

TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Fall 2021

The Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club is a recreational hiking association of volunteers who preserve and improve the Appalachian Trail as the nation's premier, continuous, long-distance footpath.

President's Report

by Bill Neilan

Summer has been busy for the RATC. The weather was hot and dry and it seemed like everyone who can hike decided the time was now. The Triple Crown points were all busy, even on weekdays. Of course parking continues to be a sore point at all the trail heads, but some relief came with the ribbon cutting of the amazing new Catawba Greenway Trail with its own new parking lot. The new lot is on Route 779 just North of the McAfee Knob parking lot on Route 311. There is also parking at the Catawba Community Center on Route 779. The new trail is a 1.7 mile hike up to the fire road. From there hikers can get to McAfee Knob or the A.T. The new trail is scenic and well laid out so that the 500 foot ascent to the top is made easily. Many thanks to Liz Belcher and the mid-day crew for their great planning and hard work.

In late August the RATC was able to once again host our annual Corn Boil. Although the Konnarock crew could not attend, we officially recognized them and all trail maintainers for making the Appalachian Trail safe and erosion free.



We did not have the usual turnout, but because we moved the food outdoors and followed other Covid rules the folks that did come had a good time and had plenty of good food to eat. Here's hoping that at the 2022 event we will be able to actually have the Konnarock folks there so we can thank them in person.

In September, Parkway Brewery held their "Pints With a Purpose" event with the RATC as the guest. Parkway offered to donate one dollar for every pint of beer sold during the three hour event. We could not pass this up! It didn't take a whole lot of advertising to muster up some participants and by the end of the night Parkway donated \$292.00 to the RATC. I wish to express my gratitude to Parkway and to all the members

that showed up and had one for the club. This was a great fund raiser and a lot of fun.

The last event of the summer was Roanoke's GoFest. This is an annual event usually held at the sports complex, but because of the new irrigation system there GoFest was moved to downtown Roanoke. GoFest is all about the outdoors and is a perfect opportunity for RATC to get our message out and to engage with many people. We had t-shirts and hats for sale but the primary reason for being there was to seek new members. I think we succeeded because we added ten new members and renewed six current memberships. I want to thank Mark Farrell, Suzanne Neal, Jennifer Frye and Cathy Butler for all their help in making this a big success. With Cathy's salesmanship we sold many t-shirts and hats. Also, a thank you to Kathryn at the ATC for the loan of equipment that made our setup better.

Winter is coming. Don't let that stop you from getting outside. The winter views are different than the summer views and the hiking is easier. Get out there and enjoy them!

Did you know that you can use Amazon to financially support the RATC?

You can support the mission of RATC by using AmazonSmile when you make purchases through Amazon. AmazonSmile is a website operated by Amazon that lets you enjoy the same wide selection of products, low prices and convenient features (including Amazon Prime) as on Amazon.com. The difference is that when you shop on AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com or Amazon Smile app), the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to eligible charitable organizations, such as RATC. Details on page 4!

Trail Supervisor's Report

by Mike Vaughn

Each year we report the number of hours worked on the trail to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Park Service. The reporting period is tied to the federal fiscal year, from October to September. Our numbers over the past year were up significantly from 2020. Club members put in 5,700 over the past year. This compares to 4,800 hours worked last year, a year that saw a large cutback in hours due to the pandemic. These hours include work done on the 16 shelters on the section of trail maintained by the club.

Over the past year we have added 21 new maintainers on our section of trail. We now have over 100 maintainers. All of the nine side trails the club maintains now have maintainers assigned to them. I have heard many positive comments from hikers on the good condition of our trails. This is a great tribute to all of the hard work put in by our group of main-

tainers. They are truly the heart and soul of our club.

In addition to all of the regular clipping, blazing, and blow-down removal performed by the maintainers, the Monday work crew performed 38 work hikes over the past year. They did extensive work on the section of trail south of Route 220 in Botetourt County, adding over 100 steps. They also rehabbed five bridges on our section. They did some further trail improvements on the section up to McAfee Knob, including installing 170 feet of log cribbing.

In the coming year, we plan on doing work on a variety of locations on our section. These include work near Laurel Creek, Bailey Gap, and additional trail work on McAfee Knob. We will also continue to perform repair work on some bridges in our section.

Come out and join us if you can! You can sign up for work hikes on our Meetup site.



The photos to the left and very top (above) are the “before” shots.

In the “in process” photo (top right), Bill Neilan, Jim Webb, Alex Plunkett, and Mark Farrell have broken the large boulder in foreground.

In the two lower “after” photos (above), note the two boulders which have been cut to afford a level pathway for hikers. Hikers who have stepped on an uneven slick, wet, or icy rock will understand the significant improvement this represents, both in terms of hiker enjoyment and hiker safety.

The work required to implement even “simple” improvements is as demanding as it is rewarding.

Using AmazonSmile

by Jim Beeson, Vice President

If you use Amazon or decide to start, you can easily support the RATC financially at no cost to you.

Heres how to get started:

Use your internet browser and go to Smile.Amazon.com or your Amazon cell phone app and activate AmazonSmile. This can be done within the settings or programs & features menus of your phone, or in your account section of Amazon.com.

You will be prompted to select a charitable organization - Select Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club (RATC). Now, whenever you make a purchase, use Smile.Amazon.com instead of Amazon.com.

That's all there is to it!

McAfee Knob Parking

New blog, additional parking

McAfee Knob, and to a lesser extent Dragon's Tooth and Tinker Cliffs, continue to grow in popularity as hiking destinations. Pressure on these trailheads' parking lots continues to grow as well, and efforts are being made to improve both access and hiker safety.

Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist, has just posted the initial version of new blog about the Catawba Greenway and its links to the McAfee Knob section of the Appalachian Trail: <http://www.ratc.org/catawba-greenway-new-parking-for-mcafee-knob-and-a-new-loop-trail/>

This blog includes maps and links for all three parking areas, map and detailed description of the new Catawba loop hike and a few photos. She will be adding more photos and no doubt correcting errors, but she wanted to get

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this out ASAP because the main McAfee lot is already overflowing frequently.

The club's website has also updated our website page about McAfee Knob and the Triple Crown to reflect this new information. <https://www.ratc.org/mcafee-knob-and-the-triple-crown/>

Roanoke County and Virginia Tech recently announced the completion of the 2.9 mile Catawba Greenway with access to McAfee Knob, one of the most iconic hikes along the Appalachian Trail, including two parking lots: one with 25 spaces and the second with 12 spaces.

Watch this video for an introductory overview of the new greenway: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8l282vCaDs>.

Hiker's Reports

by Ron Bradbury

Hike: Black Horse Gap to Daleville Park-n-Ride
Date: 8-22/23-2021

Participants: Ron and Keli Bradbury

Knocking out RATC's hikes one and two with a stop in the middle, the total distance we covered was upward of 17 miles. In addition to our interest in covering all 120 miles of RATC-maintained trails, this hike suggested itself having the perfect day one and day two distances for our available schedule with conveniently-located shelter for an overnight.

Relying on Homer Witcher's shuttle service, we parked in Daleville and hiked back to the car. Homer's dedication to the trail also provided a serendipitous bonus in the form of a freshly-moved privy at Fullhardt Knob. (Who knew, but being one of the first ten users of a "new" privy on the AT is decidedly more pleasant than being the 493,222nd. The Witchers do an amazing job in supporting the AT infrastructure, including maintaining privies and shelters.)

Heading south, the trail loses elevation from Black Horse Gap for a bit but then climbs substantially to Fullhardt Knob. Upon our arrival at Fullhardt Knob shelter, we met a solo thru-hiker--a mother of three on a bit of a hiatus from her kids--along with her dog. The rain collection cistern at the shelter was full and water was plentiful.

Day two was largely downhill with the notable exception of a short, steep-like-a-pitched-roof climb across a cow pasture just before crossing the Lee Highway. We gained immense respect for the cows that amble up and down that field.



Many AT shelters are surrounded by relatively flat, tent-friendly terrain as here at Fullhardt Knob.

The trail crosses four roads including an underpass beneath Interstate 81. For a few hundred yards, highway traffic and hikers run parallel courses in close proximity to each other. Crossing route 220 offered the tempting option of an off-trail, straight dash to the car, but we dutifully finished the short hike through the woods on the trail.

Hike: Peter's Mountain Kiosk to Route 622 (Near Captain, VA)
Date: 8-8/9-2021

Participants: Evan Jessie, Ron and Keli Bradbury

In August 2020, we hiked south from Peter's Mountain for three days. As we marveled at the remoteness of our trailhead and what we might do in the event of an emergency, we happened across two very large Timber Rattlers. (Having grown up in the Great Dismal Swamp, I have encountered many snakes and these were easily some of the largest pit vipers I have ever seen. It's possible that straddling one of these rattlers mid-stride had some bearing on my conviction, but these snakes were BIG.) But now fast forward to August 2021.

After enjoying a shuttle ride with Dirty Boots Shuttle Service from our planned terminus, we started hiking at the same kiosk, only this year we hiked north. Conversation again turned to the remoteness

of this location and, prophetically, back to rattlesnakes. Within about 15 minutes of our hike start, our snake-talk apparently manifested another rattler right on the middle of the trail. This particular snake was somewhat more agitated and belligerent than the two last year; last year's snakes rattled, moved a bit, then coiled and rattled some more. This snake just sat there and dared us to do something about it.



He finally moved a bit off the trail, but not so far that we were able to pass safely without making a wide, off-trail detour.

The rest of the hike was notable for its climb. Although my hiking app indicated that we were only climbing from approximately 2500 feet through 4000 feet, we felt



as if we'd climbed a mile. A good portion of the trail was rocky, and not tiny-pebbles-under-your-soles



rocky. The rocks were large, some were loose, and we found navigating them as we climbed to be quite exhausting.

The rewarding vista on this hike is named Wind Rock, an outcropping every bit as spectacular as McAfee Knob but apparently without as good an agent. Only at this summit did we encounter other humans, and there just a few. The former Guthook app (now renamed Farout) identified a suitable campsite with water, which we shared with a couple other section hikers.

The bear hunters parked near our car when we left on day two were interested to hear that we had not seen any bears despite hiking in their happy hunting grounds.

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club Application New and Renewal	<i>IF ACCEPTED FOR MEMBERSHIP, I AGREE TO:</i> 1. Support the objectives of the RATC 2. Abide by the rules of the national and state parks and forests 3. Respect the interests of the owner when on private property 4. Keep trails and woodlands free of litter, and 5. Abide by the instructions of the leader on group hikes and trips	
Name(s)	New Member Packet Fee: \$5	_____
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City	Individual life membership x \$250	_____
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Phone	Donation	\$ _____
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Dues are payable in January of each year. Make checks to "RATC" or use PayPal at ratc.org

Please send dues and any questions about money or membership to:
Treasurer, PO Box 12282, Roanoke, VA 24024

RATC is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Membership dues are tax-deductible.

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