

# TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Spring 2020

*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

### JIM BEESON

What a difference a few months make! Our daily lives as we know them and our activities on the Appalachian Trail (AT) have been dramatically altered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As I write this report we are under the Governors order to stay at home until June 10, 2020. The following actions were implemented on the AT to slow the spread of COVID-19 and promote "social distancing";

- RATC has suspended all club and trail related activities, including trail maintenance until further notice.
- RATC Annual Meeting scheduled for March 28, 2020 was cancelled. Our plan is to combine the RATC Corn Boil and Annual Meeting and hold it in the July/August timeframe with exact date TBD.
- RATC Board Meetings are being conducted as virtual meetings using Zoom Conference.
- The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) has asked AT hikers to not start their thru or section hikes and asked that AT section and thru hikers on the AT exit the trail until further notice.
- All 2020 Konnarock work crew activities have been cancelled.
- The National Park Service and US Forest



Service have closed AT trailheads, shelters and privies.

- The National Park Service closed the AT from VA 624 Newport Road to Mountain Pass Road; this includes McAfee Knob and Tinker Cliffs, essentially the Virginia "Triple Crown" route.
- The ATC has submitted a formal request to the National Park Service and US Forest Service asking them to officially close the AT. As of April 7, 2020 that request has not been granted, but that could change anytime.

These actions are unprecedented, unfortunate and disruptive, but acting out of an "abundance of caution" necessary to slow the spread of

COVID-19 and encourage social distancing.

In early February 2020 I reached out to you regarding the joint effort of ATC and RATC to raise funds with the purpose of acquiring the property immediately adjacent to VA 311 McAfee Knob Trailhead. I am pleased to report that RATC raised \$21,655 through your generous contributions and along with a \$10,000 contribution from RATC funds brings our total to \$31,655. In light of COVID-19 pandemic ATC and RATC suspended all fundraising activities in mid March 2020. We remain committed to acquiring this valuable property, but will access our next steps going forward with plans to resume activities in the near future.

Thank you for your understanding and patience. We will get through this and while our daily lives may be slightly different going forward it is my hope we will soon be able to resume the AT activities we all enjoy!  
**STAY SAFE AND SLOW THE SPREAD!**

### **It is Membership Renewal Time – If you have not already done so, Please renew!**

As you know, RATC is an active organization devoting countless volunteer hours to maintain and improve our 120 mile section of the Appalachian Trail (AT). RATC annual membership is inexpensive, i.e., \$25/Family and \$20/Individual. Funds generated from membership play an integral part in the club's ability to provide trail and shelter maintenance. In addition, your RATC membership includes an annual subscription to Backpacker Magazine. Backpacker is a magazine of wilderness travel, offering practical, "you can do it, here's how" advice to help you enjoy every trip. Filled with the best places, gear, and information for all kinds of hiking and camping excursions, each issue delivers trip planners and stunning color photography.

## **TRAIL SUPERVISOR REPORT**

### **MIKE VAUGHN**

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As of this writing all work hikes have been suspended due to the corona virus outbreak. Hopefully we will be able to get back out on the trail soon.

Unfortunately, the Konnarock work crew of trail volunteers have cancelled their entire schedule for this summer, so they will not be working on the Mountain Lake relocation. Our club will be scheduling regular work hikes out there later this year, when things get back to normal.

The spring hiking season is always when the club's maintainers get out and make sure their sections are clear and ready for the influx of northbound thru-hikers. Up until the trail work shutdown many of our maintainers had already been out working on their section. For those that are not familiar with the club's trail maintainer program, here is a little background: Our club maintains 121 miles of the AT. In addition, we maintain about 40 miles of side trails. We have divided up our section of the AT into 31 sections. Each section is from two to seven miles long. Each section has from one to six maintainers assigned to it. The trail maintainers do such tasks as clipping, blazing, and clearing ditches across the trail of debris. In addition they report any major blowdowns across the trail. Currently the club has a group of 80 maintainers. Contact me if you are interested in being a trail maintainer.



Did you know our club maintains the most footbridges of any of the 31 AT maintaining clubs? The 53 bridges we have are quite a lot to keep up with. In addition our 121 miles of the AT is the sixth highest among the clubs. Most of the clubs with more AT mileage than us have thousands of members. Everyone in the club should be proud of the job our maintainers perform, year in and year out.

Starting this quarter we are trying something different as far as reporting on our weekly and monthly work hikes. Instead of a report on each work hike we will summarize the quarter's work hikes in one report. This will avoid the repetitious nature of the reports, which typically will state that x number of steps were installed. Let me know what you think about this change.

Since the beginning of January we have been working on the section of the AT just north of Dragon's Tooth. This is a very steep and rocky section of trail. There have been several injuries and rescues on this section of trail over the years. This is a difficult section of trail for rescuers to access and extract injured hikers. Our primary effort has been on installing rock steps. Several areas in this section had jumbles of rocks with no clear path through them. Because of this, hikers have been creating their own paths up the mountainside. This has caused erosion on the steep slope and possible dangerous hiking conditions on these trails. The steps and cribbing, along with better blazing should provide a more defined trail. In 6 work hikes so far we have installed 40 steps. With a steep and rocky three mile hike in, this has been a very challenging work site to access.

The steep slope also presented tight quarters to work in. I am very grateful to all of the workers that have come out and worked on this section. It should be a much safer and enjoyable section of trail for future hikers. Below are some pictures from the work site, before and after.



# HIKE MASTER REPORT

***BOB PECKMAN***

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I am starting my job as hikemaster in very strange times. I am the first president of RATC to have served in that position a second time. I served as Blazer editor longer than anyone else. Now I am the first hikemaster in history to ask you to NOT lead hikes!

We can't just stay in the cabin. Especially at my age, we lose it fast and get it back slowly. But hike the less popular places. When you encounter other hikers, move off the trail and keep that distance. If you want to hike with friends, don't carpool, and keep that hiking distance. Greta Garbo, new to English and jetlagged after a flight from Sweden to LA said "I want to be alone". We need to hike alone, or cycle alone. (Never paddle alone!) What else can we do?

While I was hikemaster for a few minutes, before Josiah, I started organizing and documenting hikes. My work can be found at <http://peckmanjazz.com/HIKERATC.HTM> There is also a link to my hike library on the RATC website. Together we have so much more information than I individually have found. Please go to this site and explore. You will find mistakes which you can tell me about. It will make you think of other hikes which you can tell me about. AND it will give you ideas of hikes to lead when this mess is over.



This list also attempts to establish some standard names such as names of hikes. Again, if I don't have the best name, tell me. The rescue squad asked that we standardize the names of the two 311 parking lots. It is important when people are in distress and make a 911 call, that the name of the parking lot they have ingrained in their mind and give to the operator is the one that the rescue squad needs to go to. If I say the McAfee parking lot or the Dragon's Tooth parking lot, there is no doubt. If we teach hikers to say 311 parking lot, then that is what the 911 operator is likely to convey to the rescue squad.

Please augment and correct the hike library. Please improve the driving directions and meeting places. I will diligently incorporate the information you send me. The incentive for making this library came from scanning very old Blazers. I would look at hikes that had been done and not know where they were. We can leave something useful for tomorrow's hikers.



## HIKE LEADERS

If you would like to be a trip leader, contact Bob Peckman.

Bob's regional hike list is at <https://www.ratc.org/regional-hiking-resources/> Let Bob know if you have any suggestions for improving descriptions. Try to use the name and description when posting a hike on Meetup, or maybe suggest changes or new hikes.

When writing a trip report for the newsletter, please include the following:

1. participants
2. starting point and what it is near
3. loop or one-way
4. blaze color
5. memorable landmarks
6. if you merge onto another trail, mention its name and blaze color and approximate mileage point
7. total mileage
8. photos, and screenshots of hiking apps mapped routes
9. overall opinion of difficulty or difficulty of sections

## COVID-19 AND THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is communicating regular updates on the impacts of the COVID-19 virus on the Trail and its visitors, volunteers, communities, and partners through its website, social media, email, AT Camp, and through media partners like The Trek and Guthook Guides. For the most up to date information, go to: [wildeast.appalachiantrail.org/covid19](https://wildeast.appalachiantrail.org/covid19). The patience and adaptability of A.T. clubs during this time has been incredibly heartening, especially in the move to online meetings, suspending hikes and work trips on the A.T. The Conservancy is committed to keeping the well-being of its volunteer corps, adjacent Trail Communities, and visitors safe. The ATC will continue to monitor the situation, share information on closure statuses, and provide guidance on its website.

*With pollution and overpopulation spawning a sprawling urban desert, I am encouraged by the knowledge that there are millions in America who care about wilderness and mountains; who go forth for strength to Mother Earth; who defend her domain and seek her secrets. I am proud to have played a role in the birth of the Appalachian trail. And I am proud of the generations of hikers who have made my dream become a reality.--Benton MacKaye*

# HIKE REPORTS

## HIKING GUIDELINES

Our hikes are listed on the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club Meetup page. Guests are welcome.

Hikes are rated by length and terrain so hikers can evaluate them based on their individual strengths:

Easy terrain – Greenways or old roads

Moderate terrain – Typical AT

Strenuous terrain – long climbs and rough trails

Challenging – neglected trails and bushwhacking

Shuttle lengths are included to calculate carpool fees of \$0.10/one-way mile. We carpool to save gasoline and because trailhead parking may be limited.

If you are new to hiking or unfamiliar with the hike, contact the leader who will be glad to help you evaluate whether the hike is appropriate for you and also if you are properly equipped. Hike leaders should recommend that you don't come if you are not prepared with equipment or condition.

The club is always looking for experienced hikers to help lead club hikes. RATC needs you! Come out for the next hike-leader training.

Contact [hikemaster@ratc.org](mailto:hikemaster@ratc.org).

## NORTH CREEK BASIN JANUARY 23

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Larry Austin (leader), Dee Case, Kevin Moore, Jeff Edwards, Lois Smith, Josiah Leonard, Jennifer Frye, Dawn Lamb and Madeleine Taylor

The weather cooperated this day with partly cloudy skies and high temps in the mid-40's. This new hike started at the Whitetail trailhead on North Creek Road, located in North Creek Campground. It took us along a portion of the Whitetail Trail just above the North Creek Campground near Arcadia.

After that we did a series of Forest Service roads ending up on a portion of the former Apple Orchard Falls Trail. We had some great views of Apple Orchard Mountain, Floyd Mountain and many deep hollows along the way. We stopped for lunch along the beautiful North Creek once we reached the old Apple Orchard Falls Trail. We had to cross North Creek near its junction with the current Apple Orchard Falls Trail. This gave us the opportunity to hone our skills at crossing a creek. All but three of us waded across the creek either with Crocs, rubber boots or plastic bags. Josiah, Jeff and Dee found some rocks to step on to access the other side. We all made it safely across and to the finish line. We walked a short distance at the end to the campground where we enjoyed some refreshment and conversation before departing the area.

## **WOLF CREEK GREENWAY FEBRUARY 9**

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Kris Peckman (leader), Caryl Connolly, Mary and Jimbo Harshfield, Laura Legere, Georgia Shaurette, Adam Sink, Elizabeth Warren

No, she didn't take time off from the Presidential campaign to come on our hike, but this Elizabeth Warren was much more fun. She brought her puppy Carrie and her friend's son Adam to her first RATC hike. Hers was the only car to come to the designated meeting place, which was a good thing since the Comic Con left no parking spaces at the Civic Center. Everyone else met us at the trailhead on Hardy Rd.

The weather was warm and sunny, not at all typical for February. The trail is gravel and mostly flat, following Wolf Creek all the way. It's very well maintained, so it was an easy hike, through several parks. It ends at the Blue Ridge Parkway, and apparently one can follow a trail from there to an overlook on the Parkway, though we didn't check that out. Almost at the end is a big farm with some friendly ponies, goats, cats and pigs. Adam occasionally mentioned that he had had enough walking, but he enjoyed Carrie and the farm animals, and was proud of the step count on his Fitbit at the end of the hike.

Carrie has lots of energy but is adorable and was well behaved. I think we all enjoyed our afternoon stroll on the Wolf Creek Greenway.

## **ANDY LAYNE TRAIL FEBRUARY 23**

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Larry Austin (leader) Maya Bohler, Sharon Holland, Jennifer Frye, Kris Peckman, Dawn Lamb, Tom Behrmann, Lois Smith, Molly Armistead, Dave Mueller, Madeleine Taylor and Amy Stone.

The weather for this hike was sunny with highs in the 50's. It was quite beautiful for a hike in February. From the parking lot on Catawba Rd. we climbed the Andy Layne Trail to Scorched Earth Gap and took some photos and ate some snacks. We headed north on the AT to the blue blaze trail past Lamberts Meadow Shelter. We could smell smoke and noticed that someone had not extinguished the wood in the fire pit at the shelter totally. Several went down and got water to finish it off.

We then proceeded along the blue blaze trail that is east of Tinker Cliffs finally reaching Brickey's Gap and the AT. From there we had that arduous climb to the cliffs. We had our lunch at the cliffs which provided us with some amazing views. During lunch a large group of younger backpackers went by heading south on the AT. They apparently were Carilion employees doing the Triple Crown.

On our way back down the mountain we met the usual parade of hikers heading to the cliffs and finished at the parking lot.

## JENNINGS CREEK TO BRYANT RIDGE SHELTER MARCH 1

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Kris Peckman (leader), Crystal Wright, Ana Anderson and her dog Carlos

This was a beautiful day for a beautiful hike. But first I must apologize for incomplete research on this hike leader's part. Instead of the advertised 6 miles, this hike was 7.6 miles long, and not exactly moderate, since it involved 1000 feet of elevation gain in both directions. But our whole crew was up to the challenge, including Carlos, who slept all the way home in the car.

We started by climbing up the 1000 feet to the ridgetop of Fork Mt., where we could look down steeply to the Middle Creek valley on our right and to the confluence of Jennings Creek and the James River to our left. The 0.3 miles of ridgetop walking was followed by a descent of at least 800 feet to a lovely valley containing acres of running cedar. We had set a turnaround time of 3:45, but we didn't want to miss the shelter, so we kept on, arriving there at precisely 3:45. The shelter was designed by architecture students in memory of one of their fellow students and is indeed an architectural wonder. It was also immaculate, as was the trail we hiked. Recent hemlock clip-pings indicated maintainers had been there quite recently.

We left the shelter at 4:05 and arrived back at the car at 6:06. The late-afternoon sun highlighted bright green moss along the trail, as well as a set of cliffs on the descent that we had missed on the way up.

## SPEC MINES TRAIL MARCH 8

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Larry Austin (keader), Wilma Vargas, Dawn Lamb, Sharon Holland, Maya Bohler, Madeleine Taylor, Susan Terwilliger, Jennifer Frye, Randy Pennington, Jill Pennington, Kevin Moore, Molly Armistead and Dave Mueller

We started at the Montvale Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The temperature was cool when we started out but soon warmed up fairly nicely as the day went on. Our route into the mine area was pretty challenging as we had a number of downed trees to crawl under or go over but it added to the adventure. The stream we followed was very beautiful with some brilliant green algae in places.

We first came upon two brick storage buildings used by the miners. After over 100 years they were finally beginning to deteriorate but still provided much interest and conversation. A short distance from there we reached the actual mines.

After many photos there we decided to have our lunch at this location. We followed the old narrow gauge railroad route back out with a very steep descent back to the Forest Service Road. On the way back to our starting point via way of the Spec Mine Trail we ran across a couple of hikers and a biker near the top. After reaching Montvale Overlook we enjoyed some good conversation and refreshments. We had a great group of hikers and all met the challenge quite well.



# THE AT IN MARYLAND AND WEST VIRGINIA MARCH 13-15

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We arrived at the Teahorse hostel, located in Bolivar, WV a little after noon. We hiked down in to the historic town of Harper's Ferry and explored the town and had pizza.

Afterward, we hiked a short section of the AT to the ATC HQ. They were still closed for the season, but we took a few pics in front of the building. We then returned to the hostel, relaxed until dinner time and ate at a local restaurant close to the hostel.

Saturday morning we dropped off a vehicle at Gathland State park, then drove to Washington Monument State Park near Boonesboro, Maryland and began our hike south on the AT. We passed an historic church, Dahlgren chapel, and started a long ascent of South Mountain. The trail passes next to the Civil war battle site of South Mountain where we took time to read and photograph the monuments.

After a nice rest and lunch at White Rocks overlook, we finished the 9-mile hike on into Gathland State Park, where the War Correspondents Memorial Arch is located.

We met quite a few hikers along the way. Some thru, some sectioning and plenty of day hikers and dogs! That evening, Dee Case prepared a fantastic meal at the hostel. It was a dish she learned to cook in Italy.



The next morning, we returned to Gathland to begin our 10-mile hike south into Harper's Ferry/Maryland Heights. The hike was a little damp and cool, but a pleasant hike mostly along a ridge. We visited a two-story shelter along the way, stopped for views and descended down to the C & O canal path and finished our hike on the path along the Potomac river. Again we saw many hikers of all varieties.

Everyone enjoyed the hikes and the company was great.

*Editor's Note:* Legend is that not long before PATC started making the AT in this area, bandits had been using this section of rocky ridge as hideouts from the law for decades. They would head down into the towns to steal and then back up to the rocky ridges where the local lawmen on horseback had a difficult time catching them. This went on for decades.



## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Robert Darner and  
Janet Netzbandt  
Schelley Fickey  
Dana Harlor  
John Hubbard  
Stephen McGuire  
Mary Nickolich  
Peter Trower  
Aaron Van Ravestein  
Jay Young

If you receive this newsletter in the mail, but would rather help us save trees and money by reading the digital version posted on our website, please let the editor know:  
[blazer@ratc.org](mailto:blazer@ratc.org)

The Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club  
is an affiliate of  
The Appalachian Trail  
Conservancy  
and a member of the  
Nature Conservancy and the Blue  
Ridge Land  
Conservancy

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### **Roanoke College Liaison, Conner McBane**

## OTHER IMPORTANT CONTACTS

### **SW & Central VA ATC Regional Director,**

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### **The Mid-week Crew, Bill Gordge**

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### **Roanoke Valley Greenways Liaison,**

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TRAIL BLAZER  
Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club  
PO Box 12282  
ROANOKE VA 24024-2282

# CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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## Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club Application New and Renewal

If accepted for membership I agree to:

1. Support the objectives of the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club
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 \$5.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Indiv. # of years \_\_\_\_\_ x \$15.00 \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Family # of years \_\_\_\_\_ x \$20.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Second Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Individual Life membership \$250.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Family life membership \$300.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are payable in January of each year. Make checks payable to RATC.

Please send dues and any questions about money or membership to

Treasurer, PO Box 12282, Roanoke, VA 24024, or use PayPal at [ratc.org](http://ratc.org).

Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please Note: To save costs, the Blazer is provided electronically to all members: we send you an email with a link to the new Blazer on the [RATC.org](http://RATC.org) website. You can receive the Blazer by mail by emailing [treasurer@ratc.org](mailto:treasurer@ratc.org) or phoning her at 540-521-5435.

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RATC membership includes an annual subscription to Backpacker Magazine, at no cost to you. RATC is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Membership dues are tax-deductible minus \$6 for Backpacker Magazine.