



## What the Forest Gave Us

The Allegheny 100 is not a race—it is a test of spirit. This annual event takes place on the 100-mile section of North Country National Scenic Trail through the Allegheny National Forest in Northern Pennsylvania. It is organized by volunteers of the NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. Fifty miles through Pennsylvania's wildest forest, on foot and under weight, through wind and mud and rain. In 2025, four friends took on the A-100 together. What they found wasn't just a trail—it was each other.

Deb, a strong-willed leader, had watched her husband Ron complete the challenge the year before. Inspired by his transformation, she decided she wanted her own version of that experience. She didn't want a partner to hold her back, but she also wasn't going to hike it alone. She invited two friends into the challenge: Kristina, a free-spirited seeker, and Sonya, the steady pace-setter. Ron would hike his own hike but would be there if needed.

Ron also invited Jerry and Krina to serve as a support crew, offering help, encouragement, and hot meals when the hikers needed them most.

Each of them brought something different. Each of them left with something deeper.

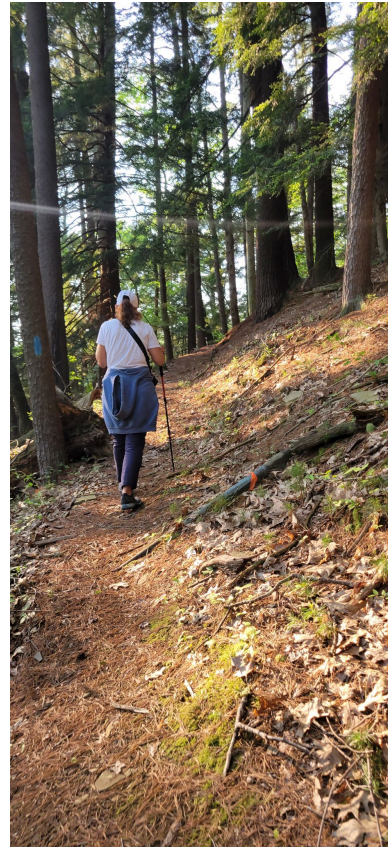


## Day One: Preparation and Beginnings

The journey began even before the trail. On Wednesday, Ron walked through the hemlocks where his hike had nearly broken him the year before. He brought Deb with him—not just to show her the trees, but to leave a prayer for what lay ahead. He knew what the trail could take from a person, and what it could give. He told the forest he was placing his trust there.

Thursday brought reunion and preparation. Jerry and Krina arrived at the cabin first, filling the place with laughter and warmth, cooking dinner and calming nerves. Their support would carry the group through the hardest moments. That evening, Sonya rolled in with a full heart and a full backpack—and plenty of jokes about how to fit it all.

Friday morning unfolded slowly on purpose. A big breakfast, a drive to the halfway point on the trail, and a few final moments of stillness before it began. When they returned to the cabin, Kristina was there—gear spread across the floor like a puzzle waiting to be solved. With Ron's quiet help, the pieces came together.





That evening at Henrys Mills, the challenge truly began as they walked their packs onto the bus for an hour ride to the start line south of Marienville for the 6 PM start. They were off to find themselves.



Ron stayed toward the back, letting the women hike their own hike. Sonya took the lead with Kristina close behind, Deb in the middle, and Ron trailing behind, quietly watching, making sure everyone had space—but not too much.

In the first hour, they settled into a 3-mile-per-hour pace—faster than planned. Ron knew it wouldn't last, but he didn't say anything. The trail would slow them soon enough. By the third hour, rain had started. By the fifth, the trail was soaked, dark, and unfamiliar.



They found a small rise where three trees stood close together—just enough space to hang hammocks. Deb, Sonya, and Kristina moved with tired but focused energy, headlamps glowing in the wet dark as they strung their hammocks between trees slick with rain.

Deb, trying to get her hammock up quickly, laid her gear down next to a tree and started tying up the rain fly. Sonya said she could smell something foul. Deb realized she had stepped in human waste someone else had left behind. Her frustration was quiet but heavy. Still, no one complained. They were doing it—tired, soaked, but still together.

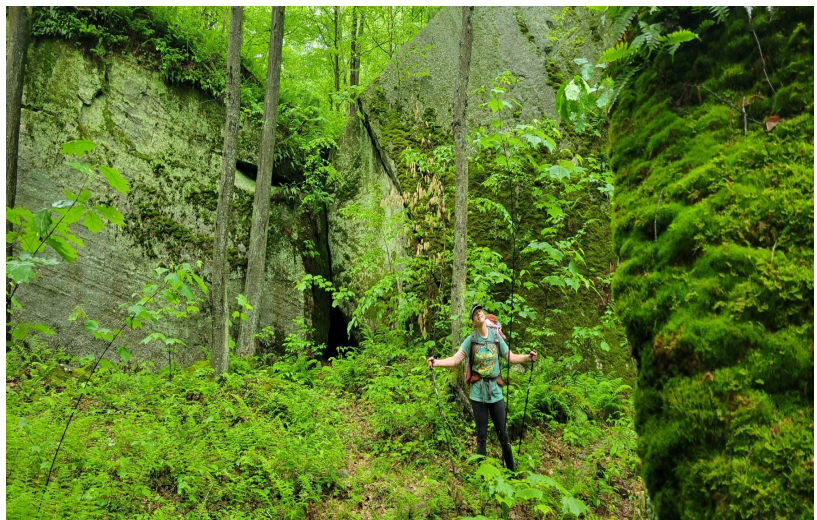
Ron hiked up the hill to hang his own hammock, giving the women time to settle in. Later, he discovered what had happened and quietly took their bear bags to hang them high, giving them space and care without making a fuss.

As the first day ended in the dripping forest, they had learned something important: challenges shared become manageable, and even the messiest moments couldn't break their resolve.

## Day Two: Testing and Breakthrough

Ron's alarm was set for 4:30 AM, but the forest stirred early. By the time he packed his gear and came down the hill, the women were already waiting, strong and ready. It was a proud moment—they weren't just enduring this challenge; they were embracing it.

They hit the trail again in the dark, the forest dripping around them. The terrain tested every step—mud sucking at boots, rocks and roots demanding constant attention, and exhaustion creeping in by the mile. As Sonya crested the ridge her thoughts went to the sheer beauty of the sun as it was shining through the trees with the glisten of the dew.... it was beautiful.



They arrived at Kellettsville Rec Area at noon—just before the halfway point. They kicked off their shoes, cooked a hot meal, and took quick "bird baths" in a small sink nearby. When Deb took off her sock she realized the importance of cutting your nails short. She is sure she is going to lose at least one nail. The break was brief but essential. Spirits lifted. Feet rested.

The plan was to push hard to their tent site, but the long miles and relentless terrain had worn them down. So they adjusted—adapting to what the trail demanded rather than forcing their original plan. The next destination became Queen Creek Shelter, which they found unoccupied. A small miracle.

Inside, there was no talk of hammocks—just relief. Sleeping bags were tossed onto the wooden floor. It was 7 PM, and they agreed: sleep until 1 AM, then rise to finish the challenge.



When Deb's alarm sounded in the early hours, the group stirred slowly. Then came the moment no one expected: Deb stood up and danced—a goofy, defiant little shuffle that cut the tension and sparked laughter. It was just enough to shake off the fatigue and remind them that joy could exist even in exhaustion.



Around 4 AM, they entered a towering hemlock forest. The darkness was profound. They turned off their headlamps and stood in complete silence. No one moved.

It was the kind of dark that strips away the outside world and turns you inward. The wind shifted. The forest breathed. And in that deep stillness, something opened. They weren't just walking a trail—they were being changed by it. In that moment of absolute quiet, each of them touched something larger than themselves.

Day two had pushed them to their limits, but it also revealed their capacity to find light in the darkest moments.

## Day Three: Breaking and Rebuilding

At first light, they stopped for breakfast. Kristina was hurting—her hip nearly locking with every step. Ron, needing space to process his own struggles, went ahead, promising to wait at the next campground. He sat alone on a rock, collecting himself, remembering why he was there.

When the group reunited, something had shifted. The women shared how they'd stopped for a moment. They sat in silence at first, catching their breath. Then, slowly, the emotion surfaced. Words of encouragement flowed. Kristina admitted how much pain she was in, and Deb and Sonya responded with compassion and strength. They passed around a shot of Fireball, hugged tightly, and let a few tears fall. They weren't just teammates on a trail anymore—they were something closer, more bonded by what they were enduring together.

Then Sonya stood, her voice light but firm: "Suck it up—and let's go."

And just like that, they rose, but the climb that followed was steep—steeper than expected—and Kristina's pain deepened. Without hesitation, Sonya offered to carry some of her weight. No drama, no fuss. Just quiet strength. It wasn't just gear Sonya carried that morning—it was a piece of someone else's burden, the kind that can't be measured in pounds. And sometimes, that's the only way forward—when someone steps in to help carry what you can't carry alone.



With about 4 miles remaining, the fatigue was no longer just physical. It had settled into their minds. Deb broke down. Her body was moving, but her spirit faltered. Her body felt like it was boiling from the inside. She took a break along a small spring flowing down the mountain. Ron and Sonya were a little ahead but Kristina remained sitting across from her. She just began sobbing. The pain of her toenails, the fatigue of her body, and the mental stress all came to a head. Kristina immediately came over and gave her a hug. She was comforting and kind. Then Ron and Sonya came back over. Ron had some heart to heart conversation with Deb, and then Sonya told her how great she was doing and also gave her a hug. All 3 were so encouraging and supportive. They stayed there a little while for Deb to recover and then they tracked onward.

Later, Deb said that moment hit her harder than anything before on the trail. The weight she carried wasn't just in her pack—it was emotional, spiritual, tied to being a leader, a friend, and a woman proving to herself she could finish. That brief breakdown was also a release. After it, she felt lighter. Stronger. Determined. She looked at the faces of her friends, saw their faith in her, and chose to believe it herself.

A few minutes later, Ron began to falter. He felt off-balance, stumbling. Then nausea. Then a sudden need to leave the trail for an emergency moment of privacy. Embarrassed, he returned—only to collapse against a hemlock, vomiting bile. The group surrounded him. Deb wanted to call for help. He said no. This, here, in the forest, was where he wanted to be. He asked the trees to take what was making him sick.

Deb stood close, her concern growing. Watching Ron struggle was terrifying. The strong one—the one who helped all of them feel steady—was barely able to stand. But she honored his request. She didn't call. Instead, she laid a hand on the hemlock too, silently asking the forest to help him the way it had helped her.

Kristina watched Ron, her eyes wide with worry. She had struggled earlier with pain and fatigue, but seeing him collapse shifted her mindset. This wasn't just about the miles anymore—it was about care. She didn't say much, but her calm presence was grounding. Later, she said that moment reminded her how fragile strength can be, and how courage sometimes looks like sitting still.

Sonya stood at the edge, arms crossed, watching everything unfold. She'd been the steady one—pacing, pushing, moving forward—but this stopped her. Watching how quickly things can change. Sonya placed her hand on Ron's back when he could stand again and simply said, "Let's finish this." No BS. Just grit.

The forest had stripped them bare—body, mind, and ego. But what was left wasn't weakness. It was true. It was the unshakeable bond between people who had seen each other at their most vulnerable and chosen to stand together anyway.



In the final mile, soaked and exhausted, they rang the triangle bell to call in their finish-line burgers. Only a few hundred yards to go. Then they walked out on the blacktop toward the tent, Jerry started walking toward them. The sight of him filled the group with emotion—a true friend who showed up not just to cheer but to carry them through. Krina followed behind, arms open. The girls embraced her one by one while Ron stood quietly, smiling, waiting for his turn. Then they walked to the tent for the burger, only to find the grill had caught fire and the burgers were ruined. Everyone laughed. Of course it ended like that. But fresh burgers were quickly grilled, and they were the best any of them had ever tasted.

That burger, after 50 miles and trail food, felt like a five-star meal. They stood together under the dripping trees, soaked, filthy, buzzing with something more than adrenaline—something like awe.

Back at the cabin, Jerry and Krina had prepared not just a meal but a homecoming. The warmth of the cabin, the smells of real food, the sound of familiar voices wrapped around them like a blanket. Each bite was more than nourishment; it was a reminder that they were cared for, that someone had been thinking of them while they pushed through the forest.

Around that table, with sore feet and full hearts, the hike became something whole. They weren't just support crew and hikers—they were family.

That night, laughter returned easily. The aches were real, but so was the glow of accomplishment. Around the table, the stories came out—the tough miles, the tears, the jokes, the small miracles. They weren't just recounting the hike; they were stitching it into memory.





## What the Forest Gave

That weekend, 179 hikers set out on the A-100. These four were among them.

But the real story wasn't the distance. It was the bonds.

A woman discovered she didn't have to walk alone. Another found that her strength wasn't just physical—it was the courage to be vulnerable and rise again. Someone who came to offer support learned that receiving help with grace was its own kind of strength. And somewhere out in that deep, wild forest, nature whispered an eternal truth: we are stronger together.


The forest gave them pain, beauty, breakdowns, and joy. The forest gave them each other.

Most importantly, the forest gave them back to themselves.

As the trail came to an end, the journey felt less like a finish line and more like a new beginning. The miles behind them held stories of struggle and triumph, but also quiet moments of connection—to nature, to each other, and to themselves.

This challenge was never just about reaching a destination; it was about discovering the strength to keep moving forward, no matter what lies ahead. For anyone standing at the edge of their own path, the forest offers this gentle invitation: take the step, embrace the unknown, and find what the journey will give you.

What the forest gave them would not be left behind on the trail. It would go with them—into the next mile, the next challenge, the next act of courage.



Allegheny National Forest  
Land of Many Uses  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NCT A-100

June 6, 2025 · Hiking

Marienville, PA

★★★★★

[Edit review](#)

Distance	Elevation gain	Moving time
53.45 mi	5,531 ft	25:16:14
Avg. pace	Calories	Total time
28:22	13,150	46:23:27