

# TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Summer 2021

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

## President's Report

by Bill Neilan

What a difference a few months and millions of vaccinations have made. We have gone from a "full lock down" to a "limited lock down" to "back to normal". The feeling of relief is amazing. In our family we have gotten to see our son and daughter-in-law and our daughter for the first time in more than a year. We enter summer with a sense of renewal and a truer appreciation for all that we have.

With the Covid restrictions removed I am happy to report that

- the Dragon tooth toilets are now open and McAfee Knob parking lot toilets are to return shortly.
- There are "No Parking" signs on the Dragon Tooth parking lot entrance drive.
- Thanks to Jennifer Frye, recreational hikes have begun and can be found on Meetup. A big THANK YOU to all the hike leaders that have put hikes together.



- The McAfee Knob Task Force, led by RATC's Dee Case and Kathryn Herndon-Powell, ATC Regional Director, is active again and still recruiting new members. Check Meetup for the next training if you want to be part of a group of amazing volunteers.

Speaking of new members, our Membership Supervisor, Mark Farrell reports that membership tops 700. As far as we can tell this is a new all-time record. And the summer has just begun!

Mike Vaughn and his trail maintainers continue to make the trail safer as they have addressed trip

hazards and erosion in many places. Jim Webb, Mark Farrell and myself, representing all the trail maintainers, were recognized in the Roanoke Times and other newspapers.

A special trail maintenance project recently completed was the painting of the perimeter walls and general upkeep of a family cemetery on land recently purchased by the A.T.C.. The RATC has committed to maintain the upkeep of the cemetery out of respect for the family.

Another bit of good news to report is that the annual RATC Corn Boil is scheduled for August 28, 2021. All the details will be entered into Meetup in the coming days. The Corn Boil is usually the chance for the RATC to thank the hard working members of the ATC Konnarock work crew for all the work they do on the RATC section of the A.T. This year, due to Covid, the Konnarock crew will not be able to join us but we will remember them as we celebrate the RATC's own maintenance workers.

## **RATC's annual Corn Boil is back on the calendar!**

Please plan to join us on August 28 from 6:00 - 8:00 PM at the Catawba Community Center.

Please bring a dish to share.

RSVP via Meetup.com





Trail Supervisor's Report

by Mike Vaughn

Back in February, rain and a sudden cold front resulted in a significant coating of ice on the trees at higher elevations in the mountains. Unfortunately, this resulted in many large limbs and trees falling across the trail. The trail was practically impassable for miles along ridge-lines, particularly on Pearis and Sinking Creek Mountains.



Soon after the weather cleared and the ridgelines were accessible our trail maintainers went to work on the enormous task of clearing these obstructions. They put in many hours and got our section of trail cleared well before the northbound thru hikers came through our section. I'd like to thank all of the maintainers that pitched in a got this difficult task completed. I'd also like to thank all of the maintainers who got out and clipped and blazed this spring. Overall, our section is in pretty good shape for the busy summer hiking season.



We are always looking for new maintainers. 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. You can find out more about the duties of a trail maintainer on our web site. Contact me (540 992-1350) if you are interested in being a trail maintainer.

Since my last report, the Monday work crew has been out working in several different areas. We added some steps and did some trail widening up on the Andy Layne Trail. We also widened about 900 feet of trail on Sawtooth Ridge as well as adding nearly 100 feet of log cribbing there. We also did some extensive trail widening south of Kimberling Creek in Bland County. I should note that Joel, a Navy Corpsman stationed in Norfolk came up and worked with us on one of the hikes on Saw-

tooth. He did the four plus hour drive that morning and drive back that evening. He put in a hard day's work with us that was greatly appreciated.



Looking forward, we will be spending 5-6 weeks on the trail up to McAfee Knob. We will primarily be working to brush in areas where hikers are going off-trail. We will also be cribbing sections of the trail that are narrow and slanted. We will also be doing some rehab work on the southern part of our section of the AT.



Planted Southern Red Oak saplings

April 20, 2021

Homer and Therese Witcher, Conner McBane, Bill Neillan, Jim Webb, David Horst, Mark Ferrell, Mitchell Rieley, Kathryn Plunkett

On April 20th, the 9 of us planted 100 Southern Red Oak saplings that were purchased using license plate funds. These were planted on the site of the old Arney house in Daleville. The house was re-

moved and the site cleaned up last year and we were anxious to get some trees growing before the invasives took over the site. Since it has been a dry year, the trees have needed to be watered numerous times. As of this writing, about half of the saplings are thriving.



Fullhardt Knob Shelter privy move June 16 and June 19, 2021

Homer & Therese Witcher, Adam Day, Landan Plunkett, Mark Farrell, Bill Neilan, Bennett Witcher, Jim Webb, Bob Grubbs

Once a privy has reached its limit of waste, a new six foot hole has to be hand dug and the privy slid over the new hole.

After two days of digging through dirt and solid rock, the privy was attached to a rope crank and slid across the newly dug hole. The dirt and rock from the new hole was shoveled over the old hole, and what remained of the dirt, was dispersed into the woods. Fortunately we had 2 engineers on the crew to help assist with the technical aspect of this project.







**Wapiti Shelter rehab**  
**April 23 - 24, 2021**

**AC Bruce, Homer & Therese Witcher, Bill Floyd, Jim Webb, Josh Kloen, Fred Meyer, Bennett Witcher, Bill Neilan, John Hvozdovic, Ernest Correale, Ron Butler, Justin Hawkins, India Drew, Jenna Judd, Blizzard**

Several years ago, the USFS approved funding to replace or rehab Wapiti shelter because of wood borer infestation. The project was supposed to be completed by March 2021, but finding someone with the requisite skill to jack up the shelter and replace several logs proved to be difficult. In

December, during a chance encounter on the trail near Fullhardt Knob, we met a member of the Natural Bridge club. Upon discussion, he revealed that he was a certified building contractor. We boldly asked if he would consider leading this project. To our delight, he accepted the challenge. Little did he know that he would have to endure many phone calls and questions about his plan before the project was approved by the USFS. The approval finally came at the end of March and plans were made to implement the project on April 23 - 25th. AC procured all of the required building materials and plans were made to haul in the materials on April

23rd, replace the logs on April 24th and reroof and stain the shelter on April 25th.

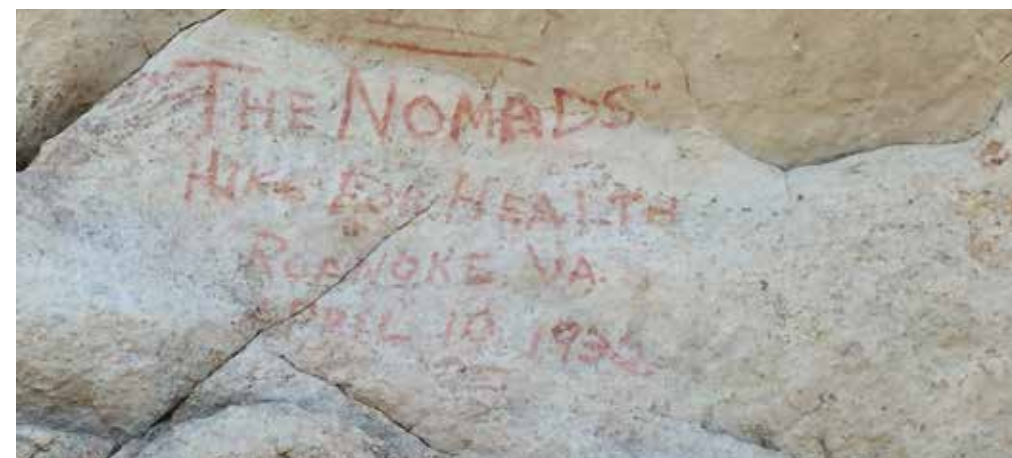
The call for volunteers was put out on meetup and the response was overwhelming. Everyone anxiously watched the weather forecast the week before. The forecast was calling for heavy rains starting midmorning on Saturday. The decision was made to try and complete as much as possible on Friday. Upon arrival at the site, work began immediately, removing the floorboards, hauling in the logs and other supplies and preparing to jack up the shelter. Under AC's direction, the shelter was jacked up, old logs were removed, new

logs were notched and set in place, and concrete was poured for the 2 stanchions in front. In addition to the shelter work, the privy roof was replaced with metal and the privy was stained. The log replacement went smoothly and was completely by 4:30 PM. At that point, the decision was made to proceed with replacing the roof. Everyone immediately set to work removing the asphalt shingles, hauling them to the truck and installing the new metal roof. Some of the logs in the shelter were sanded to remove graffiti. Work was completed just before dark. Thanks to the skilled labor force with good leadership, the necessary tasks were performed in an expedited manner. At the end of the day, everyone felt as if they had just completed a marathon.

The next morning, AC, Fred and Therese, quickly installed the 2



stanchions and we were able to leave before the rains arrived. The following week, Homer and Therese sprayed the shelter with borate and stained the shelter.



**RATC ARCHIVES, 1930s**  
**Who were the Nomads? Help us solve the mystery!**  
**Diana Christopulos,**  
**RATC Archivist**  
[dianak16@earthlink.net](mailto:dianak16@earthlink.net)

Former RATC President Jim Beeson found an interesting artifact while patrolling his section - a message left by some of the founders of our club. Along with faculty and staff of Roanoke and Hollins colleges, members of what

we believe was a local women's hiking club called the Nomads started the RATC in 1932. Tinker Cliffs and McAfee Knob were two of their favorite destinations, and they left tantalizing evidence of the passage with this inscription:

**"THE NOMADS"**  
**HIKE FOR HEALTH**  
**ROANOKE, VA.**  
**APRIL 10, 1932**

It looks like there could have been more to the message, perhaps names, but they have faded away. Today we would call it graffiti, but after 89 years it is history with a mystery.

Can you help solve the mystery? When we look at the names of RATC founders, about half are women, including:

Virginia Caldwell (membership Chair, 1940)  
Grace Cheveraux (Membership Chair, 1932))  
Betsy Gates  
Evalyn Gillenwater  
Velma Moeschler (Membership Committee, 1932)  
Sarah Mosher  
Mae Pond  
Grace Pownall (Vice President, 1932)

If you have any information about the Nomads or these founding RATC members, please let me know!



**Hikemaster's & hiker's Reports**  
*by Fred Meyer, Larry Austin, Jennifer Frye, and Dee Case*

**Hike: Thunder Ridge Overlook to Highcock Knob, round trip. Strenuous hike of approximately 9 miles with significant ups and downs. Date: 6-25-2021**

**Participants: Fred Meyer, leader, Jennifer Frye, Madeline, Dee Dee Case, Maya Bohler, Gary, and (Kris Peckman arrived on our way back.)**

There was a wonderful view at Thunder Ridge Overlook, the day was sunny and warm but not overly hot. We saw some wonderful flowers on the way, including a Canadian lily(?) We reached Highcock Knob but unfortunately there was not much of a view. On our way back and forth we met several through-hikers on their way to Maine. We ended the hike about 4 PM and agreed that it was a strenuous hike.



**Hike: Thunder Ridge Circuit Distance: 10.5 miles Date: 05-12-21 Meeting Time: 9:00 a.m.**

**Leader: Larry Austin Participants: Madeleine Taylor, Dawn Lamb, Jennifer Harvey Frye and Lois Smith**

We met at the Thunder Ridge Overlook Parking area to begin this hike. We went north on the AT to Petite's Gap. This section contained thousands of May Apple, Trillium and various other spring wildflowers. Two northbound thru-hikers passed us on the way. From Petite's Gap we crossed the Parkway to connect to the Glenwood Horse Trail (GHT). We followed this about 3 miles to its



junction with Forest Service Road 45. The GHT also offered a number of Spring flowers and we stopped for lunch at a creek crossing. Once we reached Forest Service Road 45 we had about 2 miles of road climb to reach the Hunting Creek Trail.

The Hunting Creek Trail is a beautiful trail that leads to the AT and offers some creekside walking for a way. Once we hit the AT again, we headed south about 3/4 mile back to the parking lot and our vehicles. Here we enjoyed some refreshments and socializing before heading our separate ways.

**Hike: Black Horse Gap Circuit Date: 04-04-21**

**Leader: Larry Austin Participants: Dawn Lamb, Jennifer Frye, Jill Pennington, Randy Pennington and Jane Marvin**

The weather for this Easter Sunday hike was sunny and nice. It started out a little cool but warmed up nicely as we moved along. We met at Black Horse Gap on the Blue Ridge Parkway to begin this hike. We descended the Glenwood Horse Trail (GHT) east to Day Creek Camp. There were many Service Berry Trees blooming along the way. We continued to follow the GHT up Dody Ridge which provided some nice views of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

We then veered off the GHT up the ridge on a path that led us to the Great Valley Overlook where we enjoyed our lunch. Following the Parkway for about 1/2 mile south, we then bushwhacked down a ridge about a mile or so to hit the AT south of Wilson Creek. We proceeded north on the AT back to Black Horse Gap to complete this circuit. We stopped at the Wilson Creek Shelter where we meet a northbound through-hiker.

It was a pleasure to welcome Jane Milton, a new member to the Meetup group, who moved to this area a couple of years ago from the San Francisco Bay area. Everyone did a great job on this hike even though it was somewhat strenuous at times. We had some refreshments and good conversation at the end.



**Hike: False Hellebore Rebirth Date: 04-14-21**

**Leader: Larry Austin Participants: Lois Smith, Jennifer Frye, Maya Bohler, Dave Horst, Madeleine Taylor, Wilma Vargas and Chuck C.**

The weather for this hike was partly cloudy and in the 60's. We met at the Flat Top parking lot off the Blue Ridge Parkway. We began the hike by descending to the Fallingwater Cascades Trail to view the falls. We then climbed back out on the trail that leads to the other side at the Fallingwater Cascades parking lot. From there we took an old logging road to the site of the False Hellebore where we spent some time admiring the plants. We then picked up the Glenwood Horse Trail (GHT) south about 3/4 mile to a wildlife pond on the top of Chestnut Mountain so we could try to spot some activity in the pond. We then veered off the GHT on a hunter's path over a beautiful ridge that had several game fields and some Bloodroot blooming. This ridge had thousands of Cow Parsnip beginning to arise from the ground. They normally grow about 5 or 6 feet tall and bloom in



mid-May. That should be quite a show at that time. We then picked up the GHT for about another mile or so and then took a grassy road where the Forest Service had planted some Peach Trees guarded by a little cage around each to prevent deer from nipping them. We had lunch along this old road near another wildlife pond. At the end of this road, we bushwhacked back to the Fallingwater Cascades parking lot. The bushwhack although downhill presented many obstacles of fallen limbs and debris along with rocks. However, the hillside was full of blooming flowers such as Toothwort, Yellow Fumewort, Violets, Great Chickweed and Bloodroot. After safely reaching the parking lot we headed over the ridge back to our vehicles. This ridge also had numerous wildflowers blooming. We had a good group of hikers and enjoyed some refreshments and conversation at the end.



**Round-trip, or out-and-back?**

One of the many advantages of hiking with a group via Meetup is shared transportation. Often times the group leader will arrange for a car(s) to be left at the hike's endpoint to transport folks back their car(s) at the beginning trailhead, thus maximizing the distance covered on the hike. Rather than parking a vehicle and hiking out five miles before retracing those five miles to the start, hikers can "check-off" ten total miles of trail covered. The obvious disadvantage to this arrangement is schedule; hikers may not be able to find the a group hiking the section they choose to hike, or on a day when schedules mesh. Fortunately, there is a third option which is both convenient and flexible, i.e. a shuttle!

RATC's website includes a [page of shuttle drivers](#) available for hire. Typically these drivers are AT-friendly, if not avid hikers and club members, who make themselves available for hire to meet a hiker at either the start or end of a hike and transport them back to their start point. Shuttle drivers tend to be knowledgeable about the various access points to the trail, parking options at trail heads, etc. Shuttle drivers will be prepared for gear and many even welcome the family pooch. The protocol for hiring a shuttle is simply to call and work out the details, cost, etc.

If the idea of a multi-day hike is appealing but sleeping in a tent is not, consider a hostel like [Woods Hole](#) or an AirBnB like [Dirty Boots on Big Stony](#). These two establishments and others are within easy walking distance of the AT and especially accommodate AT hikers.



**Hike: Sprouts Run/Wilson Mountain Circuit**  
**Distance: 7.5 miles**  
**Date: May 4, 2021**  
**Meeting Time: 9:00 a.m.**

**Leader: Larry Austin**  
**Participants: Lois Smith, Katia Florentino, Madeleine Taylor, Maya Bohler and Jennifer Harvey Frye**



We met at the trailhead off Solitude Road for this hike. We hiked up the Sprouts Run Trail first so that we could view the flow of the stream coming toward us.

We spotted a number of wildflowers including the Yellow Lady's Slipper, Pink Lady's Slipper, Wood Anemone, Rue Anemone, White-Haired Leather Flower, Showy Orchis, Golden Alexander, Bishop's Cap, Cancer Root, Bird-on-the-Wing (Gay Wing), Robin's Plantain among others.

After we hiked up Wilson Mountain we stopped for lunch before beginning the long ridge walk on Wilson Mountain and then back down to Sprouts Run.



Again we had some refreshments before departing the trailhead. Lucky for us we finished this hike before a terrible storm hit causing wind damage in areas.



**Hike: Beauty and the Beast (Apple Orchard Falls/Cornelius Creek Extended)**  
**Distance: 12.5 miles**  
**Date: 05-19-21**  
**Meeting Time: 8:30 a.m.**

**Leader: Larry Austin**  
**Participants: Keith Patterson, Wilma Vargas and Linda Nguyen**

We met at the Apple Orchard Falls/Cornelius Creek trailhead at the end of North Creek for this hike. We ascended the Apple Orchard Falls Trail first finding a number of wildflowers on the way.

At the Falls we took a short break for photographs and snacks. From there we climbed to Sunset Field on the Parkway. Again we spotted a number of wildflowers including Trillium, May Apple, Wild Geranium and several Jack-in-the-Pulpit.

After reaching Sunset Field we again took a few minutes to catch our breath. This was a long climb from the bottom. We crossed the Parkway and headed east to hit the Glenwood Horse Trail (GHT). We stopped at Overstreet Cascades for lunch. This was quite a beautiful spot for lunch and we could feel the chill from the Falls as we had lunch.



Following lunch we headed up Forest Service Road 190 about 2.2 miles to Floyd Field on the Parkway. Crossing the Parkway we then hit the blue blaze trail that leads down to the Cornelius Creek Shelter on the AT. There we noticed a hiker sleeping at 1:00 p.m. in the shelter. We passed several north-bound through-hikers on the AT.

We stopped at Black Rock Overlook on the AT to take some pics and get a little breather.

We took the Cornelius Creek Trail 2.8 miles back down to where we parked. Cornelius Creek offers many holes of water and smaller falls along the way. This is an extraordinary hike and it is too bad only

four of us took advantage of this opportunity.

It was a pleasure to hike with a couple of new hikers to our group, Keith Patterson and Linda Nguyen who moved here from Oregon a couple years ago to work in the nursing field. After having some refreshments to lift our spirits after this long, challenging hike, we departed to our separate destinations.

**Multiple hikes and dates**  
**Leader: Dee Case**  
**Punch Bowl Overlook to Route 60**  
**Date: 5-26-2021**  
**Participants: Adele Shaffer, Carol Rowlett, Jennifer Frye, Sissy Logan, Judy Repass, Peter Whiteis, Jennifer Whiteis, Schelley Fickey, Patty Starks and David Gloudemans**

**Salt Log Gap to Route 60 (Long Meadow Wayside)**  
**Date: 6-12-21**  
**Participants Fred Meyer, Patty Stark, Clive Hillyard, Jennifer Frye and Carol Rowlett.**

**Punchbowl Mountain to Long Mountain Wayside**  
**Date: 6-13-21**

**Salt Log Gap to Long Mountain Wayside**  
**Date: 6-26-21**



**Salt Log Gap North on AT to Montebello Fish Hatchery**  
**Date: 7-11-21**  
**Participants: Clive Hillyard, Sissy Logan, Janet Repass, Carol Rowlett, Patty Stark, Jennifer Frye and Dawn Lamb**

With the reopening of Club-led hikes this year, we started hiking the Natural Bridge Sections of the AT. The Natural Bridge section runs from Black Horse Gap to Rock Fish Gap. Our next hike North will finish up the Natural Bridge Section. On the way some of the more stunning views were at Thunder Ridge, the view of the James River and the view from Cold Mountain.

Look for more hikes as a group of us are section-hiking Virginia.





From hikers to bikers

by Bob Peckman



This is a story of two old hikers, Carl Cornett and Bob Peckman, who wanted to cycle across the country again, and Bob's wife Kris who made it possible.

Neither of us had done the Southern Tier, the shortest route at only 3,000 miles. The problem with the Southern Tier is you have to start early in the year before it gets too hot, especially in the southwest desert. But it is too cold here in Roanoke to train for the trip. So we decided that we would train in Florida while riding the route and Kris volunteered to be our tour staff, driving the car to carry equipment, book motels and to beam us up and back down when the distance between available motels was too great.

Since we are both in our 80's we planned on not having too rigid a plan. Adventure Cycling normally takes two months to ride this route so we knew that it would take us no more than three and we would just stay within our capabilities.

On March 8th we had our drink from the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine, FL and headed west. In

the early morning we wanted the sun on our backs, not in the eyes of the driver overtaking us. And it was going to be great fun meeting Jim Beeson and his friends when they passed in the other direction. We crossed Florida in pretty good time, but then we had to interrupt the trip and return to Roanoke. By the time we were able to start again, Carl was not able to come with us.

It was now April 9th and the desert was getting hotter, so we flip-flopped, going straight to San Diego and cycling back to where we had to stop. This was not flat like Florida. On the first day I climbed 3,000 feet. I was not upset that I went less than 30 miles at about 7½ miles/hour, but there were many other days where I was not aware of how much I had climbed and worried that I



was losing it. On the other hand there were two days when I rode 90 miles, the longest I had ever ridden. I rode in hail and I rode in thunder and not-too-close lightning and some less-rainy days but for the most part we had beautiful weather with only a couple of days that were too warm. I was surprised by how much of the nation is desert.

While I was having a wonderful cycling experience, Kris was learning why we pay the Adventure Cycling tour leaders, why they spend so much time doing paperwork, and how we mysteriously have a place to sleep every night. There were a few places where the official route went over some very steep places which I skirted; Kris photographed them and verified that they were not only steeper than I would enjoy, but also steeper than I could do.

I am thankful that I am capable of doing more than I thought I could and that I have a devoted partner who made it possible. I was beaten to a pulp many days but always with the good kind of tired. I enjoyed every day and managed to complete the tour in the standard two months.

AT-related art and imagery

Submitted by Matt and Collen Gentry and Bill Floyd





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

CHANGE SERVICE  
REQUESTED

<b>Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club Application</b>	<b>New and Renewal</b>	<b>IF ACCEPTED FOR MEMBERSHIP, I AGREE TO:</b> 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		
		<b>Total Amount Enclosed \$</b>

Dues are payable in January of each year. Make checks to “RATC” or use PayPal at [ratc.org](http://ratc.org)

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

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

Please Note: To save costs, the Trail Blazer is provided electronically via email/link. Paper copies may be obtained via mail. Request a paper copy via [treasurer@ratc.org](mailto:treasurer@ratc.org) or by calling 540-521-5435