

# TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Spring 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.*

## President's Report:

By Homer Witcher

On March 8, 2023, Therese Witcher became president of the RATC and I became Vice President. One of the first duties of an incoming RATC president is to write an article for the newsletter. Therese informed me that I would write such an article and since I have a lot of experience taking orders from Therese, I had better start writing!

First, we would like to thank all of our departing board members for the time they have served on the board and the contributions they have made to RATC. We would also like to welcome the new board members and the returning board members. We are looking forward to another great year for the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club.

How did Therese and I arrive at this point with the RATC? If all began when we took a hike in the Shenandoah in the early 1980's. At the trailhead there was a sign about the Appalachian Trail and we discovered that the AT ran from Georgia to Maine. In 1984, we saw a notice in the Roanoke Times about a work hike on the AT led by a man named Charles Parry. We called the number given and signed up. We enjoyed the work hike and went on countless more (between us we have accrued 16,000 hours of work on the RATC shelters and trail). In February 1985, the Daleville section was moved off from a road walk and we were asked to be the overseers of that section. Later that year, we

became co-shelter supervisors and Therese went on to become secretary and vice president in 1990. Then came our 2 children and we stepped off the board for a while. In 2012, we rejoined the board as co-shelter supervisors. Last fall, we asked our son, Bennett, if he would be interested in taking over as shelter supervisor so we could scale back a little. He agreed and we relinquished the position to him and made plans to come off the board. At the beginning of March, we discovered that no one was stepping up to take the roles of president and vice president, so we reluctantly volunteered. There are 3 things I would like for you to know about Therese to show you what a special lady she is:

In 1986, Therese had the idea to get married on McAfee Knob and backpack home to Daleville for our honeymoon. At the time, the Appalachian Trail was not on McAfee Knob and we had to clear the trail of briars in order to get to the knob.

Therese was a microbiologist and I was a hospital laboratory director. In 2001, she informed me that I had too much stress in my job and it was ruining my health. She said you need to quit and we need to take our children out of school and hike the entire Appalachian Trail. I said, I can't quit my job and she responded, "Why not?" We hiked the entire Appalachian Trail in 2002 with our 2 children,

Bennett who was only 8 years old and Taylor who was 11. This was the greatest experience of our lives and it bonded us as a family. When we returned, Therese found another job and I spent my time working on the trail and shuttling hikers. We have always worked together on projects and have had 16 family members (children, son in laws and grandchildren) that have also assisted. These family members have contributed an additional 2700 hours of volunteer work on the RATC section. This includes putting new roofs on shelters, putting in new fire grates, moving outhouses, building picnic tables, cleaning out the culverts under the cement bridge on Tinker Creek, mowing, cleaning up trash and removing bamboo, bush honeysuckle and other invasives on the Daleville section. No matter who we get to help us, they all know Therese is in charge. As Mark Farrell once said, she knows how everything should be done and I totally agree.





3 RATCers join SAWS  
3-Peat: Rich Hole Wilder-  
ness Work Hike

By Pete Irvine

Three RATC members joined four other hardy folks on the third SAWS Work Hike of 2023 on the Rich Hole Trail (FT-464) in Rich Hole Wilderness in Alleghany County on Saturday March 25. SAWS (Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards) is an RATC friend and supporter that focuses on stewardship of Wilderness and other protected lands.

John Garriss, Eric Giebelstein, and Pete Irvine were part of the crew that used crosscut saws and axes to remove 13 blowdowns from a portion of this 5.7-mile trail. Since January, SAWS has led 3 trips to this area, with RATC members participating in each trip, removing a total of 39 moderate to complex blowdown trees.



L-R: Barret Stanton, Eric Giebelstein, Mark Miller, John Garriss, Bree Forsyth, and Jamous Bitrick at Rich Hole Trailhead on White Rocks Tower Road (FR-108). Photo by Pete Irvine.



John Garriss and Mark Miller buck a complex poplar blowdown on Rich Hole Trail and across the North Fork of Simpson Creek. Photo by Eric Giebelstein.

Intersections: Appalachian Trail and TransAmerica  
Bicycle Trail 76

by Tom Ewing

A quiet section of route 785 (Blacksburg Road) west of Roanoke marks the intersection of the Appalachian Trail and the Trans-America Bicycle Trail (Route 76). These two trails connect southwest Virginia to a set of national destinations, one by foot and one by bicycle. The Appalachian Trail covers almost 2000 miles, from Springer Mountain, Georgia, to Baxter Peak-Katahdin, Maine.



The TransAmerican Bicycle Trail 76 covers more than 4200 miles, from Yorktown, Virginia, to Astoria, Oregon. When northbound hikers reach this intersection, they have completed about one-third of their journey, with another 300 miles in Virginia, followed by sections in West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. When westbound cyclists reach this intersection, they have completed just 5% of their journey, with more than 200 miles still to travel in Virginia, followed by sections in Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Oregon. Because of the configuration of the road and the hiking trail, the east-west Route 76 is actually on a mostly north-south axis, while the north-south Appalachian Trail crosses the road on a mostly east-west axis. In fact, northbound hikers actually walk south across a pasture to cross Route 785, and then they turn east, cross Catawba Creek,

and then head northeast to follow the ridgeline towards Sawtooth Gap and then Route 311.

This crossing is not just for thru-hikers or transcontinental cyclists. This stretch of the AT is part of the [triple crown backpacking trip](#), which is a popular multi-day trip in the Roanoke region. Yet this six mile stretch, from Route 624 to the trailhead for McAfee Knob is less frequently traveled by day hikers, who are more likely to hike from the parking lots of Dragon's Tooth or McAfee Knob. Route 785 is a favorite route for cyclists from Roanoke as well as Blacksburg, as part of a loop connecting along the valleys. Signs at either end of Route 785 direct TransAmerica eastbound cyclists to Route 311 and then Route 779 towards Roanoke and westbound cyclists to Route 723 towards Christiansburg.

No signs marked the AT for cyclists riding along route 785 and no sign



identifies Route 76 for hikers on the AT. Hikers may stop before crossing the road, as the trees offer a bit of shade in the stretch along open fields on either side of Route 785. Cyclists may slow down if they see hikers emerge from the trail. In the absence of any signs, however, hikers who see cyclists

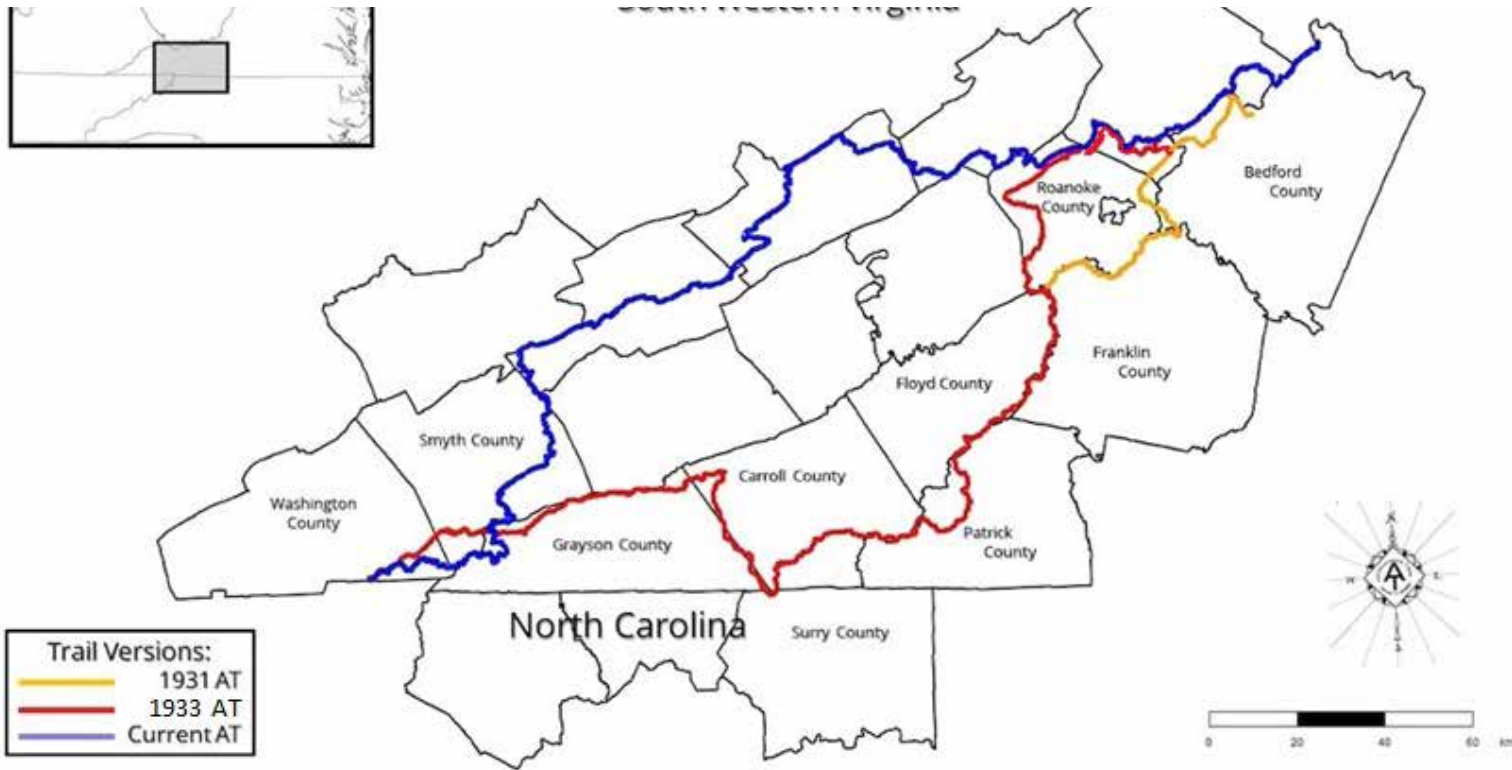
or cyclists who see hikers may not appreciate just how far these hardy individuals are planning to travel on their long distance trips. A sign posted at this intersection could indicate the most relevant distances along these trails: 230 miles east to Yorktown, Virginia; 700 miles south to Springer Mountain, Georgia; 4000 miles west to Astoria, Oregon; and 1500 miles north to Baxter Peak, Maine.

In the absence of signs, however, the best way to learn about this intersection is to ask the favorite question of trail users: Where are you headed? Hikers will likely be impressed that some of these cyclists are planning to ride across the country using their own power to drive their two wheels. Cyclists will likely be impressed that some of these hikers are using their own power to walk on two feet the length of the eastern United States. All of us can appreciate how this intersection in Catawba valley connects these two remarkable trails and the thousands of people who use them to explore and enjoy the outdoors.

Tom Ewing is a professor of history at Virginia Tech, a volunteer with the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club, and a cyclist on the roads and trails of south-west Virginia. In fall 2023, he will teach

a public history course at Virginia Tech on the Bikecentennial Route 76. More information about the Virginia Bike 76 Project will be posted here: <https://tinyurl.com/bike76va>





# Book Review and Podcast: “Virginia’s Lost Appalachian Trail” by Mills Kelly

By Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist

Mills Kelly, a George Mason University history professor and a maintainer for the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, has written a wonderful new book about the pre-1950s Appalachian Trail in Virginia, when its course from Roanoke to Damascus generally followed the Blue Ridge instead of its current westerly route. He has interviewed many people who remember or live near the old AT and have stories about ferry crossings and scruffy hikers dating back to the Trail’s early days. You can hear the podcast and find a link to the book (maybe still at a discount price) here: <https://www.r2studios.org/show/the-green-tunnel/the-lost-at/>

We had not organized the RATC archives when Mills started writing, but he was able to use some of our information in creating the overview map and telling the story around Roanoke. I helped Mills

with an early draft of the book and am featured in the podcast. Additionally, he has helped us a lot with the RATC archives and has taken charge of the archives for both the PATC and the ATC.

The 1931 yellow trail on the map above was the original route around Roanoke, but it was never really used. When the RATC was founded in 1932, our hard-hiking founders quickly convinced Myron Avery that the Trail should leave the Blue Ridge at Black Horse Gap and head up to Tinker Mountain - the 1933 red trail on the map above. As RATC Trail Supervisor David Dick reported at the end of 1933:

The trail was originally located south of Roanoke - from Villamont along the top of the Blue Ridge, past Mason Knob to Adney Gap on Bent Mountain. This trail had been measured but not very definitely marked, and it would in a good many instances require a complete relocation. Considering this and also that there are few points of outstanding interest on the southern route, it was suggested and approved by the club to locate the

trail along the more interesting route north of Roanoke.

The rough hiking and wide views from Tinker Mountain seem to have won over Avery. He personally came down to the Roanoke area several times to help with marking and measurement of the new route around Roanoke in 1933, and he probably wrote the entry in the PATC’S 1934 Guide to the Paths in the Blue Ridge saying that: “**Except for the Pinnacles of the Dan, Tinker Mountain is the outstanding feature of the Trail from the Natural Bridge National Forest to New River.**”

For detailed versions of David Dick’s 1933 map of the A.T. in the southern half of Virginia, check out our new blog [here](#). The 1933 Trail went near Tinker Cliffs and McAfee Knob before dropping into Mason’s Cove, climbing Ft. Lewis Mountain, crossing the valley again near Dixie Caverns, ascending Poor Mountain and rejoining the 1931 A.T. near Bottom Creek Gorge at Adney Gap.


Continued>>

You can find more of this story in a blog on our website about the [RATC’s founding](#).

The RATC also played a central role in [creating the blue trail](#), the current A.T., in the 1940s and 1950s, when Jimmy and Molly Denton along with Tom and Charlene Campbell played central roles in moving the Trail away from the Blue Ridge Parkway and private property to more remote and protected lands to the west.

**What’s happening with...**  
By Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist

**McAfee Knob Shuttle.** The shuttle is back, running between the Interstate 81 Exit 140 Park and Ride (Salem) and McAfee Knob parking lot every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. It provides a great way to avoid the chaos of the parking lot. All the details and a link to book service are [here](#) on the Roanoke County website. Thanks are due to the county staff for finding a grant to fund this pilot project until November 2023. They are actively seeking funding for 2024.



**Va 311 Pedestrian Bridge and McAfee parking.** This Virginia Department of Transportation Project is on schedule for construction beginning in either late 2023 or early 2024 (more likely), and it could take most of the year to complete. You can see details of the plan [here](#). The National Park Service is also requesting funding to improve the parking lot after bridge construction. Jim Webb, Mike Vaughn, Bill Neilan and Diana Christopulos have all represented RATC in this effort.

**Visitor Use Management Plan for Virginia’s Triple Crown.** The draft VUM plan will go out for public

comment this spring, probably in May. Our volunteers have been working with the partners and consultants from the National Park Service’s Denver office since 2019 to plan better management of parking, the trail, campsites, visitor experience and natural features between Va 620 and Va 652 - including Pickle Branch Shelter, Dragon’s Tooth, Johns Spring Shelter, Catawba Mountain Shelter and Campsites, McAfee Knob, Pig Farm Campsite, Campbell Shelter, Tinker Cliffs and Lamberts Meadow Shelter and Campsites. *You will have a chance to comment, and we will send out more information to RATC members before the public meetings and comment period.* Last spring the public had a chance to comment on perceived conditions and needs for this part of our section. You can see those earlier materials [here](#).

**Mountain Valley Pipeline.** A good background summary of the problems with this proposed natural gas pipeline may be found in our [summary of formal comments by US Forest Service staff in March 2015](#). Federal jurisdiction over the project is complicated, with the MVP-friendly Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in the lead and our usual partners in secondary roles. Higher-ups in the federal government forced staff experts to rely heavily on MVP’s estimates of the project’s environmental impacts rather than their own cal-

culations and observations. This is the primary reason that MVP has lost most of their federal permits, some of them twice. New permits are in the final stages: from the US Forest Service (for crossing Jefferson National Forest), the Bureau of Land Management (for crossing the AT and other federal lands in both Virginia and West Virginia), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (for water crossings along the entire 303-mile project) as well as a new Biological Opinion from the US Fish & Wildlife Service (impacts to threatened and endangered species). RATC commented on the 2022 US Forest Service Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement both as a [stand-alone comment](#) (Tom McAvooy, Conservation Supervisor) and as a contributor to [very detailed comments](#) from The Wilderness Society and other environmental and landowner groups (Diana Christopulos).

The RATC has officially opposed the project [since May 2016](#) due to its negative visual and environmental impacts on the AT and surrounding areas. We anticipate that MVP will once again receive all of its permits by late Spring or early Summer and may then again face legal challenges. If you want to see our take on the project since 2016, check these [blogs on our website](#). The newest blogs appear on top of the page.



Forest Service to Close Craig Creek Bridge

Blacksburg, Va., March 30, 2023

The George Washington and Jefferson National Forest is closing the Craig Creek bridge on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail for public safety. The footbridge that crosses Craig Creek, in the Brush Mountain Wilderness in Craig County, Va., is closed to all use indefinitely. Hikers should not use the existing bridge and should follow directions from posted signs. Appalachian Trail hikers can walk through Craig Creek within 100 yards of the bridge, utilizing a temporary detour. Creek crossing may be impassable or unsafe

during high water. During high water events, hikers should wait for water levels to recede or utilize road detours. Hikers are advised to plan accordingly.

For hikers heading northbound on the Appalachian Trail (A.T.): At the Craig Creek Rd/VA 621 road crossing, take a left and follow Craig Creek Rd for approximately 3.3 miles to the intersection with Miller Cove Rd/VA 620. Turn right and follow Miller Cove Rd for approximately 1.2 miles to the A.T. crossing. Turn left off of the road and follow the A.T. where it continues north across Trout Creek via

Hikemaster Report

by Carol Rowlett

Many thanks to our hike leaders! In addition to all the excellent trail work, Hiker Happy Hours, and other events supported by our club, RATC has sponsored more than 70 social hikes since our last hike leader training on 11/20/21. The following brave souls volunteered their time to lead social hikes posted on our Meetup site:

- Dee Case
- Carol Rowlett
- Maya Bohler
- Kris Peckman
- Janice Metzger
- Molly Armistead
- Fred Meyer
- Clive Hillman
- David Wickersham
- David Horst

Particular thanks to Dee Case, who led an amazing 27 hikes between 11/21/21 and 8/13/22, when she had to leave the trails prior to hip replacement. Dee has recovered well and is now back to leading hikes again.

Our next round of hike leader training will be posted soon. Got an idea for a hike, or want to share your passion for birding, identifying plants, etc.? More hikes are always better, ranging from strolls along the greenway to backpacking adventures. Hikes would be especially welcome for weekends and/or on the [RATC section hikes](#). Contact [hikemaster@ratc.org](mailto:hikemaster@ratc.org) if you would like to bounce around ideas or need help setting up your hike in Meetup.

by Public Affairs Officer Gwen Mason

a footbridge. For hikers heading southbound on the A.T.: At the Miller Cove/VA 620 road crossing, take a right and follow Miller Cove Rd for approximately 1.2 miles to the intersection with Craig Creek Rd/VA 621. Turn left and follow Craig Creek Rd for approximately 3.3 miles to the A.T. crossing (look for a small dirt lot on the right side of the road). Turn right off of the road and follow the A.T. south toward Niday Shelter.

Plans to remove and replace this bridge are ongoing.

Speaking of the section hikes, let's also give a shout-out to those dedicated club members who recently earned their RATC 113-Miler patch by completing the 14 RATC section hikes:

- Carol Rowlett
- Gerald DeMasters
- Dawn Lamb
- Jennifer Frye
- Ron Bradbury
- Paul Goodwin
- David Horst

Happy hiking!



Hike Reports

AT Rte 311 to Andy Layne Trailhead  
March 21, 2023

13.1 miles

Hikers: Ron and Keli Bradbury

Our annual hike to Tinker Cliffs started from route 311 and covered the 13.1 miles from there to the Andy Lane trail head. A fairly early start put us on McAfee with solitude; we saw no other hikers until



we closed in on Tinker. The twenty-eight degree morning tempered to a comfortably balmy afternoon except when hiking in wind and shade at the same time.

Having climbed Tinker Cliffs from both directions, we've decided the northbound ascent is the more strenuous. :)



Carvins Cove  
10 Miles

Carol Rowlett, Leader  
Maria Bowling, Molly Armistead, Chad, Janice Metzger, Jennifer Harvey Frye, David Grimm, Ray Gaut

We had a beautiful day for a 10-mile hike from the Bennett Springs parking lot at Carvins Cove. Janice unfortunately twisted

an ankle fairly early in the hike, but Molly and Maria walked back to the car with her to make sure she arrived safely. After stopping to make sure Janice felt OK to slowly hike back out, the rest of us continued in subdued spirits. We felt much better when we heard that Janice had made it back to her car. Our planned route had included Rattlin Run, Songbird, Enchanted Forest, Tuck-A-Way, Four Gorge

Extension, and Four Gorges. We had to re-route our hike because the creek was up on the lower part of Enchanted Forest trail. We ended up going along Happy Valley Fire Road from Enchanted Forest to Brushy Mountain and then up to Four Gorges, but the mileage was about the same.

Read Mountain  
March 26, 2023

Kris and Bob Peckman, Leaders, Mark Farrell, Suzy Fay, Shelley Fickey, Rusty Havens, Clive Hillyard, Laurel Riddle, Adele Shaffer, Steve and Lynn Smith, Susan Terwilliger, Karen Trembly

Third time was a charm! After twice being canceled for rain, this hike featured spectacularly perfect weather for the 13 of us to loop around Read Mountain, have lunch at Buzzards Rock, and return to the parking lot for 7-8 miles of

sometimes strenuous (rocks) and sometimes easy hiking.

Buzzards Rock lived up to its name, as several buzzards enjoyed the thermals above us, declining, however, to roost alongside us.

Always wanted to know what was involved in leading a RATC hike? Took the training a while back but don't quite remember how to get a hike posted on Meetup? Come join us for a friendly morning of hike leader training on Saturday 4/15/23! We will cover topics such as how to pick a good hike, posting it in Meetup, group management, emergency situations, and more. The training itself should be over by about 11:30am. Bring lunch and we can go on an optional hike (maybe 5 miles) in the early afternoon to hone your new skills. You can sign up through Meetup at <https://www.meetup.com/roanoke-appalachian-trail-club/events/292621262/> . Training will start at 8:30am at the Roanoke Valley Regional Fire & EMS Training Center at 1220 Kessler Mill Road in Salem.





**Carvins Cove Horsepen/  
Lakeside**  
**Leader: Carol Rowlett**  
**Hikers: Jennifer Harvey**  
**Frye, Madeleine Taylor,**  
**Rusty Havens, Mark**  
**Farrell, Jessica Vehmei-**  
**er, Rick Leonard, Ana**  
**Anderson, Maria Bowl-**  
**ing, Steve and Lynn**  
**Smith, Mirna Hosney**

We had a beautiful day for an 11 mile hike at Carvins Cove. Starting from the Timberview parking lot, we had a pleasant gentle downhill on Horsepen trail for a little over a mile, then about four miles of relatively easy up and down along Lakeside trail, which had some nice access points

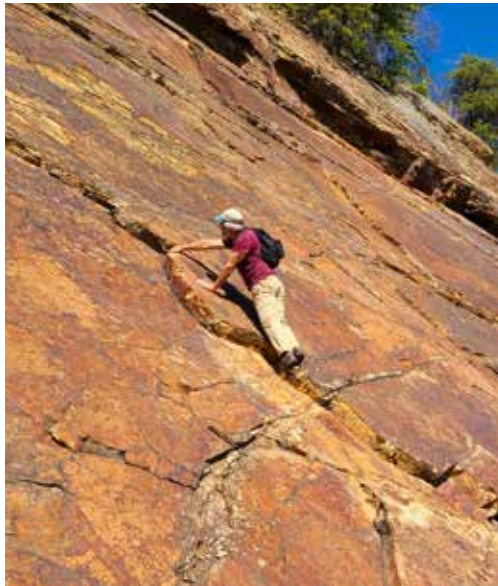
for Carvins Cove photos. After a light lunch, we faced a strenuous half mile climb up Hemlock Tunnel trail. We reported a downed tree on this remote trail; this was addressed by Roanoke City Parks a few weeks later. We then had a long ridgeline walk along Brushy Mountain Fire Road with winter views through the trees down into Carvins Cove and into the city before ending with a mile of downhill along Trough trail back to the Timberview parking lot.



**Day Creek Glenwood Horse Trail  
8 Miles**

**Hike Leader: Carol Rowlett**  
**Hikers: Ana Anderson, Madeleine**  
**Taylor, Susan Terwilliger, Kris**  
**Peckman, Bob Peckman, Gyorgyi**  
**Voris, Dave Gloudemans, Jan-**  
**ice Metzger, Maya Bohler, Steve**  
**Smith, Terri McClure**

It was a good thing it was a warm day, because several people got



at least damp feet on the creek crossings as we did this 8-mile loop from the Day Creek Glenwood Horse Trail parking lot in Montvale, VA. Although ninety percent of this hike was easy to moderate, the quarter mile climb up Doty Ridge was memorably strenuous. Along the way, we saw some cool octopus graffiti, had beautiful parkway views along the ridgeline, and got to ham it up on the way back downhill at the site of the old Black Horse Tavern.

**Explore Park/Rutrough Road**  
**Hike Leader: Carol Rowlett**  
**Hikers: Karen Trembly, Lannie**  
**Kempuch, Mark Farrell, Peg Alder-**  
**man, Steve Smith, Bob Peckman,**  
**Kris Peckman, Madeleine Taylor**

We hiked a little over 7 miles at Explore Park, doing loops on both sides of Rutrough Road. We had been concerned that there would be too much snow and ice for the hike, but instead we had a warm, mostly sunny day. We meandered along trails, explored some campsites and the old village, and saw lots of wildflowers along the river. We all expressed concern about the amount of old trash near the mountain bike skills course, and will be investigating setting a cleanup opportunity for group participation.

**Explore Park: Clean-up!**  
**Cleaner-uppers: Jeanine and Rob-**  
**ert Bomber**

On April 1, 2023, a trash cleanup was held at Explore Park. Participants were Robert and Jeanine Bomber who removed approximately 300-400 pounds of trash. The trash was removed from an area about ¼ of a mile from the mountain bike parking area. The weather started out rainy but the

**Roanoke River Greenway  
4 Miles**

**Hike Leader: Carol Rowlett**  
**Hikers: Bob Peckman, Kris Peck-**  
**man, Michael Phillips, Jennifer**  
**Harvey Frye, Christine Wickham,**  
**Molly Armistead, Mark Farrell,**  
**Chuck Cole and guest Nancy**



rain subsided shortly after the cleanup began.



We took a quick-and-easy 4 mile morning walk along the Roanoke River Greenway at Blue Ridge Drive. This section is relatively isolated and doesn't yet connect to the main greenway at either end. We checked out the progress

on the greenway bridge that will be opening this summer, looked at murals on a warehouse, and watched a very well-fed feral cat colony.





**Triple Crown, Day 1, McAfee Knob**  
**Hike Leader: Carol Rowlett**  
**Hikers: Felicia Etzkorn, David Grimm, Sharon, Madeleine Taylor, Jennifer Harvey Frye, Clive Hillyard, James Mesler**

We closed out the year by spending three days in a row hiking pieces of the Roanoke AT Triple Crown. It seemed like such a simple plan, with beautiful weather in late December! We had an excellent time hiking McAfee Knob until we hit an iced section of trail when we were almost at the top. The weather was so good that most of us had not brought spikes, so it was a challenge to get across. We decided to go down the back side of McAfee Knob toward Campbell Shelter and come down the fire road rather than risk life and limb going back down that short section of iced trail. All's well that ends well, and we ended up having a great time.



**Triple Crown, Day 2, Tinker Cliffs**  
**Hike Leader: Carol Rowlett**  
**Hikers: David Grimm, Jackie Mayrosh, Madeleine Taylor, Jennifer Harvey Frye, Clive Hillyard**

Our luck continued on the second day of our Triple Crown adventure as we hiked up to Tinker Cliffs on Wednesday 12/28/22. We had beautiful weather and excellent trail except for one little section up near the top that was completely iced. Although the ice only covered about 30 feet of trail, it was challenging because we didn't



have any other options. More of us had brought spikes this time, but no one wanted to take the time to put them on for such a short section! Again, we all lived and life was good.



**Triple Crown, Day 3, Dragon's Tooth**  
**Hike Leader: Carol Rowlett**  
**Hikers: Hannah Johnson, Madeleine Taylor, Lannie, Jennifer Harvey Frye, Clive Hillyard, Rick Leonard**

We finished up our Triple Crown challenge with a hike up Dragon's Tooth. By now you can probably guess how this went. We had a perfect day and beautiful trail except for a couple of little bitty sections.

An iced section near the bottom provided no major challenge because we could walk along the edge. However, another iced section near the top forced us to make a precarious climb up above the trail to get across. We will certainly remember these hikes!







**Hay Rock**  
**8 miles**  
**Hike Leaders:** Carol Rowlett, Madeleine Taylor  
**Hikers:** Rusty Havens, Joseph Rabe, Rick Leonard, Dawn Lamb, Sharon Babineau, Tee Godsey, Jennifer Harvey Frye, Bob Peckman, Kris Peckman, Ana Anderson, Steve Smith, Kay Davenport

**Garden City**  
**6.5 Miles**  
**Hike Leader:** Carol Rowlett  
**Hikers:** Ana Anderson, Madeleine Taylor, Christine Wickham, Jeff Krasnow, Bob Peckman, Kris Peckman, Mark Farrell, Janice Metzger

Most people learned at least one new trail on this local trek! Our 6.5 mile loop hike went across a variety of surfaces, from rough trail to well-used trail to asphalt. From the Garden City Rec Center, we headed up and around the lower part of Roanoke Mountain on the Garden City Trail and the Roanoke Horse Trail, crossing a few fallen trees.

We had such a large turnout for this beginning-of-the-year turnout that we split into two groups for this 8-mile out-and-back hike, with Madeleine Taylor graciously agreeing to lead the second group. It was a gorgeous warm day, and a great way to start the new year!

After passing Gum Spring Overlook, we crossed Welcome Valley Road and used a short side trail to skip over to Chestnut Ridge trail, which we followed up to the old Roanoke Mountain campground where we stopped at a picnic table for a snack. We then meandered along some other trails over to Virginia Pine trail, which took us downhill and dropped us into a subdivision. From there, we followed asphalt suburban streets down to the Garden City greenway and had a gradual uphill along the greenway through beautiful downtown Garden City to get back to our cars.

**Editor's Note:** The following article is included upon the election of many new board members during the 2023 annual meeting.

**President and Vice President – Therese & Homer Witcher**

We joined RATC in 1984. From 1985 to the early 1990 we served on the RATC board as shelter supervisors, secretary, and vice president. We stepped off the board while our 2 children were young and in 2002, we thru-hiked the AT when Bennett “Rock Slide” was 8 and Taylor “Cascade” was 11. We served on the board as newsletter editors from 2003-2005. We served again as co-shelter supervisors in 2012-2022. Over the years we have performed over 16,000 volunteer hours of trail and shelter work on the RATC section.



**Secretary – Susan Terwilliger**

I joined RATC in October 2012 and immediately felt I had entered another world. I have always loved to hike but have not always lived in mountainous areas. I grew up in Kansas and spent 20 years in central Texas before moving to Virginia in 2000 with my family. After working for the Department of Entomology as a technical editor, I retired in 2017. RATC opened a door to hiking, trail work, and other types of volunteering on the Appalachian Trail. Being a Ridge runner has been particularly rewarding and has allowed me to interact with people from all over. I’ve met so many hardworking, inspiring, and selfless people through the club and am thankful for the difference it has made in my life.



**Treasurer – Jimmy Whitney**

Grew up in Northern VA and first hiked the AT in 1974 with Boy Scouts. Lived in Roanoke nearly 40 years and have belonged to RATC since moving here. Served as Vice President and President of RATC back in the 1990s and served on the ATC Board from 1997-2003. After taking time off as my kids grew up, decided to return to work on the Board. Recently finished my last section hike in VA south of Damascus to complete the state of VA. Work as a CPA in a small accounting firm, married with 2 kids.

**Trail Supervisor – Jim Webb**

I retired to Roanoke in 2012 from western New York. Since joining the club in Nov. of 2012, I have participated in most of the club work hikes. I have training from the ATC in rock work and a B sawyer certificate in chainsaw (felling and bucking) and crosscut saw (bucking only) from the USFS. I served as trail supervisor from 2015-2019 and have averaged over 700 hours of trail work per year since 2014.

**Shelter Supervisor – Bennett Witcher**

I’ve been very fortunate to grow up on and around the Appalachian Trail. That’s thanks especially to my parents who carried me into the RATC 113-Mile Club before I was a year old, and my friends (some of whom are on this board) who are always happy to join me for hikes and trail work alike. I truly wouldn’t know where to begin to estimate how many thousands of hours I’ve enjoyed, alone and with others, on the trail.

With the AT being such a big part of my life, I naturally fell into getting involved with the maintaining club at Virginia Tech while I was a student there, serving as both the Trail Maintenance officer and

President. Having passed on those torches, I still want to be involved in caretaking the AT where I can be. These past few years, I’ve assisted my parents with many of their Shelter Supervisor projects, so I view inheriting this position as something of a continuation of duties and I hope to maintain the good work that’s been put in.



**Hikemaster – Carol Rowlett**

I started hiking with the RATC about ten years ago. I wanted to get out on more of the trails around Roanoke, and started haunting the RATC Meetup site looking for hikes. I didn’t think I would be fast enough to hike with such a dedicated group, so I would see where the club was hiking and then do the hike by myself. By the time I finally worked up the nerve to come out on one of the group hikes, I found that I was pretty good at it! I retired last year from a job that included teaching geology at Virginia Western. My retirement dream was to hike as much of the AT as possible in little bitty pieces. So far, my little pieces include eight of the fourteen AT states, but I’ve got many, many more miles to go. I am honored to serve as Hikemaster for the club, and my goal is to promote a variety of hikes that can serve the needs of our members and the overall hiking community.



**Land Management Supervisor – Joey Johnson**

Growing up in Roanoke, I spent many, many of my weekends out playing in the outdoors. From paddling the James and New Riv-

ers, to running around in George Washington and Thomas Jefferson National Forest, weekend rides on the Blue Ridge Parkway, mountain biking on Mill Mountain, and (of course) hiking the AT. Being surrounded by all these wonderful green spaces is what called me back to Roanoke.

When I was at Virginia Tech, I was introduced through my good friend Bennett Witcher, and the Outdoor Club to the world of trail work. Since then, I’ve spent the last 10 years seeking out opportunities to care for, and give back to the green spaces that surround me, including becoming a trail maintainer for the McAfee Knob stretch.

Now, I am excited to step into this role, and continue my stewardship of this trail. I am also looking for those who feel the same. So, if you are interested in an off-trail adventure that helps protect our trail, please let me know!

**Conservation Supervisor – Tom McAvoy**

I began my term as Conservation Supervisor in March, 2022. My responsibilities are to manage the invasive species along the trail, protect, and identify sensitive areas that support uncommon and rare plants and animals. I also maintain the section from Dragon’s Tooth, 3.5 miles south along Cove Mt. and occasionally help with the Monday work crew.

I enjoyed and hiked the AT for most of my life but wanted to be more involved.

So, when I retired in January 2020, after 43 years in the Entomology Department at Virginia Tech, I joined RATC. At VT I managed the department’s beneficial insect quarantine facility and





worked on the biological control of purple loosestrife, tree-of-heaven, hemlock woolly adelgid, and other pest species.

**Newsletter Editor – Ron Bradbury**

My first AT hike was in 1979 when a friend and I drove up I-64 from Tidewater for a winter week-end adventure. Enough time has passed that I cannot be sure, but what memory I have suggests we hiked an out-and-back near Afton Mountain. I do clearly remember the cold; our plans for a scrambled egg breakfast were foiled when our eggs froze overnight and our cheap sleeping bags proved wholly inadequate. But then apart from an occasional, off-trail interaction with someone who had decided to “hike the whole AT”, the trail faded from my consciousness for the next forty years. My second hike on the AT was to McAfee Knob in November of 2019 with Diana Christopulos as my guide.



Diana’s generosity in sharing her time opened the AT to me, and the trail has worked its way into and around my life like those tree roots you see wrapped around a rock. I met my wife Keli on a sunset group hike to Tinker, we got married on Tinker a year to the day later, and we have established an annual anniversary “hike-to-Tinker” tradition. Trail days are routine for us now on weekends and during vacations, and Keli and I have set out to section hike all of Virginia’s AT together.

Having benefitted so much from the AT, volunteering in some capacity seemed appropriate. I started with one trail maintenance hike, and sequed to the the newsletter. Through service on the board, I have come to appreciate what a treasure the trail has become in

the world as well as what enormous energy is required and provided to maintain it.

**Membership Coordinator – Cathy Butler**

This is my second year as RATC Membership Coordinator. My husband and I moved to Roanoke in 2007 and I am still in awe of this beautiful place we live. I feel incredibly lucky to have the AT and many other wonderful trails so close.

I work full time but have found I love volunteering and the feeling I get from giving back to the community. In addition to my membership tasks, we have a 2-mile section of the AT that my husband and I help maintain. We also volunteer with Mountain Junkies, Muddy Squirrel, Pathfinders, and Roanoke Parks and Recreation. Plus, I’m currently in the process of becoming a Roanoke Master Gardener.

Email me any membership questions or comments at [membership@ratc.org](mailto:membership@ratc.org)

Be sure to regularly check out our website at [RATC.ORG](http://RATC.ORG), our Facebook page at Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club – RATC and if you haven’t already done so sign up for our Meetup group at <http://www.meetup.com/Roanoke-Appalachian-Trail-Club>.

**Counselor – Brendle Wolfe**

Grew up in Appalachia, the mountains are in her blood and roots. She first became involved with RATC on a group day hike over a decade ago.



Fresh out of college and ready to explore. She has since served as a hiker leader, Board of Director’s membership coordinator and counselor. Assisting the RATC with trail stewardship and fundraising efforts. She is a recent graduate of Virginia Tech’s College of Natural Resources with a focus on sustainability. Brendle has a passion for the outdoors and can often be found extensively backpacking in the Western U. S., regionally serving as a naturalist, or instructing outdoor programs.

**Counselor – Brian Boggs**

**Counselor – Erin Byers**

I’ve lived in the area over the course of 20 years and am finally taking full advantage of all the wonderful hiking around. I have gained more peace and purpose in spending so much time in the woods on a mountain. I’ve recently joined the Club so that I can add some knowledge and service to my hiking. Everyone has been quite welcoming. I am looking forward to becoming a Ridge Runner and working with the Club to preserve the trail and promote nature.

**Interim Counselor – Adam Day**

My involvement with the RATC began with, and is credited to the Witcher clan (Homer, Therese, Bennett). I’ve known the Witchers my whole life and grew up next door to them. In fact, my mother babysat both Bennett and Taylor when they were younger and Bennett and I are roughly the same age. Growing up, we spent a lot of time playing together and naturally this involved a lot of trail time and time spent on the AT. As I understand it, Homer and Therese had stepped back from being Shelter Supervisors for the RATC during this time, but picked it back up again after Bennett and I had graduated high school in 2012. In

the summer of 2012, they asked me to help them dig and move an outhouse. Being 18 years old and all the free time in the world at this point, it seemed like the only logical thing to do at the time so I happily obliged them. Then, gradually 1 outhouse move became 2, then 3, then it was a roof replacement, then fire grate placement, digging water bars, clearing blow-downs, building bridges, clearing new trail, painting blazes etc. Next thing I know, 11 years have passed, I’ve accumulated a few hundred hours of volunteer work with the RATC, bought a lifetime membership to the RATC back in December 2022 and have been asked to become a Counselor on the board.

This request is an honor and I’m grateful for the Witcher’s providing me with this opportunity. I look forward to working with the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club and its future and will continue to be a steward for the Appalachian Trail. I graduated from Lord Botetourt High School in 2012 and went to work at Kroger in the Meat Department as a Meat Cutter. I did this for 7 years while working my way through college and eventually graduated from Roanoke College in 2019 with a B.S in Environmental Science. My work on the AT had a large influence on this.



After graduating, I interned and worked as an Environmental Consultant at a local Engineering Consulting Firm for 2 years before leaving to work with the Virginia Department of Health. Currently, at VDH I work as an Environmental Health Specialist handling all the animal bites and all rabies cases (please don’t get bitten by anything) we get in our health district. Additionally, I’m currently in training to become a licensed Onsite Soil Evaluator for the state which

is necessary for the inspection and installment of private wells and septic systems.

**Social Coordinators – Josh & Pamela Wolsey**

After our AT thru-hike we moved from Texas to the area to be closer to the trail. In order to support our hiking habit, Josh is a physical therapist assistant and Pam is a real estate agent.



**Archivist – Diana Christopulos**

When we moved to Salem in 2003, I joined my first RATC hike before our furniture arrived from Texas! My first retirement goal was to section hike the entire Trail, which I completed in 2008, covering much of the RATC section on day hikes with the club. I led a lot of hikes in the 2010s and helped found the McAfee Knob Task Force in 2015. After joining the board as a Counselor in 2013, I served as Vice President (2015-16) and President (2016-18). On the advice of our long-time Treasurer Blanche Brower, I started pulling together the RATC records - photo albums,

minutes, Blazers, maps and correspondence dating back to 1932.

We now have about 25 boxes of materials, including very old AT maps. Since my doctorate is in American History, I really enjoy writing about what we find. In addition being Archivist, my main roles now are representing RATC on the projects that date back to the time I was President: construction of VDOT’s pedestrian bridge of Virginia 311 at the McAfee parking lot, opposition to Mountain Valley Pipeline, and completion of the National Park Service Visitor Use Management plan for Virginia’s Triple Crown. I have also been active with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, serving on the President’s Leadership Council and helping with the NPS Visual Resource Inventory in Virginia and Maine. My hopes for the future are to transfer our archives to the permanent collections at Virginia Tech and to start leisurely history hikes on older portions of the AT that were built and maintained by RATC volunteers.



Dear RATC Members,  
Have you dreamed of making history? Of course, we all have. And now we have a chance to be a part of Roanoke Valley’s Day of giving - an opportunity to unite our community around causes in which we truly believe and help nonprofit organizations connect to the larger community.

We need your help! Please join our campaign and help RATC reach our goal of \$ 5,000! We need you to tell your friends and family members about the important work we do and ask them to join us in helping to make a difference. Did you know RATC maintains over 120 miles of the AT in Virginia, driven by volunteers!? Help us continue our stewardship of the trail.

Get ready to give! On April 19th, visit [GIVEROanoke.org](http://GIVEROanoke.org) and make a donation to us. You can also access our page directly at <https://www.giveroanoke.org/organizations/roanoke-appalachian-trail-club>

All giving will end at 11:59PM on April 19, so make sure to get your gift in on time! Questions? If you have any questions or would like more information, let us know. Feel free to contact Brendle Wolfe with any questions @ [blwolfe@mail.roanoke.edu](mailto:blwolfe@mail.roanoke.edu).

Thank you in advance for your generosity to our organization!



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PO Box 12282  
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CHANGE SERVICE  
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Roanoke Appalachian  
Trail Club Application  
New and Renewal

- IF ACCEPTED FOR MEMBERSHIP, I AGREE TO:*
- 1. Support the objectives of the 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](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