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Experienced hiker to present program on trails

By Tristan Navera, January 9, 2013
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Andy Niekamp poses Mount Mansfield on the Long Trail in Vermont in August. Niekamp, a local hiking enthusiast, will speak at the Franklin-Springboro Public Library on Jan. 17.

FRANKLIN —

Months after completing a 1,400 mile trek all over Ohio, an active resident has become the local expert on all things hiking.

Andy “Captain Blue” Niekamp, of Kettering, completed the 1,444-mile trek along the Buckeye Trail in June 2011 after four months of hiking. Since then, Niekamp has been involved in maintaining the trail and inspiring others with a passion for hiking.

“I liked the trail so much that I decided to get involved at the highest level possible, so, I joined the trustees in the Buckeye Trail association,” Niekamp said. “I became a section supervisor for the trail, there are 26 of them. I oversee the section from Fairborn to Piqua, 55 miles, with 10 trail maintainers.”

This spring, Niekamp created and managed the first Buckeye Trail Fest at Fort Ancient, a trail festival for all hikers in Ohio, which featured presentations on hiking and backpacking, field trips and workshops.

“This is in our own backyard, there’s a long distance trail right here in Ohio that most people don’t know about, and they’re fascinated that we have such a trail,” Niekamp said. “It’s the state’s official trail and people want to know more about it.”

Previously, Niekamp finished trekking the 2,179-mile Appalachian Trail for the third time in 2010 — something only 30 people in the world had done in the 73 years since the famed wilderness passage was completed. While 11,000 have completed the trail one time, few have done it more than once.

He also founded Dayton Hikers.org, an active local group of hiking lovers,, said Nan Allen, an associate at the Franklin-Springboro Public Library, where Niekamp will speak later this month.

“He’s just really a super hiker, ” said Allen.

The involvement with the local trail hasn’t kept him off the trail. Niekamp noted he hiked the 300-mile Sheltoewe Trace Trail in Kentucky in May, and the Long Trail through Massachusetts in August. Both trails, close to 280 miles, took a month to hike.

“It’s a wonderful journey. Wild. Rugged. I saw a lot rivers and trails, and a lot of beautiful things,” he said.

Niekamp will appear at the Franklin Springboro Public Library to talk about his travels as well as his work with the Buckeye Trail Association and his hiking group. The event will take place Jan. 17 from 6:30- 7:30 p.m. at the Franklin Public Library, 44 East Fourth St.

“It’s my personal fountain of youth,” Niekamp said of hiking. “I feel young again. I feel strong physically. It’s a great way to clear out the cobwebs mentally and rejuvenate yourself.”

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