

TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Winter 2024

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.



The AT and then some

By Nancy Reid

RATC member Charles Davidson (trail name "Chase") was honored with the "Billy Goat Award" at the Appalachian Long Distance Hiker Association (ALDHA) annual gathering in October, 2023.

The trophy, topped with a billy goat on top of a boulder, is award-

ed to hikers who complete 25,000 lifetime hiking miles on any trails.

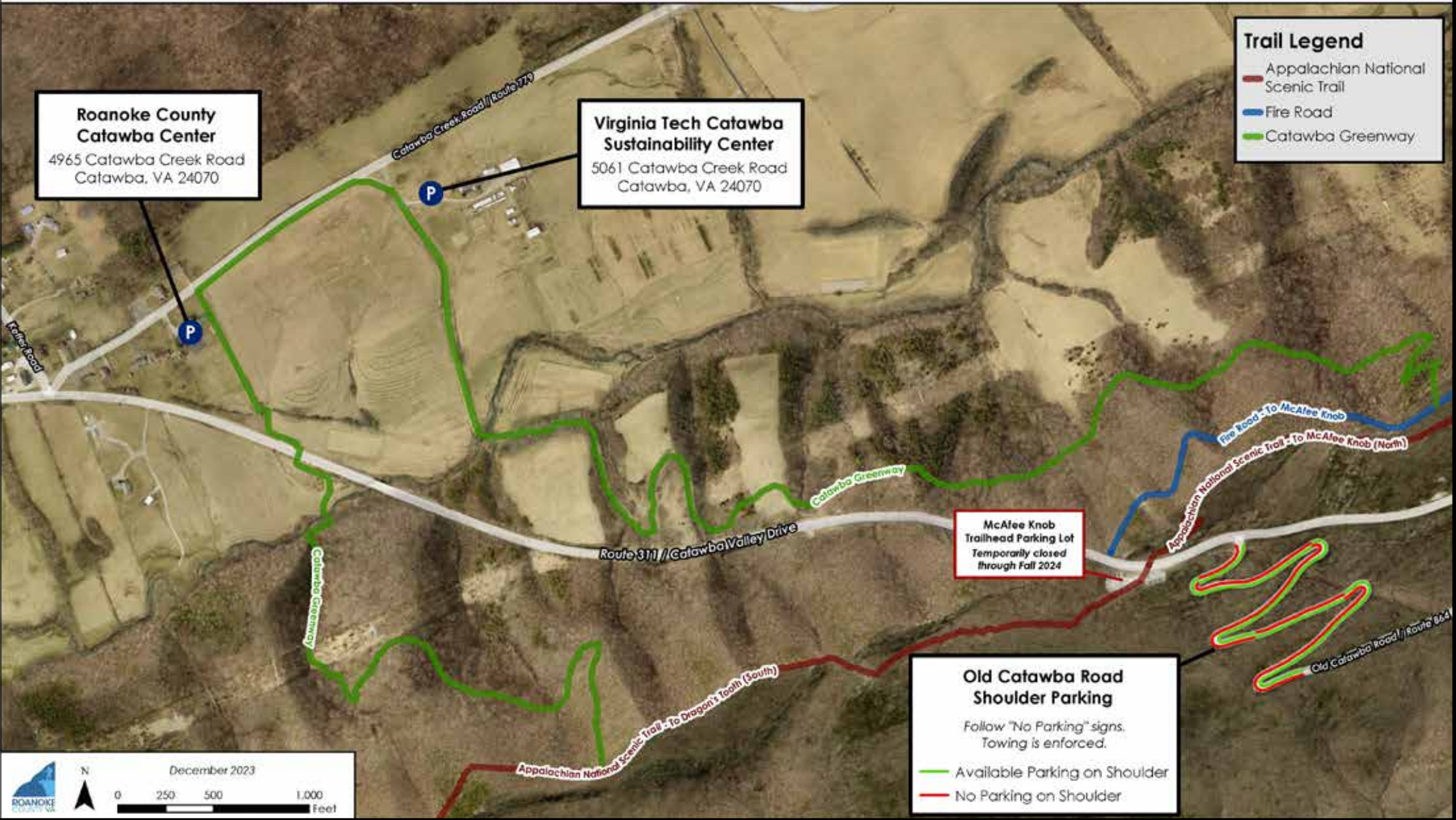
Chase began hiking when he was eighteen years old and is still going strong. Among other trails, he has accumulated his mileage on the Appalachian Trail (6 completions, 2 through-hikes), the Long Trail, the Florida Trail, the Benton McKaye Trail, the Foothills Trail,

the John Muir Trail, and the PCT (12,000 miles completed).

Chase is preparing for another through-hike of the Appalachian Trail, beginning January 1, 2024.

He says, "Whether you have a day, a week, a month, or a whole year, it is all good".

McAfee Knob Alternate Parking Options



FINALLY: Construction begins on McAfee Knob/ Va 311 pedestrian bridge

By Diana Christopoulos

Plans for construction of the pedestrian bridge over Va 311 between the McAfee Knob parking lot and the northbound Trail are right on schedule. The National Park Service-owned lot was closed at the end of November 2023 and will remain closed for approxi-

mately one year, until construction is completed. RATC volunteers and other partners have been working with the Virginia Department of Transportation since May 2017 to plan the project and gather information from the public.

The entire lot was closed to assure space for both construction and Roanoke County Fire and Rescue vehicles at all times - allowing hiker rescues and wildfire fighting. There have been dozens of rescues and two wildfires on the McAfee

section in the past five or six years. There is a fenced pathway for hikers around the edge of the parking lot, and the Va 311 road crossing remains in the same location as in the past.

[Details about the project](#) may be found on the VDOT website. The [Roanoke County website](#) and the [RATC Facebook page](#) are other sources of updated information. The [RATC website](#) also has an entire page devoted to McAfee Knob and Virginia's Triple Crown.

ALTERNATE PARKING
Roanoke County staff have worked hard to provide alternate parking options during construction (see illustration). [A large copy of the parking map may be downloaded](#) from the Roanoke County website. Options include:
Va 864/Old Catawba Road, just downhill from McAfee lot. Consult the map - parking is allowed in the areas marked green and is signed. Never park cars on both sides of this road - it is too narrow to allow emergency vehicles to pass. When-

ever possible, get all four wheels of your car off the road. Over two dozen spaces are available, although it is a steep walk uphill if you get far down the road.

Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center, 5061 Catawba Creek Road, Catawba, VA 24070, trailhead to the Catawba Greenway, a two-minute drive from the McAfee Knob parking lot. No overnight parking. From here, you take the Catawba Greenway to the AT fire road, adding about one mile each way to the McAfee Knob hike, for a total of about 10 miles. For a [detailed description of this trailhead and the Catawba Greenway](#) see the 2021 blog on the RATC website.

Catawba Community Center, 4965 Catawba Creek Road (VA 779), Catawba, VA 24070, another trailhead for the Catawba Greenway. This is location where RATC holds its annual pot luck, and parking may not be available if there is an event at the center. No overnight parking. This adds perhaps one additional mile (11 miles total) for the McAfee Knob hike.

In addition, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy has provided a padlocked parking area for RATC maintainers and members of the McAfee Knob Task Force as well as ATC and NPS staff. Consult the Trail Supervisor or Kathryn Herndon-Powell of ATC staff if you need further information.

You can also arrange to be dropped off and/or picked up near the kiosk in the McAfee Knob parking lot. The RATC website includes a [list of shuttle drivers](#). This listing is an information service for A.T. hikers. It does not constitute an endorsement by the RATC as to the dependability or safety of the service providers listed. RATC does not conduct background

checks of shuttle drivers on this list. We do not verify that they hold licenses, permits, or insurance. While some service providers may be members of the RATC, they are not representatives, employees, or agents of the RATC, and their services are not in any way affiliated with the RATC.

McAFEE KNOB SHUTTLE
The shuttle [McAfee Knob Trailhead Shuttle](#) will continue to originate at Interstate 81 Exit 140 Park and Ride and will take hikers to the shuttle stop next to the kiosk at the McAfee Knob parking area. In addition, Roanoke County is expanding the to add stops to the original route in the City of Salem, at the Orange Market Park and Ride and on Route 311 near the Dragon's Tooth trailhead parking lot. Expanded 2024 service will begin on March 1 and will run until December 1 on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and holiday Mondays. Learn more about accessing McAfee Knob on Roanoke County's [webpage](#).

[Ride Source](#) will again provide the shuttle service, and you will be able to book and pay for your ride online or when picked up when the service starts again on March 1.

The shuttle is a great way to avoid parking hassles in the McAfee Knob area. One handy feature is that you can also track the location of the shuttle bus as you return from McAfee Knob, so you will be able estimate when the shuttle will arrive at the McAfee parking area.



Conservation Supervisor's Report

Current status of MVP construction on Peter's Mountain

by Tom McAvoy
 RATC Conservation Supervisor

Work is progressing on Peter's Mountain by Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) to bore a tunnel for the pipeline under the AT. The tunnel will be approximately 200 yards long. Expected completion is in early February. This work is being done at Symms Gap.

Hikers can still hike through this section but must remain on the trail. Signs and orange fencing have been installed in the area where this work is being done.

These images were taken in December 2023, from the MVP reports found at https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/filelist?accession_num=20240103-5182. More recent reports can be found at https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/filelist?accession_num=20240110-5035.

The Peter's Mountain section of the AT is maintained by the Outdoor Club at Virginia Tech.



Approximate location of the tunnel bore

Pipeline coming up the east side of Peter's Mountain, Dec. 4, 2023 (N 37.398410, W 80.682374)



The AT at Symms Gap, December 4, 2023.



Looking up the east side of Peter's Mountain, December 4, 2023 (N 37.397665, W 80.681713)



Exit bore site on West Virginia side looking west December 4, 2023. (N 37.403325, W 80.690547)

Trail Supervisor's Report

by Jim Webb



Date: 10/30/23
Location: Sinking Creek East

Attending: Bryon Lane, John Grant, Phil Sodul, Mike Vaughn & Jim Webb

Another trip up to Sinking Creek Mountain and a little closer to completion of about 20 problem areas. We finished up a short staircase that we had started last week and moved up the trail to the next problem.

We split up to work on two different areas at the same time. The first is a sloped area of bed-rock that needs to be cribbed with large rocks and leveled. the second area is where the trail is threaded narrowly between large rocks. Moving or breaking these rocks provided a decent trail through the area.



Date: 11/6/23
Location: Sinking Creek East

Attending: Phil Sodul, Dave Grimm, Mark Farrell, Mike Phillips, Erik Leedom & Jim Webb

After this work hike we have good news and bad news. The bad news is our next hike will be our longest since we are working away from our bushwack point. The good news is that we will probably only need only one more hike up here. We managed to smooth out three problem areas since we didn't have to build any steps or structure but instead just remove some large rock protruding into the trail.



Date: 11/20/23
Location: Sinking Creek East

Attending: Mike Vaughn, Mark Farrell, Greg Stick, John Grant, Gary Moore, Dave Grimm, Dave Rada, John Hvozdoc, Phil Sudoc, and Jim Webb

With ten workers on this hike, we were able to clean up several areas of the trail that had been left over from previous hikes. We could spend a lot more time on this section of trail, but there are other areas that need attention much more than this one.

This last hike on this section involved adding a few steps and removing rocks from the trail. Removing slanted and protruding rocks from the trail doesn't add any value but does make for a more pleasant hiking experience.





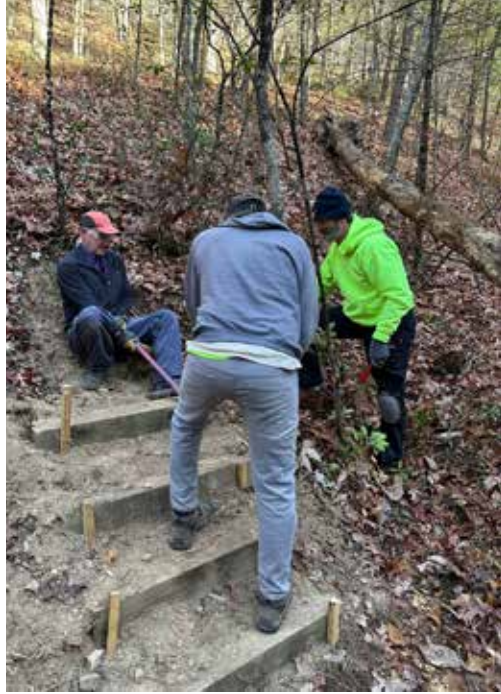
Date: 11/13/23
Location: Brush Mountain Wilderness 1 mile N of 621

Attending: Mike Vaughn, Greg Stick, Mark Farrell, Gary Moore, Dave Grimm & Jim Webb

This section of trail had numerous bridges built on it back in the 80's. In 2009, Congress designated it as a wilderness area which by one definition means limited or no structures. At that time the bridges should have been removed.

They were not.

This year with the Forest Service's condemning and removal of the large bridge over Craig Creek, our club has been pursuing the removal of the rest of them. This bridge was the last of them. After removing the bridge deck, we used the 6'x6' stringers as steps down into and up out of the bottom of the dry creek bed. Part of the stringers went to replace some steps on a switchback.



Date: 11/27/23
Location: Lost Spectacle Gap

Attending: Greg Still, Mark Farrell, John Garris, Phil, Soduc, Gary Moore, Dave Grimm, John Grant & Jim Webb.

On a cold and windy Monday morning we assembled in the Dragon's Tooth parking lot. The work we had planned to do was near Lost Spectacle Gap, and I was dreading what the weather would be there. To my

relief, the wind had eased when we arrived, and we started our work.

The work today is a set of steps on the northbound trail, that have rotted away. I believe that originally there were 4 steps here, but only 2 partially rotted ones were left. The logs were locust cut from a downed tree found nearby. With 8 workers present, work progressed quickly, and we made a short day of it.





Date: 12/4/23
Location: Dragon's Tooth

Attending: Mike Vaughn, David Poteet, Greg Stick, Mark Farrell, John Grant, Gary Moore & Jim Webb

It was cloudy and gray as we assembled in the Dragon's tooth

parking lot, but with no threat of rain and temperatures predicted to rise to the 50's, we headed up to the A.T. Our targets for today were 4 areas where erosion had put some rock steps in danger of falling over. The solution to these areas is to put more rock steps in front of the dangerous ones and crib or protect them with other



large rocks. The area was so devoid of suitable step rocks that we had to break our rule of 'there are no downhill rocks' twice.

Moving large rocks up or down the trail is a large chore but by the end of the day, we had put in 7 rock steps with accompanying cribbing.



Date: 12/11/23
Location: Sawtooth Ridge
Attending: John Garriss, Gary Moore, Brent Scott, Greg Still & Jim Webb

They say adversity builds character. If that's the case, then five characters hiked up Sawtooth ridge and worked in 32-degree weather and 20 mph winds. On a very cold and windy day we carried heavy tools up the ridge for the purpose of building some stone steps in the steep areas of the ridge. In the first three locations, erosion had undercut previously built steps and made them unsafe. Putting a rock step in front of these keeps them from falling out.

In the fourth location, a steep uphill area was given a new set of steps. More of the same work to do up here in future weeks. No photo with this report, so you will just have to hike up there to see for yourself.



Date: 12/28/23
Location: Sawtooth Ridge
Attending: Mike Phillips, Erik Leedom, Gary Moore & Jim Webb

This was the last work hike of 2023 but will not be our last hike on this section. there are still several parts of the trail here that need our attention. The trip today was to work on the set of steps that was started last week.

Despite the lack of suitable step rocks, we were able to add 5 rock steps to the trail. More work hikes will be needed on this part of the trail.



Date: 12/18/23
Location: Sawtooth Ridge
Attending: Mike Vaughn, Greg Still, Gary Moore, Erik Leedom & Jim Webb

This was a very windy hike on this day, but the temperature was in the 40's and the sun was shining brightly. We bypassed the location of the previous 2 work hikes and went on northward to a spot where hikers were going off the trail. The trail in this spot ducked down off the ridge and around a large outcropping of rock. I don't begrudge any of the hikers, going off trail was preferable to the trail at this junction.

What needed to be done to persuade hikers to stay on the trail, is a set of steps going down off the ridgeline and another going back up. We managed to build the set on the north end and installed 5 of about 12 steps needed on the south end. Another 1 or 2 hikes will be needed to finish this projects.

Hikemaster Report

Hike reports

by Carol Rowlett, Hikemaster



Hike: Shenandoah National Park - Lewis Mountain Campground to Big Meadows Wayside; Big Meadows Wayside to Hawksbill Gap
Date: 10/3/23 - 10/4/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett, Dee Case

This trip included a 10 mile hike from Lewis Mountain Campground to Big Meadows Wayside, followed the next day by what was supposed to be a 6 mile hike from Big Meadows to Hawksbill Gap. Unfortunately, our skilled wayfinders took a wrong turn from the parking lot on the second day, which added two miles to the hike.



Hike: Audie Murphy Memorial - Rt 621 to Rt 620
Date: 10/17/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Lannie Kempnich, Larry Austin, Matthew Ulmer, Rob Clark, Madeleine Taylor, Alison Robinson

This was an 8 mile point to point hike. We only met one other person the whole way. Because it had been so dry, the creek crossing with no bridge was easily rock-hopped and was no trouble at all. More problematical was a rickety ladder that had been placed across a gully on our way down to the creek.

Hike: AT Walker Gap to Suiter Rd

10/21/2023

Report submitted by Ron Bradbury

Participants: Keli Bradbury and Diesel the German Shepherd

Great weather for a solo hike with Diesel!



neault, Alissa Myers, Linda Henser, Thomas , Pam, Danjas, Christine Wicker, Ken Myers, Steve Smith, Lynn Smith, Sharon Probst, Rusty Havens, Marjan M

Hike: Roanoke Mountain Loop/Mill Mountain Combo Part 2
Date: 10/29/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Tom Behrman, Terri McClure, Sarah Allison, Sophia Vazquez, Rebecca Cox

We had a great turnout for this combination hike. The entire group did the 5-mile loop from Gum Springs overlook up Roanoke Mountain, down the back side, and up the horse trail back to the overlook. Then a smaller group continued down an abandoned trail to the Chestnut Ridge trail system.

That group went up to the day use picnic area (the old Roanoke Mountain Campground), then continued on through the trail system up to the Mill Mountain Star and down to the Star Trail parking area, adding another 6 miles. It was a fun day for everyone.



Hike: Roanoke Mountain Loop (Part 1: 5 miles)
Date: 10/29/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Madeleine Taylor, Bob Peckman, Kris Peckman, Mary Streeper, Andrew Lawfield, Teresa Mor-

Tinker Cliffs via Andy Layne Trail, 11/5/23

(This report by Kris Peckman)

Kris and Bob Peckman (leaders), Ana Anderson, Becky Cox, Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Fred Meyer, Madeleine Taylor, Jessica Vehmeier

Another spectacular Sunday for hiking. The parking lot was fuller than we have ever seen it, so of course we met several other hikers out enjoying the weather and the hike: triple-crowners and day hikers, including two happy women in scarves and pretty dresses. (Also a few well-behaved dogs.)

We were all super-impressed and very grateful for the at least 200 steps the work crews have installed in recent years. No more sliding down the steep section whether trying to go up or coming down. While eating our lunch, we studied the beautiful valley view, identifying familiar sections of the AT (McAfee's Knob, Sawtooth Ridge, Sandstone Ridge, Dragon's Tooth, North Mountain).

This hike is a relentless climb, made totally worthwhile by the glory of the Cliffs. We were disappointed to see cattle in the stream after so much work had been done rerouting the trail to fence them out of the water.

We are lucky to have the Roanoke Cement Co. for a friend and ally; Andy Layne would have enjoyed knowing them!



Hike: SW Virginia, Fox Creek to Dickey Gap
Date: 12/5/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Madeleine Taylor, Alison Robinson, Clive Hillyard

This 8 mile hike was supposed to be "mostly" downhill but had a surprising amount of relatively steep uphill. It at least did have some nice views and a pretty cascade along the way.



Hike: SW Virginia, Mt Rogers HQ to Rt 670
Date: 12/8/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Clive Hillyard, Lannie Kempnich

Although our starting point for this 8 mile hike had a dusting of snow, we were down to our base layers for most of the hike. Good company, sunshine, a light breeze, the crunch of leaves underfoot, the smell of pine - who could ask for much more? Clive even provided libations for the end of the hike.



Hike: Matt's Creek Fire Damage Hike
Date: 12/13/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Gwen Spangler, Claire Spangler, Madeleine Taylor, Diane Conner, Alison Robinson, Tracey LaBass, Dee Case, Clive Hillyard



Hike: RATC Hike #1 Black Horse Gap to Salt Pond Road
Date: 12/21/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Clive Hillyard, Madeleine Taylor, Tee Godsey, Alison Robinson

This 7-mile hike was a key exchange with a group led by Dee Case. Our hike from Black Horse Gap to Salt Pond Road had a gnarly water crossing with slick rocks and a downed tree blocking the trail on the other side. Otherwise, we had a perfect winter hiking day for the solstice.

We had the lingering scent of ash all through this 5-mile hike to view the edge of the fire damage from the November forest fire in the Matt's Creek area. Although the burn went all the way down to the water line in many areas, the shelter, privy, and even the picnic table were untouched. There was a clear arc of burn around these, from where the trail volunteers and fire-fighters cleared the area with leaf blowers to save the structures.



Hike: Catawba Greenway Trail Loop
Date: 12/28/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Traci Degroat, Dee Case, Clive Hillyard, Laurie King, Chris Lineberry, Rusty Havens, Madeleine Taylor, Kris Peckman

We had a perfect day for our 5-mile hike along the Catawba Greenway trail loop up to Sawtooth Ridge. We started at the Catawba Center and walked along the road to the Sustainability Center. Then we went up the Catawba Greenway trail to the AT, came down to the (closed) McAfee Knob parking area, climbed up to the views at Sawtooth Ridge, and then came down the other side of the Catawba Greenway trail.

Hike: McAfee Knob from Catawba
Date: 12/29/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Clive Hillyard, Dave Smith, Patrycia Hatten, Tee Godsey, Maria Bowling, Madeleine Taylor, Rusty Havens

Unlike the previous day's perfect weather hike on the Catawba Greenway trail, this hike was cold, blustery, and had intermittent sleet. We once again went up the Catawba Greenway trail, but once we got onto the AT we turned left and went up to McAfee Knob. We ate a quick lunch there in the cold and then returned using the fire road. This allowed us a view of a cache of logs that will be used to build the new campsites in 2024.



Hike: AT Bear Wallow Gap to Jennings Creek
Date: 12/30/2023

Report by Ron Bradbury

Participants: Keli and Ron Bradbury, and Wyatt the Yellow Lab

After a mile ascent the trail descended for about 5.5 miles to Jennings Creek. Snow flurries on our way to meet the Witcher Shuttle gave way to a dry, cold day with less wind than forecast. A couple of creeks had ample water.



Hike: AT Rte 630 to Rte 601
Date: 12/31/23

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Pam Errico, Patrycia Hatten, Christine Wickham, Clive Hillyard, Janet Rankin, Rusty Havens, Traci DeGroat

We closed out 2023 with a 7-mile key exchange hike across Kelly's Knob with another group led by Dee Case. We were back to beautiful weather for this hike. The stream crossings were a little tricky but everyone made it across fine. Many thanks to our trail crews for the wooden steps bolted into a boulder at one of the stream crossings!





Shelter work and weenie roast report

By Homer and Therese Witcher

Hike: Niday Shelter Out and Back,
 appx 3 mile round trip
 November 5, 2023

Participants: Homer and Therese Witcher, leaders, Jim Webb, Mack & Ann McGhee, Kathryn Plunkett, Kevin, Hannah and Miles Torrow, Taylor, Skye and Emi Peterson, Connie Tyree, Suzanne & Moussa Ishak, Bennett Witcher

On November 5th, we led 14 hikers to Niday Shelter to roast hot dogs and marshmallows. We had experienced and novice hikers, ranging in age from 6 months to 81 years. Bennett and Jim led the way to

the shelter with Therese and Skye bringing up the rear.

By the time the stragglers arrived at the shelter, Bennett and Jim had a nice fire. This is no surprise since they are both certified fire bugs. Being Therese's 39th birthday, we all sang Happy Birthday and then proceeded to roast hot dogs. New fellowships were formed and the weather cooperated beautifully.

Having years of service as Shelter Supervisor, Therese could not resist staining over some graffiti on the shelter.

We hope to lead another such hike in the future (after the fire ban is lifted) and hope you will join us.



Hike: Mill Mountain for New Year's Day
 Date: 1/1/24

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Molly Armistead (lead), Sharon, Teresa Morneault, Fred Meyer, Kathy DeCoster, Rusty Havens, Marjan, Laurie Spangler, Rebecca Reiff, Linda, Dee Case

We had a great turnout for our 6-mile New Year's hike up Mill Mountain. This hike started at the Roanoke Industrial Center, which provides greenway parking as a courtesy. We traveled along the Roanoke River Greenway for about a mile, then cut through the neighborhood to follow the Mill

Mountain Greenway up to the Star. Molly Armistead led the front part of the group, and Carol Rowlett walked with the more leisurely hikers. After a quick snack at the cold, windy top of the mountain, we returned along the Greenway back to our cars.

Hike: Tinker Cliffs
 Date: 1/2/24

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Madeleine Taylor, Clive Hillyard, Pam Reed, Janet Rankin, Rebecca Reiff

We had a grand time on our 8-mile to Tinker Cliffs and back. Depending on which turn of the trail we

were on, we had either a marvelous sunny day with no wind, or we were being chased along the trail by the breath of an ice dragon. A couple of our friends missed us at the parking lot but caught up with us at the top - possibly blown up the mountain by the wind! The temperature was 37 degrees starting out, but the wind chill was 20 degrees lower.

Hike: Sulphur Ridge Trail Loop,
 1/14/24

Kris Peckman (leader), Dee Case (winner of the Dry Boots award), Eve Taglang, Susan Terwilliger

The last time the club hiked this trail was on December 31, 2015, and the last time I hiked it was in deep snow on January 6, 2014. The trail is still there and is reasonably well maintained except it could use a little sidehill work in places.

We started down the Sulphur Ridge Trail and surprise, 4 stream crossings! The decaying bridge that crossed in one place back in 2015 is now gone. Only Dee got across all 4 times with dry boots. Then the trail goes up, up, and up, along Sulphur Ridge, with steep drops on both sides, a high ridge to our right and an expansive valley view to our left.

The wind was blowing mightily, so we had lunch on the lee side of the ridge and continued to the intersection with the Price Mountain Trail, where the wind prompted us to decide to skip the extra mile uphill to the knob and just go down the Price Mountain Trail to the car. It's an impressive descent, reminding us that we had also climbed quite a bit!



The Pinnacles of Dan, 2023 (photo by David Gloudemans)

A visit to the Dan River Gorge

December 11, 2023

by David Gloudemans

Thanks to the talk and book by Professor Mills Kelly, I learned about the Old Appalachian Trail, and particularly about the reputedly challenging section over the Pinnacles of Dan, near the headwaters of the Dan River, which I had never visited.

Today, access to the cone-shaped feature does not follow the old AT route. Instead, one parks at the end of Kimber Valley Rd, where a gate blocks access to the Dan River power plant. From there, after a pleasant ¾ mile walk beside the river, I followed power line that turned and headed up a steep val-

ley. A half dozen buried electrical boxes mark the way up and end at a falling-down metal shack on the saddle below the pinnacle itself. From the saddle, an unused roadbed leads northwest, away from the pinnacle. This, I suspect, is the route of the old AT.

Historic literature talks about navigating directly over the pinnacle on the northwest ridge. This looked like it would require fifth class climbing on rock that was too cold for me to hold onto. I skirted to the right instead. Evidence of other's passing was sketchy at best. The way involved trusting half-dead rhodo shrubs for handholds while stepping across loose dirt and rocks, with the consequences of a miscalculation possibly lethal.



end of Pinnacle Lane and getting on my bike. I encountered **No Trespassing** signs and gated, private roads. One resident called off his pit bulls and told me there was no public access to anything up there, and that his neighbor had bigger dogs that weren't as friendly, so I turned

Later I drove to the upstream end of the gorge, by the lower dam, but got there after 2:00 pm, when they close the gate. I decided to brew a cup of coffee before starting the long drive to Moneta. It was just starting to percolate when a guy came out of a nearby house and told me the side of the gravel road I'd pulled over on was private property, and I "couldn't just start making coffee anywhere I pleased." I considered debating, or offering him a half-cup, but he didn't seem real approachable so I apologized, loaded up, and drank my beige coffee-water on the way home.

There's a sheltered cave near the top that's neat. The summit itself is covered with shrubs and trees, offering little vista. From here, supposedly the old AT descended to the river and crossed it. I looked down that way; it looked steep with drop-offs. I returned the way I'd come.

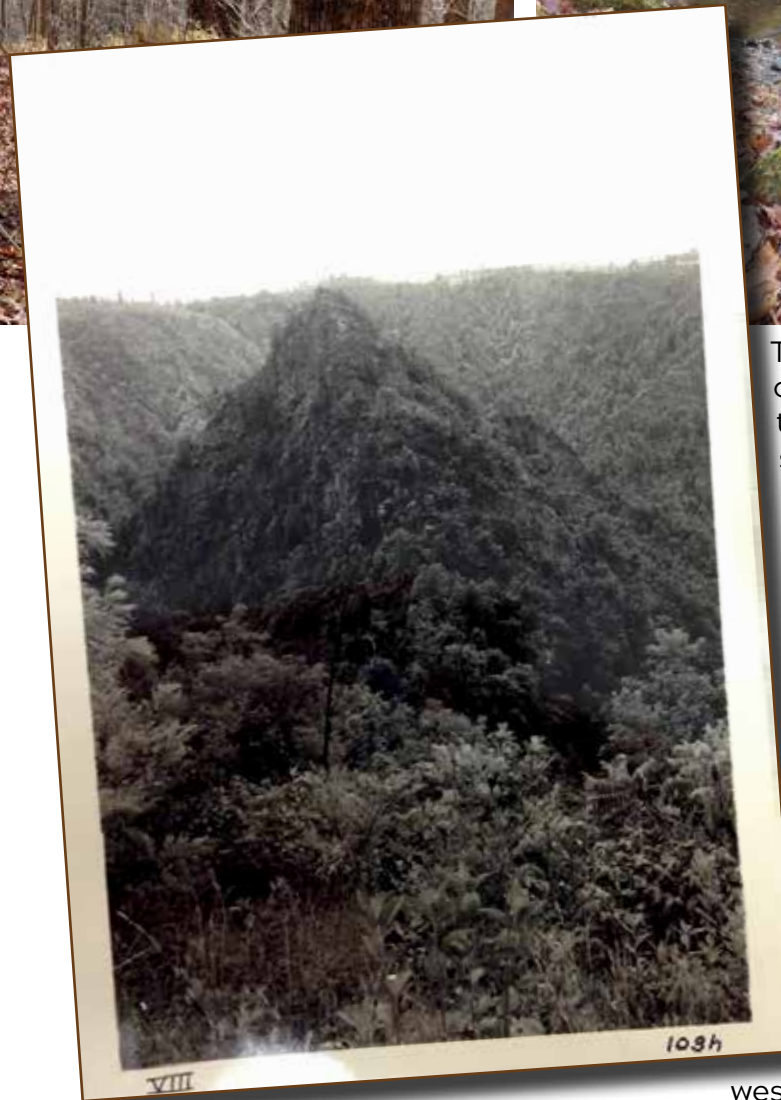
Later, I tried to find the old route to the saddle from the north-west, by driving to the

around. It'd be interesting to hike to the saddle from below again and then follow the roadbed northwest. I'm fairly certain it'd lead to the same **No Trespassing** signs from the opposite direction.

Another day I attempted to follow the Dan River from the power plant past the turn to the saddle. The trail shrunk and disappeared where it looked like high water had washed it away. The riverbanks were steep and fallen trees made progress difficult. The insides of river turns were usually flat, but crossing the water was a minor epic in itself. It'd be better in warmer months. I struggled upstream about a mile, still short of where the old AT likely crossed the river, and turned back.

The trip made me wonder how many people had actually crossed the Pinnacles of Dan and continued down the other side before the trail was relocated in 1952. The total recorded completions of the AT before then is about ten. Others surely navigated The Pinnacles section, but I wonder how many actually risked their lives up and down the most difficult path.

The Dan River Gorge is a neat place. Exploring it isn't easy.

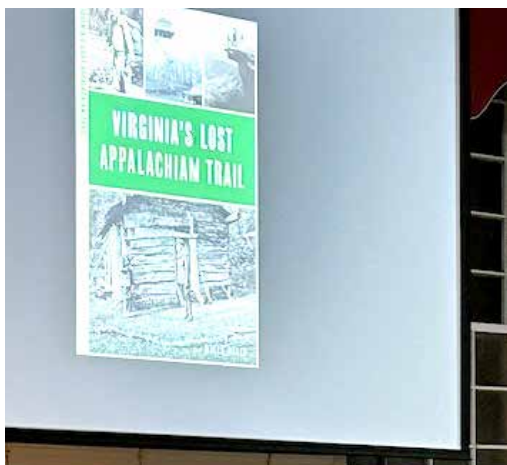


The Pinnacles of Dan from the AT, c. 1934

<https://unbuiltparkway.web.unc.edu/unbuilt-projects/pinnacles-of-dan/>



Diana Christopulos, one of our own members who played a crucial role in Mills' research for the book, provided a captivating introduction. Kelly's March 7, 2023 episode his Green Tunnel podcast visits the same story as the talk he presented on the "lost" Appalachian Trail at the potluck; that podcast goes into more detail and is highly recommended.



Photos: The raffle's Grand Prize: an original watercolor by Matt Gentry featuring our beloved McAfee Knob (top left); President, Vice President, and Shelter Supervisor Witcher (above); Archivist Diana Christopulos introducing Mills Kelly (far left); Mills Kelly and an image of his new book (left); assorted club members enjoying dinner and conversation (right)

challenges posed by COVID. On December 9th, our club gathered at the beautiful Universalist Church of Roanoke, welcoming back familiar faces, and forging new connections among the 64 members in attendance. The air was filled with festive spirit as everyone contributed a delightful array of main dishes, sides, appetizers, and desserts, creating a feast to remember.



members had the chance to win fantastic raffle prizes generously donated by local businesses. Outdoor Trails, Walkabout Outfitters, Parkway Brewery, Salem Brewery, and the grand prize—a stunning Matt Gentry Watercolor of McAfee Knob—all added an extra layer of excitement to the festivities. A heartfelt thank you goes out to each contributor who enhanced the occasion with their generosity.



Following our scrumptious dinner, we were treated to an enlightening presentation by Mills Kelly, a renowned historian, photographer, podcaster, and author of "Virginia's Lost Appalachian Trail." Mills took us on a journey through the previous Virginia section of the AT, highlighting notable areas like Fancy Gap, Bent Mountain, Pinnacles of Dan, and Floyd County until 1952 when the trail was relocated more than 50 miles to the west.

The evening was a resounding success, creating lasting memories for both our longstanding members and those who recently joined our organization. My heartfelt appreciation goes out to the dedicated volunteers who not only arrived early to help set up for the event but also stayed late to ensure the church was impeccably clean. Thank you for your invaluable contributions and commitment.

As we navigate the opening days of 2024, I hope that each of you eagerly anticipate the festivities that await us throughout the coming year.

Social Coordinator's Report **Triumphant Success: Unwrapping the Splendor of Our Annual Holiday Potluck**

Pamela White Wolsey, Social Coordinator

It is thrilling to share the heartwarming success of our recent

Holiday Potluck, a cherished tradition that made a triumphant return after a hiatus due to the

The joyous atmosphere extended beyond the culinary delights, as

SAVE THE DATE: RATC ANNUAL MEETING

MARCH 16, 2024

6:00 PM

Saint Marks UMC Family Life Center

19 Cedar Ridge Drive | Daleville, VA | 24083

Stay tuned for more details! Coming soon on our Facebook Page and Meetup!

LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS • LIFETIME MEMBERS

- Randall & Sherry Acra | Martha Armistead | Kathryn Arrington | Mel Ayers | Robin Bagby | Robert Barnes | Jim & Jill Beeson | Tom & Doris Berdeen | Kevin Black | Brian Boggs | Robert & Jeanie Bomber | Andrew Bowman | Joseph Brabant | Amy & Tim Bradley | Blanche Brower | Tom Bryant | Shawn Buck | Stephanie Buffett | Matthew Burnett | Ron & Cathy Butler | Harold (Hal) Cantrill | Rhonda (Dee) Case | Brian Chisom | Dan & Carolyn Chrisman | Leon & Jane Christiansen | Mark McClain & Diana Christopulos | Rob Clark | Carl Cornett | Hugh Craft | Rob & Beth Crittenden | Robert Darner | Adam Day | Jennifer Deegan | Gerald DeMasters | Jay & Kim Dowd | Robert & Susan Egbert | Dan & Mei Li Foy | Lisa Garcia | Matt & Colleen Gentry | Baron & Tina Gibson | Harris | Jeff & Family Hill | Johansson | Joseph Johnson | Beth Lawler | Jon & Annie | Ron McCorkle | Ann and Mack McGhee | Carolyn McPeak | Chris & Chasity Means | Craig & Sandie Meyers | John Miller | Philip & Susan Moldenhauer | Gary, Christine, Lindsey, Jessie & Casey Moore | Katherine Neal | Gloria Parry | Taylor & Nathan Peterson | Everett Peterson | Julie Petruska | Jennifer Pfister | Kathryn and TJ Plunkett | Joe Porfert | R. Lee & Inge Pyle | Bill Reich | Robert Rich | Steven Ritchie | Debbie Robbins | David Robinson | Gene Rose | Sue Scanlin | Nancy Slaughter | Tamela Staton | William (Julio) & Amanda Stephens | Bob Stimson | Christy Straight | Steven Strauss | Bill Tanger | Susan Terwilliger | Jason Thompson | Jesse Thompson | Christine & Brian Toevs | Bobbi Trout | Wilma Vargas | Andrew Vehmeier | John & Jessica Vehmeier Jr | Christopher Viscomi | Jim Webb | Nancy Westbury | Jay Raymond & Anja Whittington | David Wickersham | Beverly Day Williamson, Jr | Homer & Therese Witcher | Kevin & Suzanne Witcher | Bennett Witcher | Josh & Pamela White Wolsey | Adam Wood | Randall Woodford | Betty Young | Jay Young |
- Many thanks to our lifetime members!**



A Life Well-Lived: Ursula Kolmstetter, Guardian of McAfee Knob

by Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist

If you were a local hiker in the 1970s or 1980s, you might have met Ursula and Siegfried Kolmstetter, two Germans who immigrated to the United States in the 1950s and ended up in Roanoke by 1970. Siegfried was a physician at the VA Medical Center in Salem, and Ursula managed a household including three children and numerous pets. They became active leaders in the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club and maintainers of the McAfee Knob section for 25 years. They often helped hikers and sometimes provided a hot meal and a

bed in their home for thru hikers

When they retired from trail maintenance of McAfee’s Knob in the 1990’s, Leonard and Laurie Adkins took over on McAfee Knob. Leonard, the noted author of many books about the Appalachian Trail, recalls that, “one of our fondest memories is wandering off trail all over Catawba Mountain with Siegfried and Ursula showing us places we would never have known of. One is ‘Siegfried Falls.’ It is a

place that will probably now remain known only to a few.” Siegfried passed away in 2019, and you can read about him on the RATC [website](#).

Ursula and Seigfried also served as boundary monitors on the McAfee Knob section, a job that requires scrambling up and down steep slopes with a bucket of paint and other gear. Their daughter Karen reports that in the early 90’s when they marking boundaries at McAfee

She fell, slid down the mountain and hit her hip on a rock. It was just her and my father. She thought she was OK and walked back up the mountain to the

car. When she arrived home, she started experiencing a lot of pain, so my father took her to the ER. X-rays revealed that she fractured her hip and had to have surgery to insert two pins. The staff at the ER was amazed that she was able to walk with a broken hip.

Ursula lived to be 96 years old, passing away in Leesburg, Virginia on December 27, 2023. Her [obituary](#) in the Roanoke Times revealed an astonishing life story, further illustrating her physical and mental toughness. She enjoyed an idyllic childhood in Gottesberg, Silesia, Germany (now in Poland) - hiking, skiing, picking flowers and berries and spending time with family and friends - only to be taken prisoner by the Russian army in May 1945 and separated from her parents. Her parents died at the hands of their captors and Ursula was taken to Theresienstadt prison camp. She made a daring escape on her own in January 1946, making her way to West Germany. She later met and married Siegfried. She wrote down her experiences and kept the original copy, which will be donated to the Documentation Centre for Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation in Berlin, Germany.

She and Seigfried had a wonderful life in Virginia, and she is survived by daughters Christine and Karen and son Michael along with their spouses and two grandchildren.

Like Siegfried, Ursula asked that memorial contributions be made in her name to the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club. This can be done [online](#) or by mailing to:

Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club, P.O. Box 12282, Roanoke, Virginia 24024-2282 (recommended to avoid fees).

We extend our deep condolences and thanks to her family.



RATC Annual Meeting Speaker GUARDIANS OF McAFEE KNOB

March 16, 2024

New Location: St Marks United Methodist Church, Daleville

Potluck dinner begins at 6:00 PM; presentation to follow.

(Don’t go to the Unitarian Church in Roanoke!)

Native Americans, private land-owners, and the RATC and its partners have protected and enjoyed the McAfee Knob area for over 10,000 years, though not always in harmony. RATC Archivist Diana Christopulos will give a lively overview from the time of the Totero/Tupelo to the present, with

McAfee Knob Taskforce Report

by Brian Boggs, Liason

Get more from your Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club

Create an account at: www.meetup.com

Join the group: **Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club Group**

an emphasis on the role of RATC volunteers.

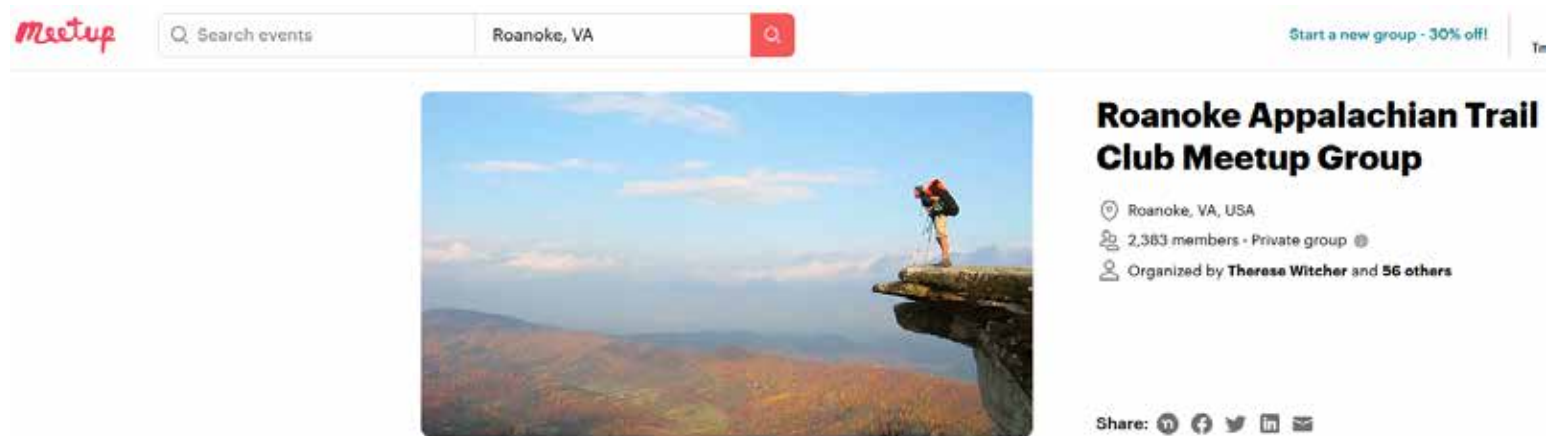
In 1932, our predecessors convinced Myron Avery to locate the AT on Tinker and Catawba mountains instead of the Blue Ridge around Roanoke.

In the 1950s, RATC volunteers relocated over 150 miles of the AT south of McAfee Knob away from the Blue Ridge Parkway to include Dragon’s Tooth, Wind Rock and many other scenic locations. This worked pretty well until the late 1970s, when private landowners closed the McAfee section to hikers for 10 years, until the National Park Service took over the corridor. RATC volunteers played a central role in the acquisition, routing

and construction of the modern Trail in the 1970s and 1980s. The presentation will feature lost maps, quirky stories, and live visits from RATC members or guests whose families built and maintained the McAfee section from the 1970s to about 2010. It will also clarify when the trail was located on North Mountain, a frequently asked question. Was it 1933? 1951? 1978? Or all of the above? Come and find out!

Presenter Diana Christopulos (trail name “DC Turtle”) holds a PhD in History. She has worked as a college professor and served as Vice President, American Heart Association National Center, etc. She joined the RATC in 2003 and has held various leadership postions. She completed a section hike of entire AT in ‘08.

To be approved for meetup, go to www.meetup.com and joining the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club group. You will need to submit a photo and use your name or first name and initial. Approval is typically granted within a few days. Meetup enables the leader(s) to see who will be attending the



The RATC maintains a group at www.meetup.com and uses that website to organize events including hikes, meetings, and trail work adventures. Accessing Meetup offers free accounts to users.

various events and the attendees' names. Other participants can look to see who else will be participating in the activity. It is a great way, if you have trouble remembering names (and who doesn't), to look back and remember the people you spoke to and hung out with a week or two after the event passed.

Most of the organized hikes have a cap on the number of participants. This is determined by the hike leader based upon the ease or difficulty of the hike and number of miles involved.

Meetup is effective for work days to let the Trail Supervisor know what tools and equipment are needed for the particular project and determine the scope of the project that particular day. Many of the same criterion used by the Trail Supervisor are utilized by the Land Management Supervisor is doing boundary work and the Shelter Supervisor in moving privies and repairing shelters.

Meetup assists training activities by letting the trainers know what handouts, supplies and other materials are necessary for a successful training.

The Hiker Happy Hour is the third

Wednesday of every month, typically from 5pm - 7pm. The HHH is typically held at a local brewery. Two are frequently visited; however, at least four have been visited in the past five years. A quick check with meetup lets you know where to find your RATC hiking buddies for the next HHH.

Meetup is great for the annual meeting and holiday pot luck. Both of these events are typically held at a church or facility with a great room / auditorium. Some of these facilities have capacity limits. Meetup helps to ensure an adequate number of plates, cups, utensils and napkins are available. The club provides corn and chicken for the annual corn boil. A proper head count assists in ordering food.

Once you join the RATC on [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com), you will be amazed at how active your RATC is, and may expand your interest and involvement within the club

Ridgerunners: an active volunteer opportunity

One can rarely hike McAfee's Knob, Dragon's Tooth or Tinker Cliffs on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday from March through October

without encountering a Ridgerunner. Identified by their orange or tan vest, Ridgerunners frequently interact with hikers or do light trail maintenance. Diana Christopulos, past RATC president, and Kathryn Herndon-Powell, Education and Outreach Coordinator, Appalachian Trail Conservancy for the Central & Southwestern Virginia Regional Office in Roanoke, VA, established the Ridgerunner program within the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club in 2015.

The fire & rescue departments for Roanoke County and Botetourt County were getting a high volume of calls for non-emergency situations in Virginia's Triple Crown (McAfee Knob, Dragon's Tooth and Tinker Cliffs). Cell phone service was rather spotty in this section in 2015. Inexperienced hikers were considering it an emergency, when their cell phone battery was less than one quarter charged. Inadequate preparation in underestimating the 4-6 hours to go to McAfee's Knob and back, in addition to improper footwear and inadequate hydration resulted in a number of non-emergency 911 calls by unprepared and frightened novice hikers.

The Ridgerunner program focused exclusively on McAfee's Knob in

2015, due to it attracting 40,000-60,000 hikers annually. The goal was to have a Ridgerunner out every Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday holidays during the March to October busy season. Growth in the Ridgerunner program expanded it to include Dragon's Tooth in 2016 and later Tinker Cliffs, but primary focus remains on McAfee's Knob due to the high hiker volume.

Do not let the name "Ridgerunner" scare you! We rarely hike the ridge, and except for Ryan Wagoner and possibly a couple of other trail runners, we don't run! On some other sections of the AT the folks we call "Ridgerunners" are known as "Trail Ambassadors."

Ridgerunners on patrol have tremendous freedom. One can work the parking lot, or do a portion or the full hike to McAfee's Knob, Dragon's Tooth or Tinker Cliffs. Working at a kiosk is a great place to meet and speak with hikers. The kiosk located .3 mile from the McAfee Knob trailhead parking lot is an ideal location. Most novice hikers are huffing and puffing after ascending the major staircase and are hoping this steep start is not a precursor of things to come. If comfortable with the opportunity, a Ridgerunner might then discuss hiking the fire road vs. the AT, or advise the hiker to be aware of time and avoid getting caught in complete darkness of nightfall.



One might share Leave No Trace principles. Most encounters are very brief. Wearing a vest, carrying a grocery bag in one hand and wearing a glove on the other lets people know you are doing something constructive. Our primary goal is to enhance the experience of every hiker, and to offer helpful education.

In August 2023, most hikers on the Dragon's Tooth trail were interested in hearing about the ropes that were installed to restrict camping in certain places below Lost Spectacle Gap. They were interested in learning about efforts to protect the Pirate Bush that only grows in three states. Knowing that less than one-half of one percent of the AT is located in a Special Biological Area made portions of the Dragon's Tooth and Boy Scout Trail more unique. The McAfee Knob trail is on National Park Service Land, whereas Dragon's Tooth and Tinker Cliffs are both on National Forest Land. The rules are different, e.g. national park and requires dogs to be leashed. Ridgerunners have helped educate dog owners and far fewer dogs are off leash today than in 2015.

Lack of rain was a big factor during the summer of 2023. Suzanne Neal, ATC's staff Ridgerunner, posted weekly water updates on Facebook. Once Roanoke fell 4.5 inches below normal rainfall, most Ridgerunners told every backpacker to be extremely care-

ful with fires due to how dry the area was. The Triple Crown area had no wildfires, unlike The Mills Creek Fire just north of north of the James River foot bridge (near Buchanan.) Ridgerunners actively posted no fire zone fliers on all the shelters, privy doors, kiosks in less than two days after that fire began.

Ridgerunners also clean up the parking lots and trash along the trail, shelters, privies, fire rings, bear boxes, etc. Some of us have folding saws and take on most trees, with a 5-6 inch or less diameter, to clear the trail. That is optional and at the discretion of the Ridgerunner. Another important objective is to accurately count hikers while on patrol.

Ninety-nine percent of the hikers Ridgerunners meet are wonderful. We are very fortunate to partner with Ranger Brian Wilson, with the National Park Service, and Suzanne Neal, the ATC's Ridgerunner. Ridgerunners are trained to engage the public comfortably and to minimize confrontation.

The Ridgerunners are a positive and supportive group. Training is typically scheduled every spring and at least once every fall. Following the training, the new Ridgerunner will go on an orientation hike with an experienced Ridgerunner before going on solo patrols. New Ridgerunners typically gain confidence with experience and familiarity, overcoming initial nervousness, and no one is asked to do a solo hike before feeling well-trained and ready. Ridgerunners were asked to volunteer one day per month.

Look at [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for the scheduled Ridgerunner trainings, which are typically posted two-four weeks in advance.

President’s report
By Homer Witcher

I would like to thank Pam and Josh Wolsey and Homer Witcher for all of the planning and hard work they did to make the holiday potluck a success. I would also like the thank Mills Kelly for a very interesting power point about “Virginia’s Lost Appalachian Trail”.

At the annual meeting, we always do some volunteer recognition. I am pleased that this year, we will again be recognizing our hike leaders and trail workers for 2023. We will also be participating in the Appalachian Trail recognition program which recognizes long term volunteers and looks at cumulative hours over the years.

teers who accumulated 250 hours of service. The “America the Beautiful” Inter-agency Volunteer Pass, provides fee-free access to federal lands for 12 months after issuance. It cannot be awarded more frequently than once every 12 months. When a pass is issued, the volunteer’s time clock resets to zero, until another 250 hours of volunteer service has been recorded.

The McAfee Knob parking lot was closed in November 2023 and will remain closed until fall of 2024 when construction of the VA 311 pedestrian bridge should be completed. Parking is allowed off Route 864 below the parking lot.



Homer and Therese Witcher

Ride Source is under contract to run a shuttle bus from the Exit 140 Park and Ride in Salem to the McAfee Knob parking lot on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and

holiday Mondays from March 1st - November 2024. They will also be using an 8-passenger van for on-demand route from Salem and include Orange Market and potentially Dragon’s Tooth. For shuttle information, go to https://mcafee-shuttle.com .

Roanoke County and the city of Salem invites you to join them to celebrate the expansion of the McAfee Knob Trailhead Shuttle Service in 2024. The celebration will be on Thursday, February 29th from 3 - 4 PM at Longwood Park, 301 East Main Street, Salem.

Recently New Belgium Brewing made a \$6,000 donation to RATC with no strings attached! Colorado based New Belgium Brewing company is moving into the Constellation Brands’ brewery in Daleville, Va.

New Belgium’s most popular beers are Voodoo Ranger, America’s #1 IPA, Voodoo Ranger Juice Force IPA and its high-velocity 2023 sequel Fruit Force IPA. New Belgium Brewing has a longstanding commitment to investing in communities and donates \$1 per barrel of beer sold to support local social and environmental causes.

To learn more about New Belgium, visit https://www.newbelgium.com

Member notes

From Bob Peckman...

The link to my library of hikes is no longer on RATC.ORG but is still on my website, peckmanjazz.com where it will remain. It is in the process of being cosmetically updated to large fonts that can be read on a hand-held. The content is also being worked on and this will be a continual process so it is best to just link here and always get the most correct information.

There are many things that I can add and/or correct. But I beg you to help me. Email me (bob@peckmanjazz.com) and provide the information that you know from doing a hike. I am a novice with GPS locations so provide locations for trailheads.

If you have no need for this library, please share your knowledge with the rest of us!

My first project is to bring Carvins Cove up to date. There are now four trailheads for the Carvins Cove Trail System: Bennett Springs, the Boat Launch, the end of Timberview Rd and now the Hitchee Trailhead at the Hanging Rock Monument. We can thank the Hitchee family for giving us the Hitchee Trail, the old road to the top of Brushy Mountain. And we will always thank Brian Batteiger and his various crews who have built this permanent trail system.

The hikes will be grouped into four groups:

- Bennet Springs Loop Hikes
Boat Launch Loop Hikes
Tinkerview Loop Hikes
Hitchee to Bennett Springs, Boat Launch or Tinkerview

Hikes can be constructed of any combination, please tell me the combinations you like.

This is just one example. I will appreciate any information or correction or addition whenever you send it. ~Bob

Hike leader accolades

Let's have a big round of applause for all of our hike leaders for 2023:

- Carol Rowlett
Dee Case
Kris Peckman
Larry Austin
Molly Armistead
Dave Gloudemans
Clive Hillyard
Brendle Wolfe
Therese Witcher
Jeannine Bomber
Janice Metzger

With their enthusiasm and love of hiking, this valiant team has restored the club’s recreational hike count back to pre-COVID numbers!

Club hike totals per year:

Table with 2 columns: Year (2019-2023) and Hike Totals (77-76).

If you would like to join our hike leader team for 2024, please contact Carol Rowlett - hikemaster@ratc.org

RATC BOARD MEMBERS

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

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.

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 or by calling 540-521-5435