



Mount Hood Chapter founder Steve Queen stepping down after 18 years

“I have been blessed to work alongside Steve on the PCT for almost 20 years. Back in the Mount Hood Chapter’s early days some Forest Service employees were not too keen on having volunteers taking significant responsibility for the trail. Steve stepped up every time resistance raised the bar. He was determined to make it work and he did. Wow.”

Mary Ellen Fitzgerald
Mount Hood National Forest

By **Ruth Weston**, PCTA Mount Hood Chapter

Steve Queen was 18 years old when he donned a cowboy hat and hefted his heavy, external-frame pack with the sheepskin-lined shoulder straps and started out on a thru-hike of the Pacific Crest Trail.

Steve often says his 1981 thru-hike was the most profound, moving experience of his life.

After finishing graduate school in 1992, he felt the need to give back to the trail by “getting people to put tools into the dirt.” Helped by **Larry Cash**, then president of the PCTA, Steve formed the Mount Hood Chapter, beginning years of rigorous work organizing, training and inspiring a handful of trail maintainers.

The first work party in 1993 drew about 20 volunteers. In those early years, the chapter focused on signage and logout. The plan to put signs at every junction along the trail specified what the signs should say, where the PCT logo should be placed and what type of directional marker was appropriate for that area.

“Back then, logout was the main goal,” said **Roberta Cobb**, who was there at the beginning. “Over time, the chapter grew to embrace more of the trail maintenance tasks.”

For crew leader training, Steve coordinated with **Mary Ellen Fitzgerald**, then the Mount Hood National Forest’s manager of trail operations based out of the Zig Zag Ranger Station. He also coordinated with **Roger Bell**, a project engineer, to train crew leaders on a better understanding of trail specifications.

Years later, crew leaders chuckle and grimace when they remember those sessions and the high bar the Forest Service set for volunteers.

“Roger inspected our work a number of times to the same standards as contract trail workers,” Roberta said.

Under Steve’s leadership, the chapter has grown the caretaker role to own all aspects of the trail within an assigned section. Chapter members build bridges, reconstruct trail, cut back brush and train volunteers. And they still install signs and complete the annual logout.



A Mount Hood Chapter work party toils away on the flanks of Mount Hood.

Over the past 18 years, the Mount Hood Chapter has evolved slowly and deliberately, always emphasizing stewardship.

Jack Konner says that under Steve's guidance, the Mount Hood Chapter has grown to 400 active volunteers. Ten percent of the trail (221 miles) is under the chapter's yearly supervision and repair.

"The PCT will benefit for untold years to come as a result of his achievement," Konner said.

Steve has established monthly meetings for caretakers and an annual potluck for volunteers. And he coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service to annually recognize volunteers.

"Steve and the chapter grew together," said **Dave Cobb**, a longtime trail maintainer. "Steve had the vision to guide us in relationships with the Forest Service."



Several years ago, Steve awkwardly asked permission to call himself president of the chapter. His motivation was that he was writing a position paper to the Forest Service addressing the issue of off-road vehicles on the trail, and he felt he needed some credentials behind his name. Of course no one argued as Steve had been the steady force guiding the group since its inception.

Steve can be outspoken at times. His dry wit and wacky sense of humor show up when least expected. He once sent an email praising all his "peeps" for their good work. Another time, he arrived at a meeting soaking wet because he had been searching for a geo-cache on the banks of the Willamette River in the rain.

Thank you Steve for your leadership and initiative in starting PCTA's Mount Hood Chapter. As a thru-hiker you have set the greatest example of giving back. You experienced the entire PCT and cared enough to devote the next two decades taking care of it. That's inspiring.

— Liz Bergeron, PCTA Executive Director and CEO

Today, the Mount Hood Chapter is considered a model trail organization.

Triple crowner **Brice Hammock** notes that when the Forest Service lost the bulk of its trail maintenance funding to pay permanent trail crews, Steve organized volunteers to fill the void.

"I was always amazed that Steve worked a demanding job while raising a family and could give so much time to the betterment of the PCT," he said. "Steve proved that with good volunteers, trail lovers could pick up the slack."

Steve's success is due, in part, to his quiet way of leading by example. Steve maintained an 11-mile section of trail on both sides of The Bridge of the Gods. In the spring he would come to the leadership meetings covered with poison oak. You can bet no one wanted to sit near him.



He exudes respect and admiration for the caretakers he works with. Even if he doesn't agree with you, you feel that he has taken the time to listen and consider your point of view.

Steve is the PCTA's 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. His service certainly exemplifies a lifetime of achievement. Not only has he volunteered hundreds of hours as head of the chapter, more importantly, he has inspired others to try enjoy their time on the trail as he does.

Above: Steve's brand of leading by example, at work on the PCT.

Below: As a thru-hiker enjoying the trail.

RESULTS OF OUR 2012 PHOTO CONTEST

(Have another look – we improved the slide show.)

Online at: www.pcta.org

