

animals with 150 pounds of gear and packed in six miles in about two hours. It was about the same out, but the horses went a little faster because they knew they were going home.”

One of the team’s favorite volunteer experiences was on the eight-day Diamond Peak Wilderness project, during which they worked with a 54-year-old owner of a construction company named **John Bradford**, from Lancaster, Ohio, who hopes to complete the Pacific Crest, Continental Divide, and Appalachian trails before he turns 75. “He was so excited to be there,” remembered Steinhauer. “He said every day was like Christmas. He woke people up at 3:30 in the morning to look at the stars, and he gave the guys books with poems marked for them to read.”

Bradford grew so close to the team that they have an open invitation to visit his home in Ohio. “I grew to love and care for all of those folks,” he said. “I want to thank them for this great opportunity. They have a fine organization, and I know that I will be back in the future to do it again.”

The PCT team spent the last third of the summer working in northern Oregon and southern Washington in the Mount Hood and Gifford Pinchot National Forests and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. They worked with PCTA volunteers and section leaders **Kim Owen, Ernie Strahm, Brice Hammack, John Vhay, Jeff Webb, and Tom Linde.**

“ Each morning Trevor (an AmeriCorps volunteer) would lead the crew up out of Divide Lake for the day’s work. I would jump in right behind him to see if I could keep up. By the time we crested the hill, one-half mile, 600 feet up, and 10 minutes later, he usually had a 20-30 yard lead on me. But I think I got stronger as the week wore on, and I adjusted to the elevation. The tasks of heaving rocks, digging trenches, carrying logs, and setting stakes for log water bars were performed with a gusto and love of work and effort that was truly enjoyable.”

- John Bradford,
Volunteer, Lancaster, Ohio

Altogether, the field team worked with approximately 60 volunteers and completed 15 projects in 18 weeks. These included three eight-day projects and twelve four-day projects.

Plans are already underway for a second season of this unique PCTA-NWSA-AmeriCorps team and volunteer program. PCT lovers are encouraged to start making arrangements to volunteer and participate in this program in 2007. Visit www.mtadamscenter.org to find out how.

“Just come with an open mind and a desire to work hard physically and mentally,” said Katie Steinhauer. “Enjoy the people. Enjoy the surroundings, and don’t be afraid to help clean the dishes.”





The PCTA as People Connector

By Katie Smith, PCTA Development Director

In July of 2006, I spent four days doing trail maintenance with an **AmeriCorps** crew working on the PCT in southern Oregon. I absolutely loved the experience, and I felt very privileged to be able to step away from my desk as the Development Director of PCTA and step out to the trail as a volunteer. Doing so gave me a unique chance to learn from and get to know some extremely dedicated people who had chosen to spend six months working on the PCT.

This 2006 PCT AmeriCorps crew was made up of seven men and women in their early and mid-twenties from all over the country. None of them had spent any significant time on the PCT before beginning their work in the Mount Ashland area, and only the two crew leaders (**Fran Haynes** and **Katie Steinhauer**) had ever done trail maintenance work before. But despite their lack of experience with trail work and with the trail itself, each crew member had selected the PCT project as his or her first choice because, like so many readers of this magazine, they love the outdoors - and the PCT called them.


My first day of work started at 6:00 am with a wonderful breakfast of banana pancakes and coffee prepared by predetermined crew members. I was the only volunteer joining the crew for this four-day stretch, and, although I was full of questions, I curbed my enthusiasm until 7:30am to give the crew a chance to wake up.

At the trailhead I was encouraged to stretch, put on sunscreen, and stay hydrated while they told me about the day's project. From the start, the crew was very friendly, albeit slightly formal (until they got to know me better).

We hiked in about a mile from the PCT trailhead on Soda Mountain Road to work on a spur trail leading up to Hobart Bluff. I was wearing my day-pack filled with water and lunch, and I awkwardly carried a heavy tool in each hand. The trail up to Hobart Bluff was steep and to say that I got warmed up by the short hike would be a serious understatement. I wiped my brow and smiled as I recalled that on a typical Friday, I would be behind my computer answering e-mail right about then.

Ian Nelson, PCTA Regional Representative for Northern California and Southern Oregon, had told the crew that this part of trail would need some check dams and water bars and would need trail redefinition to lessen the impact of water runoff. And though the crew knew their assignment, they'd never seen that section of trail before. But they were very organized, and I was impressed at how they divided up responsibilities and dove right in.

Crewmember **Leslie Pechta** offered to be my partner for the day, and I was grateful to receive her patient guidance. I think she

continued on nextpage 

Above: Katie Smith, PCTA Development Director, with the NWSA-AmeriCorps PCT crew.

Captions (previous page, bottom): 1) A final challenge: B. Bush (red shirt) and R. Mitchell help clear a huge downed tree near Hyatt Lake. 2) Completed turnpike on the Green Mountain, OR, section of trail. Photos by Katie Smith. Captions (previous page, inset photos, l-r): 3) Community volunteer, Justin Livdvinaitis from Maine, pours gravel to complete the turnpike. 4) Community volunteers, LaRue Rodgers (white shirt) and Lacey Donle (purple shirt) help R. Mitchell and F. Haynes construct a turnpike.



B. Harris and F. Haynes building a rock check dam on top of Hobart Bluff, OR.

was surprised by how little I knew about trail work. She and the rest of the crew had assumed that my job was a lot like Ian's – implementing the PCTA's programs to protect and preserve the trail. I explained that my job was actually quite different: raising funds for the PCTA to make sure that Ian and the entire organization have the financial resources needed to accomplish the goals of the PCTA. This meant that I was more skilled at analyzing data than wielding a Pulaski.

The work was physically demanding, but the crew's company made all the difference. They were constantly encouraging each other and joking around as if they had been friends for a long time instead of just two months. I loved hearing about what brought each of them to the PCT. Their stories were all different, but they all had a common thread: they wanted to enjoy the outdoors and to make a difference – just like me.

Over the next two days we worked on the PCT redefining trail tread and lopping brush. While this work was fairly basic for the crew, they all recognized that it was essential. One of the crew leaders, Fran Haynes, explained through actions and words how redefining the trail would make the trail more comfortable to hike on and would preserve the trail tread into the future by encouraging water and debris to run down the fall line of the mountain. I was impressed with the way Fran understood and explained how our work would impact the trail immediately and in the long-term.

Later, **Stephanie Ludlow** and I worked in the blazing sun redefining a section of trail that was very slanted and dusty. The work flew by as we talked about her plans for life after the project. With their time on the PCT ending in October, this topic was at the front of everyone's minds. Many of my conversations turned to questions about what types of jobs they would look for next. Would they continue to look for seasonal trail work positions, or did they want something more permanent? Were they going to move back home, or would they continue to explore the West by finding work out here?

I remembered feeling like I had more questions than answers when I was trying to find my own path after graduating from

college. Being with the AmeriCorps crew reminded me how exhilarating a search it had been. Understandably, each crew member was concerned about practical things like job hunting and resume building. They have the skills required to ensure that these practical aspects of forging their future are well taken care of, but more importantly they have been further building their characters as members of this crew, and that's going to serve them well throughout their lives. I admire each of them for recognizing and grabbing this unique opportunity to work on the PCT and I am filled with optimism for them; they have so much to offer.

The four-day project I participated in marked the end of the crew's time in southern Oregon. From there they would move north to Bend. But before they left they had a chance to report to Ian on their tremendous progress when he made a surprise visit to our camp site. I could

tell that Ian, as their first "sponsor," had really bonded with the group and that he was instrumental in shaping their experience so far. He was genuinely proud of their accomplishments, and they were sad that they would soon be saying goodbye.

Just when I was feeling pretty good about finishing all of the work that we had set out to do, Ian suggested a new project for us. If anyone else was feeling like the work would never end, they did not show it as they happily accepted the additional challenge. A large tree had fallen parallel to the PCT near Hyatt Lake. The tree's huge root system and all of the dirt and rock attached to it had been yanked out of the ground right next to the trail, leaving a gapping hole at least six feet deep that hikers and horses could easily fall into.

When I saw the root ball and the state of the trail the next morning, I thought that there was no way it could be fixed without heavy duty machinery and hours of hard work. I was half expecting the crew leaders to have the same reaction and call it quits. The next thing I knew, however, the whole crew sprung into action. **Ross Mitchell** and **Brad Bush** jumped onto the root ball and started hacking away at the dirt to fill in the hole. Katie and Fran led an effort to re-route the trail further away from the pit left by the roots. **Blake Harris** and I scoured the area for rocks and other debris to fill in the hole. Approximately two hours and one angry swarm of bees later, the project was complete. This final demonstration of the crew's amazing teamwork and efficiency was the perfect end to a very rewarding volunteer experience.

I said my goodbyes on Monday morning after eating breakfast and striking camp. On my drive home I reflected on how my volunteer experience fit into my role with the PCTA. When I joined the PCTA staff in April of 2005, I was instantly intrigued by the idea of the trail and the unique way that the PCT connects people to the outdoors. I now realize that the PCT also connects people who care about the outdoors to each other. I am truly glad that I had the chance to connect with the AmeriCorps crew this summer. They made a lasting impression both on me and on the PCT. 