

BOAT

Bus for Outdoor Access & Teaching



*(bi)*annual report
2020 - 2021

YOUR MISSION IS OUR MISSION

The mission of BOAT – the Bus for Outdoor Access & Teaching – is to **get other organization's missions outside.**

A not-for-profit **wilderness program on wheels** run from a custom bus, **BOAT makes expeditions easy for our partners.** We bring a full service outdoor program right to you, providing the logistical backbone for **exciting and educational outdoor experiences.**

info@theBOATbus.com | (414) 803 7080

- 03** *Table of Contents* | *you are here*
- 04** Founder's Greeting | a letter from Micah

BOAT BY...

- 05** ...the numbers | facts & figures on our impact
- 06** ...the media | our National Geographic debut
- 07** ...the model | how COVID changed us

STORIES FROM BOAT

- 09** What's in a bus? | Big Red (and the gear inside)
- 11** Trips during COVID | managing the pandemic
- 12** Pretty as a Picture | BOAT in PRNL
- 13** How'd we fund it? | the money (behind the mission)

BOAT 2022

- 15** What comes next? | 2022 vision
- 16** What do we need? | how you can help

Founder's Greeting



Hello to all friends of BOAT!

It's been too long! There are truly no words for these past two years. In early 2020 we took out an overnight youth leadership ski trip, driving through a memorable February blizzard over the Rockies with no idea it would be our last program for a year. We ended up serving 114 students in 2020 before the pandemic struck - and then we shut down. In a letter to our supporters as the severity of the pandemic set in, I wrote:

What's clear, right now, is that our focus should be elsewhere. The BOAT team is employed and safe. We hope you can focus on supporting those in need, both inside and outside of your quarantine bubble, that your dollars can go to reinforcing social safety nets torn apart by COVID, and that your attention is focused on an overdue reckoning on race in America. BOAT will be back, and we will need our community then, but right now we are OK.

We will use this as an opportunity. We know what we can do now, and have the means to do it - it is my sincere hope that BOAT 2.0 will be a stronger, more impactful program better able to serve diverse organizations as they work to move their missions outside. Until then - we wait for this to resolve!

I'm proud to say that proved true - BOAT 2.0 is happening, and we wanted to tell you the best parts:

We're running! In March '21, we supported an ice climbing trip to Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore that was covered in [National Geographic](#). In May '21, BOAT was a recipient of a coveted National Parks Land Trust grant for summer and fall programs. Learn more on pages [6](#) and [11](#).

We've moved! We're now based out of Milwaukee, WI. Our position in the midwest allows us to continue serving Colorado, while expanding support across the country.

We're starting new programs! We're looking forward to filling our 2022 season. If you know of partners we should connect with, please introduce them to me at micah@theBOATbus.com.

We want to honor the work done so far with this annual report - covering both years of the pandemic - as a first step to resuming something operational. Even with limited trips happening, it will take a few more months to recover financially from COVID. We welcome any donations - they will go directly to program expenses: fuel, food, and maintaining the bus. Learn more about this work in the pages that follow. My gratitude, as always, to each of you for coming along on this journey. While these past two years have been unexpected and full of strife, both personal and professional, we are excited to be on the other side of it, wiser and readier than ever to help connect people to the outdoors.

Be well,

Micah



by the numbers
data from “unprecedented times”



214

**students served on
trips**



\$0.00

**how much our
students paid**

all programs in 2021 were grant / donation funded



15

program partners



0

COVID cases



by the media

Our National Geographic debut

In March, after a year of lock down, we got a call from renowned writer and photographer James Edward Mills. The author of "[The Adventure Gap: Changing the Face of the Outdoors](#)," he is a leader in industry-wide efforts to diversify the outdoors. He had a vision - a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & people of color) ice climbing trip in Michigan.

A few months later, this appeared in National Geographic:



Following strict COVID protocols (it's cold with bus windows open!) and with the benefit of early vaccinations, we enjoyed a few brisk, sunny days on the ice walls of Pictured Rocks. BIPOC leaders from across Michigan met, discussing everything from Black nationalism to the best taco recipes between rounds on the ice.

Big Red was in the background, serving as a mobile warming house, snack bar, and of course the main source of transit - all told we covered 1,700 miles of driving over the long weekend.

BOAT's brief moment of fame in National Geographic!



After a full day of ice climbing, the group boards "Big Red," also known as the BOAT (Bus for Outdoor Access and Teaching).

More importantly, the trip kicked off a new model we have been embracing at BOAT: we are at our best supporting leaders, especially from marginalized communities, in achieving *their* vision of an outdoor program. It is not for us to be either the focus of new programs, nor their leaders - but to enable others with the resources we bring to bear. You'll see this reflected in our new mission statement and across our 2021 programs: **getting other missions outside.**



an evolving program model

Moving missions outside requires flexibility. To fully commit to giving community leaders quality experiences, 2021 marked a shift away from short-term programs and towards longer partnerships, deepening our relationships (and simplifying our calendar).

The result is more time in the field, and less on the road - maximizing our impact. It also allows us to streamline our operations, getting “kitted” for three main types of trips:



Wilderness Basecamp

Ride BOAT to a wilderness base camp for a week of canoeing, hiking, fishing, survival skills, and exploring the region. Typically tent camping with a central lodge, or cabins in the winter. We base in one place and move around for day trips or activities. Large groups.



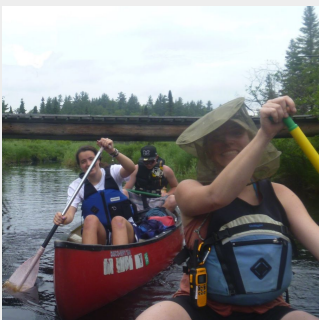
Adventure Road Trip

Play some tunes, hop on the bus, and check out a new adventure every day - a wider array of activities and campsites, switching locations on a regular basis. This lets us cover a lot of ground to see a “greatest hits” set of sites and activities. Mid-sized groups.



Expedition Backpacking

Travel off-trail through one of our premiere backpacking destinations. We’ll teach you to navigate and work as a team. You choose where to go and how difficult the days will be each day! Multiple small groups.



Custom Programs

Take BOAT to go boating! Roll up to some climbing crags. Do some low ropes or team building exercises. The sky’s the limit, and if you need something distinct from our core offerings we’ll help you plan it (or find the right partner if we aren’t it).

stories from BOAT



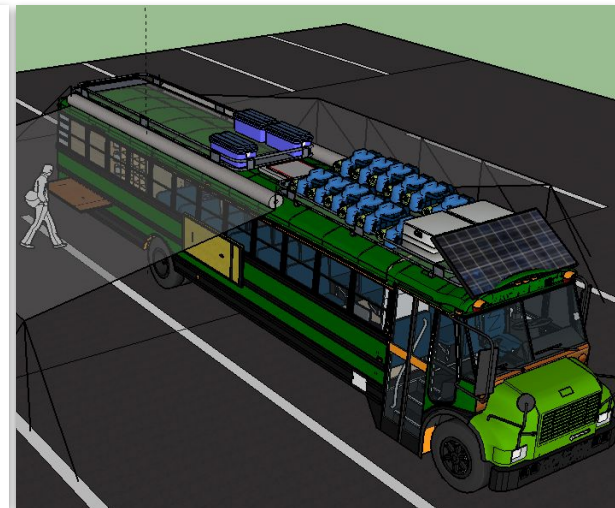
What's in a bus?

how to build a BOAT



From the very beginning, we knew we had to carry everything most outdoor programs do in a much smaller space - that meant getting creative.

Early on, we chose flexibility in design - our shelves could adjust. After two years of actually "living in it," things are more settled. A "Type A" paradise, everything lives in compact labeled and color-coded milk crates, where gear can quickly be found, cleaned, and put into the field. We can get a trip loaded and on the road in less than an hour.



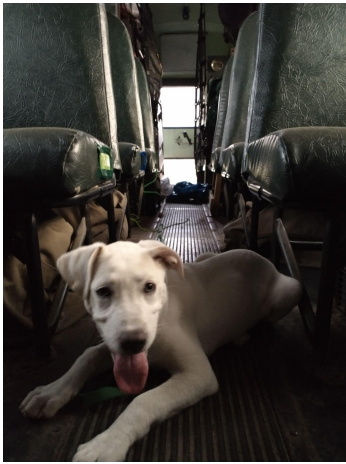
All gear - down to our tablets - is color coded: red, green, and blue, and evenly split to support 36 students in three groups of 12.

In 2019, we focused on backpacking supplies - lightweight, and meant to travel with students in packs on expeditions. But throughout 2021, we saw an increasing need for a more accessible type of program: BOAT's own version of "car camping," basecamping from the bus. Larger groups, younger groups, and others all benefit from this less intensive introduction to camping.

A new slate of equipment was needed to ensure camping trips that sometimes border on luxurious: larger cook sets, heavy-duty propane stoves, portable toilets, solar showers, undercarriage water storage, solar-powered lights, and the bus itself providing some of the rain shelter, as seen in an image below from a very wet camp out.

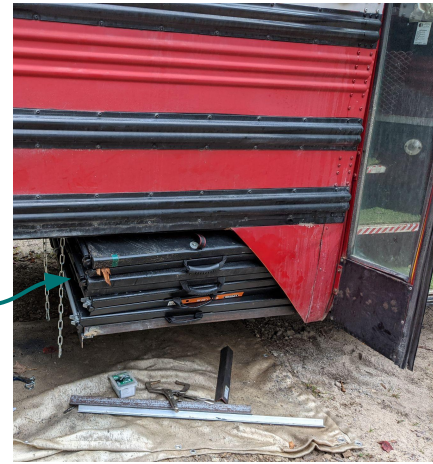


What's in a bus? The tour continued.



Backpacks sit under seats...

...while tables have their own storage under the bus, for easy set-up when it's time to cook.



Packing the bus itself becomes part of the trip - here a scout troop helps work in coordination to tie down cargo before a trip to the Upper Peninsula.



A solar array charges a deep cycle battery, powering spotlights that cover our bus-side kitchen at night.

Just a glimpse at what we carry:

36 backpacks, adjustable sizing
>50 warm layers
36 all-size rain ponchos / shelters
9 1-burner stoves (backpacking)
3 4-burner stoves (basecamping)

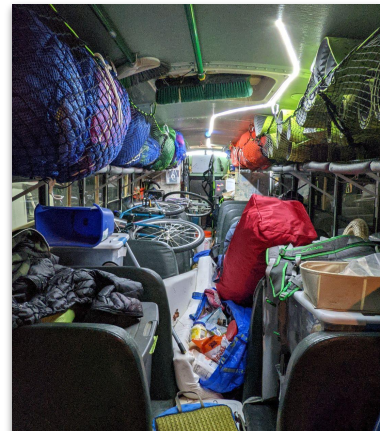
6 first-aid kits
3 throw ropes
9 sleeping tents
3 bug nets
3 sun shades

1 plastic skeleton (for education!)
9 gravity-based water filters
1 desk with smart speaker / wifi
18+ cooking utensils for basecamps
125 gallons of water storage

1 emergency battery starter
1 20-ton bottle jack
5 state atlases (and growing)
13 field guides
35 sq ft of cargo netting

Backpacks sit under seats, sleeping bags in the overhead compartment, participant gear on the roof, and nearly everything else meticulously organized in just over 70 square feet of storage less than 5' tall.

We're always adding new features. For example, 2021 brought new undercarriage storage for water jugs (and even a hot water carafe) and tables, not to mention LED lights along the whole bus. Cleaning is also a constant journey - as you can see at right, by the time we're moving across states at the end of the season it can get pretty chaotic!





Courses in COVID

How BOAT managed the pandemic



A healthy understanding of the science led to healthy trips.

In the early days of the pandemic, the risks of outdoor transmission were unclear. We cancelled all programs for 2020. But as the science evolved, so too did our tactics. In close partnership with epidemiological experts, and paired with the roll out of vaccines, we developed best practices that ultimately resulted in zero COVID issues on BOAT programs in 2021:

- ☐ Masks on the bus
- ☐ Ventilation while driving
- ☐ Testing required before trips
- ☐ "Pods" sharing tent groups
- ☐ Open windows when stationary
- ☐ More tents / tarps, fewer cabins!



Pretty as a Picture

BOAT in PRNL

PICTURED ROCKS NATIONAL LAKESHORE (PRNL)

A “crown jewel” of Michigan, this national park became home to a majority of BOAT programs in 2021.

The grant was a longshot.

In 2019, we took leaders from [Detroit Outdoors](#) through a massive snowstorm in the mountains to a conference of outdoor programs focused on access. Two years later, that blizzard encounter led to a one-off phone call, less than week to apply, and a grant: “**The National Parks Land Trust “Challenge Cost Share”** goes exclusively to partnerships “that promote access to outdoor recreation, stewardship, and connecting people to the outdoors.”

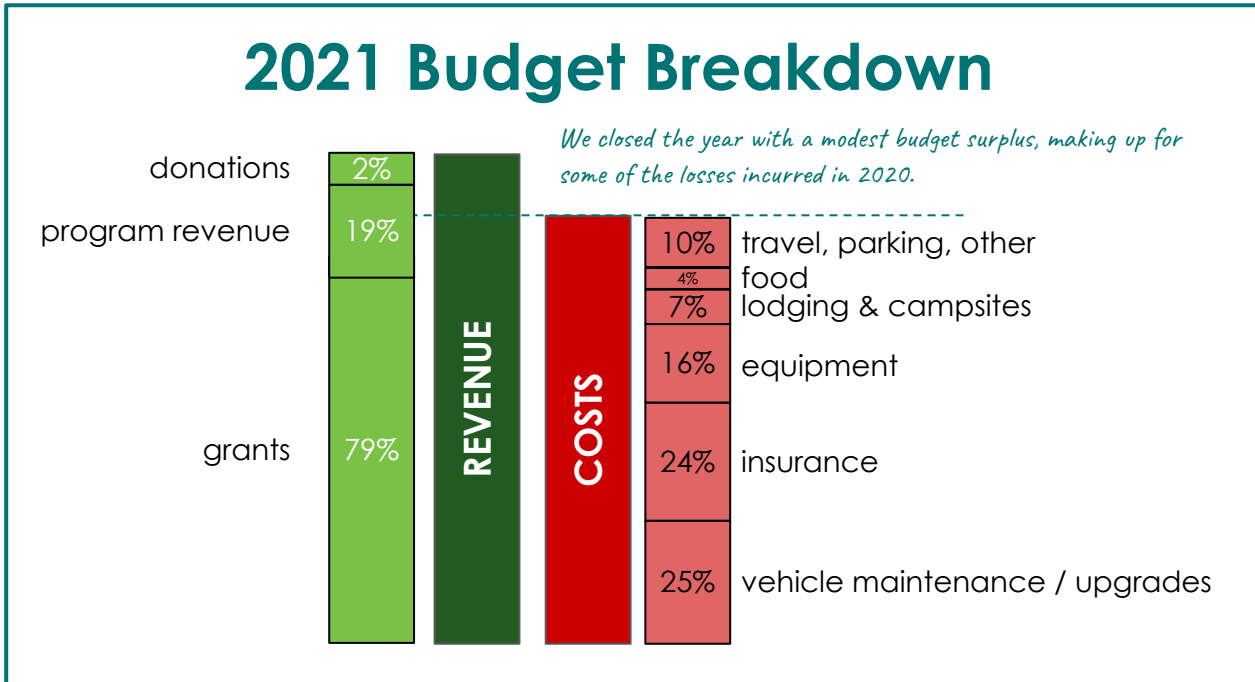
BOAT and Detroit Outdoors partnered to run multiple programs connecting BIPOC youth and adults to the National Lakeshore, including an Indigenous basket weaving clinic, a youth leadership backpacking excursion, a wilderness first aid class, and a pilot for future partnerships with the city of Detroit.





How did we fund it?

the money behind the mission



Surviving - and getting ready for thriving

While COVID wreaked havoc on our finances, some generous donations enabled us to carry through 2020 with manageable losses. We cut our operating costs as best we could, focusing on inevitable expenses like maintenance and parking. We ended the year at a modest deficit.

Our grants have us back on track in 2021. While we aren't on sustainable footing yet, we are well positioned to continue to expand programs that will get us there. Better yet, we did so at no cost to program participants, thanks to donations from our supporters and generous grants. Our 2022 looks fruitful, with several partnerships that will bring in both grants and earned income, helping us truly recover from 2020.

To grow and expand we continue to rely on donations of time, money, and connections - your support helped us get this far, and every dollar you give now goes right to 2022 programs. **Think you can support? [Reach out to us!](#)**

BOAT in 2022





2022 VISION

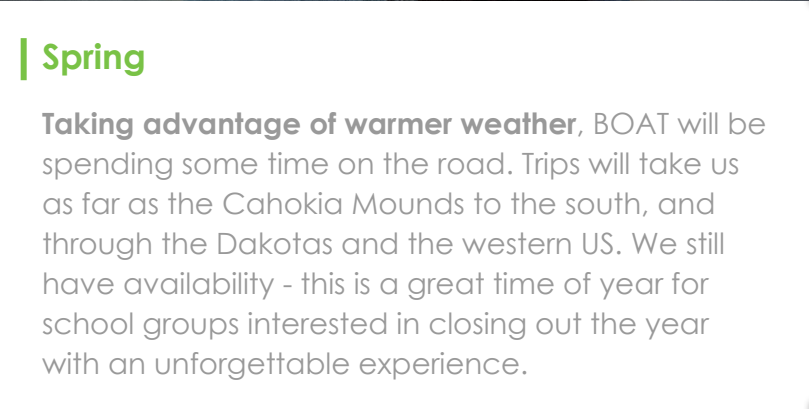
Down the road with BOAT

Our 2020 vision from our 2019 annual report...didn't quite turn out the way we expected. Here is hoping our 2022 vision fares a little better!



| Winter

While winter is mostly about planning the year ahead, BOAT will be helping facilitate youth skiing programs in lower Michigan - and catch us again at the Michigan Ice Fest supporting a BIPOC group attending and learning to climb! This mid-February event is open to the public - come say hello and climb some ice with us at [Michigan Ice Fest](#).



| Spring

Taking advantage of warmer weather, BOAT will be spending some time on the road. Trips will take us as far as the Cahokia Mounds to the south, and through the Dakotas and the western US. We still have availability - this is a great time of year for school groups interested in closing out the year with an unforgettable experience.



| Summer

Our peak season, BOAT will be supporting a range of programs. 2022 program partners include multiple youth programs focused on cross-cultural immersion to reduce segregation, a primarily Spanish-speaking backpacking program for children of immigrant families, an interfaith girls trip, and other programs that help underserved communities access outdoor spaces.



| Fall

As weather cools down, so does our schedule.. Fall is typically a time for weekend retreats. We're still finalizing plans. Some weekends are reserved for follow-up programs that reinforce connections built during our summer programs, and we hope to partner with municipal recreation departments to help them offer camping trips to residents.





What do we need?

Support our mission in 2022



BOAT is possible because of volunteers and donors

We're an unconventional idea, with some unconventional asks. Grinding rusty bolts to remove seats? Figuring out how to hold books in a shelf that moves? Converting an old file cabinet into a mobile medicine cabinet?

All of these projects take a dose of creativity, resilience in the face of obstacles (and rust), and funding for a few trips to the hardware store (plus a mistake or two). The result is a program that is truly changing how groups get outside, and if you're receiving this report - we can do it because of what you've done for us.

In 2022 we need a few things:

- **TIME:** Want to run programs or drive Big Red? theBOATbus.com/support
- **GIFTS:** Able to support our programs financially? theBOATbus.com/donate
- **CONNECTIONS:** More partnerships makes us stronger - introduce someone who wants to get outside at micah@theBOATbus.com.

BOAT

Bus for Outdoor Access & Teaching



get in touch

phone: (414) 803 7080

e-mail: info@theBOATbus.com

website: www.theBOATbus.com