

TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Winter 2025

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

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. The stories that everyone shared were very revealing and the informal atmosphere made the event special. RATC will hold its annual meeting and potluck on March 15th at 6 PM at St Marks United Methodist Church at 19 Cedar Ridge Drive in Daleville. At the annual meeting, we will be voting on the new board for 2025. As part of the Appalachian Trail Recognition program, we will be bestowing years of service and hours of service awards for cumulative volunteer hours. These awards include plaques, vests, caps and patches. We will also be recognizing all RATC volunteers who have contributed at least 72 hours and/or led 6 recreational hikes between October 1 2023 and September 30, 2024. The following volunteers have earned either an RATC t-shirt, a RATC coffee cup or a hard hat.

Jim Webb (861 hours), Ryan Wag-
oner (550), Therese Witcher (494),
Bill Dawson (377), Homer Witcher
(352), Diana Christopulos (352),
Pete Irvine (350), Kelly Mulheren
(286), Donna Logan (282), Susan
Terwilliger (252), Mike Vaughn
(245), Tom McAvoy (229), Linda
Mulheren (201), Terry Shipley (190),
Greg Still (175), Ron Bradbury (159),
Brian Boggs (130), Daniel Burnette
(128), Bo Corneal (117), Bill Floyd
(115), Greg Stick (115), Craig McNal-

ly (113), Joey Johnson (105), Joey
Hoepfner (96), Pamela Wolsey
(94), Dee Case (92), Phil Sudol (91),
John Kelly (88), John Garriss (74),
Mark Farrell (72), Carol Rowlett (30
hikes), Daniel Burnette (11 hikes),
Dee Case (11 hikes) and Larry Aus-
tin (6 hikes).

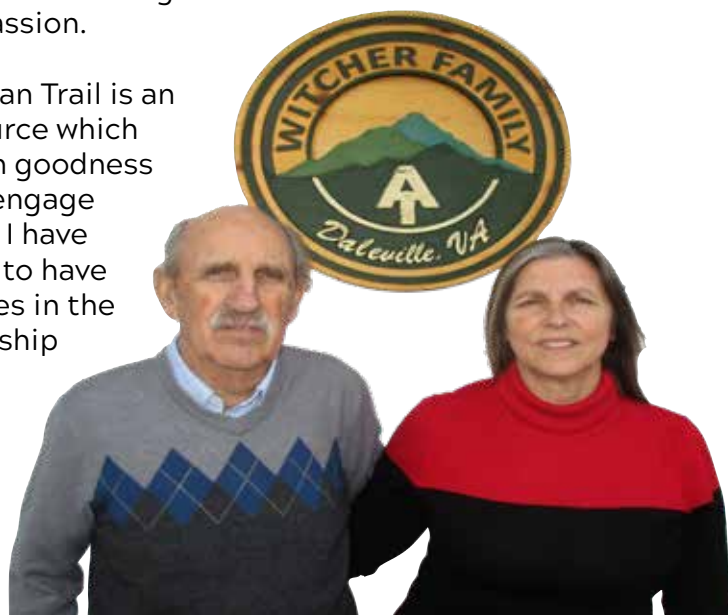
This is my final presidential report and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the RATC board for the work they have done for the past 2 years. It has been my pleasure to work with a board where every board member has performed their tasks to the highest level of accountability. This made my job as your president so much easier. I can step down as RATC president knowing that the board members will continue to perform their duties in an outstanding manner. I want to thank each and every one of you for making my responsibilities as your president so much easier to execute, And this is not goodbye since Homer and I will continue working on the AT, our true passion.

The Appalachian Trail is an amazing resource which offers so much goodness to those who engage it. Homer and I have been honored to have leadership roles in the trail's stewardship alongside the many great folks in the agencies with which we partner. Our club's volun-

teerism on the trail is important and impactful, consistently curating and improving our 120 miles of this treasure in nature.

If there was one dynamic in the administration of the trail that we could change it would be the increasing inefficiencies that have seemingly become part and parcel of the AT's inter-agency management model. Homer and I are hopeful that local efforts to maintain the trail will benefit from a return to the past, a past during which bureaucratic complexities of our national and federal partners were less cumbersome and discouraging to local volunteers.

We are expectant of change because we believe that everyone involved in the AT, at every level from local to national, shares the same passion to help people experience first-hand all the good that comes from a walk in the woods.





Volunteer sawyers from 5 A.T. Trail Clubs at Trimpi Shelter

After Helene Saw Team One

by Pete Irvine

November 14-15, 2024

Four RATC volunteer sawyers were part of the initial "A.T. Saw Teams" effort on the Mount Rogers A.T. Club section of the Trail near Sugar Grove, VA, on November 14-15.

This ATC-organized effort included 10 volunteer sawyers, either chain saw or crosscut saw certified (or both), from four A.T. Clubs, removing trees blown down during and since Hurricane Helene near Trimpi Shelter (FarOut mm 524.6) on USDA Forest Service lands both within and near Raccoon Branch Wilderness on the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The volunteer sawyers, responding



Jim Webb on the axe.



Jim Webb and 19" hickory after crosscut work.



Jim Webb of RATC and Dave Buckelew of NBATC on the A.T. in Raccoon Branch Wilderness.

to a targeted ATC request, came from as far away as Pennsylvania; representing the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC), Natural Bridge A.T. Club (NBATC), Outdoor Club of Virginia Tech (OCVT), and RATC. RATC sawyers included Trail Supervisor Jim Webb, John Hvozdoic, Eric Leedom, and Pete Irvine.

Following extensive safety briefings, and despite cold rainy weather on Day 1, these A.T. Saws Teams cut out more than 80 blown-down trees, including several mature oaks over 30" inches diameter. Chain saws and hand tools were used to clear brush, limbs, and 52 trees outside of Wilderness on the AT and blue-blazed trails to Trimpi Shelter, water source, and privy.

On the AT within the Wilderness, crosscut saws and hand tools were used to clear brush, limbs, and 31 trees.

This effort was organized and led by MRATC Trail Supervisor Doug Levin, ATC High Country Regional Manager Jerry Kyle, and ATC Interim Virginias Regional Director Kathryn Herndon-Powell. Lodging at the Merry Inn Hostel in nearby Marion, VA, and food costs for the volunteers were covered by the A.T. Resiliency Fund, created by ATC. Future similar events are planned. As of early December 2024, there are many more miles of the A.T. that remain partially or totally blocked by the impacts of Helene. It was a privilege to be a part of this effort.



Saw Team Two
November 19, 2024

by Pete Irvine

Three RATC volunteer sawyers participated in an “A.T. Saw Teams” effort on heavily-impacted sections of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) on the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in southwest Virginia in early December. They responded to a request from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), and joined 7 other non-local A.T. volunteer sawyers, local Mount Rogers A.T. Club (MRATC) volunteers, ATC staffers, and USDA Forest Service employees on December 4 and 5th.

This ATC-organized effort was based out of the Damascus Trail

Center. Following safety briefings, personnel split into four work groups. RATC volunteers Bo Carneal and John Garriss and joined a group led by Kathryn Hershon-Powell (ATC Interim Virginias Regional Manager, and RATC member) on the AT within Raccoon Branch Wilderness north of Dickey Gap. They used crosscut saws, silky saws, and axes.

RATC sawyer Greg Still used his chain saw skills on a crew in two other locations - clearing blow-downs between Taylors Valley and Straight Branch one day, and on a log step bypass of an “unrecoverable AT switchback corner” about 3/4-mile south of Damascus on day two.

This 2-day overall effort followed a similar ATC-organized volunteer effort in mid-November to assist the MRATC volunteers and local USFS staff clear areas of the A.T. impacted by Hurricane Helene in late September. Other efforts have included ongoing work by local MRATC and USFS-Mount Rogers National Recreation Area folks, an NPS saw crew from New River Gorge National Park in WV, and an ATC-funded contractor crew from RX Fire Effects LLC based in Mount Crawford, VA. The “A.T. Saw Teams” work events and the contract crew work have been supported by the ATC’s “Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund”. In addition to RATC, non-local volunteer saw-



yers (trained and certified on chain saw, crosscut saw, or both) came from the Potomac AT Club (PATC), Natural Bridge AT Club (NBATC), Old Dominion AT Club (ODATC), and the Outdoor Club at Virginia Tech (OCVT).

In southwest Virginia, multiple sections of the A.T. maintained by both MRATC and Piedmont A.T. Hikers (PATH) were heavily

impacted by Helene. While some areas of the RATC’s 120-miles of the A.T. were also affected, initial post-storm trail clearing has been completed.

A big thanks is due to all who routinely volunteer to maintain the trail and to those who rose to the occasion with extra work after this extraordinary storm.

Hikemaster Report
Carol Rowlett, Hikemaster
Brushy Hills Preserve
Date: 10/27/24
Participants: Bob and Kris Peckman, Mark Wilhelm
by Kris Peckman

Brushy Hills Preserve is a hardwood forested area preserved by the city of Lexington. Over the years they have built numerous trails, which are well maintained and very pleasant for hiking. On this sunlit fall day, the colorful leaves were falling. Surprisingly, we saw very few other hikers,



usually accompanied by their friendly and well-behaved dogs. A nice bench provided us a place to lunch with a view. A special treat was discovered by Mark near the ground: a moth clinging to a small stem. I have searched and searched but cannot find what kind of moth it was, so if you recognize it from this picture, let us all know!



Hike: Wolf Creek Greenway
Date: 10/31/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Debbie Steele, Laurie Adkins, James Westerhouse, Leonard Adkins, Kris Peckman, Ana Anderson, Terri McClure, Kayla West

We had a howling good time with a 6-mile out and back walk along Wolf Creek Greenway for Halloween. Although we started out with jackets, it was shorts and short sleeve weather by the time we returned. We were honored to have renowned author and AT expert Leonard Adkins and his wife Laurie join us for this hike.

Henry Lanum Trail (Mt. Pleasant and Pompey Mt. Loop)
Date: November 10, 2024
Participants: Bob and Kris Peckman (leaders), Dave Grimm, Fred Meyer, Nancy Reid, Madeleine Taylor, Verona Thomas, Mary Ellen Warren

As we approached the trailhead along the narrow Forest Service road, we passed many parked cars. Luckily there was room for our two cars to park in the small area at the trailhead. Also reassuring were the signs at every intersection along the way, directing us to the Henry Lanum trailhead.

Two Forest Service fire trucks arrived at the parking area while we were there. They told Nancy that an abandoned campfire had been reported.

As we started up the Pompey Mountain end of the trail, it quickly became apparent that one car contained the fast hikers and the other the slow hikers. We did meet each other briefly at the top of Mt. Pleasant, where we had lunch and admired the view, which was so stunning many of us just gasped. We saw the helmeted fire fighters putting out the remains of

a campfire below the summit, but we and several other hikers used water from our packs and our bodies to put out the remains of three more campfires on the two ends of the summit.

Our group met another group of hikers who were delighted to hear that Verona is from Jamaica, and they struck up a chorus of some Bob Marley tunes with her.

It was chilly and windy all day, but the rain held off till the end.



Sulphur Ridge - Price Mountain Trail Loop
Date: November 24, 2024

Participants: Therese Witcher (leader), Homer Witcher, Madeleine Taylor, Linda Osborne, Kris Peckman

It was a beautiful day for a leisurely hike. Homer decided not to hike with the women so he ended up doing an in-and-out hike on Price Mountain. The ladies started down on the Sulphur Ridge and Homer started up on the Price Mountain Trail. The Sulphur Ridge trail goes downhill for a mile and has several creek crossings which are not very well blazed. Everyone made it across without falling into the creek. After the last crossing, the trail turns and goes uphill on Sulphur Ridge and continues climbing for about 3 miles. After the first set of switchbacks, we started looking for fossils. We found numerous small fossils. Madeleine was our photographer and she took great pictures of the



fossils. We did not see any wildlife, but during lunch, we did hear a woodpecker.

With the leaves off the trees, we had good views on the left of Patterson Mountain and Rich Patch Mountain. After lunch, we turned onto the Price Mountain trail where we had views of Fincastle and the Peaks of Otter. After a steep descent, we were back at the car to meet up with Homer.

Hike: Audie Murphy Memorial
Date: 11/17/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Dave Grimm, Ana Anderson, Liz Adams, Russ Adams, Maria Bowling, Nottely Seagraves, Mary Ellen Warren

This hike ran in conjunction with a “slow hike” version led by Dee Case. Both versions were well attended. Because the bridge is still out at the far end of this section, we did the hike as an 8-mile out and back rather than risk fording the Upper Craig’s Creek in



mid-November. Audie Murphy was the most decorated American combat soldier of WWII. He died in a plane crash near the memorial site. His memorial is commonly

used to honor other veterans as well. While our group was at the memorial, a group of Virginia Tech students arrived from the other direction, conducted a short memorial service, and stayed to clear debris from the memorial. All of the students were in good spirits, despite having had at least one person fall into the water at the creek crossing.



Hike: Salt Pond Road
Date: 12/3/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Laurie Spangler, Clive Hillyard, Earl Mitchell

It was cold, cold, cold for this 6.5 mile lollipop hike! Although this

was initially planned as an out and back hike along Salt Pond Road from gate to gate, we decided to cut up the hill to the AT at our turn-around point. We then hiked north along the AT until we hit the crossing for Salt Pond Road again.



Hike: Hog Camp Gap to Punchbowl Overlook (17.2 Miles)
Date: November 9 - 10, 2024
Participant: Ron Bradbury

My hike started amidst a surprising crowd; at least 30 tents and their occupants (scouting troop, perhaps?) occupied the field on the northbound side of the fire road where I began day one of my overnight, southbound hike. I was initially concerned that I would be hiking with a crowd, but instead enjoyed relative solitude after the first mile.

Over the years, claims of “the best view on the AT” have been assigned by various people to various spots; I have personally concluded that this is a purely subjective assertion -- one person’s favorite is another person’s “Meh!”--so rather than perpetuate that claim for a spot along this hike, I will instead simply note that the pinnacle of Cole Mountain affords a most spectacular vista. A large field offers unob-



structed views toward every point of the compass. The commute to the trailhead and the short climb would be well worth the trouble at any time on a clear day. Mt. Rogers almost seemed visible on the horizon.

Another highlight on day one included the mile of trail along [Brown Mountain Creek](#) throughout which the archaeology of a 19th/20th century community is readily observable.

After an overnight near the Brown Mountain Creek shelter, I stum-



A more inspirational highlight on day two was first hiking around the edge of the Lynchburg Reservoir and then the rather impressive wooden suspension bridge across the Peddler River.

bled on a partially-eaten (mostly eaten, actually) deer carcass. Fortunately I still had an ample supply of jerky available in my pack for snacking.



Hike: Endless Wall Trail, New River Gorge (Lansing, WV)
Date: November 2, 2024
Participant: Bev Edwards, Basil Edwards, Keli Bradbury, Ron Bradbury

A 3.2 miles of very tame, well-curated trail provide spectacular views of the New River Gorge Bridge and of the New River Gorge itself. While our drive from home took a couple hours, this popular trail is easily accessible and in retrospect, well worth the hassle.

On the day we hiked, several kayakers were visible plying the well-reputed rapids in this section of the New River.

Conservation
Supervisor's Report
The Keffer Oak

by Tom McAvoy
RATC Conservation Supervisor

The Keffer Oak, a white oak, *Quercus alba* is located 0.5 miles north of Route 629 (Northside Rd.) on the AT in Craig County, VA (37.34988, -80.37439). The Keffer family has lived in the Sinking Creek Valley since the 1700's. This tree has long been thought to be the second largest tree along the entire AT. The largest documented tree is the Dover Oak along the AT near West Dover Rd. in Pawling, NY. This tree has a circumference of 20' (6.4' diameter) and is thought to be over 300 years old.

This past spring John Peterson, VT forestry; Jamie King, University (VT) Arborist; his intern Ameilia Berz; and I visited the Keffer oak to assess its size, health, and possible actions to improve its health. The Keffer Oak was found to have a circumference 235" (19.6'), a diameter of 74.8" (6.2'), a height of 80' and a crown of 16'. This information was entered into the Virginia Big Tree website at: <https://big-tree.cnre.vt.edu/detail.cfm?AutofieldforPrimaryKey=2435>. Jamie King supposes that the oak is over 250 years old and was alive before the birth of our nation. Due to the multiple large branches along the length of its trunk, it likely lived much of its time in an open field. Unfortunately, it is in an advanced stage of decline and will not recover.

A third of its branches are now dead and new foliage growth is below average.

Recommendations to prolong the life the Keffer Oak made by John Peterson, Jamie King, and Quintin C. McClellan, Certified Arborist, Total Tree Health Care, Inc. were to remove deadwood within the tree's crown to mitigate risks associated with pedestrians and falling debris; treat with herbicides, non-native invasive species to reduce competition for water and nutrients; spread course wood chips and woody debris within the root zone to reduce soil compaction and better retain soil moisture; apply the insecticide Baseline (bifenthrin) and the fungicide Reliant (phosphite systemic) to



the exterior of the tree to control wood boring insects and phytophthora and other cankers; fence out cows that are currently able to walk under the canopy of the tree, to reduce damage to the tree and soil compaction.

The Keffer Oak is a dearly loved tree in our area and many people walk up the AT just to see this majestic tree. Hopefully we can prolong its life for a few years.

Project Update: The
bridge to carry AT hikers
over route 311 at the
McAfee Knob parking lot
UPDATE, JANUARY 14, 2025

The bridge and parking lot are not yet open; the projected completion date has passed. The current delay is necessary to allow the handrails for the north side of the bridge to be fabricated and installed. Unfortunately, the handrails are still in the fabrication process and their completion date is indeterminate. Consequently, the bridge might not open until as late as the end of February. All parties are eager for the bridge to become a permanent part of the McAfee Knob hiking experience; other work is being done to prepare for the bridge's opening.

Kelly and Linda Mulheren have created a comprehensive signage plan for the area surrounding the new bridge. They've started making the signs using the CNC machine and are double-checking with all the partners to ensure that the placement and wording align with everyone's needs. Some signs can't be finalized until all the components of the bridge are in place, but the new signage will greatly reduce confusion when the area reopens.

Jim Webb and his crew have built the new Appalachian Trail section on the north side of the bridge up to the construction fencing. The VDOT construction team plans to coordinate with RATC to open the fencing, allowing the crew to finish connecting the trail to the bridge. A similar process will be used for the trail on the south side. Unfortunately, the frozen ground and current weather conditions will delay building these trail sections. This means that the bridge could open before the trails are fully



complete. Fingers crossed for a warmer week so crews can get out there and finish the trails!

As with many major projects unanticipated delays have been discouraging but the bridge project is nearing the finish line and have built stronger partnerships along the way. There's still work to be done, but only mild optimism is necessary to envision that the bridge will open before the start of the 2025 hiking season this spring. The ATC is planning a press event

and partner gathering to celebrate this incredible contribution to the Appalachian Trail and the McAfee Knob area.

For additional information, contact:

Suzanne Neal
Catawba Mountain Ridgerunner &
Natural Resource Technician
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Text or call: 540-808-7702

Trail Supervisor Report

Projects at the new bridge over Rte 311 (McAfee Knob)

by Jim Webb

Date: 11/19/24
Location: New north side Trail connector for Pedestrian bridge
Attending: Dave Grimm, John Grant, Susan Terwilliger, Gary Moore, Mike Vaughn, Erik Leedom, Brent Scott and Jim Webb

With the opening of the pedestrian bridge over Rte. 311 estimated to be about January at the time of this report, the connecting trails on either side need to be completed soon. The club work hike on the trail north side went a long way to that end.

The Appalachian Conservancy Crew (ACC) employed in September managed to bring the rock steps up the hill and into alignment. As the ACC crew left, there was still much to be done.

- Work performed by our crew this hike was to,
- 1. put rock cribbing on the downhill side of the steps to prevent erosion and keep people on the trail.
 - 2. Finish the trail to the top of the steps.
 - 3. Take the remaining steps down to the construction fence.

The remaining steps will be needed to finish the trail once construction on the bridge is finished. At that time the construction fence will be removed, and we will proceed to finish the connecting trail

Another work hike is needed soon to finish the connector on the north side.



Date: 11/25/24
Location: Rte. 311 pedestrian bridge.
Attending: Greg Still, Moke Vaughn, Gary Moore, Dave Grimm, Greg Stick, John Grant, Suzane Neal, Kathryn Herndon Powell & Jim Webb

This was another work hike in preparation for the opening of the pedestrian bridge over Rte. 311 scheduled for some time after the end of 2024. Locations for this week's work were in several areas. Finishing touches were put on the stone steps on the McAfee side of 311. When the contractor finishes the bridge, and the construction fence comes down our club will finish the trail to connect to the bridge as quickly as possible.

We also put in posts for a fence that will try to urge people to use the completed bridge. These rail fences will be at the road and at

Date: 12/2/24
Location: Trail south of Rte. 311
Attending: Dave Grimm, Mike Scott, Gary Moore, Mike Vaughn, John Grant and Jim Webb

A very short work hike on the south side of Rte. 311 to connect the A.T. with the pedestrian bridge now under construction. On this day about 75-80 feet of trail was dug on the sidehill just above the ramp to the bridge. This relocation also terminates at the construction fence at this time. When the bridge is completed and the construction fence is removed, work will immediately resume on these connectors.



Photo from mid-bridge looking future AT trail north



the top of the ridge where the new trail connects. The new trail has been extended to within a few yards of the fence at the ridge top. The third area of work was the flagging of the new trail on the south side of 311. Since we can use the old trail, completion of this trail will come after the finish of the north side





Member Notes



Annual Holiday Potluck

by Pamela White-Woolsey

The 2024 Annual Holiday Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club- RATC Potluck as a memorable evening. This year's theme, "What does the AT mean to you?" brought heartfelt stories of love, health, friendship, family memories, and the healing power of nature.

Huge thanks to Dennis Helms for the music, our members for the amazing potluck dinner and stories, and to Matt Gentry, Walk-about Outfitters, Parkway Brewing, and Outdoor Trails for the generous prizes!

RATC BOARD MEMBERS
President•Therese Witcher•president@ratc.org || **Vice President**•Homer Witcher•vicepresident@ratc.org || **Secretary**•Susan Terwilliger•secretary@ratc.org || **Treasurer**•Jimmy Whitney•treasurer@ratc.org || **Membership Coordinator**•Cathy Butler•membership@ratc.org || **Shelter Supervisor**•Bennett Witcher•sheltersupervisor@ratc.org || **Shelter Supervisor**•Therese Witcher•sheltersupervisor@ratc.org || **Trail Supervisor**•Jim Webb•trailsupervisor@ratc.org || **Hikemaster**•Carol Rowlett•hikemaster@ratc.org || **Newsletter Editor**•Ron Bradbury•blazer@ratc.org || **Conservation Supervisor**•Tom McAvoy•conservationsupervisor@ratc.org || **Land Management Supervisor**•Joey Johnson•landmanagement@ratc.org || **Counselor**•Erin Byers•counselor1@ratc.org || **Counselor**•Brian Boggs•counselor2@ratc.org || **Counselor**•Brendle Wolfe•counselor3@ratc.org || **Counselor**•Adam Day•counselor4@ratc.org || **McAfee Knob Task Force Liaison**•Brian Boggs•mcafeetaskforce@ratc.org || **Webmaster**•Jill Pennington•webmaster@ratc.org || **Roanoke College Liaison**•Conner McBane•cmcbane@appalachiantrail.org || **RATC Archivist**•Diana Christopoulos • || **Social Events Coordinator**•Pamela and Josh Wolsey•

RATC would like to welcome our new members for 2024!

Family Memberships

- Denise Alexander & Landon Arrington
- Bethany & Braden Bell
- Connie Brown
- Bradford & Milza Clay
- Stephen Earsom
- Sarah Ellis
- Josh & Gina Gilbert
- David Groce
- Brianna Gunter
- Richard & Catherine Hach
- Crystal Harman
- James Hayden
- Philip Heindel
- Nicole Higgs
- Beth & Steve Jewell
- Joe Kidd
- Christopher Leigh Kelly
- Kish
- Phillip Lochbrunner
- Daniel Lucas
- Tony & Marion Mabry
- Ulrike McLellan
- Michael Menard
- Jesse Miner
- Kriss & Cheryl Myers
- Emily Peake & Adam Mallek
- Meg Preston & Brenden Reber
- Amy Roberts
- Parker Sanders
- Peter Schmitthenner
- Stephanie Snider
- Shannon Stutz
- Joseph & Jessica Wall
- Laura Welfare

Individual Members

- Christy Arthur
- Brian Badgley
- Fran Bayne
- Daniel Belloni
- Felicity Bilow
- Ruth Bittner
- Madison Brousseau
- Daniel Burnette
- Ready 4 Change
- Edward W. Clark, III
- Carole Costello
- Andrew Downs

- Elizabeth Fitzgerald
- Mary Frye
- Edmond Goneau
- Carolyn Gould
- John Graham
- Cat Hanson
- Nikolas Hicks
- Mary Hodges
- Jeffery Hoepfner
- Michael Jefferson
- Lannie Kempnich
- Erik Leedom
- Jon Lillestolen
- Diana Logan
- Christopher Marshburn
- Jacqueline Mayrosh
- Paintings
- William Parsons
- Jennifer Peterson
- Kathryn Rainer
- Janet Rankin
- Julia Raring
- Joseph Rastatter
- David Schoendorfer
- R. Scott Schwarzer
- Michael Scott
- Kailee Sesler
- Sierra Shoosmith
- Debra Steele
- Kathryn Sternig
- Jeff Stewart
- Nina St. John
- Lauren Stroud
- Eve Taglang
- Renee Thornhill
- Adam Torres
- Leon Vinci
- Mary Elen Warren
- Anne Weber
- Eric West
- Harrison West
- James Westerhaus
- Mark Wilhelm
- Ben Wilson
- Jonathan Wilson

Lifetime Family Memberships

- Stacey & Daniel Rorie
- Anna & Ed Shore
- James & Susan Terry

Lifetime Members

- Robert B Johnston
- Bob Patten



ATC 100th Anniversary GIVING BACK CELEBRATION Prizes and Awards!

by Linda Mulheren

In 1925 the Appalachian Trail was founded with a gathering at the grand Raleigh Hotel in Washington, D.C. That conference, with a constitution written by Benton MacKaye, was the formal beginning for one of the most unique parks in America. One hundred years of hard work has brought us a great trail we all know and love, We are so fortunate to inherit this trail, and we must be dedicated to preserving it for generations to come. One of the special things about the trail is that it is cared for by a fantastic cadre of volunteers, without whom the trail would quickly vanish.

In honor of this 100th anniversary, we at The Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club (RATC) are challenging you to help take ownership of this task. Anyone can help. We have needs big and small. Some require work in the woods, many do not. Will you help preserve this treasure? We are not the largest of clubs but we care for some pretty awesome miles of the AT right here in Southwest Virginia. This work truly takes a team.

Today marks the start of the GIVING BACK celebration! For all of 2025 there will be prizes and awards given for helping fulfill our mission. For more information and updates please check out our Facebook page or website (RATC.org).

McAfee Knob Task Force

2024 Volunteer Ridgerunner Report

48 Active Members

275 Patrols

238 Gallons of Trash Removed

67 Fire Rings Removed

14,995 Visitors Seen

13,529 Visitors Contacted

The McAfee Knob Task Force is a group of Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club volunteers dedicated to protecting three popular and beloved destinations on the trail: McAfee Knob, Dragons Tooth, and Tinker Cliffs.

Volunteer Ridgerunners minimize the negative impacts of heavy visitation in this beautiful area by educating the public about Leave No Trace best practices, sharing local information and advice to prevent emergencies, monitoring and reporting conditions, and performing light maintenance such as removing litter and graffiti.

2024 Season Highlights

Dennis the Menace

A McAfee Knob regular, Dennis, grew in visibility throughout the year, showing himself casually to almost every visitor. Ridgerunners knew this was a big problem, and stepped up to help educate visitors about black bears, and proper food storage. After months of almost daily sightings, Dennis has left the area.

311 Pedestrian Bridge

Construction of the bridge over VA-311 began in November 2023, and required a closure of the McAfee Knob parking lot. Volunteers have helped visitors navigate parking options, and spread information about the McAfee Knob Shuttle. Ridgerunner education has been a crucial part of maintaining hiker access to McAfee Knob during this major project.

New Ridgerunners!

The McAfee Knob Task Force welcomed 13 new Volunteer Ridgerunners during two trainings held in April and September. 9 Orientation Hikes were held throughout the year to help train the new Volunteers. RATCs Brian Boggs led most of them, as well as ATC Staff Suzanne Neal accompanied by NPS Ranger Brian Wilson.

Hurricane Helene

Hurricane Helene devastated our Appalachian Mountains on Sept. 26th with heavy rain and winds. Volunteer Ridgerunners waited for the all clear, then hiked out to report downed trees. Ridgerunners also helped communicate southern trail closure to thru hikers.

10th Anniversary

The McAfee Knob Task Force was created in 2014, and the first Volunteer Ridgerunner patrols took place in 2015. Depicted below is a summary of data collected from over 1,800 Ridgerunner reports in the last 10 years.

The Task Force began as a group who recognized visitor education was a key part of managing impacts in the McAfee Knob area. This small group has now grown to over 140 members, and patrols Dragons Tooth and Tinker Cliffs as well. In 2015, 32 patrols were completed. Flash forward to 2024, where volunteers patrolled 287 times. That's a 700% increase in patrols!

Patrols Completed Since 2015

Year	Patrols Completed
2015	32
2016	100
2017	150
2018	120
2019	110
2020	80
2021	100
2022	120
2023	150
2024	287

Trash and Fire Rings Removed

Year	Trash Removed (Gallons)	Fire Rings Removed
2015	150	10
2016	400	20
2017	350	15
2018	300	12
2019	250	10
2020	200	8
2021	180	7
2022	160	6
2023	140	5
2024	120	4

The graph above highlights the Volunteer Ridgerunners' decade-long dedication to protecting natural resources. Encouragingly, 2024 has seen a slight decrease in trash and fire rings. Following the surge in visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic, hiking levels have now returned to normal. However, maintaining these natural spaces remains a significant effort. Since 2015, it is estimated that Ridgerunners have spent around 85 hours dismantling fire rings, demonstrating their ongoing commitment to preserving the environment.

Trail Trends:

A Data Dive into Hiker Types

Types of Visitors Seen by Volunteer Ridgerunners

Year	Thru Hikers	Day Hikers	Backpackers	Others
2015	1000	1500	500	200
2016	1200	1800	600	300
2017	1400	2000	700	400
2018	1600	2200	800	500
2019	1800	2400	900	600
2020	1500	2000	700	400
2021	1200	1800	600	300
2022	1400	2000	700	400
2023	1600	2200	800	500
2024	1800	2400	900	600

Virginia's Triple Crown attracts a diverse crowd of hikers. In 10 years, Volunteers have seen 137,257 day hikers, 21,056 backpackers, and 5,538 Thru Hikers! Day hikers hold steady as our primary user group, representing 80%-85% of visitors seen each year. Trail runners and rock climbers make up most of the "Others" category.

Here's a look at how many visitors Volunteer Ridgerunners encountered on average during a patrol at each of the three jewels of the Virginia Triple Crown, since Tinker Cliffs was added as a patrol area in 2021.

The 2021 visitor counts reflect the increase in outdoor recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2024 visitation at McAfee Knob may have been impacted by the parking lot closure.

Average Visitors Seen Per Patrol

Location	2021	2022	2023	2024
Dragons Tooth	100	120	110	130
McAfee Knob	150	180	170	190
Tinker Cliffs	50	60	55	65

10 Years of Visitor Education and Natural Resource Protection.

13,542 Hours Worked (564 Days)

13,689 Miles Hiked (Like hiking the whole A.T. 6 1/2 Times)

164,837 Visitors Seen

122,511 Visitors Contacted

3,496 Gallons of Trash Removed (Roughly 116 Trash Bags)

510 Fire Rings Removed

2,221 Patrols

Faces of The Task Force

The Leader - Brian Boggs

As RATC Lead for the Task Force, Brian brings spectacular leadership and attentive coordination, making the onboarding of new volunteers seamless. His friendly demeanor and passion for natural resource protection and education set a great example for the volunteer Ridgerunners he dutifully trains. Although Ridgerunners usually patrol solo, Brian has fostered a true sense of teamwork among the volunteers.

Ranger Ryan

Ryan "High Pockets" Wagoner has patrolled McAfee Knob 399 times since joining in 2022. He has volunteered over 1,000 hours and is an essential steady presence dedicated to educating visitors. Ryan is a working dad and an avid trail runner who found a way to fit regular Ridgerunner patrols into his training routine. He's known for detailed reporting and a positive attitude, strong friendships, and effective communication with all partners.

The Minister Of McAfee

Bill Dawson has volunteered over 475 hours since joining in 2022. A retired pastor, he brings a natural warmth and genuine interest in others to his visitor contacts. Bill has probably taken thousands of photos of visitors on the iconic McAfee Knob "surfboard" rock, in his dedicated efforts to ensure everyone has the best possible experience. He brings wonderful energy to the Task Force team, and makes each visitor feel like they belong to the Catawba Valley community.

Faces of The Task Force

The Hike Leader

Carol Rowlett isn't easy to keep up with! A Task Force member since 2021, Carol became RATC's Hike Master in 2023. She coordinates the club's hiking program and leads many hikes herself year-round. While working on her own section hike of the entire A.T., Carol has created a unique group of RATC members who travel to different states to hike the Trail together. On top of all that, she still finds time to patrol our Catawba Valley as a Volunteer Ridgerunner!

The Founder

Diana "DC Turtle" Christopolos currently serves as the RATC Archivist and Historian. She founded the Task Force in 2014 to bring focus to the impacts of high visitation at McAfee Knob. Diana volunteers in numerous capacities, and was the voice of RATC in the 5-year process to create a Visitor Use Plan for the Virginia Triple Crown. Whether she's chatting with a visitor or training new Ridgerunners, she has a rare depth of local knowledge to share.

The Legend

Donna Logan, known as "Signage," is a passionate lover of the Appalachian Trail. She completed her thru-hike at the age of 54 and has been with the Task Force since its founding. Donna speaks to all visitors as if they are family and cares for the trail as if it were her own backyard. Her warm inclusivity brings the trail community together and has greatly enriched both the Task Force and RATC.

Faces of the Partnership

Appalachian Trail

Cooperative Management System

Land Management Agency

Volunteer Clubs

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

The Cooperative Management System for the A.T., often described as a "three-legged stool," defines roles for partners in our shared goal of A.T. stewardship. The McAfee Knob Task Force is an excellent example of the Cooperative Management system at work. Volunteer Ridgerunners are local RATC volunteers, with their accomplishments described above. Here are some other partners who make it all possible:

Brian Wilson is a Ranger for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST), a unit of the National Park Service. McAfee Knob and Tinker Cliffs are on ANST land. Brian is a law enforcement officer, and handles difficult incidents with skill and professionalism. But he is best known for his regular visitor education efforts that reduce risk by teaching trail safety, proper behavior, and environmental preservation. He also trains Task Force volunteers and fosters a strong sense of responsibility, ensuring the trail remains safe, sustainable, and well-maintained for future generations of hikers.

2024 was Suzanne Neal's fourth season as the Catawba Mountain Ridgerunner, a seasonal staff position of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). Based in ATC's Virginia Regional Office, Suzanne's role is distinct from other staff Ridgerunners on the A.T. because of how closely she works with RATC's Volunteer Ridgerunners and other partners in management of the "Virginia Triple Crown". Suzanne leads training days and orientation hikes for new volunteers, compiles volunteer patrol reports to send out weekly, and facilitates strong communication among all parties. Her dependability, good humor, and solutions-focused attitude are behind many of the successes shared here.

Beth Christensen is District Ranger for the Eastern Divide Ranger District (EDRD) of the Jefferson National Forest. Headquartered in Blacksburg, the EDRD spans nearly 400,000 acres and includes 150 miles of the A.T. Dragons Tooth is one of the most popular destinations on the district. Ranger Christensen and her team ensure the area is managed responsibly, addressing safety concerns and supporting conservation efforts.

Megan Cronise (left) and Paula Benke (right) work for Roanoke County in the Transportation Department. They are the dream team behind the McAfee Knob Shuttle, and are key partners in efforts to improve the McAfee Knob parking lot and alleviate pedestrian safety concerns. In the photo above, Megan is receiving recognition as the 2023 Virginia A.T. Partner of the Year! Roanoke County Fire & Rescue also offers essential support to the McAfee knob Task Force.

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.

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