2003). I'd recommend practicing a bear hang before you set out on the trail if you know you are travelling through an area with a black bear presence.

Bear hang instructions adapted from How to Hang A Bear Bag, (2007):

- Select a pair of branches 20 feet apart and at least 15 feet off the ground.
- Attach one end of a rope to a rock that is easy to throw. Tie the other end to a tree trunk or any nearby sturdy anchor.
- Throw the rock over both branches.
- Attach a carabiner to the rope midway between the branches. Tie it so it can't slide towards either branch. Attach your food sack to the carabiner.
- Pull on the unsecured end of the cord to lift the bag high enough up to be out of a bear's reach from the ground (at least 10 feet) or in either tree (4 feet).

There is animal life other than bears you should be sure to respect while on the trail as well. No matter how cute animals may seem, they are still wild and should not be provided with human food. Storing food poorly or accidentally leaving scraps behind can attract unwanted visitors to your campsite. Remember that if an animal responds to your presence, you are probably too close (McGivney, 2003).

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

General tips for this principle according to McGivney, (2003):

- Keep noise levels down.
- Keep a low profile and avoid disturbing other hikers where they're camped.
- Yield to other hikers when you meet on the trail.

The FLTC asks hikers to travel in groups of 10 people or fewer. This reduces impacts on the trail and the possibility of disturbing other groups. You are almost always keeping other visitors in mind when you practice Leave No Trace principles. There is a good chance you will never return to some of the places you visit.

Imagine a camping trip where there is another group camped nearby. You cannot see them, but you can sure hear them. They're listening to loud country music and singing along, badly, you might add. Members of the other group walk through your site looking for firewood. They are apologetic, but do not hesitate in cracking a dead limb off the tree near your tent. Darkness falls and you're snuggled in your sleeping bag. Just as you're about to fall asleep, someone stumbles through the understory nearby. You become fully awake with the realization he or she is peeing in your campsite. What was supposed to be a nice campout in the woods has been ruined. If the other group had had some outdoors ethics, you may have had a better experience.

Being disrespected by others never adds to an experience. When out hiking and camping, remember to be considerate of others. People should remember the Golden Rule when backpacking, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (McGivney, 2003).

Outdoors ethics are a discipline of their own. Sadly, you only really notice when they aren't being applied. By making sure to plan ahead and prepare, travel and camp on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, minimize campfire impacts, respect

wildlife, and be considerate of other visitors you will be minimizing your impact. By following LNT principles you'll be sure to not trash nature. Ideally, those who use the trails and campsites you used on your hike will hardly know you've been there.

Conclusion

Hiking the Finger Lakes Trail is an adventure! I've learned this through hiking and reading about this long distance trail. The FLT presents a great opportunity to enjoy the outdoors with friends or family, to practice your backpacking skills, and learn about nature.

Do you feel you know a little something about the Finger Lakes Trail? After reading the sections of this guide on planning and packing, animals, plants, FLT history, and backpacking ethics, you're mentally ready to go out and back pack from Ellicottville to Portageville. Before hitting the trail I'd recommend making sure you're physically ready as well. You can set your own pace and do the trail in as many days as you like. The section covered by this guide is 52 miles long and gives a sample of the western section of the trail. The entire Finger Lakes Trail crosses roughly 558 miles in New York from east to west. That should keep you busy awhile!

If you haven't seen them, you should check out the Finger Lakes Trail Conference website, fltconference.org and the End To End Guide by A. Preus, J. Dabes, and E. Sidote. These resources helped me enormously in my writing of this guide. If you'd like to read a quick (60 pg) account of hiking the whole Finger Lakes Trail from end-to-end in 1994, see *Go West Old Man* by Jim Dewan.

Best of luck and happy hiking!
-*Jen Maguder*

Acknowledgements

I've had a great pleasure in learning about the Finger Lakes Trail while working on this project. Getting information has been greatly simplified by the articles and website of the Finger Lakes Trail Conference. Furthermore, I have sincerely grown to love the Finger Lakes Trail and want to thank all those who work to maintain and expand it.

My family showed enormous support in the hiking and editing portions of this project. Without having my sister and mom as hiking companions, I wouldn't have nearly as good stories to tell. I want to thank them for getting soaking wet, covered in bug bites, chased by cows and a dog, accepting a ride from a stranger, and being excellent hiking buddies. I also want to thank my dad for picking me up on nameless country roads 50 miles from home.

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