

TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

February - April 2025

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.

Pedestrian bridge opens Twenty years in the making

Some problems take time to solve. More than 20 years ago a trail-wide survey of every AT road crossing identified the intersection of the AT and Route 311 as one of the most dangerous crossings on the trail in part because of the 55 MPH vehicle speed limit around a blind curve over the crest of hill. That survey immediately prompted the RATC to begin working on a solution, well before hiker traffic reached today's impressive levels. According to RATC archivist and former club president Diana Christopulos, these are some of the early building blocks of the bridge's foundation:

* RATC volunteer Liz Belcher accompanied then-ATC Virginia Director Andrew Downs up to the parking lot shortly after his arrival in Roanoke in 2013 and convinced him the bridge

should be a high priority

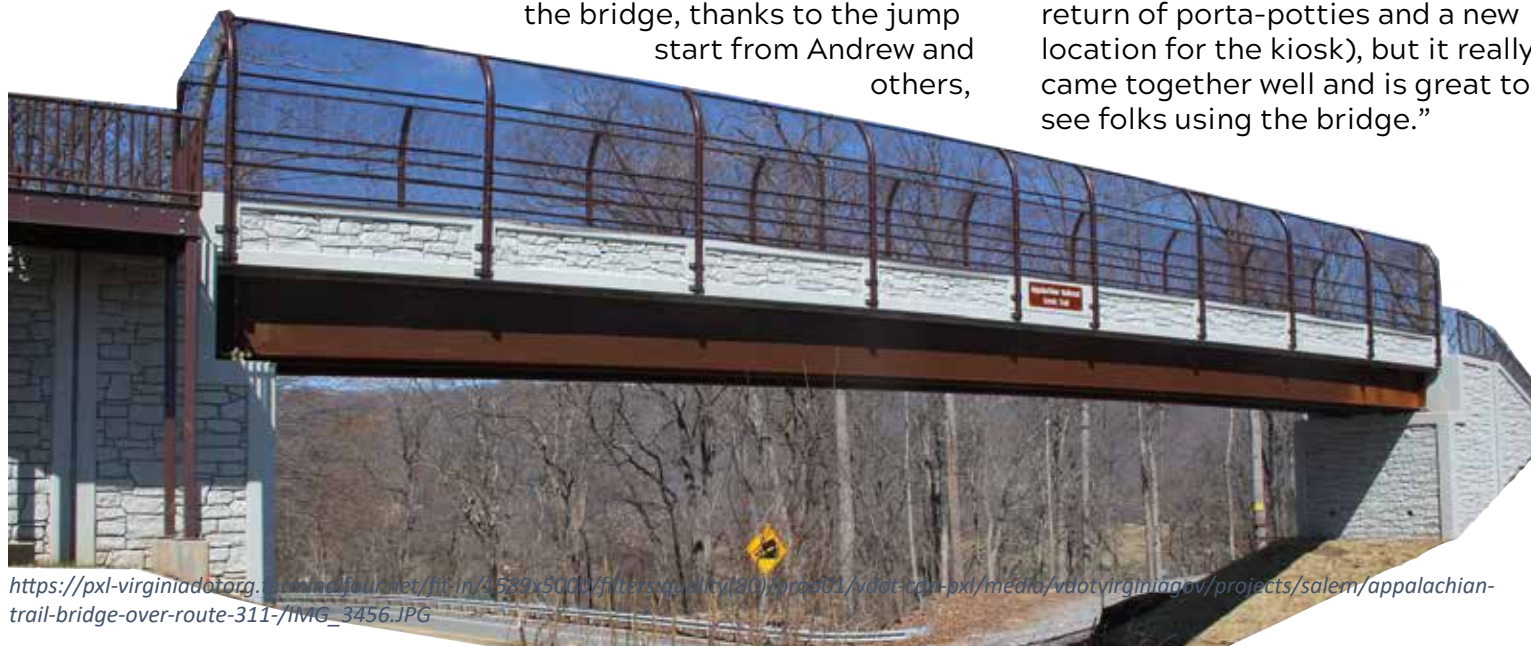
* The federal Department of Transportation began providing dedicated funding (90%) for pedestrian projects about that time, and the Roanoke-Allegany Regional Commission here in Roanoke had authority over funds for the Virginia Department of Transportation.

* Andrew Downs led the charge in getting about 30 letters of support for the bridge project in 2016 when Diana Christopulos was RATC president, which made approval a slam dunk.

Brett Randolph of VDOT convened meetings of a planning group in May 2017, with Andrew Downs, Liz Belcher, Brett Randolph, Diana Christopulos and other charter members. That planning group is still meeting! Ed Clark, the new National Park Service AT Supervisor, comes from Vinton and has been very active in making good things happen regionally. Beyond the bridge, thanks to the jump start from Andrew and others,

and in conjunction with the Triple Crown Visitor Use Management Plan completed over 4 years with the National Park Service, we have a unified effort to keep improving the entirety of the Triple Crown corridor. Susan Terwilliger, Brian Boggs and Carol Rowlett are now representing the RATC on a new committee for operation and management of the Triple Crown.

According to Kathryn Haddon-Powell, as the bridge neared completion, "RATC really rallied. In last the couple of days we did have to finish up the trail construction/ old trail decommission (shout-out to Mike Vaughn and the wheelbarrow crew!) and get signs posted (shout-out to Kelly and Linda Mulheren!) Roanoke Cement donated boulders, and Suzanne Neal and Brian Wilson worked with a contractor to get them in place just in the nick of time before the fencing was removed. There are still more finishing touches to come (like the return of porta-potties and a new location for the kiosk), but it really came together well and is great to see folks using the bridge."



https://pxl-virginiadot.org/-/media/vdot/vlrqiniagov/projects/salem/appalachian-trail-bridge-over-route-311-/IMG_3456.JPG

Member Notes
2025 Annual Meeting

March 15,,2025
by Pamela White Wolsey, RATC Social Coordinator

We celebrated our Annual Meeting, honoring outgoing officers and welcoming the new ones at the St. Marks Methodist Church in Daleville.

Members were recognized for their incredible years of service (some with over 25 years!) and for their volunteer hours (with one reaching over 10,000 hours!) Guests were welcomed by Bob Peckman entertaining us on the harmonica and they all enjoyed a delicious meal with too many desserts to count.

Bill “Circuit Rider” Newman, a well-seasoned thru-hiker, inspired us with his uplifting message about the impact of trail clubs.

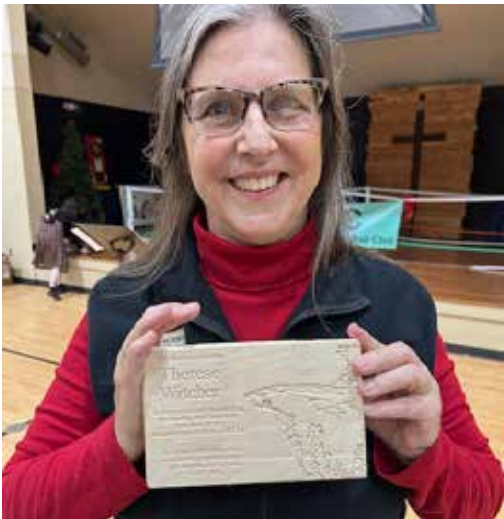
A special thank you to our outgoing president, Therese Witcher for her dedication to the trail and our club, and a big welcome to Linda Mulheren, our new president!



A variety of club members were recognized for volunteer hours ranging between 100 and 1500 hours.



Jim Webb (7556 hours), Diana Christopulos (8234), Therese Witcher (7236) and Homer Witcher (10,586) were honored with a Presidential Life Service Award in recognition of their cumulative volunteer support of the AT (left.)



Therese Witcher has relinquished the gavel (and probably picked up a shovel), passing the torch of presidential leadership to Linda Mulheren. Among other avenues of service, Linda and her husband Kelly have been primary movers in boundary marking, a rigorous task performed when trees are bare of leaves in the fall and winter months.



President’s Report:

By Linda Mulheren

First, let me express my sincere thanks to the institution of the Witchers.



Therese and Homer have earned nearly every award presented by RATC and ATC. Their combined years of service are tough to beat and reflect their unwavering commitment to our club and the Appalachian Trail. Typically, one would thank their predecessor. However, in this case, Therese and Homer are a team. While Therese has excellently executed the duties of president for the past two years, Homer has been almost equally busy with trail work, shuttling, and providing general assistance where needed. They are not leaving our community but will be more available to engage in work of their choice and spend more time with their beloved family.

Let me begin the recap of the last few months with some good news. Over 800 miles of trail were initially closed due to Hurricane Helene. Now, fewer than 20 miles remain to repair. This is frankly a miracle; although many people from various agencies contributed, the majority of the work was done by volunteers. Opening even a mile of heavily damaged trail is a significant achievement. Just try to imagine the effort required to open up 800 miles. I can’t overstate my awe at that accomplishment.

Locally, while our forests hibernated, the 311 bridge project moved forward. Without much notice, a small group of those involved were invited to finally celebrate its completion. Just as we painted the new blazes, a group of high schoolers

from Ohio made their way up and over Route 311 as the pedestrian bridge opened at last. The new route to McAfee Knob is incredible and beautiful, and I hope you all will venture out there to see it soon. As always, parking at the trailhead is limited, so please, please use the shuttle. It took a lot of work and planning to make that option a reality. Taking the shuttle means a less stressful day for everyone and ensures safety for the many individuals who want to climb that mountain. Your community is grateful!

This year has already been a busy time for the club. Boundary season has wrapped up with around 100 monuments inspected and refreshed. We are so far removed in time from the original surveys that we now have to create new witness trees. If this sounds like a foreign language to you, I’ve been there. Boundary work is a fun adventure with its own learning curve. If I’ve piqued your interest, great! Give the Land Management Supervisor a call next fall, and he will happily tell you all about it. We could use a good team of volunteers with those skills.

I am proud to share that our “Giving Back” event has caught the attention of the ATC. In celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the ATC, clubs along the trail are finding creative ways to honor this milestone. We are inviting everyone to contribute

to our cause and “Give Back” to this wonderful place and opportunity to explore the beauty of nature. Has it ever crossed your mind how fortunate we are that people long ago not only recognized the value of this natural treasure but also ensured it would endure for future generations? I am grateful. So I give back. Will you join me?

I can name a handful of our members who do the majority of the club’s giving. This includes those who put in hard labor (which I can attest is quite satisfying) and many who handle administrative tasks too! With around 700 members, there are numerous jobs to be done to keep this organization running smoothly. Trail work is im-



Don’t forget that purchasing a specialty AT plate from the Virginia DMV helps out our trail clubs.

portant, but so is boundary work, trail ambassadors, marketing, data management, event planning, tool maintenance, teaching, accounting, social media input, surveying, and trash collecting! You name it. This club could likely benefit from your talents in some way. And let’s not forget the value of helping our young people, as working for something you love brings a sense of pride and ownership.

Let’s “Give Back” and show that volunteerism is not a dying value!

VARO Volunteer of the Year

Homer Witcher has been presented with the Volunteer of the Year award from Virginias Regional Office (VARO) of the Regional Partnership Committee.



These are Kathryn Herndon-Powell's comments about the award:

"It has been a privilege to facilitate nominations and voting for the Volunteer of the Year award among the 8 A.T. Clubs in Virginia for 12 years now, and I'm usually glad I don't get a vote because I wouldn't know how to pick among all the dedicated volunteers who get nominated by their fellow club leaders. Most of the

time, the nominees aren't well known outside of their own club unless they've attended RPC meetings. This year was different on both counts – just about everyone knows who Homer is, and I wished I could throw in a vote for him. A few folks from other clubs expressed surprise that he hadn't received the award already at some point.

"I have always found Homer's status as a local celebrity delightful. It's no surprise, when you meet a hiker on the Trail in our area and mention RATC, for them to say "Do you know Homer?" And they really light up when you say "yes". They love to share what a great shuttle experience they had, something interesting about the area that Homer told them, or just how inspiring it was to meet him. But of course, Homer's charm



Homer, often with family members by his side, has done pretty much every conceivable trail-related task, from digging privvy pits and building picnic tables to assuming leadership and administrative duties. His shuttle services are legendary; hikers are in good hands when the "Im Homer" license plate and driver arrive at a trail head.

and hospitality as a shuttle driver is only a small part of his massive impact on the Trail and hiking community over his several decades of service. You would be hard pressed to find another

section of the whole Trail, from Georgia to Maine, that has been so thoroughly built, rebuilt, and lovingly cared for as long as the Witchers (led by their industrious patriarch) have been caring for the A.T. in Botetourt County. And I'm pretty sure Homer has lent a hand over the years on every other inch of RATC's section as well, not to mention OCVT's section and any place he's called upon. The way Homer urged Therese to serve as RATC President the past two years, and supported her as VP, is only the latest instance of his tendency to step up and fill a need wherever it arises.

"I can't overstate the value of the Witchers' relationships in the community. Tinker Cliffs to Troutville is a very complicated section of Trail, with challenging access and dozens of neighbors. If the land owners adjacent to federal land know RATC, you can bet they know Homer and Therese, and odds are

they have a friendly feeling toward the Trail that stems from the friendly interactions they've had with the Witchers. It helps that Homer is such a charismatic personality, but I think the work he does for the A.T. is so clearly a genuine labor of love that it's absolutely contagious. You need look no further than Homer's children and grandchildren to see that effect at work – every one of them has caught the A.T. maintenance bug, and the Trail and our community is so much stronger for it.

"Both personally and on behalf of ATC, I am thrilled to congratulate Homer on his extremely well-deserved recognition as 2025 Virginia Appalachian Trail Volunteer of the Year."

Kathryn Herndon-Powell
Regional Director, The Virginias
Regional Manager, Central Virginia

Trail Supervisor's Report

by Mike Vaughn

I am very excited to be back as Trail Supervisor. Previously, I was Trail Supervisor for four years, from 2019 to 2023. It is always enjoyable to get out and work on the trail.

As you know, Jim Webb has been Trail Supervisor for the past two years. Jim also served as Trail Supervisor from 2015 to 2019, so he is now taking a well-deserved rest from the many duties of the position.

My priority going forward is ensuring that hikers have an enjoyable experience on our section of trail. Our club maintains 121 miles of the AT, in addition to more than 30 miles of side trails. I want to work

with our maintainers in doing all we can to make sure that the trails are well-blazed, clear of blow-downs, and vegetation is properly cut back.

What separates us from other hiking and outdoor clubs in the area is that we are a trail maintaining club. This was the primary purpose of the people that founded the club in 1932. This is still true today, nearly 100 years later.

Over 100 club members are involved in trail maintenance. These individuals work on a section of trail that averages about three miles. They go out several times each year and do the hard work that is needed to ensure the trail is actually a trail and not an overgrown mess.

We still have a need for some additional maintainers. At this

point, several of our sections have no maintainers on them. Please contact me at mikeva999@yahoo.com or at 540-992-1350 if you are interested in becoming a trail maintainer. Training and equipment will be provided.

Going forward, there are several major projects coming up on our section of trail. Below is a recap of these projects:

War Spur Relocation: This a relocation of a steep and badly eroded section of the AT just south of the intersection with the War Spur trail in the Mountain Lake wilderness. The ATC Konnarock crew has been digging new trail for the past four years. Most of the 6,000 feet of new trail has been completed. The Konnarock crew, along with RATC volunteers, will be working out there for three weeks this July

and August and should complete the relocation.

Catawba Shelter: Plans are to build 12 tent sites near the Catawba shelter. Lumber for the work has already been transported to near the work site. The Konnarock crew, along with RATC members, will be starting construction of the tent pads in May. This project probably won't be completed until next year.

Andy Layne Trail Relocation: Plans are to install a new bridge upstream from the current bridge crossing. In addition, a new parking lot will be constructed south of the current parking lot. This land that this portion of the Andy Layne trail is located is owned by the Roanoke Cement Company. The relocation is being done at their request. They have gener-

ously offered to fund the construction of the new bridge and parking lot. This work will be done by a contractor. Approximately one and half miles of new trail will have to be built for this relocation. The club will primarily be responsible for the trail building.

Craig Creek Bridge Replacement: In 2023 The Forest Service performed a structural evaluation of the bridge across Craig Creek. They determined the bridge had deteriorated and was unsafe for foot traffic. The bridge was then removed. Plans are to build a new bridge at the site of the old bridge, which is just north of the AT crossing on Route 624 in Craig County. The new bridge is currently in the design phase. Construction of the bridge is expected to occur next year.

Daleville Relocation: In the past few years two apartment complexes have been built on land adjoining the trail corridor just south of Route 220 in Botetourt County. The current trail is with fifty feet of the property line of the apartments. Plans are to place the trail further in the woods. This will entail building about a half mile of new trail. The club will do this. We are currently waiting on NPS approval to start this project.

As can be seen, the next couple of years will be a very busy time on our section of trail. The improvements outlined above will help ensure that hikers for many years to come can enjoy everything the Trail has to offer. I find it very rewarding to work with all the fellow stewards of this resource and look forward to seeing many of you out on the trail in the year ahead.

Vestiges of Helene

Date: March, 2025

George Dietrich, Jim Webb, Mickey Pellillo, and Walter Shroyer worked on section of the Appalachian Trail from Rt 611 (Slide Mountain Road) to 608 (Licksillet Hollow Road).

We went out with a sawyer (someone certified to use a chainsaw on the AT) to help finish clearing the trees off of this AT section caused by Hurricane Helene. We cut and removed 8 trees blocking the trail. They were all oak trees and it took us about 4 hours. It was a beautiful day and we saw 3 other hikers and two hunters.

We can now say, "There are no down trees blocking the Appalachian Trail in our section".



Tinker Creek bridge - cleaning out the culverts

March 8 and 14, 2025

Participants: Homer and Therese Witcher; Kevin, Brenin, Darin & Ryan Witcher; Kathryn Plunkett; Nathan Peterson; Adam Day; Bill Newman; Conner & Kaitlyn McBane

The heavy rains and flooding in February caused a lot of debris to clog up the Tinker Creek bridge.

We received a picture from Robert Bomber at the beginning of March and decided that this was a task for the Witcher clan. We started the attack on March 8th and made some great headway, but we couldn't leave the task incomplete. On March 14th, we completed the job with the help of 3 honorary members.

Thanks to Kevin and Conner, my chainsaw received a couple of unscheduled cleanings in the creek; this is not an approved chainsaw maintenance method.

Clan Witcher unleashed Bear Box installation at Pig Farm

March 16, 2025

Participants: Homer and Therese Witcher; Nathan, Taylor, Skye & Emi Peterson; Kevin, Brenin & Ryan Witcher; Adam Day; Ian Vest; Jack Ayersman, Taylor Petty, Bill Newman

The Witcher clan was at it again on March 16th. With the help of some friends, a new bear box was installed at the Pig Farm Campsite. This involved carrying the 300-pound bear box over 100 yards uphill through a briar patch. While the guys did the manual labor, the ladies went to Campbell Shelter and did some maintenance tasks.





Date: 2/25/25
 Location: 311 pedestrian bridge, trail North
 Attending: Mike Scott, Mike Vaughn, Greg Stick, Jim Harshfield, Pete Irvine & Jim Webb

This was our second work hike inside the construction fence on the trail connecting the new pedestrian bridge to the AT. With only 6 volunteers, which is the minimum for moving the step stones, I knew we would have a busy day. This section of the hillside was very rocky which made the digging and placing of the step rocks difficult. Extra time was taken in the placement. Four steps were placed before lunch which used all the stones. After lunch, we removed a section of the construction fence

and continued up the hill connecting to previously built trail.
 At the same time as the steps were being put in, a ramp from the bridge landing to the fire road was being carved out of the rocky side-hill. This will help prompt hikers returning from the knob on the fire road to cross Route 311 on the bridge and not run across at the blind turn.



Final prep for the bridge opening

Date: 2/7/25
 Location: Trail North of 311 Pedestrian bridge
 Attending: Susan Terwilliger, Greg Still, Bruce Agnew, Dave Grimm, John Grant, Gary Moore, Greg Stick, Kathryn Herndon-Powell, Mike Scott, Erik Leedom, Shane Smith & Jim Webb

When the word came down that our club would be allowed to work inside the construction fence on the trail connector, a work hike was quickly set up. Having only three days to get the word out, I was not sure of the turnout. I was pleasantly surprised as the crew grew to 12.

Under the direction of our ATC member, Kathryn Herndon Powell, we worked on 2 paths coming off the bridge. First and foremost, is the connection to the A.T. Several rock steps are needed to be installed to climb the hill to the pre-



viously built connector trail. Three steps were put in for this purpose.

The other work performed was a short path down to the fire road. This is important for hikers coming back from the knob on the fire road to be able to access the bridge. The work on both trails proceeded slowly but surely as the hillside has a lot of underlying rock. With the bridge opening just a few weeks away, a couple of more work hikes will be needed to finish these trails.



March 26, 2025, 8:30 am
 Work Hike - Catawba Mountain
 Mike Vaughn, Mike Scott, Bo Carneal, Gary Moore, Greg Still, Dave Grimm

Today we were finishing up the new section of the AT south of the Route 311 foot bridge, as well as some work around the parking lot. The new bridge was scheduled to open the next day so we needed to get this work done promptly.

Upon arrival on the site, we split up into two groups, with Mike and Gary digging fence posts for split rail fencing that would block off the old section of trail as well as installing a new directional sign and post. The rest of us started work on clearing a path through the rip-rap and bringing up gravel for the new trail. The work went smoothly and these tasks were completed by noon. Afterwards we installed a few locust steps on the new trail and worked around the parking lot, filling potholes and laying out a path to the steps. We were all pleased with the results of our work. The new bridge and trail look great.



Catawaba Shelter Sustainability

Date: March 29, 2025

Participants: Pete Irvine, Bumi, Roman, Renee, Kai, Austin, Emily

What’s going on at Catawba Shelter? A 6-person trail crew from Appalachian Conservation Corps (ACC) is helping RATC, ATC, and NPS-APPA make this popular overnight site between Route 311 and McAfee Knob more sustainable.

L to R: Bumi, Crew Lead Roman (yellow hardhat), Renee, Assistant Crew Lead Daisy, Kai, Austin; with ACC Crew Coordinator Emily in red hardhat in foreground.

The crew is building steps between the shelter and the water source downhill, and building trail to a future camping loop with designated tent pads. They are finishing a 9-day hitch now, camping near the site, and will return in a few weeks for a second 9-day work hitch.

April 22, 2025, 8:30 am

Work Hike - Catawba Mountain
Participants: Mike Vaughn, Mike Scott, Bo Carneal, Jim Webb, Greg Still

Today we started digging the new trail for the new tent pads near the Catawba shelter. The 12 tent pads will be along a 1,500-foot loop trail. Upon arriving at the work site, we split up, Bo and Jim went with a chainsaw to clear trees and brush along the proposed trail route. The remaining three started digging new trail.



The layer of “duff” or organic matter was thick and had to be cleared to get down to the mineral soil. It got somewhat warm in the afternoon, particularly because the leaf cover overhead is not fully out. We kept at the task and by the end of the day had dug 120 feet of new trail. It will take quite a few more work hikes to complete the loop.

The overall project is scheduled to take two years to complete. Previous newsletters have featured “flying logs” which are also integral in the expansion and stability of this shelter and its surrounds. The logs will be used to level and define future tent pads.



Hikemaster Report

by Carol Rowlett, Hikemaster

New Hikemaster

We welcome Dee Case as the new RATC Hikemaster. Dee has already set up the full 14 RATC section hikes to be done across the next several months. If you would like support in earning your RATC 113-Miler patch, now is your chance. Carol Rowlett, our outgoing Hikemaster, will still be around, supporting Dee's efforts and leading a variety of shorter local hikes.

Hike Planning

Dee and Carol led a hike planning meeting on 2/8/25. In attendance were also Bob and Kris Peckman, Jeanine Bomber, Diana Christopulos, Carol Via, and Patty Jackson. As we work toward having a set hiking schedule, Dee will focus on the RATC section hikes, Carol will continue to offer local mid-length hikes, Diana will organize some hikes over historical AT sections, and the Peckmans will support service hike opportunities. We welcome your help in any or all of these endeavors. If you would like to help out, please contact any of these individuals or hikemaster@ratc.org.

Hike Leader Training

Dee and Carol led a hike leader orientation meeting on 3/5/25 at Corned Beef & Co. Kris Peckman, Patty Jackson, Carol Via, Debbie Steele, and Mark Wilhelm were also in attendance to learn about the ins and outs of leading a successful RATC hike. We hope to see these individuals leading hikes soon!



Hike: Mill Mountain Ramble

Date: 1/29/25

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Steve Smith, Ed Chado, Dee Case, Pam Errico, Laurie Spangler, Linda Osborne, Christine Wickham, Bob Peckman, Carolyn Gould, Susan Terwilliger, Clive Hillyard, Rusty Havens, Fran Bayne, Rebecca Reiff

January was a challenging month as the Roanoke Valley and the rest of southwest Virginia dealt with the aftermath of a snowstorm and

a deep freeze that turned everything to ice. The Blue Ridge Parkway and some other access roads were closed, and many of the trails were too iced to be safe to hike. We did manage one hike at the end of the month when temperatures finally warmed to near 60 degrees. We meandered along a variety of trails between the Mill Mountain Star and the Roanoke Day Use Area for a low-key 6 mile loop hike. The trails were in generally good condition.



Hike: Lick Run Greenway

Date: 2/5/25

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Jane Baugh, Laurie Spangler, Janice Metzger, Dee Case, Debbie Steele

We started February with a pleasant 6-mile walk along Lick Run Greenway, traveling from the Best Buy parking lot, through a lovely

wooded section that is great for birding, and down to the Hotel Roanoke. Well-dressed conference attendees at the hotel were a little puzzled as we wandered in with our hiking attire and packs, but were welcoming in pointing us toward the bathrooms for a break before the return hike.

Hike: Explore Park

Date: 2/26/25

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Carol Via, Janice Metzger, Fran Bayne, Laurie Spangler, Mary Streeper, Christine Wickham, Carolyn Gould, Jane Baugh

And then the next rounds of ice and snow hit. Our hike for Explore



Park had to be canceled twice before we finally got some good weather. Although major sections of the Explore Park trail system were closed as they installed greenway along the river, we were able to stitch together about 5

miles of continuous trail in a loop. We had to cross a number of trees downed by the ice storms.



Hike: Murray Run Greenway Full Moon Walk

Date: 3/14/2025

by Jeanine Bomber

Ten participants walked the Murray Run Greenway Trail with the hopes of seeing the Full Worm Moon which is a blood moon. Although the moon was not visible due to cloudy weather, many great conversations were had and new friendships were formed.



Hike: RATC Hike #14

Date: 3/8/25

Participants: Dee Case (northbound lead), Michael Peterson, Leslie, Laurie Hudgins, Angela Daniel, Madeleine Taylor, Kris Peckman; Carol Rowlett (southbound lead), Steve Koren, Ed Chado, Debby Allen, Traci DeGroat, David Hartzig

We began our RATC section hikes with a key exchange hike at the southern end of our range, with

Hike: Whetstone Ridge

Date: 3/20/25

Leaders: Bob and Kris Peckman

This was a preview hike in preparation for our scheduled hike on March 23. After about 2 hours driving and shuttling, we started hiking at 10:30 am. We had done this hike 9 years ago, but this experience told us what age can do to you!

The first four miles are moderate hiking, up on the ridge but with no dramatic views. But at 4.5 miles, you leave Whetstone Ridge and start climbing South Mountain. South Mountain has many peaks, with very sharp ascents and descents. The descents were more difficult than the ascents, as we had to slide down abundant dry leaves. There are several spectacular views at certain points on South Mountain. When we reached the point where, back on Whetstone Ridge, a sign points

Dee Case leading the northbound group and Carol Rowlett leading the southbound group. We successfully remembered to do the key exchange when the two groups met along the trail! Hike #14 is 9.3 strenuous miles from Kimberling

Creek (VA 606) and the north to Jenny Knob (VA 611) at the south. Although the excellent RATC maintenance crews had obviously done tremendous work clearing the trail earlier, the February ice storms had brought down a whole new obstacle course of trees. At one point, the trail blockage was so widespread that we had to pull up FarOut to get back on trail.

you left to descend the last 2.5 miles on a much more gradual decline, the sun had just set. Out came our flashlights, but darkness slowed our pace. When we stopped for a short break and turned off the flashlights, the stars were stunning. About 2/3 of the way down this section, the flashlights failed, and we contemplated tucking ourselves into the leaves until morning. Then suddenly Bob realized duh, we were carrying two phones, each one equipped with a flashlight! So on we went, reaching our car on Irish Creek Road at 11:15 pm.

We apologize to Clive Hillyard who was the only person still signed up for this hike by March 21. We altered the hike to an out-and-back on the easier section, but Clive opted to withdraw, so we canceled the hike. I am quite sure that Clive and many other hikers would find this hike a treat; it was just beyond our capabilities now.



Hike: Hinchee Trail
Date: 3/4/25
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Laurie Spangler, Kris Peckman, Patricia Starks, Christine Wickham, Kathy DeCoster, Debbie Steele

With March, we finally emerged from the ice age of the prior two months. We began March with a 6-mile moderate out-and-back hike on the Hinchee Trail. Hinchee is a wide gravel fire road with two miles of gradual uphill to where it enters the Carvins Cove trail system. The trees felled by the ice storm had been cleared on the lower part of the trail. However, we began to face major challenges as we neared our planned turnaround point, and decided to turn back just before we would have turned around anyway.



Hike: Read Mountain
Date: 3/26/25
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Carolyn Gould
 This had originally been posted as a different hike; however, due to the limited attendance we decided to divert to the closer hike on Read Mountain. We had a beautiful day for our 5-mile loop hike, al-



Hike: Roanoke Mountain/Roanoke Horse Trail
Date: 3/23/25
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Carolyn Gould, Susan Amos, John Graham, Janice Metzger, Kathy DeCoster, Kaya Western

This hike had to be rescheduled due to a forecast of thunderstorms. The day proved to be another obstacle course hike, but we were prepared and had fun with the challenge across the 7-mile loop hike. Along the Roanoke Horse Trail from Garden City to Gum Springs Overlook, we used our trek sticks to help feel our way through pits of knee-deep leaves, and climbed over, under, around



Hike: Chestnut Ridge Loop Trail
Date: 3/19/25
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Carolyn Gould, Christine Wickham, Janice Metzger, Jessica, John Graham, Karen Trembly, Barbara Conti, Clive Hillyard

In contrast, the local, well-traveled Chestnut Ridge Loop Trail had been recently cleared. We only had to cross one downed tree during the entire 6-mile loop. The bigger challenge was whether Mill Mountain Parkway would be cleared of trees and re-opened before our hike date. Fortunately, both the Mill Mountain Parkway and the Blue Ridge Parkway re-opened a couple of days before our planned hike, so all was well.

and through downed trees. Then we got a cardio workout going up the old paved loop road on Roanoke Mountain section. We stopped to gasp for breath at the two great overlooks on the way up. A quarter mile of large downed trees had not yet been cleared on the back side of the paved loop. It was entertaining seeing the different ways our group members found to go across these!



northbound (NOBO) thru-hikers along the way. About four miles in I chatted briefly with Zenith who appreciated solitude and staying ahead of “the bubble” of NOBO hikers, camping only at stealth sites to avoid the ruckus at shelters. She had started from Springer Mountain in March. I had considerable interactions with a mother-daughter pair of (SOBO) hikers, Turtle (who hikes really fast and must have been in her late 70s) and her daughter Taco Cat who were section hiking to Damascus. My first interaction with them was passing but my second was more extensive.



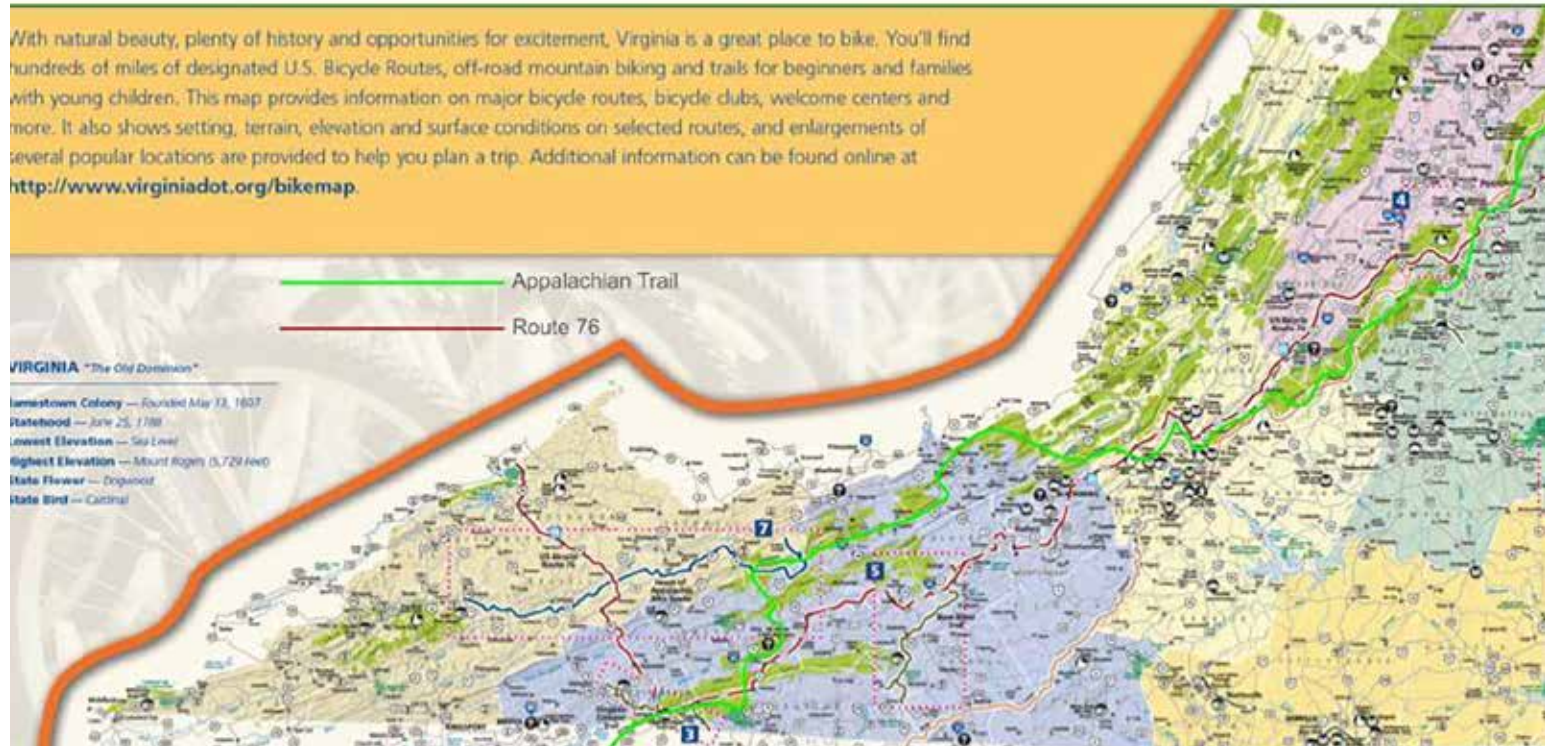
Hike: Rockfish Gap to Reid’s Gap
Date: 4/4/2025
Participant: Ron Bradbury

I started my hike at one of the five Virginia intersections of the AT with an interstate highway and hiked south about 20 miles, encountering a handful of

my lunch break and stayed ahead of me, and every NOBO hiker I encountered thereafter asked me if I was “the guy who rescued Taco Cat’s bear bag.”

The fog was persistent until about 10AM, but it lifted at just the right time to afford a view of Wintergreen Mountain across a valley. Packed snow on the north-facing slopes of that ski resort was still visible. I spent a second night on the trail close to Reid’s Gap as my ride was not due until the next morning.

That night I shared a stealth site with NOBO hiker “Bourbon”, who came by his trail name quite honestly; his nightly hiking tradition was to enjoy a hot toddy by a fire. One of the three water bladders he carried was actually full of bourbon. He also convincingly advocated for the many benefits of hiking in a dress shirt. I hiked 20 miles in two days, but Bourbon had done 23 that day and was planning on 17 miles the next. He was enjoying his toddy by a campfire when I turned in, and was gone the next morning before 5AM. He told me the base weight (without food or water) for his pack and gear was 6 pounds.



Appalachian Trail and Route 76

by Tom Ewing

The Transamerican Bicycle Route 76 and the Appalachian Trail run in parallel across Virginia from Damascus in the south to Rockfish Gap in the north. Whereas the distance in a straight line is approximately 183 miles, cyclists ride 250 miles on Route 76 and hikers walk nearly 400 miles on the Appalachian trail to cover the same distance. The convergence of these two routes, one for cyclists and one for hikers, is representative of the broader parallel development of endurance exercise in twentieth and now twenty-first century America.

These two routes intersect at least eight times in Virginia. Northbound hikers entering Virginia from North Carolina and eastbound cyclists from Kentucky both pass directly through the trail town of Damascus. Route 76 and the Appalachian Trail intersect or run in parallel several times in the Mount Rogers Recreation Area, where both routes take advantage of the natural beauty and challenging topog-

raphy of this region. Virginia's highest mountain, Mount Rogers, at 5,729 feet, is at the center of a large expanse of forests, valleys, and creeks set aside for recreational purposes. Whereas the Appalachian Trail passes through many dedicated parks and recreation areas throughout Virginia, this setting is more unusual for cyclists, as Route 76 follows more established roads through communities.

The Blue Ridge Parkway includes several points where Route 76 and the Appalachian trail run in close proximity and intersect twice. Both hikers and cyclists along the Blue Ridge Parkway will enjoy the stunning views out into the valleys: the nickname the "green tunnel" for the Appalachian trail provides some sense of the limited views along much of the deeply shaded route, while cyclists spend considerably more time riding along valley roads that along the tops of ridges.

At Rockfish Gap, the two trails meet at the northern starting point for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Route 76 continues to the east,

through Charlottesville and then to Richmond, while the Appalachian Trail continues into Shenandoah National Park and then to Maryland to the north. Bridges over Route 250 and Interstate 64 safely convey hikers across many lanes of traffic, while westbound cyclists climbing up Mount Afton will welcome the controlled access and reduced speeds of the Blue Ridge Parkway. While the views from overlooks are quite spectacular, both cyclists and hikers seeking an escape from cars are unlikely to see this section of either the Appalachian Trail or Route 76 as their favorite part of the ride or hike, given that the intended purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway is to facilitate travel by automobile.

Three points where these routes converge near Roanoke are broadly representative of the converging features and divergent character of Route 76 and the Appalachian Trail. McAfee Knob is often declared the most photographed location on the Appalachian Trail. From the cliffs jutting out over the hill, hikers can look down into the Catawba Valley, including Route 779, where Route 76 winds through



a hilly and wooded section of road. Even nearly a mile away, vehicles are easily visible, including bicycles. From the vantage point of the mountain top, hikers will be able to see the length of the valley, and perhaps admire the cyclists for their opportunity to ride a road that is both scenically beautiful and lightly trafficked.

In Troutville, a designated trail town, the two routes cross along a relatively busy roadway. Cyclists paying attention to vehicle traffic on Main Street could easily miss the small sign indicating a trail crossing on either side of the road while hikers, checking for

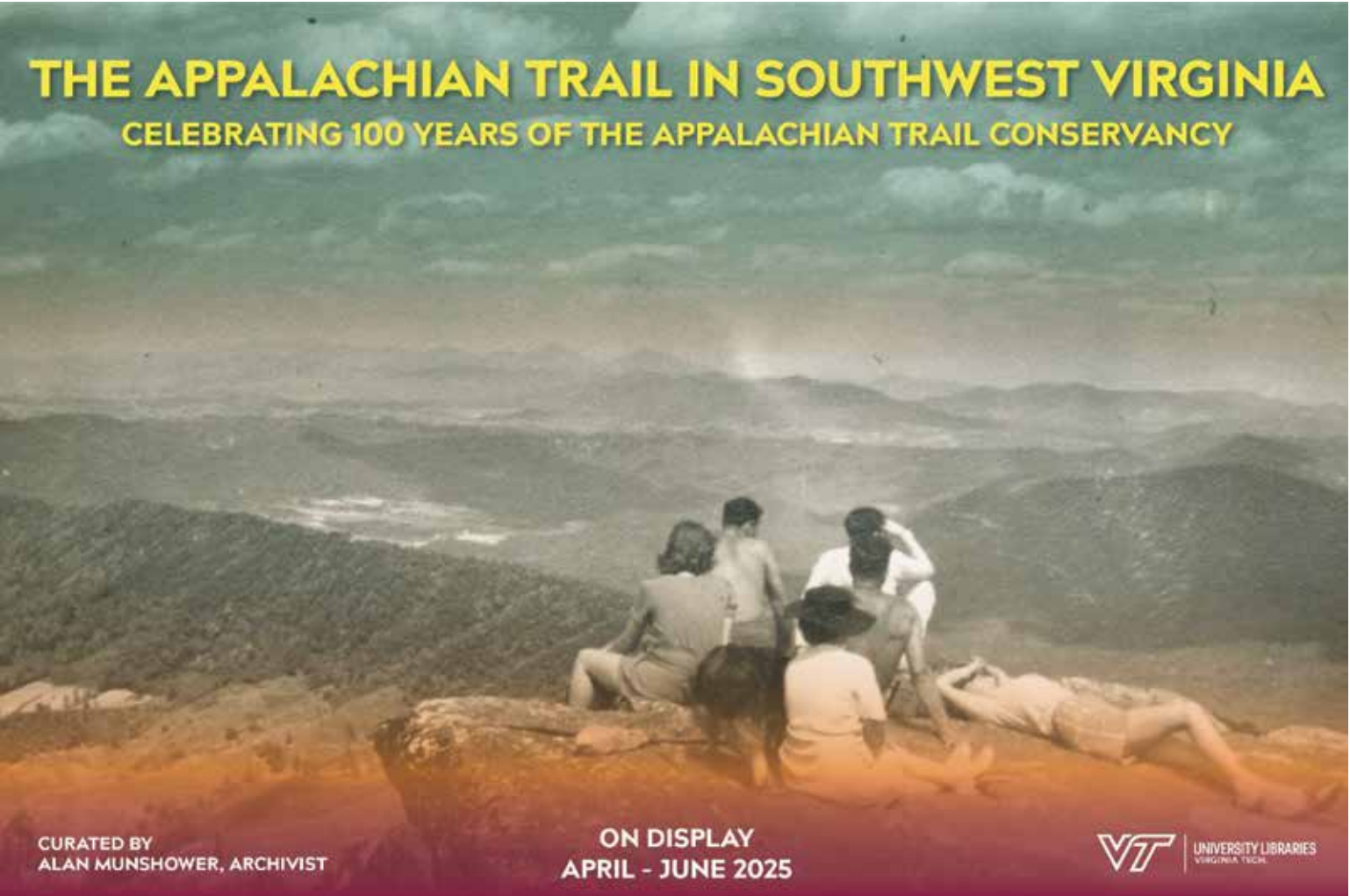


traffic, probably won't notice that they are crossing a designated bicycle route.

About six miles southwest of the valley below McAfee Knob, the Appalachian Trail crosses Route 76 along route 785, also called Blacksburg Road or Catawba Road. Two fences, one on each side of the road, designed to allow hikers to pass through but keep livestock from leaving the fields, indicate where hikers cross the road. White blazes, the standard marking for this trail from Georgia to Maine, on the fences and trees are the only indication of this crossing. By contrast, no

signs at this point mark the road as Route 76, so hikers and cyclists who cross paths here may not know how the others are following nationally recognized transcontinental trails.

Cyclists and hikers along the length of the Appalachian Trail and Route 76, are beneficiaries of trends in twentieth century America which encouraged people to leave the comfort of the homes and the convenience of their automobiles to find new ways to travel long distances powered by their own energies, whether on foot or on wheels.



Special Collections and University Archives at Virginia Tech proudly presents the exhibit: *The Appalachian Trail in Southwest Virginia: Celebrating 100 Years of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy*. Running now through June 2025, the exhibit features materials from the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club Collection, the Rick Boucher Papers and the Rupert Cutler Papers, among others.

The exhibit is located in Special Collections and University Archives, on the first floor of Newman Library on Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus. The majority of the exhibit can be viewed seven days a week. Some materials are viewable only during hours when the Special Collections and University Archives reading room is open. Hours for Newman Library can be found at: <https://lib.vt.edu/>

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From the Archivist...

RATC HISTORY: RATC LEADERS IN DRAG RAISE MONEY FOR MYRON AVERY MEMORIAL FUND

Myron Avery, who instigated the founding of the RATC and many other AT maintaining clubs, passed away on July 26, 1952. RATC volunteers honored him with a fund raiser that featured six RATC male leaders in drag.

We thank the descendants of Marie Otey (dinner party organizer and provider of hats) and John Otey (Miss Busy Body) for sharing this story and the accompanying photos. Here is the story it appeared in the March 1953 RATC Blazer.

Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist

DINNER PARTY

By Virginia Welch

March, 1953

The dinner party given by Doris Shelton and Marie Otey at the home of the Sheltons was highly successful. The food was delicious and plentiful. The fun was abundant.

The highlight of the evening was a fashion show presented by Madam Sarsaparilly (Marie Otey). Her hat, a gorgeous number, topped all of the others in her famous collection. The six mademoiselles who modelled her creations were beyond description. Those who saw them will long remember.

Miss Shrinking Violet (Jimmy Denton), oddly enough, had the haughtiest expression; Miss Hurdy-Gurdy (Dave Shelton) was the most gorgeous in spite of her

stringy blond hair and bare feet; Dagmar (George Phillips) had the most explosive charms and the longest petticoat; Mrs. Mushroom (Lee Johnson) was the most dignified; Miss Busy-Body (John Otey) had the most unusual figure, and Miss Wrinkle-Proof (Lynn Williams) was the sauciest. The graceful manner and walk of the models was particularly noteworthy. The show was tremendously funny and all laughed hilariously throughout its performance.

The Club appreciates the untiring efforts of Doris and Marie for working many hours to give this dinner and entertainment. They in turn extend their thanks to all of the people who helped them in any way with the dinner or program. The success of it is proven by the 37.00 earned and added to the Myron Avery Memorial Fund.

TRAIL BLAZER
Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club
PO Box 12282
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REQUESTED

Roanoke Appalachian
Trail Club Application
New and Renewal

- IF ACCEPTED FOR MEMBERSHIP, I AGREE TO:*
- 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	
Address	Individual # of years	x \$15	
	Family # of years	x \$20	
City	State	Zip	Individual life membership x \$250
			Family life membership x \$300
Phone		Donation	\$
Email		Total Amount Enclosed	\$

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

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