

# TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

*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.*

Summer 2020

## NOTES FROM A YOUNG A.T. LOVER

**Noah Stephens, 14, Trail Name "Pack Rat" is the son of board member Julio Stephens**

I love the Appalachian Trail, I always have! My first experiences on the AT were riding on my Dad's back at less than a year old. Over the years, my love for the outdoors has grown greatly. I enjoy hiking, camping and exploring. I turned 14 years old last month and decided to make it my goal to get the 113-mile patch. It is so special to live in this area and get the opportunity to hike the Roanoke AT Club's section of the Trail. My Dad helped me map out section hikes to help us complete the 113 miles within the next year. My Dad, brother, Christian, 11 and I are doing this together. My Mom and youngest brother, Grayson, 7, will be doing some of the shorter hikes with us and shuttling us where we need to go.

We just completed our first section hike of 5.5 miles in Bland County. It was a great adventure. We saw Dismal Falls, a swinging bridge, and many flowers native to Virginia. We took pictures along the way to help us remember our journey. During our hikes, I hope we get to see a lot of wildlife and just enjoy the world God created.

*(That's me on the cover of Journeys, and I am in the blue shirt and hat in the bottom photo with my Dad and brother, Christian.)*





*Photo of view from McAfee Knob by Jennifer Harvey Frye*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

**JIM BEESON**

As I write this report I am pleased to report that all RATC sections of the AT, including the "Triple Crown" are open as of June 13, 2020! It has been a long three months with zero RATC trail activity and I know everyone is anxious to resume "normal" activities. Our daily lives as we know them and our activities on the Appalachian Trail (AT) have been dramatically altered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following actions have been implemented and/or modified:

- RATC Board Meetings are being conducted as virtual meetings using Zoom Conference, supplied by ATC.
- RATC will resume trail maintenance, recreational hikes and McAfee Knob Task Force activities using protocols outlined by National Park Service and
- Appalachian Trail Conservancy. These involve utilizing PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and maintaining social distancing, etc.

ing, etc. It will not be the same experience as pre COVID-19, but allows resumption of activities with necessary precautions.

- Mike Vaughn, RATC Trail Supervisor and Bill Neilan, RATC Vice President will provide guidance concerning COVID-19 Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) requirements for Trail Maintainers and McAfee Knob Task Force Members, respectively to resume trail activities. RATC AT Shelters and Privies remain closed
- 2020 RATC Annual Meeting has been cancelled for 2020. Our plan is to resume normal annual meeting schedule in March 2021. Our current slate of RATC Board of Directors will remain in office until March 2021, at which time RATC Board of Directors election will be conducted. RATC Corn Boil is cancelled for 2020. RATC 2020 Holiday Get Together is TBD.

In early February, 2020 I reached out to you about the joint effort of ATC and RATC raising funds for acquiring the property immediately adjacent to VA 311 McAfee Knob Trailhead. I am pleased to report that RATC to date has raised \$23,535 through your generous contributions, and along with a \$10,000 contribution from RATC funds our total is \$33, 535. With the reopening of McAfee Knob Trailhead we will resume fundraising activities. I am working closely with Andrew Downs, ATC Regional Director. Additional details and next steps will be forthcoming.

We have several open RATC Board and RATC leadership roles:

- Trail Blazer Editor – Current Editor Anne Pfeiffer and her husband will be relocating to somewhere near Seattle, WA soon, to be closer to their sons. Duties involve editing and laying out the Trail Blazer, four issues each year. Using common software and templates is fine.
- Membership Coordinator – Steve Urbaniak



accepted a full time position and is not able to perform Membership Coordinator duties anymore.

- Counselor – Brian Boggs is stepping down in order to provide care for his mother. Duties involve providing advice and counsel on RATC issues utilizing your expertise, skill set and experience.
- Social Coordinator – Scott Karns has performed this role for the last three years. Duties involve planning RATC social events: Annual Meeting, Holiday Potluck and Corn-boil.
- Webmaster – Current Webmaster Jonathan Eagle secured full time employment and is not able to perform the Webmaster duties any more. Duties involve responsibility to manage all aspects of ratc.org website using Word Press.

If you are interested in any of these roles or wish to recommend an individual please contact me at [president@ratc.org](mailto:president@ratc.org) or 540-986-5301. Thank you for your understanding and patience during this difficult time.  
**STAY SAFE!**



**Help us raise money to improve the McAfee Knob trailhead and get this awesome tee shirt. Only available August 1 – 22, 2020**  
[www.bonfire.com/mcafeeknob](http://www.bonfire.com/mcafeeknob).

# TRAIL SUPERVISOR REPORT

*MIKE VAUGHN*

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As of this writing (late June) trail maintainers are permitted to go back out and work on the trail. The trail was shut down for three months for maintenance. Many maintainers have reported that they have been out clipping and removing blowdowns. Hopefully we can catch back up over the next couple of months on the maintenance backlog. If you spot any blow-downs on your section of trail, please let me know.

At our annual spring meeting we normally give out awards to our trail maintainers. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic we were not able to have the meeting.

I would still like to recognize all of the maintainers who were due to receive an award. Six maintainers worked over 32 hours on the trail last year. They were: Warren Clark, Bruce Davidson, Brian Kelley, Fred Meyer, Jill Pennington, and Randy Pennington. Three worked over 56 hours. They were: Chase Davidson, Georgia Shaurette, and Sue Terwilliger. I am pleased to announce that 15 club members worked over 72 hours on the trail. Here are their names and the number of hours they put in on the trail last year: Bruce Agnew 82, Jim Beeson 84, Caleb Fort 92, Bill Floyd 93, Theresa McDaniel 94, Julie Petruska 107, Dave Horst 119, Matt Gentry 120, Sandy Myers 123, Mark Farrell 229, Bill Neilan 285, Therese Witcher 377, Homer Witcher 492, Mike Vaughn 499, Jim Webb 747

Many thanks to all of our trail maintainers. Your efforts are greatly appreciated, particularly by the backpackers on the trail.

If you are interested in being a trail maintainer please let me know. Our club has a group of workers who work on the trail almost every week, replacing bridges and installing steps.

In addition, we have a group of maintainers who perform routine maintenance work on an assigned section of trail. We typically have two to three overseers on each 3-6 mile section. Maintenance activities performed include clipping, periodic reblazing, clearing drainage structures, and reporting trail problems such as blowdowns. Tools and training are provided. Maintainers should walk their section of the trail at least four times per year.

We have an ongoing need for trail maintainers. Please email me or text or call me at 540-992-1350 if you are interested in working on a section of trail or have any questions about the trail maintainer program.

## HIKE MASTER REPORT

***BOB PECKMAN***



The powers that be have issued the OK to resume pleasure hikes. There is a flow chart defining the different phases of the Pandemic. But human behavior is making it much simpler than that. When you go to the stores, you will see that half are wearing masks and half are not. We have kids going to the beach and returning infected. Let me be clear, there are two phases to the Pandemic: now and after a vaccine. If anything, the now phase is getting worse. People can spread the virus before they present as sick. And some are silent carriers who just spread the virus without getting sick. Because of that we have to realize that you and I and every hiker may be infected and we **MUST** protect others accordingly.

In resuming pleasure hikes, we are taking risks of becoming ill and also becoming infected and harming others. Unless human nature itself changes, the precautions that we need now will be needed until we have a vaccine.

RATC is NOT the general public. We are not

relying on human nature to do or not do what is required. The options are to come on an RATC hike and follow the rules, or stay away from us. And it is your duty as a leader to make this happen. You not only have the right, but the obligation to clarify the rules and to demand that, during the hike, hikers obey or leave the group.

Unfortunately it must be stated that anyone with symptoms such as fever, change in taste or smell, or respiration problems, or have been in contact with an infected person must stay away. The rules are:

- Wipe the signup pen with hand sanitizer between uses or have folks sign with their own pen.

- Wear a mask if you are only six feet apart, stay six feet apart when possible.
- When outdoors and much more than six feet apart we can dispense with the mask, but keep it handy.
- Avoid the privies; use the woods.
- Do not carpool. Select hikes without a car shuttle or modify them.
- Eat lunch more than six feet apart.
- If you develop symptoms during the week after the hike, tell your hike leader and tell me at [hikemaster@ratc.org](mailto:hikemaster@ratc.org).

Pick hikes with no car shuttle and follow the rest of the rules.

## 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

## 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

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).

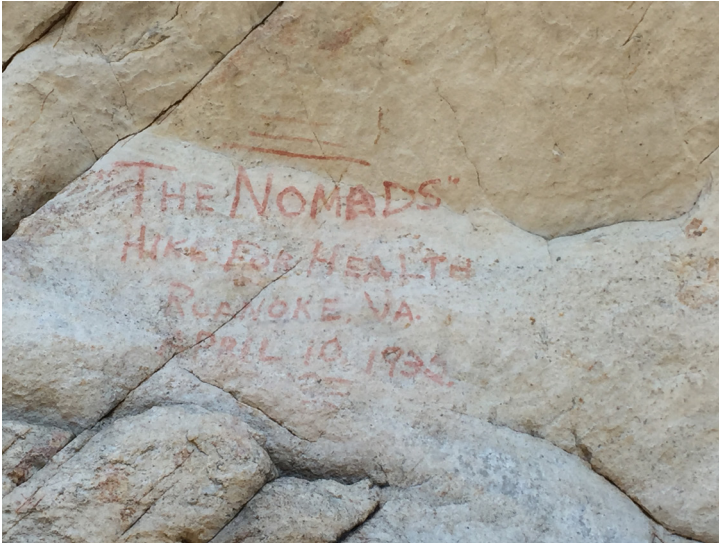
The Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club is an affiliate of The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and a member of the Nature Conservancy and the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy

# HOW THREE HIKING CLUBS BECAME THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

**DIANA CHRISTOPULOS**

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*RATC has been around since 1932, and we are finally pulling together all the records. Acting as the RATC Archivist, I am working to digitize it and write about it. This is the first story. There will be more, both in the Blazer and on the RATC website, [www.ratc.org](http://www.ratc.org). If you have minutes, important documents or outstanding photos – especially from pre-2000 – let me know. [dianak16@earthlink.net](mailto:dianak16@earthlink.net)*



In 1932, Roanoke College had an outings club, as did Hollins College. In addition, hikers from Roanoke and Salem, mostly women, had their own hiking club called The Nomads. On November 13, 1932, members of all three groups went for a walk in Carvins Cove, followed by supper at the home of Donald Gates, an economics professor at Roanoke College. Then they founded the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club. Their own favorite hiking spots like Tinker Cliffs,

McAfee Knob, Carvins Cove, Poor Mountain and Bent Mountain Falls would shape an immediate relocation of the originally planned AT route.

## The Founding

Like other clubs south of Washington, DC, RATC was the brainchild of Myron Avery, the driven and meticulous implementer of Benton McKaye's visionary Appalachian Trail. Avery became chairman of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in 1931, when about 1,000 miles of the AT had already been completed. He was also president of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and, like Johnny Appleseed, was busy planting new clubs between Georgia and Maine. Under his guidance, the RATC founders became expert trail builders. After encountering Avery at an ATC event in the Smoky Mountains, Prof. Gates called a meeting of interested parties at the Roanoke YMCA on October 24, 1932.

Next came a two-day meeting with Avery and other PATC members at the Hotel Mons near the Peaks of Otter on October 29-30. It must have been an impressive show. After day hikes to Sharp Top and Flat Top, PATC members showed movies and slides on how to mark and build trail along with scenic views on the completed northern sections. The next day they demonstrated exactly how to construct a trail.

No doubt energized by the training, Gates hosted a meeting and supper on November 13, prefaced by



the Carvins Cove hike. Over 20 people showed up, and almost all become founding members of RATC. There were nine men and eight women, not counting Gates' wife and son. RATC was a very social organization from the beginning, with hiking as the hook for everyone and trail building as the passion of a few.

The founding members were:

F.S. Baird  
Virginia Caldwell  
Mary Lane Charles  
Grace Cheveraux, Membership Coordinator  
E. B. Coxwell, Secretary  
David Dick, Trail Supervisor  
Donald S. Gates, President  
Evelyn Gillenwater  
John McGinnis, Trail Committee member  
Velma Moeschler, Membership Committee member  
Selma Mosher  
Harold Pearn, Trail Committee member  
Elmer Phelps, Trail Committee member  
Mae Pond  
Grace Pownall, Vice President  
Lawrence Pownall, Treasurer  
Philip Trout



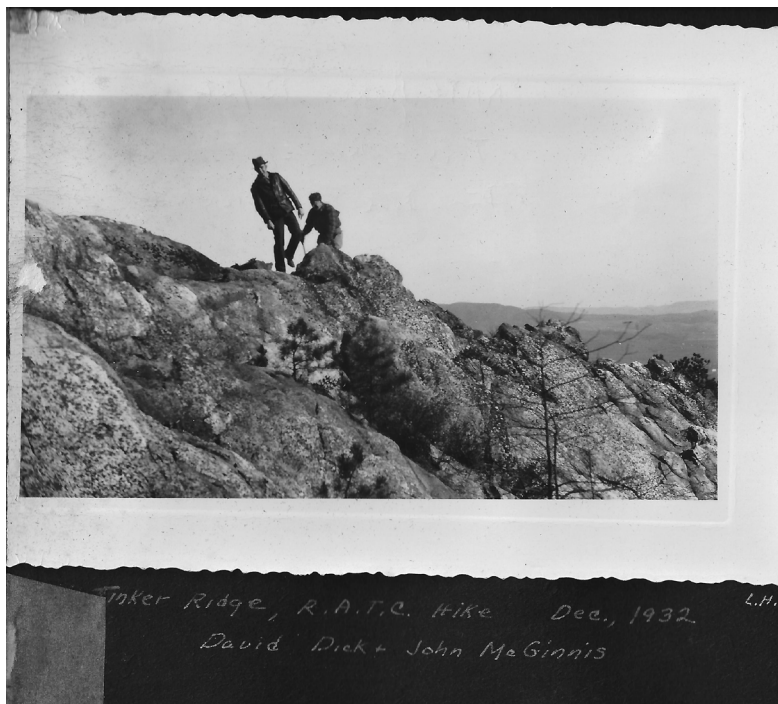
Some are pictured above at the founding meeting. Donald Gates is in front, second from the left. Grace Cheveraux, in charge of Membership, is fourth from the left.

Even though eight of the founding members were women, none were originally named officers. This must have caused further discussion. As reported in a club history written in 1951, at the November 26, 1932 meeting "it was decided that a fifth officer was needed and Grace Pownall was elected vice-president." The club fell into a monthly pattern of hikes followed by supper, with destinations including Tinker Ridge and McAfee Knob (January 23, 1933), Fort Lewis Mountain, Mason's Knob, and Apple Orchard.

## Building Tinker Cliffs and McAfee Knob into the Trail

From Avery's standpoint, the real purpose of the RATC was to build trail. The route laid out by Shirley Cole, extension agent for Floyd County, followed the Blue Ridge for 200 miles. RATC was assigned 55 miles between Black Horse (Tavern) Gap (currently the northern boundary of our territory) and Sweet Annie Hollow, later extended about 15 miles south to include Tuggles Gap, near Rocky Knob. The long section between Tuggles Gap and Pinnacles of Dan, near the North Carolina border, was handled by the Mountain Club of Virginia, which included members from RATC, the Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club, Myron Avery and a resident of Pinnacles of Dan.

How do you make a trail building club out of three hiking clubs? Let them build trail where they like to hike. RATC members did not want to follow the Blue Ridge between Black Horse (Tavern) Gap and Adney, preferring their favorite haunts like McAfee Knob and Tinker Cliffs. A 1945 history of the RATC noted that, "The main problem facing the club in 1933 was the re-routing of the trail from East of Roanoke to Bent Mountain to what club members felt was the more desirable route North and West of the city. Avery allowed the change, and he personally supervised it. He would "come to the Roanoke area [from Washington, DC] by train on Friday night, often staying at the Meadow View Inn in Daleville where by bus, train, or car club members would meet with him and spend the weekend marking, measuring and mapping the new trail." The new route descended the Blue Ridge to Cloverdale and climbed Tinker Mountain, running below McAfee Knob on the Carvin's Cove side, dropping in Mason's Cove before climbing Ft. Lewis Mountain and crossing US 11 near Dixie Caverns. It then climbed Poor Mountain, passed near Bent Mountain Falls and arrived at Adney Gap. The details of this relocation will be the topic of another blog.



It is clear that hiking and socializing were at the center of the original RATC, with trail building spurred on by Avery. Long and short hikes were scheduled each month and first shared by post cards, later by the Bulletin, a monthly mimeographed production that included information about ATC happenings. Short hikes were the most popular, with many originating at Roanoke's downtown YMCA, with hikers reaching the trailhead by train or bus. Very few people owned cars at this time. Members went on excursions to Cave Mountain Lake, a YMCA camp, Arcadia and Virginia Beach. They rented Mountain Air, the spacious old building near McAfee Knob that now exists only as a fire place with the name engraved. They

had an annual photo contest, though the results have not survived.

Myron Avery managed to harness the energy of a hiking social club to get 70 miles of the new AT blazed, and RATC members played key roles in completing the entire section in southern Virginia. By 1933, Trail Supervisor David Dick created a trail map for the southern half of Virginia that was sold by Avery's PATC. Our archives include several hard copies! But that is a story for another day.



# PREPARE TO THE HIKE THE AT AT THE WOODS HOLE WEEKEND

*OCTOBER 2-4, 2020*

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Are you ready to turn your dream of thru-hiking or section-hiking the historic, 2,192-mile Appalachian Trail into reality in the near future? Then you won't want to miss this very special weekend retreat to benefit the iconic Woods Hole Hostel, regularly ranked by hikers among the best hostel experiences on the trail. Join hosts Neville Harris, artist, yoga instructor and long-time owner of the hostel, and Steve Adams, two-time AT finisher and host of the popular *Mighty Blue* on the Appalachian Trail podcast—over one million downloads to date—for a weekend of conversation and camaraderie with successful thru- and section-hikers, hostel owners, and an expert from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, who will answer all your questions and get you prepared — and excited — for your hike.

## The Event

**What:** A weekend retreat of presentations and discussion for individuals considering thru-hike or long section-hike of the AT.

**When:** Oct. 2-4, 2020 (with optional Oct. 1 overnight camping practicum)

**Where:** Woods Hole Hostel, located on a gorgeous mountain outside Pearisburg, Virginia, some 600 miles north of the southern terminus of the AT. Named the “best overall off-trail experience” by *Platinum-Blazing the Appalachian Trail*, Woods Hole has been described as “A slice of heaven not to be missed” by the AT Hiker Yearbook.

**Cost:** \$250 per person, for bunkhouse lodging or camping, all meals from Friday lunch to Sunday lunch, access to all presentations, presenters and materials. \$350 for private space (two tents or two private rooms). Private accommodations are \$350, subject to availability. All fees benefit Woods Hole; presenters are volunteering their time.

**Registration:** Email [WoodsHoleHostel@gmail.com](mailto:WoodsHoleHostel@gmail.com) for application. Attendance limited to 10 individuals, first-come, first-served, with a wait list in case of cancellations. Limited scholarships may be available, based on need, at the discretion of the hosts.

**Etc.:** All sessions will comply with applicable physical distancing and other, related COVID-19 precautions, based on latest U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommendations. Fee fully refundable if event is canceled due to COVID-19 concerns.

For the full brochure and more details, contact the Woods Hole Hostel at [WoodsHoleHostel@gmail.com](mailto:WoodsHoleHostel@gmail.com)

# NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

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I took over editing the Blazer just about a year ago, but my heart is calling me west. My husband Tim and I are moving closer to our boys who live in Seattle.

The AT. has threaded itself through my life. I have childhood memories of hiking my Dad's favorite stretch of trail on Mt. Washington, NH. During college, my fellow VCU students and I hiked much of the AT in Shenandoah National Park. My grandparents lived just a short walk to Gapland on the AT in Maryland and my grandfather owned land that eventually became part of the AT corridor. Tim and I got married on their farm below the trail in the village of Burkittesville where you could see the AT ridgeline from the porch where the ceremony took place. We spent our honeymoon, where else, but backpacking on the AT on Mt. Washington via Tuckerman Ravine. It was a classic Mt. Washington story, with clear skies and beautiful sunny weather at the bottom, but a wall of rain and fog and hurricane winds at the top reducing us to crawling.

Six months before we got married, I took a job in the publications department at the Appalachian Trail Conference (now Conservancy) in Harpers Ferry editing trail guides and maps during the days of hot wax, x-acto knives, long phone calls with AT club presidents as they described relocations to me, and hand drawing new routes on map overlays. I was the inhouse illustrator, researcher and one of the writers with the thrill and privilege to research in the AT archives as I wrote the biographies of Benton MacKaye, Myron Avery and Jeanne Stephenson. PATC also needed caretakers for the Blackburn Center so my soon-to-be husband and I left our

group house apartment in Baltimore City for the mountain top lodge, which had no running water after April, but a mighty fine outhouse with Town and Country magazines and a magnificent view if you kept the door open. We got to play host and nurse to hundreds of long distance hikers on the AT that year, and I sewed all my bridesmaid dresses on that famous dining table. The first house we bought was just a stone's throw below the AT along the Shenandoah River.

Seven months pregnant with my first child, the AT annual meeting was held at Lynchburg College that year. One of the hosting club presidents, an obstetrician, blocked me from going on the hike to McAfee Knob, something I had looked forward to for a year. But six years later, with a new career in teaching, I moved my family to Roanoke, and one of the first things we did was hike to McAfee Knob with a six-year old and a 1-year old riding on my husband's back. Our sons, now adults, have hiked many miles of the AT in Virginia, although we never bothered to keep track of how many. I wonder what our favorite section of PCT will be?

Thanks for the memories, AT, *Anne Pfeiffer*

For the most up to date information on COVID and the AT, 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.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### **President, Jim Beeson**

986-5301, [President@ratc.org](mailto:President@ratc.org)

### **Vice President, Bill Neilan**

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### **Secretary, Susan Terwilliger**

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### **Counselor, open**

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### **Counselor, Julio Stephens**

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### **Counselor, Brendle Wolfe**

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### **Webmaster, Jonathan Eagle**

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### **Regional Partnership Committee Rep., Jim Beeson**

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### **Regional Partnership Committee Alternate,**

### **Roanoke College Liaison, Bill Neilan**

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

540-525-6812, [cmcbane@appalachian-trail.org](mailto:cmcbane@appalachian-trail.org)

## OTHER IMPORTANT CONTACTS

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

Andrew Downs, 540-904-4354

[adowns@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:adowns@appalachiantrail.org)

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

540-774-3016, [bgordge@cox.net](mailto:bgordge@cox.net)

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

Diana Christopulos

540-387-0930, [dianak16@earthlink.net](mailto:dianak16@earthlink.net)

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)



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.