



FALL/WINTER 2025-26

TRACKIN'

THE CHAUTAUQUA RAILS TO TRAILS NEWSLETTER



Memorable Ride

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Photo Credit: Jacob Bodway

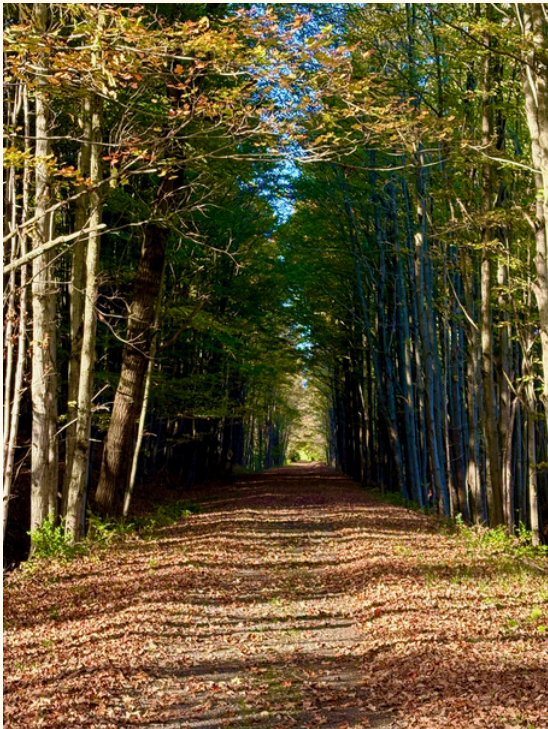
JACOB BODWAY, CR2T BOARD MEMBER

In late September 2025, I embarked on an adventure that promised to push the limits of my physical endurance. My plan was to park on Summerdale Road, just outside of Mayville, NY, and ride the entire Fred J. Cusimano Westside Overland Trail on my hardtail mountain bike. The ride would start in Chautauqua Gorge State Forest and take me to Brokenstraw State Forest, a mere two miles from the NY/PA border. From there, I would turn around and ride the Westside Overland Trail until I reached Sherman, NY, where I would return to my car on the Ralph C. Sheldon section of the Chautauqua Rails to Trails. (Continued, next page)

CR2T Board of Directors

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Jacob Bodway, Bemus Point
Wendy Brickman, Mayville
Dee Dippel, Bemus Point
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Bill Ward, Mayville (President)
Dena Ward, Mayville
Thom Wright, Jamestown (Trail
Maintenance Czar)

We welcome interested trail enthusiasts
to join our board.



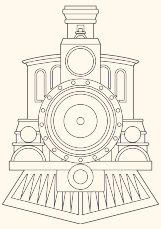
Photos by Jacob Bodway



Memorable Ride (cont.)

The total mileage of this ride was close to 60 miles with 5,550' of elevation gain, and it took nearly eight hours.

Needless to say, this ride was one of the most memorable rides of my lifetime. While riding the Westside Overland Trail, I passed through meadows, old-growth forests, wetlands, and ravines. What made the return ride memorable, however, is the way that the Chautauqua Rails to Trails links with my main route and provides me with a nice level surface without any incline. This beautiful section of trail runs on an old railroad bed, with steep ravines on each side. With the leaves in full fall color, I was able to enjoy the view and to connect with nature, as I witnessed turtles and a blue heron near the ponds on Titus Road. Returning to my car, exhausted and ready to devour any food that I could get my hands on, I looked back down the rail corridor and thought to myself, "I live in paradise."



From the Locomotive

BILL WARD, PRESIDENT

As President of Chautauqua Rails to Trails, I am proud to reflect on another remarkable year on the trail. What continues to inspire me most is not simply the miles traveled, but the community built along those miles – walkers, runners, cyclists, cross-country skiers, volunteers, donors, landowners, and neighbors who believe in preserving and celebrating this beautiful corridor through Chautauqua County.

A Year of Strong Trail Use

Trail usage remained strong throughout the seasons. From the first signs of spring through the vivid colors of autumn – and even into the stillness of winter – the trail has served as a place for recreation, reflection, connection, and wellness. Families introduced children to biking. Friends met for long walks and meaningful conversations. Visitors discovered the natural beauty and history that make our region so special. Every footprint and tire track reminds us why this work matters.

Holiday Happy Hour at Big Inlet Brewing

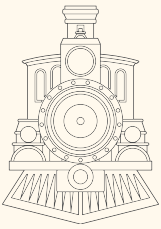
One of the highlights of the season was our Holiday Happy Hour at Big Inlet Brewing. The evening was filled with music, great food, and – most importantly – trail lovers sharing stories and conversation. It was a warm and festive gathering that perfectly captured the spirit of Chautauqua Rails to Trails: community-centered, welcoming, and forward-looking.

Events like this strengthen the relationships that sustain our mission. We are grateful to everyone who joined us and to Big Inlet Brewing for hosting such a joyful celebration.

New Year's Eve Hike to Prospect Station

We closed the year in meaningful fashion with our annual New Year's Eve hike to Prospect Station, commemorating the tragic 1800s train wreck that occurred on that very site. The hike has become a moving tradition – blending history, remembrance, and fellowship.

We were honored to hear James Fincher, President Emeritus of Chautauqua Rails to Trails, retell the story of the historic train wreck. His thoughtful recounting reminded us of the human stories embedded in the very ground beneath our feet. (Continued, next page)



From the Locomotive (continued)

BILL WARD, PRESIDENT

I also was honored to perform Christmas Eve at Prospect Station, a song I wrote commemorating the event – a tribute connecting past and present through music. Moments like these remind us that the trail is not only a recreational asset but also a living historical corridor.

Strategic Planning for the Future

This year also marked a significant milestone for our organization as we completed a comprehensive strategic planning process led by Kate Ebersole. Through thoughtful discussion, collaboration, and visioning, we developed an ambitious five-year plan – twelve clear priorities that will guide our work and growth. We are already hard at work implementing this plan, focusing on stewardship, expansion, community engagement, sustainability, and ensuring that the trail remains safe, accessible, and vibrant for generations to come.

Gratitude for Our Community

None of this would be possible without you.

To every trail user who greets a neighbor with a smile...

To every volunteer who clears brush or lends professional expertise...

To every donor who contributes financially...

To every partner who supports our events and mission...

Thank you.

Chautauqua Rails to Trails belongs to the entire community. Your energy, generosity, and enthusiasm are what make another successful year possible. As we look ahead, we are filled with optimism and determination to continue enhancing and preserving this treasured resource.

Here's to another year on the trail – together.



Photos by Breann Agett



Trail Updates

Ramblings From Trailside

THOM WRIGHT, TRAIL CZAR

Many thanks from the Board to all of our volunteers. We are especially grateful for our Trail Stewards who dedicate time to inspect the trails for issues such as illegal/unwarranted motorized vehicle use, tree concerns, illegal dumping, and grass length and corridor needs. But **remember**, anyone who uses the CR2T network can reach out to us via our website, email, or Facebook site to report concerns. You can use your own discretion to move small limbs and branches onto the unmowed portion of the trail. Please report larger branches and trees to us so we can get them taken care of. We are all volunteers, therefore we may not address issues immediately but we will address them.

What does trail maintenance look like? Here are a few examples.



Last year's trail wash out near Titus Road, CR2T, Chautauqua Lake Snowmobile Club and Rizzo Excavating all helped to get the trail back in shape



A concrete box culvert that although still functional can at times demand some attention of clean out.



An attempt at a beaver decoy to reduce the frequency of culvert clean outs by our dedicated trail stewards. May not be that pretty, and time will tell if it works, but we can hope.



Trail Updates (continued)

Ramblings From Trailside

THOM WRIGHT, TRAIL CZAR



Not a typical blow down situation, but happens more than you'd think. This is why at times you will notice some large trees taken down before they blow over and take some of the trail with them.



A more typical blow down situation, one that tends to block trail users and the mowing operations. If you come across something like this, please contact us. If it's just a small sapling or branch and you want to move it yourself, that is your prerogative, but please no use of power tools unless you are working in conjunction with CR2T

A close up of the trail topping fines that are scheduled to be installed on the Fincher Trail this Spring 2026





Trail Updates (continued)

Ramblings From Trailside

THOM WRIGHT, TRAIL CZAR



A deteriorated trail section between Highland and Webster Road, likely due to in part misuse, as well as a very limited and stretched maintenance budget. This section has now been regraded and top coated, and hopefully will be a pleasant trail for residents and visitors for year's to come.



Managing overgrowth at our trail heads is an ongoing task. CR2T depends on our trail stewards to report and, at times, handle the overgrowth .



Our beaver friends help set the stage for the wonderful wetland areas that bring in the birds and other wildlife that one can often witness while enjoying the trails. However, sometimes those beavers are a bit too busy.

Inconsiderate behavior by a few can cause significant problems for many. Gates are locked for a reason, and only those authorized by CR2T should be moving through the gates.





Group Hikes Update

OUR GROUP HIKE EXPLORE CHAUTAUQUA RAILS TO TRAILS AND OTHER GREAT LOCATIONS. ALL ARE WELCOME! TO PARTICIPATE CONTACT JUDY TAKATS AT HIKE@CR2T.ORG

Monday Morning

Monday hikes are 3-4 miles long and begin at 9:30 AM. Occasionally the group may gather for coffee or food after the hike.

Fall/Winter hikes included our Laurie Baer, Prospect, Jim Fincher and Webb Trails, other local points of interest including Chautauqua Institution, Long Point State Park and College Lodge, and a roadtrip to Letchworth State Park!



Co-Sponsored 3rd Saturday

Co-sponsored with the Chautauqua Hiking Club, these nature-focused hikes offer a chance to connect with fellow nature lovers and learn more about our region. New hike leaders are always welcome, email hike@cr2t.org to volunteer!

Fall/Winter hikes included the Eastside Overland Trail in Gerry, and Point Gratiot in Dunkirk.





Chautauqua Rails to Trails Celebrates the Season with Annual Holiday Happy Hour

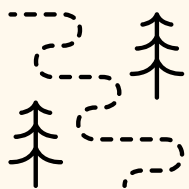
BREANN AGETT, CR2T BOARD MEMBER

On Monday, December 8, 2025, Chautauqua Rails to Trails gathered at Big Inlet Brewing Company in Mayville, NY for its annual Holiday Happy Hour, a festive tradition that replaces the board's regular December meeting with an evening of community, celebration, and support for the trails.

The event featured 50/50 and basket raffles, along with a special auction for a horse-drawn carriage ride on the trail generously donated by Laff 'n Lyon Ranch. Guests also had opportunities to join as members, enjoy a cash bar, and dig into free pizza and an impressive spread of cookies donated by generous board members, members, friends, and family. An Ugly Sweater contest added extra cheer, while holiday music and carols, led by talented volunteer musicians, kept the room full of seasonal spirit.

Thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of everyone who attended, the event raised nearly \$1,000 to support Chautauqua Rails to Trails and its work to build and maintain safe, accessible trails for the community. (Continued, next page)

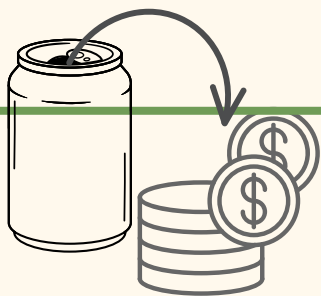




Chautauqua Rails to Trails Celebrates the Season with Annual Holiday Happy Hour (continued)



A huge thank you goes to our volunteer musicians, Big Inlet Brewing Company, everyone who donated raffle baskets and cookies, and especially to Rails to Trails member and friend Martha Anderson, who worked tirelessly to help gather donations and make the evening such a success. It was a wonderful reminder that when the community comes together, great things happen, even in ugly sweaters.



PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING THE TRAILS BY DONATING REDEEMABLE CONTAINERS. ASK THE ATTENDANT TO ADD THE TOTAL REFUND TO THE CHAUTAUQUA RAILS TO TRAILS ACCOUNT.

Southside Redemption Center
1752 Foote Ave,
Jamestown, NY

Don's Car Wash
184 East Fairmount Ave,
Lakewood, NY



Since Our Last Trackin’

A SUMMARY UPDATE PROVIDED BY BOARD SECRETARY
WENDY LEWELLEN

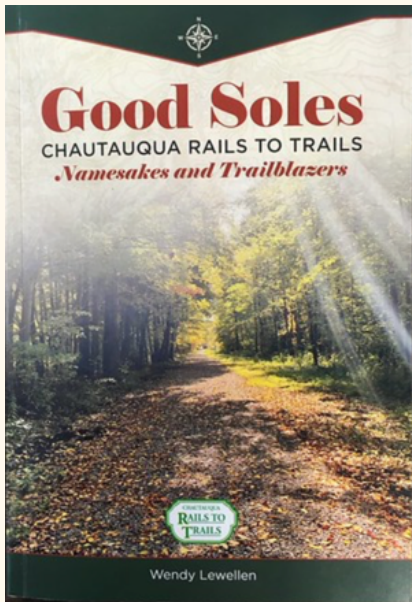
- The board is putting the finishing touches on our updated Strategic Plan, an effort which began with our facilitator Kate Ebersol last April. Bree Agett has been willing to help us with the project, thankfully..
- The idea of creating improved parking at Bentley Road on the Diggs Trail and at Nettle Hill Road on the Sheldon Trail are two new goals.
- For the first time the Mayville Bluegrass Festival became a fundraiser for Chautauqua Rails to Trails under the leadership of our President and musician extraordinaire, Bill Ward. It was successful in every way, including financially. Thank you, team!
- We endured major work by National Grid (owner of the Ney Trail south of Prospect Station and of the Baer Trail between Bliss Road and Plank Road). We had to create helpful signage\$.
- Funding is being secured for extensive damage to the Ney Trail in Brocton by ATVs, which are not authorized to use our trail. Collaboration with the Chautauqua County Sheriff’s Department to remedy this is underway.
- We have made progress in grappling with the ever-changing, ever-increasing popularity of Electric Bikes. The board is endeavoring to create an official policy which may include speed limits and the creation of appropriate signage.
- At our November Annual Meeting we approved and updated our board of directors’ membership. The slate of officers, all incumbents, were re-elected: President—Bill Ward, Vice President--T. John McCune, Treasurer—Dorothy Gruber, and Secretary—Wendy Lewellen.
- Bree Agett unofficially led the charge in conduct of Events. Thom Wright continued as Trail Maintenance Czar, Judy Takats as Membership Chair and Hikes Leader, and Wendy Lewellen Signage Chair in conjunction with Bob Lannon—Sign Ninja. John McCune, aided by Bill Ward, is still representing us with aplomb in the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance. McCune also serves as Co-Chair of the Friends of Chautauqua Greenways, supported by Bill Ward.
- It was a successful team effort in staging the traditional Holiday Happy Hour at Big Inlet Brewing on December 8th. The same was true for the annual Christmas Eve Prospect Station Train Wreck Commemoration thanks to President Emeritus Jim Fincher and President Bill Ward who provided the program, and thanks to Judy Takats who headed up refreshments. Both events were well attended.
- The task of hiring a trail consulting firm is a critical next step, especially relating to our goal of developing a rail trail from Sherman to Clymer to Corry. Jacob Bodway is leading this as he unceasingly seeks significant funding from many sources—foundation grants and support from governmental entities.
- Planning was begun for a spring membership drive. In spite of Judy Takats’ persistent and competent efforts, our general membership is stagnant at best, and we continue to look for ways to remedy this. (Continued, next page)



Since Our Last Trackin' (cont.)

A SUMMARY UPDATE PROVIDED BY BOARD SECRETARY
WENDY LEWELLEN

- Because CR2T took a hiatus in conducting a July Wine Walk in 2025, there is a perception that many past participants have made their regret known to board members. The effort to seriously considering reviving this is being explored.
- John McCune and Dorothy Gruber, as Geocaching enthusiasts, are planning some events on our trail.
- The 3rd Saturday Hikes have continued in collaboration with the Eileen Campbell and the Chautauqua County Hiking Club. Monday morning hikes have seen a noticeable increase in attendance.
- This list is by no means comprehensive. Our hard-working volunteer board has done way more than the achievements listed above.



ORDER NOW

Increase your enjoyment of the trails with a deeper understanding of their history. Good Soles highlights the lives of the people for whom each of our trails are named, provides insight into who they are and how they relate to Chautauqua County trail history, and gives credit to the early impassioned trailblazers who worked so hard throughout the early 1990s and beyond. A history of the organization is included. 100% of your order proceeds benefits Chautauqua Rails to Trails.

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH



Take a Hike!

To alert us of trail maintenance needs, discuss volunteer opportunities or for any contact needs, complete the Contact Us form on our website www.cr2t.org/join-us/



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OR RENEW YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP**

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YOU FOR SUPPORTING CR2T*



HAPPY TRAILS!

Photo by Breann Agett