

TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Fall 2026

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.



Stakeholders celebrate the official opening of the new Andy Layne Trailhead. Note the chainsaw used for ribbon cutting.

Completion of the Andy Layne Trail Relocation

In the midst of fairly cold weather and after a winter storm covered the region with a little bit of snow and whole lot of sleet and ice, reports began arriving to RATC Personnel I about logging operations along a section of the Andy Layne Trail. Most readers know of this popular section of trail leading up to Scorched Earth Gap and providing access to Tinker Cliffs, and they also know that it is part of a unique partnership with the Roanoke Cement Company upon whose land the trail crosses.

It turns out that work on a company project had gone a bit "out of bounds" compromising the trail, requiring its immediate shutdown and subsequent relocation. While there were plans to relocate that section of trail in the future, it was never the intent of



Roanoke Cement to disturb it, and they were just as surprised by the events as the hikers who found excavating equipment and downed trees blocking access to one of the most popular hikes in the region.

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Fast forward to August 20, 2026, Roanoke Cement, members of the ATC, and the RATC held a Ribbon cutting in the new parking lot to celebrate the official opening of the relocation. There is still a little bit of work to do to put the project into final condition, but a spiffy new bridge and signage are a testament to a relatively speedy remedy for an unfortunate problem. RATC President **Linda Mulheren** took the time to document and share thanks to many people who contributed to getting this project completed in a timely manner. Her words are here:

“I hope everyone has seen the wonderful media coverage of our ribbon-cutting on the new Andy Layne parking lot and rerouted trail. I would like to thank those in the Club who put forth so much effort to make this happen and get this hard work done.

First, **Mark Wilhelm** put in more hours than anyone on this project. From helping with the emergency reroute to keeping the website updated, hauling trees, cutting trail, and building the kiosk, he has been heavily involved since the catastrophic felling of the trees, and I am so grateful. I wish we had ten Marks! Jim Webb put in a lot of hard hours over a few days, as did **Matt (Sharpie) Gentry**, who provided amazing artwork of glorious mountains and retired bridges. **Craig McNally** lent his back and brains for one very long day working on sign installations. **Mike Vaughn**

was very involved early on with the planning of the reroute. I have added **Kelly Mulheren** near the end of this list because I do not want to seem partial, but he has put in almost as many hours on this project as me. He has been there at almost every instance, working alongside everyone as every stage, as well as putting together a large number of signs. That job is not finished, as the project is still ongoing as we transition to a new connector to the North Mountain Trail, and he will be on call as always.

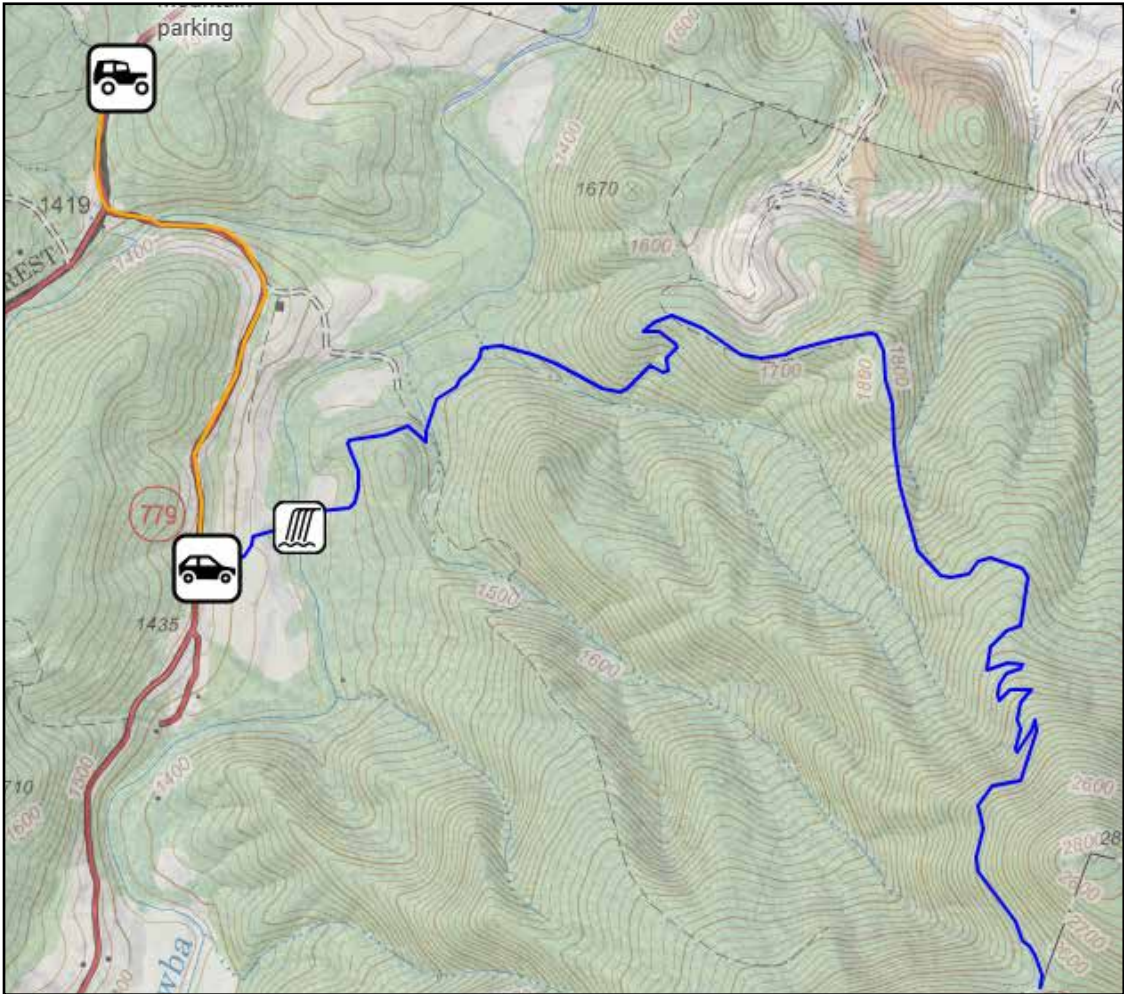
I can’t not mention ATC: **Kathryn Herndon-Powell, Leigh Anne Weitzenfeld, Elizabeth Leibel, Connor McBane, Luke Weir**, who have all been out at the sites multiple times, and have also done so much behind the scenes, especially **Kathryn Herndon-Powell**. We as a Club are often the public faces behind most of their work. We cannot forget that they are the ones who make projects like this happen. So please remember to thank these folks for making this project happen.”

Often times problems like these this take eons to resolve, in this case the stakeholders pitched in and now one of the premier hikes in Roanoke Valley is now even more accessible with improved parking and infrastructure.

Mike Scottt
blazer@ratc.org



This spiffy new bridge is a big improvement over the log structures previously used to cross the Catawba Creek.



Map showing the new trailhead and parking area relative to the old trailhead which still serves the North Mountain Trail.



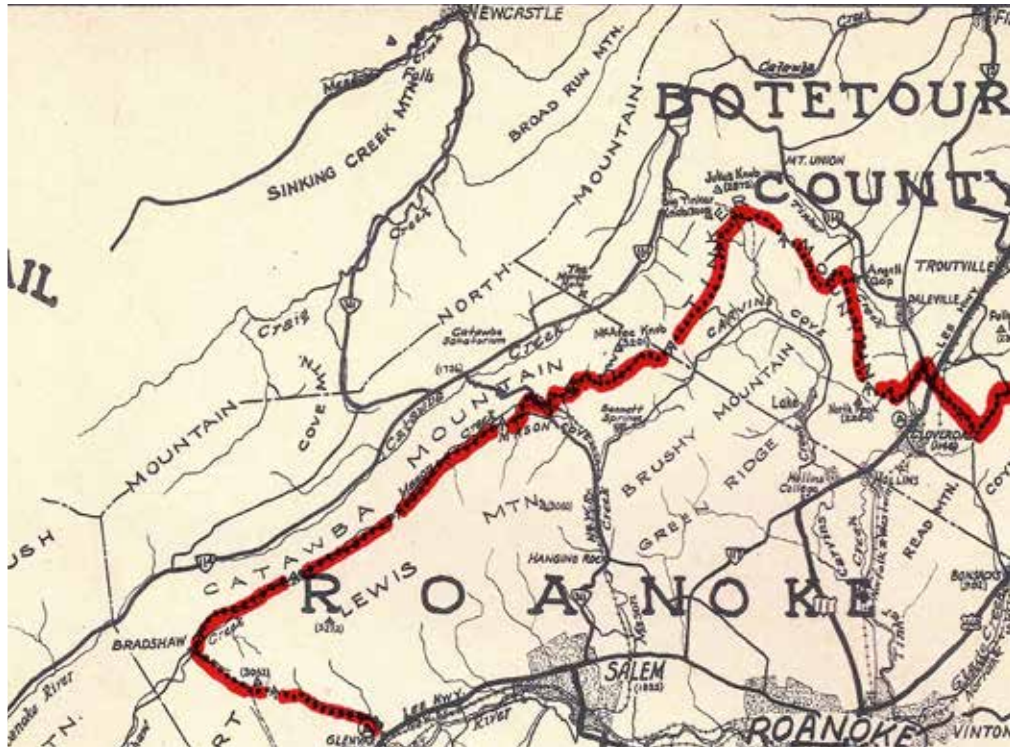
The new Andy Layne Trail kiosk.

Before the Andy Layne Trail

Our Club has just celebrated the completion of a new parking lot and bridge for the Andy Layne Trail at the foot of Tinker Mountain, but the trail itself was built decades earlier. Of course Native Americans lived in this valley for perhaps 10,000 years before the arrival of Europeans, so people have walked this way for millennia.

1930's

The biggest challenge for A.T. maintainers has always been protection of the land on which the Trail is built. When our volunteers built the Trail here in 1933, most of it was on private property, especially in the Roanoke Valley. Handshake agreements were the only protection.



Our Club's original A.T. section (1932-52) left the Blue Ridge at Black Horse Gap, as it still does, and crossed the valley to reach Tinker Mountain, turning south to pass near McAfee Knob and dropping into Masons Cove. It then crossed Ft. Lewis Mountain and US 11 before climbing Poor Mountain, passing near Botom Creek Gorge and rejoining the Blue Ridge at Adney Gap (see 1933 David Dick map).

The A.T. did not enter the Catawba Valley. This route was almost entirely on private land. Myron Avery and Club leaders recognized the fragile nature of its protection, and they supported the October

1938 Appalachian Trailway Agreement between the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service that promised to protect a one-mile corridor for the A.T. whenever feasible.

1940's

RATC founder and original Trail Supervisor David Dick, who was also a certified Virginia surveyor, worked closely with Myron Avery and Jefferson National Forest (JNF) staff on an implementation plan for this strategy during the 1930s and early 1940s. North Mountain was already inside the JNF, so the A.T. would be protected there. In 1942 RATC President Dick reported that:

We have had several hikes on which we explored possible locations for the major revision of the trail between Tinker Cliffs and Marion. A good connecting link between Lamberts Meadow on Tinker Mountain and the Forest Service trail on North Mountain has been located.

World War II stopped the Club's work on the A.T., and the Supervisor of JNF turned his attention to lumber production for the war. A postwar generation led by Jimmy and Molly Denton as well as Tom and Charlene Campbell took up the task in 1949, pledging to move the entire A.T. between Roanoke and Damascus to westerly locations, away from the Blue Ridge Parkway and from miles of road walks and private lands.

1950's-60's

By 1954, RATC volunteers led by Denton and Campbell had moved the A.T. about 145 miles, close to its current location between McAfee Knob near Roanoke and Iron Mountain near Damascus. They initially used David Dick's plan for several exploratory hikes, which would have routed the trail from Tinker Mountain to North Mountain on a route starting near an old Botetourt County landfill in the Catawba Valley. This A.T. would have bypassed McAfee Knob. However, Campbell and Denton discovered an enticing new area that changed their minds about using North Mountain. They thought Cove Mountain, Millers Cove and an outcrop named Buzzards Rock were beautiful and they were also partially inside the JNF. Campbell thought Buzzards Rock was a boring name for the outcrop and he renamed it Dragon's Tooth. They kept the Trail near McAfee Knob and took it on across Sawtooth Ridge to Dragon's Tooth. The old trail from the Botetourt County landfill to Tinker Mountain continued to exist, though, and was sometimes used for RATC hikes.



Tom Campbell on Tinker Mountain 1949

1970's-80's

Although RATC often maintained excellent relationships with private landowners, the crush of new backpackers and hikers in the 1960's and 1970's resulted in major problems, especially on the McAfee Knob section where many prominent local people had homes and property. The entire A.T. was at risk due to informal agreements with private landowners who were fed up with sloppy hikers on their land. In 1968 the U.S. Congress made the Appalachian Trail one the first two national scenic trails, a unit of the NPS that was uniquely maintained by volunteer Clubs supported by the Appalachian Trail Conference, (now Conservancy). Congress initially failed to provide any funding to purchase private land for the A.T. corridor, but remedied this in 1978 with funding for the NPS to buy land and to use eminent domain to if necessary.

In February 1978 the RATC Board received a certified letter from landowners on the McAfee Knob section notifying them that the AT was closed to all hikers, including RATC members. The section from Va 311 to Scorched Earth Gap ended up being closed until March 1987 - a little over 9 years.

Dr. Bill Gordge, the Australian-born pediatrician who led RATC conservation efforts for many years, advised the board that they could and should fight the closure but that a temporary trail needed to be built. The initial bypass involved a long road walk in Catawba Valley, but on March 19, 1978, twelve RATC members blazed a twelve-mile trail to reroute the A.T. As reported in the Summer 1978 *Blazer*:

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The trail now leaves the parking lot at Rt. 624 and passes over and along the crest of North Mtn. for about ten miles, then descends into Catawba Valley near the Botetourt County land-fill. At this point it crosses Rt 779 and climbs two miles to Scorched Earth Gap near Lamberts Meadow Shelter where it joins the old A.T. This relocation was made with the help of the Jefferson National Forest people who permitted us to use the existing North Mtn. Trail.

The trail from Route 779 in Catawba Valley to Scorched Earth Gap is across the property of the Lone Star Cement Company (now Roanoke Cement). Mr. William J. Cavanaugh, President of the cement company was very generous in arranging for us to cross their property and assisting in locating the trail.

Most of the Club's energy then went into building the new A.T. across Catawba Mountain under the leadership of Charles Parry. Andy Layne maintained the side trail now named after him from 1979-90. He lived in Tidewater much of his adult life but had grown up in Vinton and had a sister he stayed with there. He started volunteering with RATC in 1978 and served as RATC Shelter Supervisor (1980), Vice President (1981) and Counselor (1985-86). He had previously been a volunteer with the Tidewater A.T. group.

What was Andy's trail like? A March 12, 1989, trip report on a hike led by Homer and Therese Witcher ("Tinker Cliffs from Old Landfill") described the route as "nearly vertical" and opined that "It may have been easier if the Sherpas had shown up, but a foul-up in customs has caused more than one problem." They also encouraged "hats off to overseer extraordinaire Andy Layne" while noting that "The view was magnificent as usual" and that it was easier to reach the cliffs from Catawba Valley than to climb up from Carvins Cove.



The log bridge spanning Catawba Creek on the old section of the Andy Layne trail. Matt (Sharpie) Gentry is the sketch artist.

1990's-2000's

Charles Parry, the RATC's long-time Trail Supervisor who is now in the AT Hall of Fame, called Andy Layne "Mr. Everything" and "the heart at soul of the Club," adding that:

"He is the club's most active member, and almost every club member knows him. Andy normally leads three or four hikes each quarter, goes on every work hike and almost every all day hike, oversees a section of Trail, goes on club backpacking trips, helps with the hike scheduling, and is everybody's right-hand man. Over the years Andy and I have spent well

over a hundred days, often just the two of us, working together on the Trail. During the past four years, the Konnarock Trail crews have spent a total of 48 days working on our Club's Trail section, and Andy has been there to help every single day. I doubt that any other Trail Club member in the southern region, excluding Konnarock crew participants, can equal that record. I can't. It is easy to overlook the fact that Andy is 74 years old, as many people half his age would have difficulty keeping up with him. This past summer, he put more work days than anyone else into the Wilson Creek shelter and Trail relocation project. His last work hike was October 5, when we completed a side trail to a water source near the new shelter. A week or so later, we learned that Andy had angina. In early November he had double by-pass surgery...."

Unfortunately, Andy did not recover from that illness, passing away on March 3, 1991. The Club wrestled with what to do in Andy's honor, initially settling on a memorial work hike each year. By the end of 1992, however, they appear to have decided to rename the side trail from Catawba Valley to Tinker Cliffs the Andy Layne Trail. The first reference I have found is in the November 1992 board minutes, where Trail Supervisor Charles Parry reported, "the trail relocation was flagged, and the bridges were anchored to trees on the Andy Layne trail." Our records, which may be incomplete, contain no official dedication.

In February 1999 Hikemaster Don Nulph reported receiving a letter from a friend stating that the Andy Layne Trail had been closed. This certainly shows how informal things were in those days! The board response: "We may need to try and relocate it to an area on the easement form the cement company." RATC had signed an easement agreement with Lone Star Cement in 1991, but part of the Andy Layne Trail was on another private property. So began a relocation, and this is what led to the eventual ceremony honoring the opening of the Andy Layne Trail, which occurred on March 3, 2001.

All references are to the RATC Archives, which are part of the Virginia Tech Permanent Collections.



Andy Layne and his dog.



Linda Mulheren,
President

President’s Report

It might surprise you to know that I would sincerely love to talk with you. I’d love to hear what you enjoy about our Club, what you would like to see, and what we could do better. You, as a group, make possible our oversight of 125 miles of Appalachian Trail and dozens of miles of side trails. I would like to extend my compliments to you for helping us make that possible. We sincerely could not do it without your support.

This is the time of year when I report all of our Club volunteer hours to our agencies and partners. Those volunteer hours are incredibly valuable to us, as they represent all of the volunteer work that goes into doing what we do. In turn, we receive matching funds from various grants and allocations. It’s quite a task trying to gather hours from people who do trail work, shelter work, group hikes, outreach, conservation, land management, and more. I do my best, but there are a lot of variables, redundancies, and missed reports, as well as general data gathering that we don’t necessarily track. Adam Day is working with a group to come up with a better tracking system, and we should be implementing that this coming month.

The administration and leadership volunteers carry a huge amount of the non-maintainer hours for the Club, and as you can imagine, those are not the first group of volunteer hours most people think of when they think of a hiking club. Our trail maintainers and shelter maintainers are the first volunteers most of the public sees when they think of our Club, and they do a huge amount of very hard work. But behind the scenes, there is the leadership. Let me tell you a little bit about those leaders and what they do.

Adam Day, our Vice President, is the Club’s leader-in-training. If you write to me, more than likely I will reply and CC Adam as I try to keep him in the loop with everything going on. He manages special projects, such as volunteer-hours tracking, and he steps up whenever there’s an urgent issue that needs dealing with that I haven’t taken care of. He runs the Board meetings in my absence and attends many of the meetings that I do. He and I meet often to discuss management of the Club.



Jimmy Whitney,
Treasurer

Our Treasurer is Jimmy Whitney. His role is to manage the accounts for the Club. If we receive funds, they go through him. When we need disbursements, he takes care of those. He manages our banking accounts and makes investments as appropriate. And, to my great relief, he also manages our financial documents with the state and federal governments.

Our outgoing Secretary is Laura Simmons. She has served very well and stepped up when Susan Terwilliger was ready to retire after 17 years! The role of Secretary is to take the minutes of each meeting and distribute them in draft and final form to the Board of Directors. Laura is moving out of the area, and we need another Secretary ASAP!

In no particular order, our Chairs are:

Our Membership Coordinator is Herve Marand. This is a huge task and vital to our Club’s continuation. This person wears many hats, including maintaining the membership list, ongoing oversight of new and retiring memberships, and recruiting new members at events. They work closely with the Treasurer when money is coming in from memberships.



Herve Marand,
Membership
Coordinator

Mark Wilhelm is our Trail Supervisor. Trails management is our primary task as an organization. We have about 120 trail maintainers on our list, but unfortunately, about a third of those are doing most of the work. We have a number of people who haven’t reported any work for the past year, and we are trying to track down whether they’re just unable to do the work or simply haven’t turned in their hours. The Trail Supervisor is in charge of the tasks and the people needed to get the trail work done. It’s probably one of our biggest jobs, and frankly, I feel like leadership needs to be a shared responsibility instead of all being on one person. We’re working at getting an Assistant Trail Manager to break the numerous tasks up among various people in order to do the best job we can.



Bennett Witcher,
Shelter Supervisor

Bennett Witcher, our Shelter Supervisor, manages all 16 of our shelters. This is a giant responsibility, and so we have found a number of people willing to adopt a shelter and share the workload. We still have a couple of shelters available if you are interested in adopting one. Beginning this year, we’re going to be building eight new privies, which will be more like small buildings than previous versions. It’s an enormous undertaking, and we can use all the help we can get.

Our Land Manager, Kelly Mulheren, not only runs the boundary program, but they may also be involved in any kind of land transactions that occur within our Club boundary. We go out and meet our neighbors and work with them on all kinds of issues.



Kelly Mulheren,
Land Management
Supervisor



Tom McAvoy,
Conservation
Supervisor

Tom McAvoy, our Conservation Chair, is busy working with invasive species of all kinds and helping protect our wilderness. This role coordinates work with ATC. Think science!

Our Newsletter Editor, Mike Scott, works to put out a quarterly newsletter for the Club. That involves soliciting and writing articles, doing the design and layout, and managing the printing and distribution.



Mike Scott,
Newsletter Editor

Ancillary Positions

We have a number of ancillary positions that are non-voting roles:

The Social Events Chair, Jeanine and Robert Bomber, work to put on each of our three annual social events. In the spring, we have our annual meeting; in the summer, we have our corn boil; and in the winter, we have our annual holiday potluck. These folks pull together the events, rent the space, purchase supplies, coordinate the setup and cleanup, and advertise the event. They are also available to help the Membership Chair with booths and events.

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We have one person whose role is to coordinate Club communications with the President and disseminate that messaging online. We have a number of social and digital formats that need constant maintenance and input, including Facebook, our website, Instagram, etc. Having one person serve as the coordinator allows for a more consistent message, but additional people providing input is helpful. **Nick Lindsay** is our **Social Media Coordinator**.

We don't often need a **Legal Counselor**, but when we do, we have somebody who is on call for advice.

A working group was established years ago to help monitor a severely overused area, and they called themselves the McAfee Knob Task Force. We still have an individual in the Club who is the leader of our group of Ridge Runners and works with ATC to make sure the program is functioning at its best. **Tom Martin** serves as the **McAfee Knob Task Force liaison**.

Every group our size needs to have a person organizing the paperwork, especially when you don't have an office. We have historical material going back to the founding of our Club in 1932, and having someone who can organize and manage that material is important. Although the majority of our archives now live off-site, we still have an ongoing need for managing the more recent material. This coming year, we will be making sure that all of that material is online and available to our membership and the public. **Diana Christopulos** is the Club's **Archivist**.

Wow! That is a lot of folks who work behind the scenes to keep the Club running well.

We have annual elections, and a nominations committee is currently working to put together the voting slate for the spring meeting in March. We do have a couple of openings, but beyond that, I want to put out a request for assistance to the current positions.

I've been asking our current Board members to find a backup person who knows their role well so that, if they need help or need to fill in during an emergency, that person could take over the job. Imagine if even one of these people just wasn't there all of a sudden and we had no one trained to take on the role.

I ask each of you to consider stepping up to help any of our leaders with their jobs. Even if you don't want to step up into the job one day, all of these positions represent a huge amount of work for one person. Please reach out to me or anyone else if you're interested in helping with any of the tasks we regularly do, or if you have an idea or suggestion for things we ought to be doing that we aren't.

Thanks again for being a part of our team. We are able to do great things because of your support!

Linda Mulheren
president@ratc.org

Save the Date

December 19, 2026
5:30- 8:00 pm
Christ Lutheran Church

Plan to spend the evening sharing good food and fellowship. Bring your favorite potluck dish, trail stories, and a friend.

Children are welcome and children's activities will be available.

More information will be found on the
[RATC Meetup site](#)



It is that time of year. Acorn mast has begun to cover parts of the trail.

RATC BOARD MEMBERS

President: Linda Mulheren
president@ratc.org
Vice President: Adam Day
vicepresident@ratc.org
Secretary: Laura Simmons
secretary@ratc.org
Treasurer: Jimmy Whitney
treasurer@ratc.org
Membership Coordinator: Hervé Marand
membership@ratc.org
Shelter Supervisor: Bennett Witcher
sheltersupervisor@ratc.org
Trail Supervisor: Mark Wilhelm
trailsupervisor@ratc.org
Hikemaster: Dee Case
hikemaster@ratc.org
Newsletter Editor Mike Scott
blazer@ratc.org
Conservation Supervisor: Tom McAvoy
conservationsupervisor@ratc.org
Land Management Supervisor: Kelly Mulheren
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Counselor 1: Erin Byers
counselor1@ratc.org
Counselor 2: Robert Bomber
counselor2@ratc.org
Counselor 3: Elliot Day
counselor3@ratc.org
Counselor 4: Tom Martin
counselor4@ratc.org

Non Voting Members

Legal Advisor: Andrew Bowman
McAfee Knob Task Force Liaison: Thomas Martin
mcafeetaskforce@ratc.org
Webmaster: Mark Wilhelm
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Roanoke College Liaison : Conner McBane
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Archivist: Diana Christopulos
archivist@ratc.org
Events Coordinator : Jeanine and Robert Bomber
events@ratc.org
Regional Partnership Committee Rep: Tom McAvoy
Social Media Coordinator: Nick Lindsay
socialmedia@ratc.org
Sign Makers: Linda and Kelly Mulheren
signs@ratc.org

Conservation Work

Wavyleaf basketgrass, (*Oplismenus undulatifolius*) is a rapidly spreading invasive plant which is capable of dominating forest under stories. It was first found in Maryland in 1996 and is a native of southeastern Europe. Basketgrass alters habitats, displaces native plants, and reduces pollinator populations. It has been recently found along the A.T. just north of the James River, Carvins Cove, Northern and Central Virginia.

Leaves are between 0.5 and 1.0 inches wide and 1.5-4 inches long. The leaves have a distinct 'rippled' appearance, which earns the name 'wavyleaf.'

Stems are short, low-creeping, 8-11 inches tall, but may reach 18 inches tall, and grow in dense carpets. Seeds mature in late summer.

If you think you see it:

- ◇ Take a picture so experts can verify the identification.
- ◇ Use a GPS device, phone or the FarOut App to record the location.
- ◇ Record the Date & Amount! In square feet
- ◇ Report Your Sighting!

Please send your photos, coordinates, and location descriptions to ckrotoski@appalachiantrail.org or conservationsupervisor@ratc.org

Prevention is Key! Seeds are designed to stick to your boots and clothes! After a hike inspect and clean your boots of any seeds that may have stuck to yo. Spread the word!



A thicket of Wavyleaf basketgrass showing the characteristic ripple of the leaves.



Mature Wavyleaf basketgrass showing seedpods along the stem. Mature plant spread seeds in late summer. The seeds are sticky and will cling to boots or clothing or the coats of animals.



Photo credit Virginia Native Plant Society

<https://vnps.org/wavyleaf-basketgrass-help-stop-now/>



Photo credit Virginia Native Plant Society

<https://vnps.org/wavyleaf-basketgrass-help-stop-now/>

More on the Web

Read more about efforts to recognize and halt the spread of invasive Wavyleaf Basketgrass on the [Virginia Native Plant Society](https://vnps.org) web site.

<https://vnps.org/wavyleaf-basketgrass-help-stop-now/>

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Tree-of-Heaven Management

A large stand of tree-of-heaven has been growing for many years along the AT on the edge of the pasture just south of the Blacksburg Rd. Last September we treated about 50 trees using the hack and squirt method. An axe is used to cut about 1/2" into the trunk exposing the phloem and xylem that transports sap within the tree. A herbicide is then sprayed into the cuts allowing movement of the herbicide throughout the tree. We returned on July 30 this year and found at least 50% of the treated trees dead! We retreated several trees and treated about 25 new trees.



Bo Carneal using an ax to notch in the tree's xylem and phloem.



Tom McAvoy injecting herbicide in the notches.

The trees were checked again on Sept. 2 and nearly all the trees treated last year, and this year are now dead. This is approximately a 95% mortality rate. Removing Tree-of-Heaven and other invasives allows our native plant species to return to habitats that have been adversely affected. Their removal also helps deal with spotted lanternfly populations, which use the tree as

Submitted by Tom McAvoy
conservatioin@ratc.org



A grove of Tree-of-Heaven in summer bloom.



Dead Tree-of-Heaven one year after the administration of herbicide.

More On the Web

The Nature Conservancy
Devilishly Invasive Tree of Heaven

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/indiana/stories-in-indiana/journey-with-nature--tree-of-heaven/>

Trail Relocation Near Catawba Shelter

The Catawba Shelter area has been the focus of ongoing work directed by the ATC and largely supported by work done by the RATC and various work crews. Given the volume of visitors to McAfee Knob Trail and the ease of access to shelter, the shelter area gets a high volume of use, and the environment surrounding it shows the impacts of constant human attention.



Some noticeable effects in the shelter area are compaction of the ground, the clearing of the forest floor, and diminished tree and plant cover.

The first part of the plan to fix this problem was the completion of numerous tent pad sites accessed by a new loop trail connected to the privy trail and water source trail. These flat level sites are a big improvement over the sloped hillside and spaced far enough apart for some privacy. They are large enough for several backpacker tents or a family sized tent.

The second part of the remediation involves the relocation of the A.T. which directed hikers and campers to the highly impacted camping area around the shelter. Campers are now directed to the tent pad sites and the new trail location will lead hikers past the shelter and away from degraded tent site area. Hopefully this change will allow the impacted space to recover. This strategy has been successful along other heavily impacted parts of the trail.

To help speed progress in completing the relocation [The Konnarock Crew](#) left its base camp near Mt. Rogers to work around Catawba Shelter. The work depicted in the adjacent photographs took place at the end of July. Its completion will signify another step in managing and improving the infrastructure and experience in the McAfee Knob area.



extending the Catawba shelter trail relocation from the work started by the Konnarock Crew.



SAWS volunteer workcrew in the Brush Mountain East Wilderness.

Work Hike - Catawba Mountain September 14, 2026

Mike Vaughn, Jim Webb, Greg Still, Mike Cote, Dave Grimm

It was a fairly cool day when we started out from the parking lot. Our plan was to dig trail for an A.T. relocation that would bypass the old tent pad sites near Catawba shelter. Since the 12 new tent pads have been constructed the park service wants the old sites not to be used any more. They have experienced significant erosion over the years and in very poor shape.

The plan is to construct about 1,200 feet of new trail. The ATC's Konnarock work crew had been out working there this summer and had completed about 350 feet of new trail. Upon arrival at the work site the five of us spread out and began digging trail where the previous work crew had stopped. Most of us had not been out for a work hike in quite a while and were a little out of shape. A small herd of curious deer stopped by a couple of times to watch us work. There were not a lot of rocks or roots to dig out so the work went well. By the end of the day, we had completed 130 feet of new trail. We felt good about our progress.



The Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards(-SAWS) also organizes groups which help to maintain the trail. Volunteer Coordinator, **Jim Baum**, organized this work group which rehabbed trail leading up to Niday Shelter.



SAWS volunteers rehabbing a section of trail.

Tracking Flora and Fauna Along the Appalachian Trail

The RATC recently received information about an interesting citizen science project which crowd sources data gathering using smart phones with cameras and geolocation technology. The RATC has not started an official participation in the project, but it would like members to have the information if they have an interest in contributing to it. The communication given below was sent by the ATC and describes the rational and goals of the project:

“The ATC would like to share some background information and perspective regarding a community science monitoring project related to the Appalachian Trail. The project is part of the iNaturalist platform and is called “Flowers and Fauna along the Appalachian Trail Corridor”. Using the A.T. as a mega-transsect through the Eastern US, the project is leveraging the power of iNaturalist and participatory science to track the phenology (timing of budding, flowering, and fruiting) of target species along the A.T. and how they are responding to a warming climate.

The project was built by the research staff at the [Appalachian Mountain Club](#) (AMC) with input and support from resource staff at the ATC and APPA. The project was designed to replace the older A.T. Seasons phenology project through the USA-National Phenology Network that some may recall from a decade ago. The partners found that the iNaturalist platform had a more user-friendly interface and was a better all-around fit for the complexity of the A.T.

In recent years, AMC has put significant energy into expanding their decades long work of monitoring alpine plants in the northeast. They

designed the “Flowers and Fauna along the Appalachian Trail Corridor” project to be a Trail-wide project that allows any visitor to easily snap and upload a photo through the iNaturalist App. Since the rollout, ATC has been helping to spread the word about the project while AMC has taken on the significant legwork of recruiting and training monitors, reviewing submissions, and curating data. To strengthen the data, AMC is eager to engage as many Trail visitors as possible.

The project link and information can be found on ATC’s website and we have training opportunities available on the AT Volunteer Engagement Platform for those who wish to learn more. We are hoping to be able to offer an in-person training at the 2027 Volunteer Leadership Meeting.

The project is well suited for A.T. trail maintainers interested in learning more about plants as well as the non-traditional volunteers who wish to support the work of the A.T. but aren’t interested in the day-to-day of trail maintenance. It’s also a quick and simple activity suitable for all types of hikers, from the local who walks their dog on the Trail, to the thru-hiker, and everyone in between.”

If you are interested in participating, the sign up information and additional links to the project are provided. As mentioned, the data collected may be used for academic study as well as for use the the public. It will document longitudinal data documenting changes in eco-systems as well as completely practical information about where things live along the transect.



Hike, snap photos, contribute to science!

You can help AMC scientists during your hike today by uploading photos of plants on iNaturalist. This is one of AMC's community science projects which aims to identify changes in phenology (the timing of when plants bud, flower, and fruit) along the Appalachian Trail due to climate change.

- 1. Download iNaturalist and register.**
iNaturalist is a free app that allows you to easily contribute observations, even without cell service. Using this Classic version of the app ensures you can add to observations to our project on your mobile device. Scan the QR code to direct you to the correct app!
- 2. Turn on location services on your mobile device.**
Your photos will be automatically dated and geotagged.
- 3. Become a member of our project.**
Search “Flowers and Fauna along the Appalachian Trail Corridor”, click “Join this project”, and make observation coordinates visible to project curators.
- 4. Take photos along the trail and upload them after your hike.**
Take a photo of the whole plant and a close-up of buds, flowers, or fruit. If you're not sure what species you have observed, the community on iNaturalist will help confirm or identify the plant.
Bonus: Before you hit SHARE, select the project, toggle to add, and fill out the observation fields that pop up. Read the descriptions, and leave the answer as '?' if you aren't sure! Then SHARE!

Thank you for contributing!

It may be as simple as a hiker who wants to increase their chances of finding a location to see a yellow Lady's Slipper or locating spring peepers in a vernal pond.

The website already contains thousands of images, but each one documents times and places giving a full picture of how life behaves along the trail.

Mike Scott
blazer@ratc.org

iNaturalist

The Project on The Web

[Flowers and Fauna Along the Appalachian Trail Corridor](#)

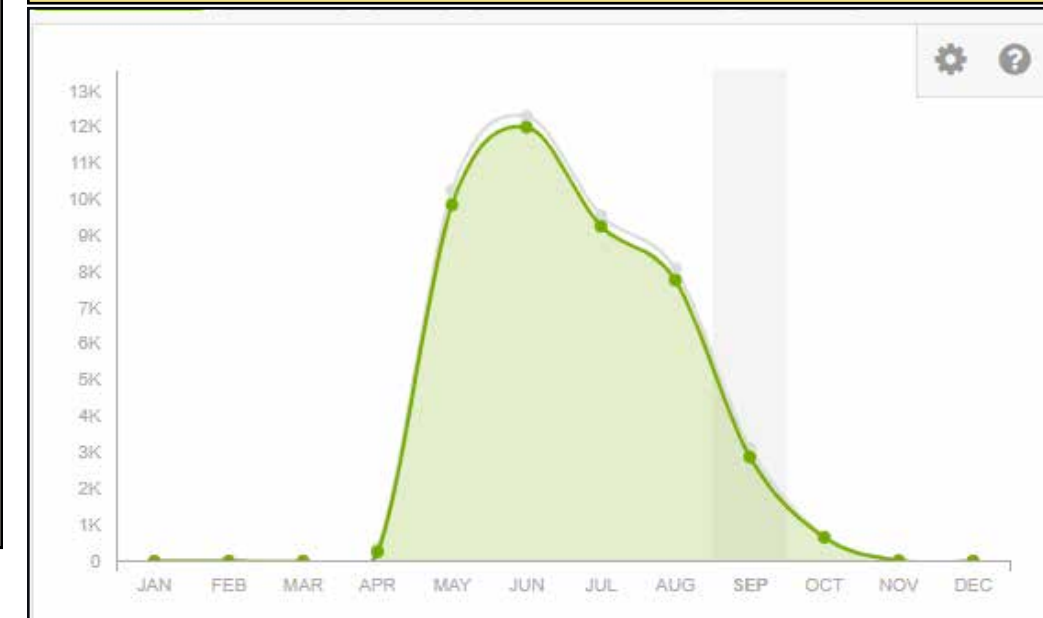
<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/flowers-and-fauna-along-the-appalachian-trail-corridor>

[iNaturalist Account SignUp](#)
<https://www.inaturalist.org/signup>

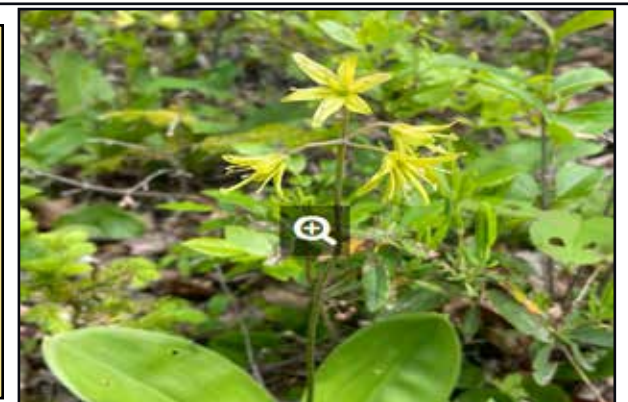
[Here's a link to the project's most recent photographs and observations](#)

https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?place_id=any&project_id=flowers-and-fauna-along-the-appalachian-trail-corridor&verifiable=any

[The project's images of identified species](#)
https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?project_id=flowers-and-fauna-along-the-appalachian-trail-corridor&verifiable=any&view=species



The image to the right is *Clintonia borealis* with a late summer bloom. The image was submitted to the project on Sept 22nd, 2026. It's location was identified and it then became part of a data set which aggregates all submissions of this specific plant. The graph above was selected to show its seasonality, but one could also see a number of other demographic details of the plant selecting the tabs above the graph. Each image also has a map place-marker showing its geolocation.





A view from Read Mountain taken on June 22nd.



This hike, guided by Carol Rowlett, went through Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve. This Preserve is managed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and is located in Roanoke County. The longest trail through the preserve is a four mile loop trail which is listed as fairly strenuous. This hike took place on July 6th, 2026

[Poor Mountain Nature Preserve](https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-area-preserves/poormt)

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-area-preserves/poormt>

RATC Guided Hikes

The RATC offers guided hikes most every week of the year. This includes not only stretches of the A.T. within our region, but also many interesting hikes on other public lands. These are generally well attended and guided by leaders experienced and knowledgeable about the conditions and nature of hike. As always, you can sign up for these hike on our Meet-Up site linked below

[RATC MeetUp](https://www.meetup.com/roanoke-appalachian-trail-club/?eventOrigin=your_groups)

https://www.meetup.com/roanoke-appalachian-trail-club/?eventOrigin=your_groups



Not all hikes venture into wilderness. This image is shows a group heading to the Roanoke River Greenway on July 15th, 2026



On July 27th, this group hiked Roanoke City's Murray Run Greenway, which traverses forests situated within several neighborhoods near Patrick Henry High School and Raleigh Court.

Continued on page 22

Carvins Cove Recreation Area

These images from guided hikes are all within Roanoke County's Carvins Cove Recreation area. The trail system can be reached by a number of parking lots and are interconnected, allowing hikers to make multiple loops and choose various distances and challenges. Hike leader Carol Rowlett explored these trails with hikers through July and August.



Four Gorge Loop Trail, August 3rd, 2026



Laurel Canyon Trail September 7th.



Carvins Cove Trail on September 21st submitted by Molly Armistead



Rattl'n Run Trail is also part of the Carvins Cover trail system maintained by Roanoke County. This hike took place on August 10th.

More on the Web

[Carvins Cove Natural Reserve](https://www.playroanoke.com/parks-facilities/carvins-cove-natural-reserve/)
(<https://www.playroanoke.com/parks-facilities/carvins-cove-natural-reserve/>)

[Roanoke Valley Greenways](https://greenways.org/)
(<https://greenways.org/>)



A bear on Carvins Cove Trail on September 21st, 2026. Submitted by Molly Armistead.



August 31st, 2026 on Mill Mountain. This hike traversed the entire circumference of the mountain and dipped down into some of the neighborhoods at the mountains base using some little know trails to connect some of the more well known and more often used trails.



Listed as RATC hike Number 1, Black Horse Gap to Curry Gap, this hike took place on September 14th, 2026



One of Roanoke’s best community events is the Go Outside Festival, or GoFest. It allows the Roanoke Valley to showcase the numerous opportunities that are available here in the Roanoke Valley.

The festival is also a great time for the RATC to recruit new members and to that end, we operate a booth which provides information about our club and where people can register right on the spot.

Of course we need volunteers for this effort and encourage any member er to use the [RATC Meetup app](#) to register for a time slot at this event. It’s really fun to be part of such a vibrant weekend d in the city. The takes place during this time Period:

Friday October 16th, 5:00pm till Sunday October 18th: 600pm



Bennett Witcher giving out information at last year’s event. Always a great time to recruit new members.

David Stedman Sutton
May 12, 1957 - May 28, 2026

David Sutton was a conscientious hike leader who took care of his participants and a USPS mail carrier who knew the people on his route, some of them RATC members. He passed away unexpectedly on May 28, 2026 from complications due to cancer.

David and his wife Linda Tanner-Sutton began hiking with RATC in 1999 and joined the Club in 2000. The next year he was leading hikes and by 2017 he had amassed a large collection of RATC hats and t-shirts for leading multiple hikes each year until he had to pause due to a major medical event. Linda and their son Matt were co-leaders on some of the hikes. They frequently attended RATC social events like the Corn Boil, annual meeting and holiday party.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia on May 12, 1957, Dave graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in Agri-Economics. His sense of adventure led him to jobs all over the country, including Yellowstone, Denali, and Sequoia National Parks. He became a U.S. Postal Service mail carrier in California and met Linda on a Sierra Club Singles hike in the Sierra Nevada mountains. They were married in 1990 and moved to Porterville, CA in the hot, dry Central Valley after Linda was hired by the USDA Forest Service on the Sequoia National Forest. They moved back east in 1999, with Roanoke as a happy medium between his parents in Atlanta and hers in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

Dave was a dedicated, dependable (walking) letter carrier and instructor for over 35 years. Immediately after finally retiring from the Post Office at the end of 2022, he started part-time work as a Materials Management Technician at the Distribution Center for Carilion Clinic and Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital. He was well-known and admired for his calm, friendly manner and strong, dependable work ethic. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Dave was a long-time, regular member of the Carilion Wellness Athletic Club and Sierra Club as well as RATC. Besides hiking, he enjoyed bicycling, canoeing, traveling, painting, music, and working out. He volunteered frequently at local, outdoor music and sports events and the American Red Cross.

Several of us attended a visitation in his honor at Oakey’s South Chapel on June 11, 2026. The family asks that memorials be directed to the RATC, The Roanoke Valley SPCA, or the American Red Cross.

Diana Christopulos and Linda Tanner Sutton



Dave and family on McAfee Knob.



Dave and son Matt on McAfee Knob.

RATC TRAIL MAINTAINERS AND SECTIONS

#	Section	Maintainers
1	VA 611 to Va 608	Walter Shroyer Mickey Pellillo
2	VA 608 to VA 606	Matthew Barnett Todd Coake (sawyer)
3	VA 606 to Ribble Trail	Mike & Jennie Reilly, Denise & Bill Hendon Stephanie & Jack Buffet
4	Ribble Trail to Big Horse Gap	Bill & Leslie Kay Floyd
5	Big Horse Gap to Doc's Knob Shelter	Craig McNally Mark Allamong (sawyer)
6	Doc's Knob Shelter to Power Line	Matt Gentry Tim Ligon
7	Power Line to Wilburn Overlook	Greg Still (sawyer) Craig McNally
8	Wilburn Overlook to Cross Road	Julie Petruska, Sue Terwilliger, Craig McNally
9	Cross Road to US 460	Adam Stevens
10	Pine Swamp to Bailey Gap	Dave & Lori Jones (sawyer)
11	Bailey Gap to VA 613	Pete Schitthenner Eric West Adam Stevens
12	VA 613 to Lone Pine Mountain	Greg Hardwicke Lisa Garcia Kurt Stephenson Ryan Wagoner
12A	Lone Pine Mountain to War Spur Trail	Eric West
13	War Spur Trail to Johns Creek Road	Kelly and Linda Mulheren Molly and Fred Jones
14	Johns Creek Road to Rocky Gap	Terry Shipley, Greg Evanylo
15	Rocky Gap to field north of route 42	Brian Kelly (sawyer) David Engel
16	Field North of route 42 to Route 630	Shane Smith
17	VA 630 to Sarver Shelter Trail	Chase Davidson , Russ Estes, Paul Goodwin David Anderson
18	Sarver Shelter Trail to N. end of Ridgeline	Chase Davidson (sawyer), Kathryn Herndon-Powell,Susan Herndon-Powell, David Grim, Russ Estes, Paul Goodwin
19	N. end of Ridgeline to VA 621	Eric Hanson, Molly Brunner, Josie Demarce
20	Va 621 to Audie Murphy Monument	Erik Leedom

Online Access to the The Trail Blazer

Still getting a paper copy of the The Trail Blazer? It has been delivered this way for decades and the RATC is happy to mail one to you each quarter. While we still have access to print services, this remains a significant club expense and at times we have struggled to find a printer that is both reliable and economical. If you have the resources to view the digital issues, you are getting a little more than what is provided in print. We often publish fantastic color photos taken by club members and also provide links which expound on topics covered in our publication and it is delivered right to your email inbox.

Use the email address listed below if you are ready to go with a digital copy.

If you are new to the RATC, or would like see back issues of The Trail Blazer, the entire archive of all issues going back to the summer of 1999 are stored here:

<https://www.ratc.org/newsletter/>

The Trail Blazer is always looking for content as well. If you have good story about an experience on the trail or working with RATC, feel free to submit your content to:

blazer@ratc.org

#	Section	Maintainers
46	Catawba Valley Trail (CVT)	Johnathan Harris Michelle Cook Sean Cook
47	Ribble Trail	Bill & Leslie Kay Floyd
48	Boy Scout Trail	Donna Logan
49	McAfee Fire Road, Rte 311 to AT crossing	Peter Irvine (sawyer) Kailee Sesler Sarah Ward
50	McAfee Fire Road, AT crossing to Campbell shelter	Dario Izquierdo Gary Moore

#	Section	Maintainers
21	Audie Murphy Monument to VA 620	Lee Hipp Will Mackinnon
22	VA 620 to Ridgeline	Hugh Craft Joe Brabant, Jan-Erik Zeller (section sawyer)
23	Ridgeline to Dragons Tooth	Tom McAvoy, Charles Hudson, John Grant, Jan-Erik Zeller (sawyer)
24	Dragons Tooth to VA 624	David Poteet Sarah Allison
25	VA 624 to VA 785 Tree line	Bo Carneal Sarah Waid
26	VA 785 Tree line to VA 311	Bo Carneal Becky Carneal
27	VA 311 to Fire Road	Jim Webb (sawyer) Greg Stick Erik West
28	Fire Road to Campbell Shelter	Jim Webb (sawyer) Greg Stick
29	Campbell Shelter to Brickeys Gap	Bill Gunn Nick Lindsay Christian Smith
30	Brickeys Gap to Ditch Trail	Kevin Witcher
31	Ditch Trail to Angels Gap	Bryon Lane
32	Angels Gap to Power Line	Mike Vaughn Jeff Armstrong
33	Power Line to US 220	Ron and Cathy Butler, Nancy and Leonard Galvan Robert & Jeanie Bomber
34	US 220 to VA 652	Homer and Therese Witcher
35	Va 652 to Fullhardt Knob Shelter	Dave Horst (sawyer)
36	Fullhardt Shelter to Salt Pond Road	John Garris Mark Wilhelm
37	Salt Pond Road To Wilson Creek	Greg Lester Andrew Bowman
38	Wilson Creek to Black Horse Gap	Theresa McDaniel, Andrew Bowman Mary Frye
39	Andy Layne Trail	Daniel Howell, Randy Fuller
40	Dragon's Tooth Trail	Donna Logan, Brad Clay
41	War Spur Trail	Anja Whittington, Jay Raymond
42	North Mtn Trail, Route 311 to Grouse Tr.	Jeff Hoepfner Alex Reis
43	North Mtn Trail, Deer Tr. To Grouse Trail	Hugh Craft Joe Brabant
44	North Mtn Trail, Grouse Tr. To Turkey Trail	Bob Patten
45	North Mtn Trail, Turkey Tr. To CVT	VACANT

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)	Individual	\$20	
	Lifetime Ind Member	\$250	
Address	Family	\$25.00	
City	State	Zip	
Phone	Lifetime Family	\$300	
Email	Donation	\$	
	Total Amount Enclosed	\$	

Renewal dues are payable on the anniversary of initial membership. Make checks to "RATC" or use PayPal at [ratc.org](https://www.ratc.org)

<https://www.ratc.org/membership-levels/>

Mail checks to: RATC, PO BOX 12282, Roanoke VA 24024-2282

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.