

BC3 grad visits all 121 PA state parks in 302 days

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Trevor Nordquist, 27, of Butler, a 2014 graduate of Butler County Community College, accomplished his goal of visiting each of Pennsylvania's 121 state parks on Aug. 16. Nordquist visited all of the parks within 302 days. He is shown Friday, Aug. 21, 2020, on BC3's main campus in Butler Township.

(Butler, PA) "So, I can't make this up," Butler County Community College graduate Trevor Nordquist begins.

Within seconds of leaving the last of Pennsylvania's 121 state parks that he would visit within 302 days, and satisfying a goal born of his newfound love for Mother Nature, Nordquist looked upward and noticed a brown and white discrepancy in the gray mist above his head.

The brown and white discrepancy floated in the drizzle just off Hawk Point Overlook in Susquehannock State Park in southern Lancaster County, then dove toward the Susquehanna River 450 feet below.

“The last point in my whole trip,” Nordquist said, “and it’s a bald eagle.”

His first-ever sighting, 275 miles from his home in Butler and on Aug. 16, was as if an acknowledgment from Mother Nature, she representing the Great Lake, whitewater river, grand canyon and old-growth forests to which Nordquist traveled in pursuit of visiting each Pennsylvania state park.



A state map Trevor Nordquist divided among 13 regions, and a number of state park maps Trevor Nordquist collected while visiting each of Pennsylvania’s 121 state parks, are shown Friday, Aug. 21, 2020, on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township. Nordquist, 27, of Butler, a 2014 BC3 graduate, accomplished his goal of visiting each of Pennsylvania’s 121 state parks on Aug. 16.

He’d add 15,000 miles to his car, tug a backpack filled at varying times with sunscreen or an umbrella, parkas or swim trunks, endure his first tick bite that left him bedridden for four days “with a fever, chills, the whole nine yards” and pitch his first tent alone “and with a lot of struggles.”

The bald eagle “put an exclamation point on what I did,” Nordquist said. “It ended it in the most rewarding way. Put a closure on it. This is it. He did it. What are the chances of the whole entire experience ending like that?”

“I fell in love with the outdoors”

Nordquist, who earned an associate degree in general studies in 2014 from BC3, was inspired during the summer of 2019, and from afar, to visit each Pennsylvania state park upon his return from working 10 weeks with the nonprofit community service provider AmeriCorps in Greeley, Colo.

It was in Colorado where, Nordquist said, “I fell in love with the outdoors.”

He returned to Butler County in August 2019. On Oct. 15 he visited his first series of five state parks in northwestern Pennsylvania, beginning with Oil Creek State Park in Venango County.

Within the next 10 months – excluding December, January and March, when he did not travel – Nordquist visited state parks as close to home as Moraine State Park in Butler County to as far from home as Neshaminy State Park in Bucks County, where hikers can view the Philadelphia skyline.

Twenty times Nordquist left Butler County toward one of 13 Pennsylvania regions he created on his state map by outlining in black marker.

He defined a visit at a minimum as exiting his car, taking a photograph and collecting a park map if a park office was located on site.

“I don’t know anyone personally who has done it”

Visits ranged from two minutes, “I would think, ‘OK, this is it?’ to seven hours at Leonard Harrison and Colton Point state parks in Tioga County, on the east and west rims, respectively, of the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. Trips ranged from one day to four.

Pennsylvania, Nordquist said he realized, “is actually extremely beautiful. I always brushed off Pennsylvania as being my home state, so I never gave it the credit that it deserves. There’s just so much so much to see here. It’s a huge state and every corner of it has something different to offer.”

Every region outlined on Nordquist’s map encompassed a collection of state parks, at least one of which is located within 25 miles of every Pennsylvanian.

Each state park in Pennsylvania is unique, said Chris Calhoun, who was raised near Kettle Creek State Park in Clinton County and served as a law enforcement ranger with the National Park Service before becoming coordinator of BC3’s park and recreation management program.

Calhoun said he has had students who have discussed visiting each Pennsylvania state park, that doing so himself may be among his plans when he retires, and that “I don’t know anyone personally who has done it.”

Nordquist’s achievement, Calhoun said, “is impressive.

“I respect what he did. He went out and really got to know the essence of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania by visiting areas that have been set aside for future generations. He has a memory that he will be able to tell his grandchildren about when he’s sitting down and sharing his life story and passing that family legacy along. What a great story to tell. ‘Hey, I remember when I visited 121 state parks.’”

Nordquist will likely start his story with “So, I can’t make this up,” about the first bald eagle he ever saw, about how he could clearly identify the brown body and white tail in the gray drizzle in the last seconds of the last state park he visited in a 302-day span.

“It was proof,” he said, “that what I did was worth it.”

Nordquist, a senior at Slippery Rock University, expects to earn a bachelor’s degree in December in Arabic and Japanese culture and language and has completed graduate-level courses toward his next goal, of teaching English as a second language.

