

# TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Fall 2023

*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.*

## Hikemaster Report

by Carol Rowlett, Hikemaster

### **Hike Safety: A Cautionary Tale from your Hikemaster**

I generally hike multiple times each week, and pride myself on being a cautious hiker and hike leader. Although misfortune can occur on any adventure, I have been lucky enough that sprained ankles and scrapes and bruises have been the worst injuries on any of my hikes. However, recently I had a nearly catastrophic incident resulting from my own incredibly rash decisions. All I can do is claim temporary insanity.

I was with a group of ladies hiking the Presidential traverse in New Hampshire. We had several water crossings, and the streams were raging due to large amounts of rain. We were extremely careful across all the crossings, but we were falling behind schedule and starting to risk hiking in dark as well as rain before reaching our shelter. Then we came to one last water crossing. It was more challenging than any of the previous ones that did not have a bridge.

As we considered what to do, I scouted upstream and found a tree down. It had branches going out in all directions and would be time-consuming to use for the crossing, but I knew that I could

inchworm across. Before I could start, one of the other ladies walked directly into the water and used the branches to help her make the crossing. She was safely on the other side in 30 seconds flat. Knowing that we would lose at least an hour if I and the rest of the group crossed on the tree, I made a split-second decision to follow my friend's example and take the quicker route through the water. She had made it safely, obviously I could do so as well.

WRONG! I stalled midway across and ended up losing my grip. Even though I continued to try to get across, I went completely under through a couple of pools before landing my feet against a boulder. By this time a second lady had successfully made the perilous but quick crossing through the water. The two of them made a chain from the bank and were able to pull me to shore with the help of a trek stick.

There are many lessons to be learned here.

What I did wrong:

- Following someone else's route instead of following the way I KNEW was safest for me.
- Making an abrupt decision without consulting with the others on how to get everyone safely across. If I had made it across, the others would have been more likely to copy the

same method. What could have happened to the next lady? Or the one after her?

- I did not stow my gear. NEVER attempt an iffy water crossing in your rain gear, and ESPECIALLY take off any rain cover on your pack. Once I slowed down in the crossing, the streaming water filled the pack cover. This extra weight and resistance forced me down through the pools and made it extremely difficult to make progress toward the shore
- ALWAYS loosen your pack and undo the chest and belt straps before a risky water crossing. Had I attempted to come out of the fully strapped pack after stabilizing against the rock, the current could have easily spun me away from my resting spot.

What I did right:

- Having brave, quick-acting friends!
- Being a whole lot tougher than I had ever imagined myself to be.
- Staying calm and continuing to problem-solve all the way through.
- Continuing to struggle toward the shore. My balance point on the rock was only about six feet from shore, which allowed my friends to reach a trek stick to me.

Added note - should you ever have to rescue someone in this manner,

As a reminder, hunting season for deer as well as bear, turkey, etc. is opening across the state. Please wear conspicuous blaze orange on all hikes and stay safe! You do not need to buy a whole blaze orange wardrobe! A blaze orange hat, scarf or even a ribbon tied to your pack will set you apart from nature!





**Stream crossings, especially in remote areas like this one in the Rawa Wilderness (CO), can be challenging and should be taken with care.**

use a sturdy branch or a trek stick with few sections. The first trek stick they held out to me had the standard three sections and came apart as soon as they tried to haul me in! I saw the humor in this even as I stabbed futilely at the water for traction with the cork-handled section remaining in my hand. Fortunately, their next choice was an older trek stick with only two sections, and they were able to reach it to me without leaving a joint in the middle.

The rest of the story is that the other ladies made their slow careful way across the tree, receiving

many bruises but no drenchings. They all helped carry my soaked gear the rest of the day, and I will love them all forever. We successfully completed our traverse without further major adventures.

The big take-away here is that safety ALWAYS outweighs time. When faced with a potentially dangerous situation, STOP, STOP, STOP. Think it through. What is the safest choice for you? What is the safest choice for EACH MEMBER of your group? How can you help them make the best choices?

Happy and safe hiking,  
Carol Rowlett

**Hike reports**

**Hike:** Carvins Cove - Hi-Dee-Ho/  
Buck Loop  
**Date:** 7/31/23

**Hikers:** Carol Rowlett (leader),  
Dave Rada, Clive Hillyard, Theresa  
O’Kane

We had a beautiful day with lots of wildlife for our Carvins Cove loop hike of about 7 miles. From Bennett Springs, we hiked up the



increasingly steep Hi-Dee-Ho trail for a mile and a half. Our loop then took us along the ridge line on Brushy Mountain Fire Road and then steeply down Buck to Midway Cruise, which returned us to the lower part of Hi-Dee-Ho.

Dave was visiting the area and taking a break from helping his son move. Theresa had never been to McAfee Knob, so Clive offered to take her with him on his next Ridgerunner patrol.



**Location:** Read Mountain  
**Date:** 8/14/23

**Hikers:** Carol Rowlett (leader),  
Alison Robinson, Joseph Brabant,  
Dee Case, Rusty Havens, Laurie  
Hudgins, Steve Smith, Kathy  
DeCoster, Michael Faw, Sarah  
Hunter, Mark Farrell, Tee Godsey,  
Sharon Babineau

We started out with a hot, muggy day for our 5-mile loop hike at Read Mountain. However, shortly after our stop at Buzzard Rock the weather changed abruptly. Even though the forecast still said a 10% chance of rain, we got thoroughly soaked. Fortunately there was no thunder or lightning, and the weather soon cleared. We finished the hike in high spirits and wet clothes under sunny skies. We will not forget to bring all 10 hiking essentials including rain gear for our next hike, no matter what weather is forecast!

**Location:** Chestnut Ridge  
**Date:** 9/8/23

**Hikers:** Carol Rowlett (leader),  
Sharon Babineau, Rusty Havens,  
Fred Meyer, Christine Wickham,  
Ken Meyers, Lawrie M., Phil S.



We enjoyed a pleasant morning with a 6-mile (ish) hike around the Chestnut Ridge Loop near Roanoke Mountain. The bathrooms at the picnic area were incredibly clean and well-stocked with toiletries, which was a pleasant surprise.



**Location:** Hay Rock  
**Date:** 9/21/23

**Hikers:** Carol Rowlett (leader),  
Janet Rankin, Rob Clark, David  
Gloudemans, Rusty Havens, Madeleine Taylor, Pam Reed

We had a gorgeous day for our 8-mile out and back hike to Hay Rock. Our hike was enlivened by a variety of section hikers and flip-flop thru hikers along the ridge line. Janet’s dog Tucker was the perfect gentleman all along the way. Dave Gloudemans, of course, found a tree to climb along the way!

**Location:** Angel’s Rest  
**Date:** 9/25/23

**Hikers:** Carol Rowlett (leader),  
Laurie Wyatt, Madeleine Taylor,  
Janet Rankin, Sharon Babineau



There is also an Angel’s Rest hike in Oregon! We were contacted by a hiker in Oregon about doing a synchronous hike of the two Angel’s Rests.

The Oregon group started out at a little after 9am their time, while we in Virginia started at noon. We hiked in high humidity but otherwise good weather; the Oregon group had to hike in the rain. We were initially puzzled by our con-



tact’s request that along with the standard pictures to exchange, we take detailed pictures of bench-size rocks. It turned out that he is an artist. His plan was to do an art installation that would include pictures from both hikes as well as a pair of benches modeled after rocks we each found along the way. I will keep tabs and see how he progresses with this inventive concept.

**Hike Leader Training**

Wish that more/different hikes were available? We are investigating the idea of doing a morning of hike leader training this fall. If you would be interested in becoming certified to lead RATC hikes, please contact [hikemaster@ratc.org](mailto:hikemaster@ratc.org), or call Carol Rowlett at 540 354 4128. If there is sufficient interest, we will coordinate a time for the training.

~Happy hiking!





**Location: Dickey Gap to Partnership Shelter**  
**Date: 10/14/2023**

**Hikers: Keli and Ron Bradbury**

Our 2023 goal was to hike all of the AT miles basically between Roanoke and Damascus, which represents a step toward our larger goal of hiking all 500ish miles of the AT in Virginia.

Between us, we started the year needing about 140 miles; by October this hike and one other were all we had left.

The weather both days was a bit damp which made for some slippery footing, but we had a great hike and the beautiful colors of fall were an added bonus.

Relying on shuttle driver Paul, we parked at Dickey Gap and hiked north to the Partnership shelter covering the 15 miles in 2 days. We enjoy camping on the trail and so a 2 day trek suited us to a tee.

Since both days were relatively short hikes, we landed at our campsite with plenty of daylight left. Before dark, two southbound through hikers stopped to chat, one named Mousetrap and the other named B Minus. Both had interesting stories, and not surprisingly, they were acquainted with each other.

Mousetrap's trail name was given to him on the Pacific Coast Trail (PCT) when he accidentally crushed a mouse with his hiking boots. "I thought I had stepped

on a bag of pretzels," he said. His more significant accomplishment is hiking the International Appalachian Trail, a trail to which he introduced us. We are not entirely clear on the details, but he mentioned Quebec and Florida and said that Virginia is about halfway between his start and his planned terminus.

B Minus spend about 10 minutes trying to convince us to drop out of society and hike, which seems to be his life. We asked him how he can afford to hike more or less full-time. He replied that he doesn't own anything; he admitted needing some money, but only enough for the next meal at the next gas station. These two guys had met on the PCT and are now in the same bubble heading south to Springer Mountain.

During our northern progression on day two we encountered multiple southbound through hikers, one of whom had experienced 51 days of rain since leaving Maine.



**Location: Walker Gap to Suiter Road**  
**Date: 10/21/2023**

**Hikers: Keli Bradbury and Diesel the German Shepherd**

Keli and Diesel took covered all 13.5 miles in about 6 hours. A gloomy forecast was wrong and blue skies contrasted with fall leaves. This was Diesel's first long hike.



**Maine to Georgia**  
**Club members complete the AT**  
*by Chase Davidson*

Nancy Reid and I just completed hiking the Appalachian Trail September 16, 2023 on Springer mountain. We Started in 2016 Climbing Katahdin and proceeding SOBO. Our first section was a 370 mile hike through Maine and New Hampshire.

We are both RATC Maintainers on Sinking creek mountain, 20 years for me and 8 years for Nancy

*Here is a letter that Nancy wrote to friends and family after that first 370 mile hike, shared with permission:*

*Hello friends and family,*

*I have been home for 10 days and finally have the energy to write this- for you and for myself. I had a great adventure, and a great adventure requires great recovery. I came home sore, bruised, ravenously hungry, and exhausted. Now I'm just extra hungry and a little sore in the knees. Still no squatting for me!*

*I made it through Maine and most of the White Mountains in New Hampshire. I left the trail by bus and train from North Woodstock, New Hampshire after 374.6 miles (plus a few extra for backtracking when we missed the trail). I had planned to be home by September 1 because of ukulele camp. I was sorry not to see the rest of the White Mountains, but it was a relief to be giving my body a break... after only about 1/7 of the full length of the trail! Chase is hiking on. He has 50 more miles in Mass. and then will enter Conn. He may complete the trail to Ga., may walk home to Virginia, or may come home sooner. That is how he lives.*

*The experience fills my thoughts and dreams and I don't know how to tell it. I'll tell some, and if you want to know more, ask, and if you want to know less, stop reading!*

*For the first two weeks or so, I was very disorganized. I couldn't find things in my pack; I packed it wrong and needed things in the bottom. In the morning, Chase would be standing quietly with his pack on while I fumbled: adjusted the length of my poles and my hip belt, realized I hadn't filled my water bottle, opened my pack to*

*get my kerchief, etc. Hikers are given trail names by which they are known. Chase is actually a trail name for Charles, but, as he silently waited and I fumbled and hurried, my private trail name for him became Efficient SOB.*

*AND I was physically awkward. I tripped on rocks, slipped on wet roots, caught my poles in crevasses, was pushed off balance when my pack side-swiped a tree branch or pushed me forward as I slid down a boulder. I fell down 7-8 times, too...humbling for one who has always felt athletic and balanced! I think Chase may have slipped down once.*

*It took me several weeks to get to know my pack and become comfortable with ways of the trail: how much water to filter, how to follow the blazes, how to set up camp, where to step. Be suspicious of wet rocks and roots, especially ones that slope downhill. Look where each foot will go and, as you place that foot, know where the next one will go. Do that rapidly! Gradually I became more sure-footed and tripped less.*

*During those first weeks, we were in a beautiful place called the Hundred Mile Wilderness. We hiked a mountain chain covered with sweet-smelling balsam firs, and hundreds of shallow mountain "ponds" (looked like lakes to me!). There are no towns during this stretch of the trail, and I loved it. Hearing the strange nighttime calling of the loons and the LOUD frog choruses on these ponds was one of the best parts of the trip.*

*When you put your feet down deliberately hour after hour, day after day, you come to know the geology of a place.*

*Maine and New Hampshire are glacial. The granite and slate bedrock of the mountains we hiked*



was easy to observe because the soil is very thin...less than a foot thick over much of the mountains. Large uprooted trees reveal a mats of roots that are only 6-8 inches deep. The trail is often over giant, bare slabs of granite or over jumbles of boulders of various sizes.

smashed glasses. Chase helped me slide back down, and he did a not-wound-care-approved repair job on the eyebrow and the glasses. Fortunately, it has healed well, and the glasses got a temporary repair job when we got to town 2 days later.



Much of the time there is no soil at all and the "trail" is like walking up a dry, or sometimes, flowing waterfall.

Maine and New Hampshire are said to be the most difficult parts of the Appalachian Trail because of the large rocks and the rough trail. Mahoosucs Notch, a mile long jumble of dump-truck-sized boulders, is said to be the "hardest mile" on the AT. You can see a bit of it on You Tube if you look for Mahoosucs Notch: The Hardest Mile by Will Wood. The "trail" goes over, around and under the boulders, sometimes we had to take off our packs and hand them through a gap to squeeze through. It took Chase and me 2 1/2 hours to go one mile.

Mahoosucs Notch was a challenge and sort of fun until my foot slipped as I was ascending a slanted, wet slab of granite. My face smashed into the rock as I hung from a sturdy root with my right arm. Unfortunately, I got a laceration in my eyebrow area and

I walked when the wind was blowing me over on a ridgeline (one fall). I walked in my cozy rain suit when it was cold, blowing, and raining (another fall). I walked when I was soaked in sweat. I walked when the early morning spiderwebs caught in the sunscreen on my face. I walked when the air was crisp and the world was beautiful and I smiled and smiled. I walked when I was exhausted, and then I saw there was yet another ascent at the top of the switchbacks I had just come up. I finally came out above tree lines and saw ponds and blue mountains for 360 de-



grees, and I smiled some more. When I put my feet down deliberately hour after hour and walked mostly in silence, the busyness of "regular" life was gone. Sometimes it seemed too difficult, but the residual was a calm relaxation.

After the Hundred Miles Wilderness, we came near towns, usually tiny hamlets, every 4 days or so. In the towns we would devour greasy, high calorie foods (yummy pizza) and wet, crispy salads. We showered and did laundry while wearing only our rain gear so everything else could get clean. Sometimes we stayed in hostels and sometimes in a motel. Sometimes we stayed an extra day to soak aching legs in the tub and rest a little. It was always good to get to town and also good to leave town for the quiet rhythms of life in the woods.

We met southbound hikers and northbound hikers and some people who were out for a few weeks or days. We could tell who was who by how brown they were, how grubby their clothes and packs looked, and how they smelled. By the end, I was self-conscious standing in line at the post office to get our pre-mailed boxes... afraid that I might smell like a high school wrestling team's locker room, too. There is a culture of long distance hikers...people who are happier hiking long trails than they are at their homes between hikes. They light up talking to each other

about trails they want to hike, have hiked, about the politics and maintenance of the trails, and about beards. Yes, many of them have prodigious beards! Chase is one of them. I have learned much about him while watching him with his peers.

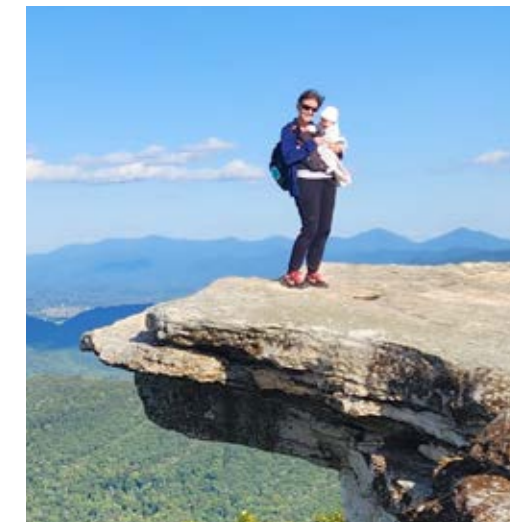
Chase was a (mostly) patient teacher, and a funny, and supportive companion. Despite having been constant companions for many weeks in a tiny tent, we still like each other. We'll be exploring how our lives overlap in the times when he is home, and we hope to plan some more adventures.

I want to do more backpacking, but probably shorter trips. Having hiked the slabs and boulders of Maine and New Hampshire, I am looking forward to the more civilized trail here in Virginia...and what is North Carolina like? I don't think I'll go nomad; I love my home life and home-people as much as I love adventures.

And I love all of you and look forward to seeing you, whenever that is.

~Nancy

## Member Notes



### New 113-Miler

Emi Peterson is the newest member of RATC to earn her 113-mile patch.

At 5 ½ months, she is the 4th youngest RATC member to complete the entire RATC section. She is beaten by her mom, Taylor, who achieved the patch at 3 ½ months; her uncle, Bennett, who achieved the patch at 3 months; and her sister, Skye, who achieved the patch at 2 months.

We are confident that Emi and Skye will continue the family tradition of being active members of RATC.

### Back in town

After a 14-year absence, long-time RATC members **Leonard and Laurie Adkins** recently moved back to the Roanoke area and would enjoy getting reacquainted with old (and even new) friends.

Reach out to them at [habitualhiker.com](http://habitualhiker.com) or 540-314-2197.

Thanks!  
Leonard M. Adkins  
P. O. Box 904, Elliston, VA 24087  
540-314-2197

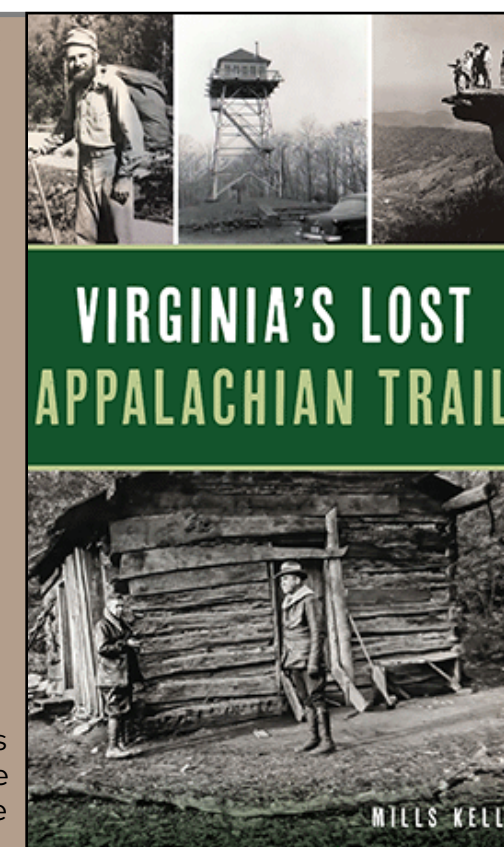
## RATC HOLIDAY POTLUCK

**Featuring Mills Kelly, Author of Virginia's Lost Appalachian Trail**

**December 9, 2023**  
**Potluck starts at 6PM**  
**Speaker at 7PM**

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Roanoke, 2015 Grandin Rd SW, Roanoke, VA 24015**

For more than two decades hikers on the Appalachian Trail in Virginia walked through some of the most beautiful landscapes of the southern mountains. Then, in 1952, the Appalachian Trail Conference moved the trail more than 50 miles to the west. Lost in that move were opportunities to scramble over the Pinnacles of Dan, to sit on Fisher's Peak and gaze out over the North Carolina Piedmont, or to cross the New River on a flat-bottomed boat called Redbud for a nickel.



Historian and lifelong hiker Mills Kelly tells the story of a 300-mile section of the Appalachian Trail that is all but forgotten by hikers, but not by the residents of the Southwestern Virginia counties that the trail used to cross.



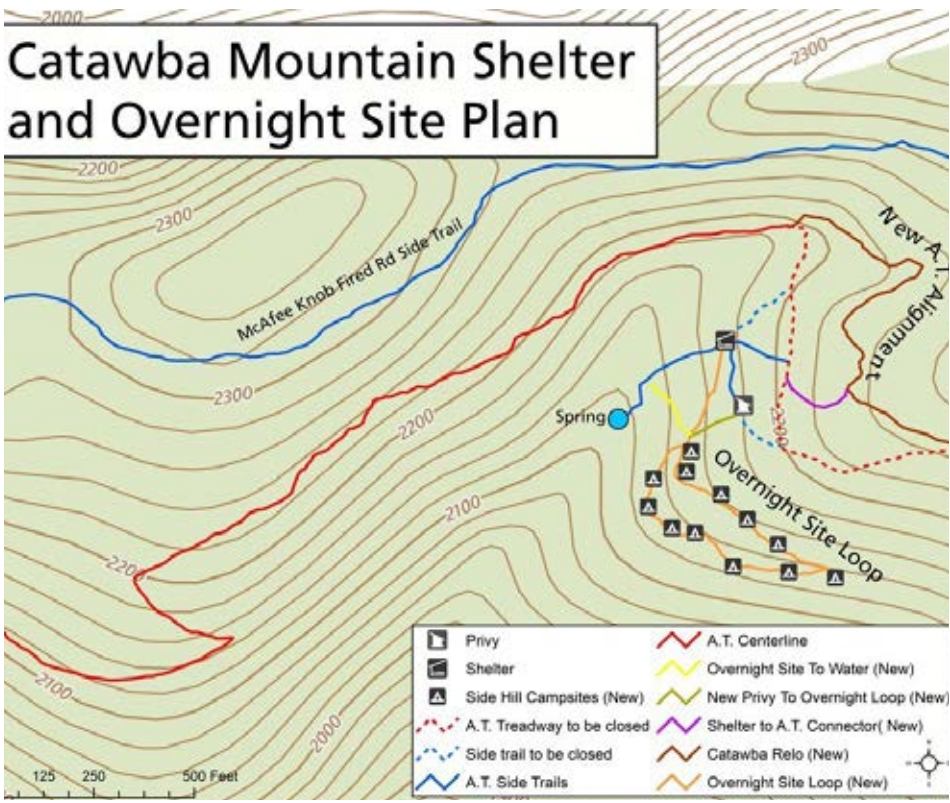


# **Swarms of locust** **Catawba Shelter Improvement Project**

by Kathryn Herndon-Powell

Big thanks to everyone who has helped unload logs on the McAfee Knob Fire Road this fall, in preparation for an ambitious project to improve camping facilities at Catawba Shelter! So far, 69 black locust logs have been delivered to Catawba Mountain, and staged along an old driveway just out of sight of the Fire Road. Those logs came on 4 separate truckloads on 4 separate dates, starting in August -- and we've got 2 or 3 more truckloads coming, hopefully before serious winter weather. Each log is 10-12 feet long and weighs 500-700 pounds, so getting them safely off the truck and up to the staging area (just out of sight of the Fire Road) has taken much effort and ingenuity.

The project at Catawba Shelter will address a few issues. A short relocation of the A.T. will pull the Trail farther away from the shelter, eliminating a hard-angle turn where northbound hikers often get disoriented passing by the current camping area. Twelve new



sidehill tent pads, laid out along a new loop trail, will provide a more sustainable and enjoyable camping experience. Finally, the maze of connecting trails will be simplified and improved, with a new site map and directional signage to orient visitors. When the

project is complete, barriers and signage may be deployed to encourage re-vegetation of the old user-created trails and camping areas. Tent pads built into a slope (a "sidehill" alignment) protect vegetation because they can't sprawl beyond their original footprint. They will also provide more separation and privacy between campsites, while still being close enough to the shelter to make use of the water source, privy, and bear box.

However, each tent pad will require log timbers to support the downhill side. The new trails, as well as existing trails such as the steep trail to the water source, will be reinforced with log steps to halt erosion and protect water quality.

Black locust wood is world-famous for its durability and natural rot-resistance, even when in contact with the ground. Here in the south, it grows so abundantly that we can often harvest all the logs we need for trail projects from the surrounding forest. But harvesting enough trees for a project of this scope would have a massive impact on the surrounding area. ATC worked with our NPS partners to secure federal grant funding for this project, starting with the purchase of all these logs.

This is just the first part of a major project, so keep an eye on meetup for opportunities to get involved!

Rigging expert Fred Lashley will be coming to our area to train RATC volunteers on how to set up a Griphoist high line system (basically a zipline) to "fly" the logs from the Fire Road to the shelter. Once the project passes NPS environmental compliance review, we plan to hire a trail crew – but would love to have lots of RATC folks working right alongside them.

Dates are TBD, but with these logs up on the mountain, we're on our way!



Conservation  
Supervisor's Report

by Tom McAvoy  
RATC Conservation Supervisor

Pirate Seen At McAfee Run!

In late September a pirate was seen harassing local hikers along the Blue Blaze trail up to Dragon's Tooth. It's reported that he was protecting the small and rare tree called pirate bush. It is a parasitic tree that grows along the McAfee Run stream on the way up to the Tooth. It only grows in a few places in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

The US Foerst Service, ATC, and RATC have roped off the camping area where the pirate bush grows. No camping is allowed here to protect the pirate bush. Camping is still allowed on the Appalachian Trail.

A video was made of this incident and can be viewed on the RATC Facebook website: <https://www.facebook.com/RoanokeATC>.

If this pirate is encountered on your hike up McAfee Run, just do as he asks. He may seem threatening but he's harmless!

Video was directed by Kathryn Herndon-Powell, edited by Ann Simonelli, with hikers Donna Logan and Mike Vacek, Ridge Runner Brian Boggs, and pirate Tom McAvoy.



Pirate, Mike Vacek, and Donna Logan.



Brian Boggs, Mike Vacek, and Donna Logan.



Laura Belleville and Andy Downs planting trees.



Dane White ATC, Andy Downs, Laura Belleville, Kathryn Herndon-Powell, and Jim Webb getting ready to plant.

Appalachian Trail Land Acquisition

by Tom McAvoy  
RATC Conservation Supervisor

Several years ago, the National Park Service and a land trust acquired approximately 1,000 acres of land just below the iconic McAfee Knob. The money to purchase this property was part of the mitigation funds given to the ATC from the Mountain Valley Pipeline. The viewshed from McAfee Knob is one of the most photographed along the AT.

Preserving this view is critical to maintain the rural character of this view. Eventually this land will belong to the ATC. Having this property under the management of the ATC will help ensure the land is properly managed both to

preserve the viewshed and a diverse habitat.

A grant of \$300,000 was secured to manage this property for the next five years. Currently this property is a mix of pasture and forest.

Under the direction of Conner McBane, Natural Resource Manager, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, cows will be removed soon from some of the pastures and managed for early succession.

Early successional habitats have herbaceous cover with a mix of beneficial annual and perennial broad-leaved plants, perennial grasses; and a variety of shrubs that thrive after a disturbance.

McAfee Knob with Andy Downs in the foreground.



ATC property outlined on a topographical map and circled in a photo from McAfee Knob. Tinker Cliffs is in the background.

This type of habitat provides abundant food and shelter for many species of birds, insects, and animals. These habitats are much more diverse and productive than the pastures that are there now.

On September 13 seven of us planted 85 potted trees to establish a high quality early-successional habitat for the next 10-20 years. White oak, shagbark hickory, and other late successional trees species will begin to regenerate.

The long-term goal is to improve forest health, control invasive species, and the A.T. viewshed visible from McAfee Knob.



From the Archivist...

By Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist

This is a poem from the Summer 1988 RATC Blazer, poetry from the anonymous writer, Two x Six (a trail name.) **Two by Six** is the size of a white blaze on the AT.

The Shelter Mouse

The mouse in Trout Creek Shelter would scamper helter skelter,  
Across our drowsy noggins, as we drifted off to sleep.  
While logs we were a-sawing the little wretch was gnawing  
Through someone's precious Kelty, for the candy hidden deep.  
Without an invitation he would visit devastation  
On our chill and our pudding, that for lunch we planned to keep.  
It was useless to berate him or to try to decimate him  
For safely from the rafters, the thief would brightly peep.  
When leaving in the morning, we would always leave a warning  
To unsuspecting strangers, about the sneaky tiny creep.

We were told if we approved it the shelter they would move it  
To Pickle Branch in Miller's Cove, between the mountains steep.  
Oh Joy! We'd shake that critter, leave him leafing through the litter,  
While we live it up at Pickle Branch, he'll nope alone and weep!

Our new shelter is secluded where roads have not intruded  
In the hemlock and the laurel, by the branch's gentle sweep.  
How nice to think of slumber and not to have to wonder  
About that greedy rodent, dining on the cheap.

As I sit and loose a shoe-lace and glance around the new place  
I see a little movement, that makes my senses leap.  
From the shadows of the ceiling squeaky greetings send me reeling  
For peeping from the rafters, is a little furry heap...

Two x Six

President's Report:

By Homer Witcher

Every fall, The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) asks RATC to report the number of hours and the number of volunteers that have contributed to RATC in the past fiscal year. This information helps ATC to compete for funding for the A.T. from the National Park Service Volunteers in Parks program.

An organization is only as strong as its volunteers and RATC has many great volunteers. I would like to single out 3, but there are many more whose work is greatly appreciated.

Jim Webb, our trail supervisor, who always leads RATC in trail maintenance hours and is also the Regional Partnership Committee representative for RATC.

Diana Christopulos, our archivist, has spent in excess of 1000 hours working on the RATC archives, representing RATC on the development of the NPS Triple Crown



UPDATES ON MAJOR RATC ISSUES

by Diana Christopulos

Route 311 pedestrian bridge and 2024 shuttle service

The Virginia Department of Transportation is in the bidding process for construction of the pedestrian bridge between the Va 311 parking lot and McAfee Knob. A bidder should be selected by the time this Blazer is published, and construction will occupy most of 2024.

During that time the entire parking lot will be closed to hiker traffic. RATC maintainers and McAfee Knob Task Force members may use the gated small lot adjacent to the parking where the little house used to be. Contact Kathryn Herdon-Powell of ATC if you need the combination.

Roanoke County has secured funding for the 2024 shuttle service, with bidding also under way by the end of this year. When the lot is closed, hikers may use the shuttle or park at the Catawba Sustainability Center or along Va 864. The county has added more signage on Va 864 to clarify where parking is and is not allowed.

Visitor Use Management Plan and many other administrative duties.

Pam Wolsey, our social coordinator, who organized a very successful corn boil in July and who is currently planning the RATC holiday potluck on December 9th. The guest speaker will be Mills Kelly.

We hope to see you there.



Triple Crown visitor use management plan

Public comment on the VUM plan occurred throughout August, including a virtual session and an in-person session at the Salem Civic Center. Many thanks to all the RATC volunteers who showed up to help with the in-person

session. NPS has shared the comments with the planning group (including RATC representatives). A final plan should be in place by early 2024. We expect this will help us secure funding for high priority projects such as improvements to the McAfee Knob parking lot.

EARL V. SHAFFER

From a press release by the AT Museum

**First Appalachian Trail Thru-Hiker:** Earl Shaffer, 1918 - 2002, was a native of York County, Pennsylvania and the first person, in 1948, to hike the entire length of the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine in a single journey. He was also the first to thru-hike the A.T. in both directions (from Maine to Georgia, southbound, in 1965), and the oldest, in 1998, when he thru-hiked the A.T. again at age 79.

Earl was a poet, WWII veteran, musician, antiques dealer, and the author of three books, Walking with Spring, Appalachian Trail: Calling Me Back to the Hills, and Ode to the Appalachian Trail. Three volumes of his poetry have also been published posthumously. Two, titled Before I Walked with Spring and South of the Sunset, contain poems Earl wrote as a soldier in

the South Pacific during WWII. The third volume, Not Too Distant Trails, contains many of his poems related to the Appalachian Trail, hiking, and nature.



Volunteer: Less well-known is Earl's lifetime volunteer service to the Appalachian Trail. He was elected Corresponding Secretary

Mountain Valley Pipeline

As a result of Senator Joe Manchin's successful attachment of a very specific rider to the federal debt ceiling bill (and to President Biden's approval of this move), MVP has been given permission to build regardless of federal laws and regulations. They expect to begin boring under the AT on Peters Mountain in early October and have asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for permission to bore 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. MVP claims that noise on the AT will not exceed 30 to 40 decibels. Please direct any questions, observations or concerns to Diana Christopulos at [dianak16@earthlink.net](mailto:dianak16@earthlink.net).

of the Appalachian Trail Conference in 1952 and served in that position until 1958. He was a co-organizer of two trail maintenance organizations, the Susquehanna Appalachian Trail Club (SATC) and the Keystone Trails Association (KTA). Earl was the key scout and trail-blazer for a 69-mile relocation of the AT in Pennsylvania carried out by the SATC. He built or led the construction of four Appalachian Trail shelters, lobbied for passage of the National Scenic Trails Act, and did routine trail maintenance for many decades.

[www.earlshaffer.org](http://www.earlshaffer.org)

[www. Facebook.com/ earlshafferfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/earlshafferfoundation)





# Trail Supervisor's Report

by Jim Webb

## Mountain Lake Wilderness Relocation

Date: 7/24/23  
 Attending: Dave Grimm, Mark Farrell, Greg Stick, Bill Floyd & Jim Webb

Once again, the RATC club joins the Konnarock trail crew at the Mountain Lake relocation. The terrain seems to alternate from soft dirt sidehill to root filled Mountain Laurel to small rockslides.

Our morning was spent digging about 100 feet of sidehill before breaking for lunch. The afternoon found us working on placing step stones across a small rockslide. Individual work hikes are usually measured in feet or yards, but as we were walking out, I realized that last year the hike out from the end of the relocation was 1/2 mile and now was 3/4.

Date: 7/31/23  
 Attending: Mark Allamong, Jim Mesler, Bob Huff, Greg Stick, Dave Grimm, Bill Floyd & Jim Webb

This was the last week of the Konnarock crew for this year and very good progress was made on the relocation. For the last few weeks, the trail building has been going through some very rocky and difficult terrain. This week was no different. Most of our time was spent on using the plentiful rocks as steppingstones, cribbing and gargoyles.

The relocation has less than 900 feet to go to hook up with the trail and I anticipate that with luck and another year of Konnarock we can finish it.



**Sinking Creek**  
 Date: 7/20/23  
 Attending: Michael Phillips, Taylor Adkins, Mark Farrell, Mike Vaughn, Dave Grimm & Jim Webb

The morning started cool but rather quickly warmed up as we started up the fire road across from Caldwell Field Campground. After a rather steep climb, we reached the AT. We headed south on the AT for about 2/10 miles to our first work site.

This section of Sinking Creek Mountain has received little to no attention in the way of

trail structure. Several areas are strewn with large rocks that the trail has to navigate around or over.

We split into 2 groups with Mark and Mike V. building a crib wall across a large, slanted rock while the remainder of us set about to use some large rocks to build steppingstones to keep hikers on the trail across a small rock field.

It was after lunch when we accomplished these tasks, and growing warmer as we headed down the trail and home.



**Date:** 8/9/23  
**Location:** Sinking Creek East  
**Attending:** Mike Vaughn, Jeff Armstrong, Dave Grimm, Brent Scott & Jim Webb

So much to do. Another trip up to Sinking Creek Mountain to work on the numerous rock fields that cross the trail. We had flagged 22 areas that needed attention on the trail, and have now attended to 6. It seems that as soon as we take care of a difficult area of the trail, the next one is more of a challenge. Larger rocks buried deeper. Rocks on top of rocks. All of these things add to the complexity of the work.

We are looking forward to more trips up here to finish the job.



**Date:** 8/5/23  
**Location:** Sinking Creek East  
**Attending:** Mike Vaughn, Dave Grimm, James Mesler, Jeff Armstrong & Jim Webb

Another warm summers day, another work hike up to Sinking Creek Mountain. A day a little

more unusual than normal, as we shared the parking lot at the end of the road with a truck load of bear dogs out for some training. The hike up to the trail was pleasant as it got cooler with the elevation.

The worksite was just as we had left it since this part of our section is not very well traveled. We first

set about to quarry some large rock steps for placement over a very short but steep area of the trail. Next was a more or less removal of obstacles and smoothing of a level section.

As we packed up at the end of our day, we had placed 6 rock steps and about 20 feet of rock cribbing.

**Date:** 10/16/23  
**Location:** Sinking Creek East  
**Attending:** John Grant, Mike Vaughn, Greg Stick, Phil Sudol & Jim Webb

The cooler weather of October made the whole hike much more pleasant than those of a few weeks ago. There wasn't much in the way of sidehill digging today. The hillside in this area was mostly strewn

with large rocks. The day was spent moving and leveling the rocks to make a footpath.

A very good day as two rough areas were covered.





**Date:** 10/23/23

**Location:** Sinking Creek East

**Attending:** Greg Stick, Bryon Lane, John Grant, Phil Sodul & Jim Webb

It was cold in the parking lot as we waited for everyone to assemble, but quickly warmed up as we headed up the mountain.

Picking up right where we left off last week, we quickly used two large rocks as cribbing across a slanted section and added crushed rock to make a sound trail. We then moved on up the trail to another rocky part.

We crossed the rocky section by using a large flat rock as a sort of a bridge to the other side, added cribbing around it and decided to break for lunch.

After lunch, we again moved up the trail to an area that was going to need a set of steps. Quitting time came before we completed the steps, but we managed to put 5 of them in.



### The Witcher Way *Cleaning up the AT*

Darin and Ryan Witcher, grandsons of Homer and Therese Witcher, are to be commended their outstanding community service. Along with their father, Kevin, they have helped out on numerous trail projects over the years.

On July 23rd, Homer was out walking on the trail south of Daleville and saw yet another abandoned campsite. He made a call to his son, Kevin, and within 24 hours, the site was cleaned up. The multi-generational crew collected over 10 bags of trash and hauled out a shopping cart full of litter. The clean-up crew consisted of Homer, Therese, Kevin, Darin and Ryan Witcher.

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- 1. Support the objectives of the RATC
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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:  
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