



New Northern Terminus Monument celebrates the vast PCT terrain and the people who love it

By Michael Hanley, PCTA Regional Representative

The Bell 206 shuddered perhaps 100 feet above the ground.

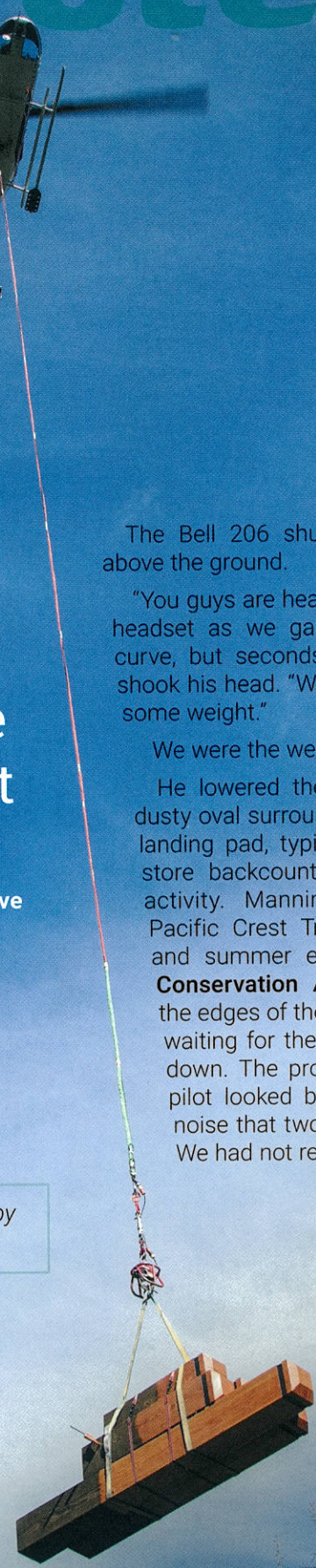
"You guys are heavy," crackled over the radio headset as we gained altitude in an arcing curve, but seconds later the helicopter pilot shook his head. "We are going to have to drop some weight."

We were the weight.

He lowered the machine back toward a dusty oval surrounded by scrubby trees. The landing pad, typically a quiet field used to store backcountry toilets, was filled with activity. Manning Provincial Park staff, Pacific Crest Trail Association volunteers and summer employees of the **Student Conservation Association** stood around the edges of the field in high visibility vests waiting for their flight group. We touched down. The props continued to spin. The pilot looked back and shouted over the noise that two people needed to get out. We had not rehearsed this part.

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The new northern terminus monument is delivered by helicopter. Photo by Loren Schmidt.



1331 Garden Highway
Sacramento, CA 95833
Phone: 916.285.1846 • Fax: 916.285.1865
email: info@pcta.org



Info line: 1-888-PC-TRAIL • On the web at www.pcta.org
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Loren Schmidt works on the new monument in his workshop. Photo by Jonathan Ley.

Trail Protection *(continued from inside front cover)*

Glancing at each other in the tight space in the rear of the helicopter, it was clear no one wanted to move. We had all traveled a long distance to hitch this particular ride. Selflessly, **Shannon Cunningham** and **Jeremy Canaria** got out and crouched on the ground. The door swung shut, and the aircraft's engine propelled us skyward once more.

Loren Schmidt – a world-traveler, retired shipbuilder and leader in the North 350 Blades chapter of PCTA volunteers – sat next to the door. Wedged on my left was **Kane**, a trail crew leader and British Columbia parks ranger. **Kara**, another good-natured Canadian ranger, occupied the seat next to the pilot. I looked down. The landing area was littered with cargo nets full of gear to be flown to drop points scattered all around the 273-square-mile Provincial Park. Among the supplies were five 12x12 Douglas fir posts ranging in length from 4 to 10 feet. Loren had crafted the timbers in his shop to perfectly replicate the beloved but battered Northern Terminus Monument.

I gazed out the window at this bundle of wood. It looked fairly nondescript from the air, but those posts had already come a long way. Oregon-Canadian Forest Products had generously donated the timber for the new monument after hearing about the project from **Whitney LaRuffa**, board president of the **American Long Distance Hiking Association – West**. The **William A. Kerr**

Foundation had financially supported the monument's fabrication. Over several months the posts had been milled in Oregon, routed by **Tom Watson** of Bonney Lake, whose father, **Lyle**, had helped maintain the PCT in the 1970s. Then the posts were shaped and painted in Loren's shop in Concrete, Washington.

But if the helicopter could not lift six adults, could it really haul more than a thousand pounds of lumber? Was this going to work?

Jeremy and Shannon, now miniature versions of themselves, joined **Rudy Giecek** and **Roger St. John**, the two other bold PCTA volunteers who had made the trip. They looked up. We had all traveled to work on the monument replacement together. But now we would be separated. Park staff had suggested our flights would be squeezed in between others – the chopper was in high demand. It might be a couple of hours between the first and second flights to the border.

As we flew south, the view from the air reminded me of my own PCT thru-hike. The trail simply refuses to step off the gas. Even after traveling such a long distance and growing accustomed to beauty, I was forced to stop and marvel at the scenery in the Pasayten Wilderness. From the aircraft we could see the jagged spires near the Devil's Staircase, the last great high point of a northbound long-distance journey.



The installation crew proudly poses with the fruits of their labor. From left to right: Roger St. John, Rudy Giecek, Shannon Cunningham, Jeremy Canaria, Michael Hanley, Loren Schmidt

The pilot spotted the 20-foot-wide cut that marks the border and arced into a long spirally descent. He hovered for a moment above the floor of the U-shaped valley and then landed on a gravel bar next to a creek. I slid out. Crouching, I worked my way around the aircraft and retrieved our tools from the side box: two shovels, a combi, and a 4-foot level. Moments later the helicopter was airborne. I stood and gazed at the meadow in which we suddenly found ourselves. We had landed north and a little bit west of the PCT.

I had daydreamed about this moment while on conference calls with the **U.S. Border Patrol** and while discussing logistics with **Mike Liu**, the now retired district ranger of the Methow Valley Ranger District in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, who strongly supported this project. We had permission to step across the international border and replace the monument, but as I looked around I realized the valley floor had looked different in my imagination. We were in a marsh on the opposite side of Castle Creek from the terminus.

Before we had found a way to cross the chest-deep stream, the sound of the helicopter returned. I thrashed back toward the gravel bar. Water sprayed from the creek as wind pushed down from the aircraft's main propeller. Jeremy, Roger, Rudy and Shannon all climbed out. Moments later the helicopter

was gone. Smiling from ear to ear we remarked on our good fortune. We were all together in a beautiful place. We found a logjam, crossed the creek, hacked our way through dense forest and intercepted the trail to the border.

Moments later, Kane's radio hissed. The helicopter was coming back with the lumber. Staring through the trees the load appeared as it passed over us. All of the posts were there. Loren waved his arms. The pilot lowered the bundle and set it down on the Canadian side of the border.

We took photos with the old monument. We marveled to each other about the folks at BC Parks. **Kevin Wilson**, the area supervisor, and **Jesse Hopps**, the senior park ranger, had surpassed all our hopes for assistance. Months earlier they had promised to find a way to help us move the materials. We had put our faith in them, and here we were standing on the border with all our supplies.

Roger grabbed a shovel and was the first to set about digging around the weathered structure. Trading off frequently, we dug. Mounds of dirt soon surrounded the iconic monument. After half an hour, Rudy gave the timbers a shove. It wiggled. "I think I can push this over." We stepped back. He squared up and pushed the posts backward.



The Northern Terminus Monument was installed in 1988 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the PCT's designation as a National Scenic Trail. For 30 years, it had marked the start or end of countless PCT journeys. It endured rain, snow and hikers' footprints. But after all those years, its service was done. It popped out of the ground with minimal fanfare.

We dug more and set the first new post in the footprint of its predecessor. The helicopter returned to fly the old monument posts out of the backcountry. We worked slowly and carefully into the afternoon. Loren supervised the placement of each timber. Hikers arrived from the south, and at times we had a small crowd.

Meander – a long-time thru-hiker who visits and maintains the register at the terminus, which is now attached to the back of the monument – gave us feedback and encouragement. Six hours after the first helicopter ride, the new Northern Terminus Monument was standing proud. And there it will stand for decades as a celebration of the ambition of the Pacific Crest Trail

It is the scale of the PCT that I find so remarkable. As it weaves its way across the mountains of the West, the PCT challenges hikers and horseback riders to pass into new drainages and see new landscapes. Our work replacing the worn and weathered monument was to mark the northern edge as a way of celebrating the vast array of land traversed by the PCT and those who love being out there.

For more than 50 years, the trail has been maintained and supported by thousands of people who did their part to enact a shared vision. This monument is also a symbol of those collaborations. I am enormously thankful to the volunteers who built and installed the terminus. Loren's efforts to craft such a beautiful structure are truly noteworthy.

I am grateful for retired **National Park Service** employee and thru-hiker **Chris Kounkel**, who pushed this effort along, and I am indebted to the **Forest Service**, Border Patrol, PCTA donors and BC Parks for making this project possible. Here's to the next 50 years! 🐾

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For more information,
contact Angie Williamson
at (916) 285-1849 or
awilliamson@pcta.org