

2021 Copper Harbor Trails Fest Presented by the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge Recap

November 10, 2021



John and the KML Team,

It was another great year for us at the 28th Annual Copper Harbor Trails Fest Presented by the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge! We're glad that you were able to join us and we look forward to continuing to improve the event over the next three years. This report details some of the impact we generated during our Labor Day weekend event. Half of the fun was the several months of run-up to the event, while the other half was concentrated on 2.5 crazy days in the Harbor.

In 2021 we had **508 unique registered participants** across all of our events, 403 of whom were 18 years or older. Participation was predictably down in 2021 compared to 2019 due to taking a year off from the pandemic, lingering hesitancy to travel, and persistent "bad news" relating to trail closures. However, the drop was not as significant as feared. In 2019 our unique participant numbers totaled 669, while in 2018 we had 559 unique participants. We are excited that our momentum was not dampened too significantly and look forward to boosting numbers again to their pre-pandemic levels. Our age range for 2021 was between 2-69 years old, and racers hailed from 15 states. Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were predictably the top three.

Almost each race saw a corresponding drop in numbers from 2019, although all remained competitive and viable. The Enduro slipped by a hair (from just over 300 to 281), buoyed by a strong slate of new trails at East Bluff and the addition of a new class for younger beginner riders. Adding a separate class for our youngest racers allowed them to compete against their peers, while also allowing parents to ride (untimed) with their children for free. This created a fun atmosphere for these new racers and helped them avoid riding alongside more serious racers in larger groups. We look forward to expanding this in the future to welcome even more younger riders in. Each class in our Enduro was split into waves for the first time, significantly reducing congestion on the course and ensuring everyone had an excellent day. The more experienced classes in the Enduro reached capacity by race day and we don't foresee expanding beyond the ~300 rider limit we currently have.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for us was our Downhill race actually *increased* in 2021 compared to 2019 (72 vs. 63). We were certain this event would drop precipitously due to the year-long closure of our signature downhill trail Overflow, and last-minute switch in the race course to East Bluff's newest trail, Citrus Tech. Racers were excited for the change, and while the trail is not quite as "big" as Overflow, Citrus Tech still offered riders a premier downhill race experience. Unfortunately, we experienced unforeseen parking congestion for spectators attempting to watch this event. Parking is limited near East Bluff and cars were reportedly parked for half a mile in either direction along Mandan Road. This will be addressed in 2022 with shuttles from town, mandatory parking only on one side of the road, encouraging spectators to ride their bikes, or a combination of these.

The XC race dropped 20%, from 257 participants in 2019 to 203. Our course changed quite a bit this year. All racers took a loop up East Bluff, we had the fewest road miles since long racers began heading out to High Rock Bay, and we reversed the loop to the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge for our long

racers. This resulted in the most polarising part of Trails Fest! On the one hand, short racers were excited to *not* make the rugged climb up to the KML and down the intimidating Red Trail to end their race, as has been tradition for several years running. On the other hand, we had long racers ride *up* Red Trail, a challenge “enjoyed” by a few and dreaded by many. An informal aid/morale oasis above the worst stretch lifted spirits (mostly whiskey) and brought cheer to those who encountered it. Unfortunately, the worst injury during the event took place on the uphill portion of Red Trail, necessitating a lengthy but successful extraction in coordination with emergency responders and CHTC’s volunteer patrollers. The injured rider sustained a concussion after a high fall from a slippery bridge but bore no ill-will to the organization or race. We’ll reassess the value of riding up Red Trail for 2022 when we begin formulating our XC course in mid-summer.

Our 10k Trail Run dropped back to 2018 levels with 56 participants, from a high of 86 in 2019. We’re not sure exactly why this may be, as the course was similar to prior years in terms of difficulty. Our reach to this segment is more limited, and the earlier Run the Keweenaw event this year was more organized than it has been recently which may have drawn more interest that would have come during Trails Fest.

Finally, our Junior XC race dropped by more than half, from 124 in 2019 to 57 in 2021. This is a particularly challenging event to grow and remain steady, as parents are much more likely to register their kids day-of rather than ahead of time. This is in part due to the unpredictability of the weather and pandemic vacation travel. The race itself was the same course as previous years, and although attempts were made to streamline the start of the race, chaos almost always ensues when congregating several dozen young, rambunctious kids (and parents!). We’ll continue to explore how better to serve this race to make it fun, mildly competitive, and as well organized as kids can allow.

The evening entertainment went well this year. Saturday brought Uncle Pete’s Allstar BBQ Blues Band to the stage, accompanied by our hired sound guy who kept things organized throughout the weekend. On Sunday we had an opener, Anthony Shepherd, play acoustic tunes in the late afternoon while 4onthefloor got the crowd rocking after the awards. The latter band showed up a few hours late without explanation but got started right on time. Based on the cash gathered from our \$10 entry charge, we estimate **about 320 additional people** came just for the evening entertainment. This is on top of volunteers and racers who all got free entry to music both nights.

Beer sales were down for the weekend more than expected. Partly this was due to lower attendance. Additionally, we lay part of the blame on bringing in several high ABV beers which cost around only a little more but required fewer purchases to get a buzz going. Trade offs! Our biggest challenge of the weekend probably was the lack of food vendors. Due to staff shortages and supply chain issues, none of our usual four food trucks could make it. No others we reached out to in the Keweenaw were able to commit either. CHTC wound up sourcing pasties from the Mohawk Superette on short notice, a stop-gap measure that kept people fed for those who found the pasty table. These were appreciated but not necessarily the ideal food for the event. A small hot dog stand also came to assist last-minute, but reviews were mixed due to the simplicity of the fare. We hope to get our food game back in order in 2022 when the chaos of the food establishment business settles down a bit.

Over 120 volunteers helped with a variety of tasks, from setting up race courses to taking photos to checking I.D.s and more. Many racers volunteered during their downtime, while others came up specifically to help ensure the event happened smoothly. We transitioned our volunteer registration system to RunSignup, significantly enhancing the experience and allowing for much greater flexibility on the back-end of things.

280 shirts were printed for the event. These were sold to participants or given out to volunteers. The front of the shirt featured the event graphic from Chris Schmidt, while the reverse side had the CHTC and KML logos under the neckline. **648 stainless steel insulated pint glasses** were purchased as well, also featuring the event graphic and script version of the KML logo. These were given to all participants except the Junior XC. Extras of each of these are being sold on our website and at future events.

Four email campaigns with information about Trails Fest were sent out after the KML got involved roughly a month before the event. **A total of 10,603 emails were sent, of which 3,054 were opened (29% average)**. An additional six campaigns that made mention or featured Trails Fest went out prior to the KML's involvement in the event, and an email after the event with photos and a recap was released afterwards. This is the same number of emails that were sent in 2019 over roughly the same time period (mid-June to mid-September), with very similar results.

Between 8/5/2021 when we announced the KML's involvement in the event and 9/20/2021, 23 Facebook posts were released that included "Presented by the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge" and tagged the event page. **These posts garnered 91,381 views and 8,525 engagements**, an average of 3,973 and 371 per post, respectively. This is right on par with our 2019 data. Our online outreach efforts have stayed consistent despite the challenges over the past two years. An additional couple dozen posts that also mentioned "Trails Fest" in a more concise form also were posted throughout the summer but were not included in this analysis. The dedicated Facebook event had 327 people marked as going or interested, which is down significantly from prior years. This may be due to fewer people using Facebook as deeply, or slight changes in outreach strategies early in the summer that didn't drive as many people to the event page. Fortunately, it did not appear to have a big impact on our overall outreach.

The Daily Mining Gazette posted one article in the run-up to the event, a press release about the KML becoming our title sponsor. Another short video piece in anticipation of the event was released by ABC 10 UP as well.

Overall we consider the event to be a success, particularly after taking a year off and losing quite a bit of knowledge as a result. We can't wait to continue to grow and expand the event with the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge's help in the coming years. I hope your fall has gone well and you're geared up for winter. It's been a great season and planning for 2022 will begin in earnest soon!

-Nathan Miller, Executive Director
Copper Harbor Trails Club