

TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Summer 2022

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.

Accidental Fall

What happened near McAfee Knob early on Sunday morning, May 29, 2022?

By Diana Christopulos

Some things we know about the morning of May 29 and others we probably will never know. After Paul Classen/Grandmaster, a 23-year-old hiker from the Netherlands fell from a cliff near McAfee Knob, the dramatic rescue assured that he got the best possible care in the fastest possible time. Local hikers and others stepped up to provide transportation and support to both the hiker's family and his "tramily" (trail family). About a dozen thru hikers stayed in the area to memorialize Paul/Grandmaster and support his family. Here are the facts we have, based on first-hand and published accounts.



Paul Classen and his father, Patrick Classen

Grandmaster got his trail name because he always carried a small chess set with him, and he frequently used it. Neville Harris, owner of the renowned Woods Hole Hostel near Pearisburg, reported that "One of the guys helping here played many chess games [with Grandmaster]. They both connected strongly because of their passion for the chess game. They made very good memories."

He hiked over 700 miles with his tramily. His father, Patrick Classen, had spent two weeks shadowing the group only a month earlier in North Carolina, earning his own trail name, Grandpapa. So the tramily and the family knew one another. Sunday was to be Grandmaster's last day on the AT, starting with sunrise at McAfee Knob and finishing at Daleville. He already had a ticket to fly home from Washington, DC.

What happened? I spoke with the hiker who was sitting next to him. They were perched at the overlook just north of McAfee Knob, with their feet on a rock ledge, drinking coffee, laughing and talking as they waited for the sun to come up. Just before sunrise, Paul's head dropped, and he slumped over and fell off. The hiker could not see his face but believes that Paul passed out. The reason is unknown and will likely remain unknown.

The rescue effort was exceptional. Matt Johnson, a local runner, was 20 feet away when the accident occurred. He led tramily members

down to Paul, and they provided constant contact and reassurance. Other tramily members were deployed down the trail to meet staff from the Roanoke County Fire & Rescue squad and help them carry gear. The county's crew used their four-wheeler on the newly-graded fire road and later told RATC volunteer Pete Irvine that the regraded road made for a much swifter evacuation. They got within 0.3 miles of the Knob, then retrieved Grandmaster on foot and drove the four-wheeler to the former Home Place restaurant, where Carilion's medical helicopter was waiting. A wilderness medical physician was part of the rescue team. Grandmaster was then flown to the regional ICU trauma center at Carilion in Roanoke.

People wondered why it took so long for the media to confirm Paul's death. Paul's father arrived in Roanoke from the Netherlands late Monday afternoon, and the confirmation occurred the next day. According to a well-researched [May 31 Roanoke Times article by reporter Emma Coleman](#):

The long-distance hiker who fell 50 feet off a cliff just north of McAfee Knob's summit early Sunday has died, the Roanoke County Fire and Rescue Department said Tuesday.

Paul Classen, a 23-year-old from the Netherlands, died at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital later that day, after a dramatic rescue operation involving first responders, fellow hikers,

a physician wilderness medical care specialist, an ATV and a helicopter retrieved him from the remote mountain near Catawba.

Support did not stop with the rescue. Eight family members stayed at a motel in Roanoke until Thursday. The parents of one hiker drove up from North Carolina for a day. Local hikers and maintainers helped, too. Molly Amistead, Homer and Therese Witcher and I provided transportation.

Paul's father, Patrick, and his fiancé arrived in Roanoke late Monday afternoon.

Early on Monday, twelve thru hikers who knew Grandmaster and had stayed behind hiked up to McAfee Knob. I picked up Patrick and his fiancé plus a family member and took them to the Mason's Cove Fire Department - source of the Sunday rescue crew - where we were met by the chief and the chaplain. The chaplain and other staff took my passengers up to the Knob via truck, four-wheeler and on foot for a small memorial and to see the site of the accident. Josh Wolsey and I met all of them with cold drinks in the McAfee parking lot a few hours later.

It was lunchtime, and the whole group had not been able to sit down together for a meal. When they heard who we were, the staff of Macado's in Salem graciously served the 15 of us on the outdoor patio, even though they were severely short-handed. The two-hour lunch was a boon. Patrick/Grandpapa was of course devastated, but he and his fiancé repeatedly stated how impressed they were with the kindness of the Americans they were meeting.

Faramir, a family member from North Carolina, and I worked out a plan to cover the costs of three motel rooms (for the family and the family), the big lunch and some gear that had been lost during the rush of the rescue. Thanks to the immediate generosity of over 50 people, we achieved our \$2,300 goal in two days. Thanks so much if you were one of the donors!

Robyn Urdaibay, a young hiker from Scotland who is part of the family [posted this on her Facebook page](#):

Two days ago my friend fell off a cliff and passed away. I met Grandmaster on the first day of

my hike, and we hiked together for two months. I was not there at the time of the accident, but my friends were. My trail family. The group of us have hiked more than 700 miles together, and that creates a bond stronger than I could have imagined. I never thought something like this would be a part of my hike. I just can't wrap my head around how it happened. We all intend to hike on, carrying his memory with us. But right now we are with his father, and taking some time. Thank you to everyone who has been following my hike and wishing me well. Hug your loved ones.

We know that Grandmaster was deeply loved by a lot of people and that he had the best possible chance of survival. Everything else is speculation.

By the end of June his family had reached the halfway point of the Trail in Pennsylvania, finding some peace and solace in long days of hiking.

We wish them well.

President's Report

by Bill Neilan

Summer has arrived and with a vengeance. Record number of ninety degree days recorded in Roanoke already. Be sure to bring and drink lots of water and to dress appropriately while on the trail. Dehydration and sunburn can change a great day hike into a nasty one.

July 4th has passed and it will not be long until we enjoy the annual RATC Corn Boil. This year we get to celebrate the folks from the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) for their work on

a RATC section of trail. All RATC club members are invited and as this is a Pot Luck event asked to bring a dish to share. Sign in to Meetup for details and to let us know that you are coming.

Work has begun on the new round about at the intersection by Orange Market and is expected to be completed by August 1st. This improvement is expected to eliminate the traffic backups that occur there twice a day.

The northbound thru hikers have pretty much all passed our way and the southbounders will be here soon. Thanks to Mike Vaughn and

all the trail maintainers the hikers have a great section to hike through.

I encourage everyone to get out and enjoy the outdoors as much as you can. I want to thank all of you who have renewed your membership and our Life Members for your continuing support. Remember, a club is only as good as the participation of its members.



"The Green Tunnel" podcast traces the Appalachian Trail through time

by Anne Reynolds

Mills Kelly has been hiking on the Appalachian Trail since his days as a Boy Scout in 1970. "I had no idea that this trail ran from Maine to Georgia," he said. "My Boy Scout leaders in Northern Virginia took us hiking on the Appalachian Trail in Shenandoah National Park all the time, and as far as I knew it was just the trail in Shenandoah National Park that was called the Appalachian Trail."

But in 1971, through-hiker Ed Garvey came to speak to the troop, bringing with him a slideshow of his recent excursion. His tales sparked Kelly's imagination, and since those Boy Scout days, he estimates that he has hiked around 600 miles of segments of the AT, in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New England, and Georgia.

Now Kelly is a history professor, telling stories that bring history to life for students at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. And he has been able to harmo-

nize these skills with his interest in the trail, and thus bring the AT to a wide audience.

Kelly is the host of "The Green Tunnel" podcast, produced by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM), a research center at Mason that specializes in history and information technology, where Kelly serves as director. The podcast tells stories that narrate the history of the trail, the people who helped create it, and issues common to modern day hikers and those who have enjoyed the trail since its inception. "It occurred to me that this is the perfect subject for a podcast," he said, "because hikers love to hike with earbuds in, and our mission [at RRCHNM] is to democratize access to information. Well, what could be more democratic than a free podcast?"

In its recently concluded first season, The Green Tunnel described the trail's conception in the early 1920s as a haven for an increasingly industrialized society, and how its many local segments came together to finally stretch from Mount Oglethorpe to Mount Katahdin. Listeners meet some of the

individuals whose contributions to the trail have made it a unique destination, and visit some of the trail's most iconic locations.

Kelly promises more of these varied views in the podcast's second season, which is in development now. "The first one we're working on is called 'Virginia's Lost Appalachian Trail,'" he said. "An old stretch of trail where the northernmost 60 or 70 miles was really under the supervision of Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club." Like the first season, all of the episodes are deeply researched and based on archival research and interviews.

"It's really the history of 20th century America," said Kelly. "Gender, race, class, political power, government power, the taking of land from people -- pick a theme in American history, and it's reflected in the history of the Appalachian Trail."

The Green Tunnel podcast is available wherever you listen to podcasts. You can learn more about it, and the team that produces it, at <https://greentunnel.rrchnm.org>.

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Trail Supervisor's Report

by Mike Vaughn

I'd like to welcome a large group of new trail maintainers who have started since January 1, 2022.

Here is a list of them and the sections they are working on:

- Tim Shively**
Big Horse Gap to Doc's Knob shelter
- Jeremy Spicer**
Bailey Gap to Route 613
- Paul Goodwin**
Sinking Creek Mountain (south end)
- Molly Brunner**
Sinking Creek Mountain (north end)
- Josie DeMarce**
Sinking Creek Mountain (north end)
- Ed Kohinke**
Dragons Tooth to Route 624
- David Poteet**
Dragons Tooth to Route 624
- Greg Stick**
Route 311 to fire road
- Warren Elsea**
Route 311 to fire road
- Brian Buccola**
Campbell shelter to Brickey Gap
- David Tillman**
Ditch Trail to Angel's Gap
- Ashley Curtice**
McAfee Fire Road
- Joe Brabant**
North Mountain

This has been an excellent year so far for training for our maintainers. We had a class for new and existing maintainers in April put on by the ATC. Another class will be held on July 23.

In June, a Forest Service instructor taught a one-day class on identifying hazard trees. Hazard trees are dead or damaged trees that are located near shelters or AT parking lots; these trees need to

be identified and cut down due to safety concerns. Also in June, Tom McAvoy, the club's Conservation Supervisor, taught an on-line class on identifying invasive species along the trail.

We did two work hikes on the eastern side of Brush Mountain in Craig County; here is a recap of where the Monday work crew has been working recently:

In May and June we did four work hikes out on Kelly Knob in Giles County. We installed 15 rock steps and 10 log steps on steep sections of trail out there.

We also added some step stones across a creek. As we worked, we saw many north-bound thru-hikers passing by on their way to Maine.



Finally, the club sponsored two crosscut sawyer classes in June, resulting in eight more certified crosscut sawyers for the four wilderness areas our section of trail goes through. The classes were taught by instructors from the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS), a group based in North Carolina. A great thank you to club member Pete Irvine for suggesting we hire a contractor to conduct this much needed training.

Thanks to all who came out for the work hikes. In coming months, we will be working in the southern part of our section of the AT.

Please contact me if you would like to spend some time working on the trail!

Mike Vaughn
trailsupervisor@ratc.org

Scouting Project

Last winter, Eagle Scout candidate, Cara Newbill proposed to the club that she build a kiosk at the AT parking lot along route 100 in Pearisburg. The club approved this and Cara got busy raising funds and buying materials. In May, with some help from friends, Cara was able to complete the kiosk. It turned out spectacularly, and this location was much in need of a kiosk.

The RATC is very grateful for Cara taking that project on and we are happy that she has completed this critical step in becoming an Eagle Scout.



Hiking Reports

Hike: Carvins Cove Rattlin' Run - Four Gorge Loop
Date: Friday April 15, 2022

by Maya Bohler

the next hour layer upon layer of clothing came off. The day turned out to be sunny and quite warm. We looked for wildflowers and spotted a few violets, a dwarf iris and a couple of wood anemones. The showiest flowers we saw were



Maya Bohler (leader), Mary Harshfield (co-leader), Elizabeth Clem, Jimbo Harshfield, Richard Harris, Carina Hughes, Dawn Lamb

We met at Bennett Springs Parking at 9 AM. It was unusually cold for this time of the year, and everybody was bundled up in winter clothes. It looked and felt like winter, and most of the trees were still bare.

As we hiked up Rattlin' Run the temperature rose quickly, and over

a neat row of daffodils. It seemed obvious that someone had planted them.

At the end of Rattlin' Run we took Songbird down to Happy Valley and then up Brushy Mountain to Four Gorge. Along the way we enjoyed a lunch break in a sunny location. We were back at the Parking around 1PM. It turned out to be a 7-mile hike, one mile longer than expected.

Everybody enjoyed the hike.

Hike: Mines-Hammond Hollow, 9 miles, a loop hike beginning at Montvale Overlook at milepost 95.9 on the Blue Ridge Parkway
Date: April 10, 2022

by Fred Meyer

There were 12 participants: Fred Meyer, leader, Bob and Kris Peckman, assistants, Ana Anderson, Tom Behrmann, Maya Bohler, Angela Butters, Dee Case, Richard

Harris, Jennifer Frye, Patty Starks, and Dawn Lamb.

It was extremely windy and cold when we began the hike and there was a wonderful view at Montvale Overlook. We crossed the Parkway and hiked 2 miles to USFS 634 and turning right for another 3.2 miles. We had lunch before we went up the Hammond Hollow trail for 1.4 miles.

Hike: Brushy Mountain Outpost to Poor Valley Road

Dates: May 27 - 29, 2022

by Ron Bradbury

Hiker: Ron Bradbury

Along with the normal fun of just being out, southbound (SOBO) hikes in this region during the months of May and June offer an added benefit of passing through "the bubble", i.e. the large group of northbound (NOBO) through hikers who left Georgia in March or April on their way to Maine. Over the course of these three days and twenty-seven(ish) miles, I greeted all manner of NOBOs, who typically asked about the water supply ahead or were curious about resupply options, etc. I chatted with one guy from the south of England; he had spurned a trail name and I forget his real name.

We chatted at an overlook, over trail mix. He had hiked since Georgia, and planned several more weeks on the trail. He had seen five bears, three that morning. He was rather matter-of-fact in observing that many of the through-hikers he had met seemed to be seeking something or seeking escape from some life angst--an unexpectedly-philosophical observation from a twenty-something year old dude in shorts and a t-shirt. He preferred to avoid shelters and mostly had camped wherever he could find a spot. He referenced having hiked major

continued>>

Along the way we saw some wonderful flowers coming up; once we reach the AT, we crossed the Parkway at Harvey's Knob and returned to Montvale Overlook where we started. It was still very windy but it had warmed up nicely.

Everyone was a bit tired but happy.

trails on multiple continents--I had to wonder what life circumstance facilitated this accomplishment, but I did not ask.

The area south of Bland shows up on some maps as the "Beartown Wilderness" and "Hunting Camp Creek Wilderness"; in fact I did see two bears. The first I startled--it was just a black blur disappearing over a knoll; the second was quite large and standing on its hindquarters as if to emphasize its size.



Upon crossing Laurel Creek at Sutter Road, SOBO hikers are greeted with a barrel of wood chips and a sign from the local trail club asking for help; the club requested that hikers carry and dump a bag of fresh wood chips into the mouldering privy at the Jenkins Shelter, which I was happy to do. I probably ended up with half a bag as tears in the bag along the way caused a bit of a chip leak. The leak would have made it easy to retrace my steps had I gotten lost--but did not especially help the very needy privy.

A handful of hikers arrived at Jenkins while I was taking a break and dumping the wood chips; this group was one of a few I have personally encountered who seemed more interested in raucous partying than in the whole AT Nature



Scene. They were loud and a bit crude in their conversation, so I opted not to stop for the night. A few miles down the way I found a site about 50 yards off the trail that was flat, had a delightful spring, and proved quite amenable for my hammock, so I camped there.



The view from the shelter at Chestnut Ridge is spectacular; it overlooks without obstruction an area called Burkes Garden. Lots of happy thru-hikers were drying out there after a day of heavy rain and many adjacent sections of the trail more resembled creeks than a footpath. Staying dry was hopeless. I ended this hike at small parking lot on Poor Valley Road, which is one of those dirt roads that seem to exist out of the past--with no reason for being and no reason for staying.

On that note, I also learned that www.alltrails.com occasionally displays roads which in reality are impassable and long-abandoned, e.g. route 727 from Poor Valley Road going west/north, up and over the ridge; it looked good on paper but in reality, not so much. The road does exist on the other side of the ridge, but is not sedan-friendly.

In its entirety, these miles emphasized contrast; starting within a few miles of a town and traffic and busy I-77, a little bit of effort carries hikers into a remote wilderness of startling, rugged beauty.



Hike: AT from Lake of the Clouds Hut to Summit of Mt. Washington
Date: June 23, 2022

by Ron Bradbury

Hikers: Ron and Keli Bradbury

Strictly speaking, a mile is a mile is a mile, but this particular hike may have been the longest mile Keli and I have ever hiked.

Mount Washington has a fearsome reputation for the weather at the summit--in fact the 231 mile per hour wind speed recorded there stood from 1934 until 1996 as the fastest-ever recorded wind gust on the planet. Three days before we hiked, a Mt. Washington hiker was surprised by 80 mph winds and a sudden snow storm; he was rescued, but succumbed to hypothermia and died in the hospital later that night. The section we hiked was above the tree line--rising from approximately 5000 feet above sea level to just under 6300 feet.

Conservation Supervisor's Report

Garlic Mustard Pull

by Tom McAvoy

On a rainy May 7, five volunteers walked up the Andy Layne Trail to the AT at Scorched Earth Gap for the purpose of pulling up garlic mustard, *Aliaria Petiolata*. Garlic mustard grows along the Andy Layne Trail for nearly its entire length.

This non-native invasive weed is an aggressive species that is very shade tolerant and grows well in mature forests. Garlic mustard is native to Europe and was first introduced during the 1800s for medicinal and culinary purposes (see recipe , below). This species shades out our native plants and produce allelopathic compounds that inhibit non-garlic mustard seeds--many of our native plant

Mount Washington is also steeped in hiking history. The path was built in the 1800s a horse path; although the section we were on is part of the AT, trail signs refer to it as the Crawford Path, with AT in parentheses; even the iconic Appalachian Trail defers to the longevity of the Crawford Path. The path is considered to be the oldest continuously-maintained hiking trail in the United States.



Our choice of trails to the summit--tangential to the AT--was called the Ammonusuc Trail. The first two miles were easy, ambling along the Ammonusuc River with minimal climbing. At about two

species--from germinating. Garlic Mustard seeds can survive and germinate for up to 10 years.

We pulled up 7 large trash bags of garlic mustard-- about 100 pounds--and threw them all in a dumpster!



miles, the trail began a sharp ascent, complete with stone steps and multiple scrambles over large, steep slabs of granite; we were most grateful the rocks were dry and offered reasonable traction. That third mile was very steep and required concentration; blue blazes were worn and minimally arrayed.

We took a refreshing break in the Lake of the Clouds Hut, but couldn't see the nearby lake for the fog; essentially, we had climbed up into the bottom of a cloud that covered the summit.

The huts along the AT in New Hampshire are referred to by the acronym the "AMC", short for Appalachian Mountain Huts. They're like our local shelters on steroids, complete with sleeping quarters, dining rooms, a kitchen and staff. After a break at the hut, we donned extra layers, hats, and gloves. The temperature at the trail head was 61 degrees; at the

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Garlic Mustard Pesto
<https://food52.com/recipes/28281-garlic-mustard-pesto>

- Ingredients
- 11 cups lightly packed garlic mustard leaves and the young terminal tips in the spring, loosely chopped.
 - 1/4 cup pine nuts
 - 1 garlic clove
 - 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
 - 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt
 - 1/2 teaspoon sugar
 - 2 squeezes of lemon juice

- Directions
- In a blender, grind the garlic, pine nuts, and Parmesan.
 - Add the garlic mustard.
 - While blending, pour in a steady stream of the olive oil for 1 minute, or until smooth.
 - Add salt, sugar, lemon juice, and pulse until mixed.

summit, it was 40 degrees with wind steady at 43 mph, gusting to 55 mph and a wind chill of 27 degrees. The most important layer proved to be our outermost wind breakers. These conditions amplified the length of our longest mile.

Almost immediately upon leaving the hut, the trail surface became exclusively rocks--somewhat like a long, skinny granite jigsaw puzzle. The trail was marked by cairns with white stones on top, a functional replacement for



The yellow sign reads, "STOP. This area has the worst weather in America. Many have died here from exposure, even in the summer. Turn back now if the weather is bad."

Invasive Species and American Chestnut Identification Available on RATC Website.

A guide to identifying the more common non-native invasive species as well as the endangered American chestnut along the Appalachian Trail is available on the RATC website.

Two downloadable .pdf's and a video can be found at <https://www.ratc.org>. On the RATC home page along the row of tabs go to 'Trail Maintenance'. Then scroll down to 'Identifying Plant Species of Interest'. Here you will find two pdfs' and a video.



white paint on trees. The stone foot way went on and on, and in the fog, we could only see about 25 yards. The climb was steady. At times the wind caused us to lose our balance. We were grateful to reach the summit, which we knew to be quite developed.

The weather station loomed from the fog, and we were able to warm up in the visitors center. The summit is accessible via car and via a unique train called the Cog Railway. Having trashed our timeline because of the tedious, steep ascent we opted to take the 45 minute train ride back to the trailhead.

The two .pdfs' can be downloaded to your phone and used in the field to ID suspected invasives and American chestnuts. In "Identifying Non-native Invasive Plants on the AT," there is also information on how to record and document the plant species you find using the [EDDMapsS app](https://www.eddmaps.org/). <https://www.eddmaps.org/>

This information can be uploaded to the EDDMapsS app and for American chestnuts to the [TreeSnap app](https://treesnap.org/).

<https://treesnap.org/>

While thru-hikers pass over the summit of Mt. Washington, they are spared the steep ascent up the headwall of the mountain which we tackled. If they are fortunate enough to summit the mountain on a clear day, the views are magnificent and memorable, but I'd wager that no matter the weather, that one mile of their 2100 miles is not easily forgotten.



Documenting your observations on EDDMapsS and TreeSnap will help us locate invasive species and develop plans to remove them to help protect American chestnut trees.

Contact me at tmcavoy@vt.edu if you uploaded any invasive and chestnut sightings or have any questions. Thanks!

Tom McAvoy
RATC Conservation Supervisor

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CHANGE SERVICE 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:
Treasurer, PO Box 12282, Roanoke, VA 24024

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

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