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From hiker to author: Captain Blue on the Blue Blazes

By **Debbie Juniewicz**
Contributing Writer

From small towns to big cities, farmland to coastline, Captain Blue spent 88 incredible days on his Buckeye Trail thru-hike.

Andy Niekamp - aka Captain Blue - is sharing his experiences from the 1,444-mile trek in a book entitled "Captain Blue on the Blue Blazes - The First Solo Thru-Hike of Ohio's 1,444 Mile Buckeye Trail." The book will be available in December with purchase and release details available at <http://buckeyetrailhiker.com/>.

The impact of the hike - specifically, the people he encountered along the way - has been a lasting one for the Dayton Hikers founder.

"The people are amazing," Niekamp said. "I was surprised by the amount of 'Northern Hospitality' that locals showed me. Ohioans are real trail angels and my book has many instances of people performing random acts of kindness for me."

Niekamp shares his thoughts about the book and his temporary transformation from hiker to author.

What prompted you to write a book?

Encouragement from my friends. On my thru hike of the Buckeye Trail in 2011, I wrote daily blog entries. One of my friends who is a writer, thought the blog had book potential. My blog was different from other trail blogs that were out there because it told a story. The story unfolded a little day-by-day. I certainly didn't plan it that way; it just happened that my journey had all of the elements of a good story - problem, climax, resolution. I'm self-publishing - it's the way to go. I liked that



Bridal Veil Falls, Cleveland Metroparks. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

I was able to have total control over the design, content, marketing and distribution.

You are used to physical and mental challenges on the trail, what has been the biggest challenge for you as far as the writing process?

First let me say, I'm a long-distance backpacker first and foremost, not a writer. So getting into the mindset of being an author was a tough transition for me. I am more comfortable being in the mountains, out in the elements, than being in front of a computer thinking of the right words to type. Luckily, I had some very talented friends who helped me along the way. In some ways, writing a book is a lot like a long-distance hike. You begin a journey and you aren't



Andy "Captain Blue" Niekamp on the Buckeye Trail.

sure where it will take you. The journey unfolds day-by-day.

How is the book different from your daily blog of the hike?

The book contains much

more detailed accounts of my Buckeye Trail thru hike than the blog. When I blogged during my hike, I was often sitting on a log in the woods writing. I had miles to hike that day so my entries were short and

sweet. With the book, I had time to add detail, research historical accounts, and provide background information. In the book, you will realize what a contrast I was experiencing on the Buckeye Trail. The Buckeye Trail is an urban, suburban, rural hiking and wilderness experience. It was not like any long-distance hike I had ever done.

If people took one thing out of this book, what would you want it to be?

I want people to hike the Buckeye Trail and be proud of Ohio. Ohio is such a beautiful state and the people are so friendly. Most Ohioans see Ohio from the window of their car driving on an interstate. I saw Ohio on foot and up-close. Ohio is very scenic with acres

CELEBRATE 2018 ON THE BUCKEYE TRAIL

Niekamp will be making Buckeye Trail presentations in January and there are some group hikes on the Buckeye Trail that the public can attend.

■ **January 6** - Buckeye Trail Winter Hike and book signing, Caesar Creek Visitor Center; more information at www.winterhike.com

■ **January 15** - Buckeye Trail Association Winter Hike, Hueston Woods State Park; more information at www.buckeyetrail.org

■ **January 20, 2018** - Thru-Hiking the Buckeye Trail: Things That Will Change the Way You See Ohio, 2 p.m., Springboro Public Library; more information at www.fspl.org.

Full event schedule: <http://buckeyetrailhiker.com/schedule/>

of rolling farmland, acres of prairie, bogs, fens, wetlands, forests, streams, rivers, lakes wildlife and rugged ridges.

What's next for Captain Blue?

I'd like to hike the Florida Trail. My plan was to hike it this winter but Hurricane Irma damaged it too much - maybe next year. Oh yes, I will be working on completing the Appalachian Trail a fifth time.

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