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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / SUMMER 2020

THE A.T. EXPERIENCE





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A JOURNEYS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / SUMMER 2020

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“
THE TRAIL'S ABILITY
TO CONNECT NEVER
CEASES TO INSPIRE ME...IT
CONNECTS US TO NATURE
AND THE LAND, BUT IT
ALSO CONNECTS US TO
EACH OTHER.
”

~ Kathryn Herndon-Powell

I OFTEN REFER TO MY CO-WORKERS, A.T. VOLUNTEERS, AND ALL those who love the Trail and help to protect and advocate for it as a “force of nature.” This is perfectly apropos for a dynamic group of people who are deeply devoted to keeping the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s message and the core story of the Appalachian Trail strong, relevant, and resilient. This is the message we strived to create in an issue that focusses on the complexity of the Trail experience — and the myriad visitors who seek it. Their voices, art, and photography — along with so many others who work behind the scenes — are genuine, strong, and expressive. These are the people who, along with our dedicated members, not only preserve the A.T. experience but are constantly working to make that experience and story one that anyone — in whatever form they love or embrace the Trail — can experience it at its best.

Wendy K. Probst / Editor in Chief



Sarah Jones Decker

Sarah “Harvest” Jones Decker is a Virginia native who started hiking the A.T. in her teens. She thru-hiked in 2008 and hiked the Trail again in sections in 2018-2019 for her book, *The Appalachian Trail: Backcountry Shelters, Lean-tos, and Huts*. She has her MFA in Photography from Savannah College of Art & Design and a BA in Journalism and Creative Writing from Virginia Tech. Sarah and her husband own an organic farm south of the Trail town of Hot Springs, North Carolina.

“As both a thru-hiker and section-hiker, it was hard to pick one single Trail experience to write about,” she says. (Trail Stories page 42) “In my brainstorming, I kept coming back to a quote I love by Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, ‘No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.’ This could be said for our beloved Trail. It is always changing and we are changed because of it.”



Deidra Goodwin

Appalachian Trail Conservancy Next Generation Advisory Council member, Deidra Goodwin, has a background in facilitation and experiential education. Always balancing a passion for outdoor recreation and conservation, Deidra’s next steps will be pursuit of a masters degree in experiential education. With that, she plans to take her passion for experiences and the outdoors to continue to support as many people as possible in finding their personal definition of “outdoorsy.”

“One thing that I have experienced over the years is how often people tend to doubt themselves,” she says. “Writing this article about my take on the A.T. ‘Engagement Spectrum’ (page 34) was especially important to me because it gave me a platform to continue the narrative I’m trying to build for myself and everyone I encounter. There are so many ways to do life that we cheat ourselves by not giving our own way enough credit.”



Kathryn Herndon-Powell

A resident of Roanoke, Virginia, Kathryn Herndon-Powell has been the education and outreach coordinator for Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Virginia regional office since 2013. “The Trail’s ability to connect never ceases to inspire me,” she says. “It connects us to nature and the land, but it also connects us to each other. I consider it a privilege to work with the dedicated volunteers and agency partners whose behind-the-scenes work makes this world-class hiking experience possible. Community and partnership are in the Trail’s DNA, and the successes of the McAfee Knob Task Force are one of the best examples I’ve seen of how powerful we are when we work together.” (page 22) Kathryn and her wife Susan have both thru-hiked the A.T., and welcomed their son Nash to the family in December. While in quarantine, they’ve been pointing out McAfee Knob’s graceful curve on the horizon as seen from their back deck. They hope to take him on his first hike there soon.



Andrew Downs

Andrew Downs, a North Carolinian living in Roanoke, Virginia, serves as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s (ATC) senior regional director in the central southwest region. After a 2002 thru-hike, a 2005 season as a backcountry naturalist at the Appalachian Mountain Club’s Greenleaf Hut, and graduate studies in the Great Smoky Mountains with North Carolina State University, Andrew began work with the ATC in January 2007. Reflections on his adventure as a thru-hiker led to a recognition that his experience might not have always been a good thing for other hikers, or for the A.T. itself. “I had a life-changing experience on the A.T., but I might not have been as thoughtful as I should have been about how I impacted other visitors and the resource itself,” he says. “That life-changing hike and a desire to make the Trail a better place for all has led me to a career serving the Trail and protecting the one and only A.T. experience.” (page 12)

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SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES AND REALITIES

JUNE 15, 2020. I FEEL IT IS IMPORTANT TO place a date on this column as it helps establish the reality of this day, which is different from yesterday, and I am sure will be different from the day you read this in July. In this new reality, the only thing that seems to be absolute is that there will be significant change occurring almost daily.

The theme of this issue centers on the Appalachian Trail experience. We've talked about the Trail experience for years, so it is not necessarily a new topic. But the lens by which we look at this theme, and the context in which it needs to be considered, has changed drastically and, perhaps, permanently.

First, we must now look at the Trail experience in the reality of a global pandemic. For the first time ever, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) asked people to not hike on the A.T. In mid-March, we asked thru-hikers to leave the Trail if they had already started and we asked all others to postpone their start. This was followed by a plea to all visitors to stay off the Trail. This guidance was based on science and facts and took into consideration both human safety and resource protection. As I write this today, we are just now offering advice on how safe day use can be undertaken. We also are still waiting for approval from the National Park Service to let our volunteers return to the Trail. And we continue to struggle on how to advise long-distance hikers how to safely traverse the length of the Trail considering all the communities and states the A.T. passes through.

Second, heightened attention to events that — while nothing new — are suddenly being viewed through a clearer lens, has brought the conversation of racial and social justice to all aspects of our lives, including how it translates to the A.T. experience.

"Stay in your lane; just talk about hiking; don't be political." I am just anticipating some of the reactions to the sentence above based on the reactions I've received in the past two weeks since the ATC published "A Commitment to Justice," our letter to the Trail community about the ATC's commitment to making justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion the cornerstone of our work. I will be honest: I am somewhat confused by the counter arguments. The very nature of a commitment to social justice means there is an acknowledgment that we can not parse out which areas of society are to be just, and which areas get a pass. Before the murder of George Floyd and the broad-based embrace of the Black Lives Matter movement, the COVID-19 pandemic had already

cleared away much of the fog surrounding justice and equity in our country. And I saw it directly impacting the A.T.

During the peak of the lockdown, we heard constant pleas to make the Trail "available" because people needed that outlet and couldn't possibly sacrifice their outdoor time. Reporters asked me: isn't closing the Trail closing off the possibility for people in overcrowded cities and perhaps unhealthy or dangerous home environments to have an outlet to escape? The reality is that the vulnerable and those facing a greater chance for exposure and sickness were not the ones clamoring for use of the Trail. And, in fact, they represent a large swath of our society that never gets the chance, in even the best of times, to experience the Appalachian Trail.

The reality is that hiking — particularly recreational day use — requires one to start out from a position of privilege. You have the privilege of having free time that is not taken up with second or third jobs, or unrelenting child or elder care. You have the privilege of personal transportation and affording gas to get yourself to a trailhead. You can afford boots and day packs and have access to technology to bring up information on where to go and how to get there. And, most likely, you have had the privilege of experiencing hiking from a young age, with peers, and that it has been a welcoming and positive experience.

This is not reflective of the reality for much of the American population. As I stated in my letter:

"The A.T. is not racially or ethnically diverse. It is not accessible to people from low-income communities. It is not always a safe place for women. And, it is not relevant to many people we consider to be part of the next generation. We recognize this must change. We recognize we must orient ourselves and the broader Trail community to justice in its many forms — environmental, social, racial, and economic."

Sitting here today, I wonder what the next few months will bring. I hope that it shows us having moved forward with these discussions — if only by a small increment — and that there is a recognition that the pursuit of justice is very much the responsibility of the ATC and our current ecosystem. The blazes that lead us along our path must also lead us to a more open, welcoming, and equitable Trail community.

From the start, the idea of the Appalachian Trail was both radical and visionary. The idea of the Trail was never just about hiking and was very political. The stand we are taking today absolutely matches our past and is critical for our future. Thank you for joining with us.

Sandra Marra / President & CEO



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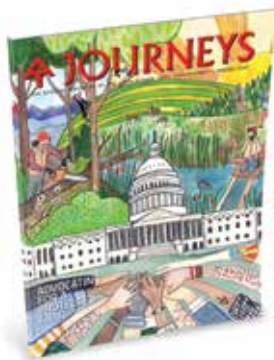
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FIRST, LET ME TELL YOU HOW much I enjoy *A.T. Journeys*. I look forward to it each quarter and read it cover to cover, before sharing it with my son (and fellow section-hiker). I solo hiked about 100 miles of the A.T. (Harpers Ferry into Pennsylvania) as an unbelievably unprepared 17-year old 45 years ago. When I quit, I felt a huge amount of “unfinished business” that has stayed with me. Flash forward to summer of 2018... my two sons and I hiked a section from the south entrance of Shenandoah National Forest to

Harpers Ferry over eleven days. There’s talk of coming back for another piece one day. Please keep up the great work!

Doug Dodson
McKinney, Texas

AS SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN on school boards, park boards, an alternate school teacher and a current township trustee, I realize we primarily only hear the negatives. Because people who are happy don’t let you know... because, well, they are happy and satisfied. Yes, I may have only “driven” the Appalachian Trail, and hiked small sections over the years. But thank you for all that you and everyone at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) does for this great American treasure. People who dedicate themselves to their jobs and their passions rarely get to hear the positives. The hard work of the ATC is what makes the A.T. the greatest trail in the world.

Coley O’Connell
Elwood, Illinois

THIS MESSAGE IS FEEDBACK
to an Appalachian Trail Conservancy

(ATC) email titled “A Commitment to Justice” sent by [ATC president/CEO] Sandi Marra. I was interested what the ATC had to say about the current social state of our country, and I am glad that I was. Amazing. This concise, well researched, and eloquent statement shouts its support for the inclusion of and justice for all. I haven’t heard or read a statement from any other major company that highlights the base issue better. Thank you so much!

Sarah “Sassie” Reichl
Fortville, Indiana

A.T. Journeys welcomes your comments.

The editors are committed to providing balanced and objective perspectives. Not all letters received may be published. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.



editor@appalachiantrail.org

Letters to the Editor

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

P.O. Box 807

Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0807

Trail Talk

f Thank you to all the Trail maintainers. Your work keeps boots on the ground! Experiencing the “Great Outdoors” brings people to the connectivity of us and nature. You play a vital role in forwarding humankind. ~ Kate Fields

@ @rnoturb
Thank you so much for caring for the trail I love!

f So great to see all those working to protect the Trail. I thank you! ~ Linda Bennett

f It’s a great feeling on the

A.T. to come around the bend, after a long day of hiking, and find an awesome shelter for the evening! (and even better if it’s not full!) ~ Brian Sparks

@ @pattycollier4
I am so grateful for the wisdom that led to the A.T. being protected wilderness and open to all who need healing from the stresses of life. Thank you for all of the good that you do.

@ @gee.haw
In 2012, my eight-year-old daughter and I traveled to Gallipolis, Ohio to visit Grandma Gatewood’s grave.

There was one gentleman working in the cemetery that day, and he kindly showed us to her gravesite. He said that many hiking folk came to pay their respects, but he couldn’t remember anybody bringing flowers with them. I felt proud that my daughter and I had chosen to honor her in that way. Grandma Gatewood had many tribulations in her life, but she found sanctuary on the Trail... she was strong, smart, resilient, and perhaps most of all, courageous. God bless her memory. I believe as long as people seek peace and tranquility on the Appalachian Trail, she’ll never be forgotten.

f I visit the Trail throughout the year to watch the slow parade of wildflowers as the seasons progress from spring to early autumn. Autumn brings a burst of colors as the leaves change. Winter brings unobstructed views of the gently rolling hills as far as the eye can see. ~ Rieza Soelaeman

@ @the_wandering_lily
Thank you to all the volunteers! Out on the Trail recently, I have seen them out checking on the Trail and hikers continuously! I appreciate you!



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Contact / Lisa Zaid / Director of Development / lzaid@appalachiantrail.org



BY ANDREW DOWNS

THE A.T.

experience



THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL IS BOTH A PHYSICAL RESOURCE AND A UNIFYING IDEA THAT TRANSCENDS BOUNDARIES AND CONNECTS VISITORS.

The A.T. began as a vision in 1921 with the publication of Benton MacKaye's "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning." In 1937 — through the coordination and collaboration of the Appalachian Trail Conference (now the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, or ATC), several dozen land management agencies, and thousands of volunteers — that vision became a reality in the form of a continuous footpath from Georgia to Maine. The distinction between *a trail* and *the Trail* is important. One is a thing made of dirt and rocks. The other is a concept that connects sections of trail into a single, transcendent entity that traverses fourteen states — officially known as the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

WHAT IS THE A.T. EXPERIENCE?

The concept of the A.T., from its rugged overlay atop historic trails in the north to hundreds of miles of ridge walks in the south, finds expression in a discrete set of conditions, activities, and opportunities we collectively call the A.T. experience. While everyone's hike is unique, there are common elements running through each visit to the Trail: nature, challenge, self-reliance, and connectivity. These qualities and others form the concept that unifies the management efforts of the Trail partnership that protects and manages the A.T. In other words, the A.T. experience is the purpose for managing the A.T.; and that purpose is distinct to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

The A.T. experience is a rare and special thing. It's not always quantifiable or easily described, but you may have sensed it while on the Trail. It's also not limited to any single type of hiker — day, section, or thru. Thru-hikers, by their nature, highlight an important experiential component: hiking long distances — many enjoy the social aspect that the "People's Trail" offers. Birders out for a day may not seem like traditional A.T. hikers, but they exemplify another core





The A.T. experience provides a feeling of being connected to something larger — a feeling that cannot be replicated in the eastern U.S.

component to the A.T. experience: immersion in nature. What are the core experiential components of the A.T.? Where did they come from, and why are they important today? How do we manage for them with so many folks seeking to carve out their own unique and individual “experience”?

THE HISTORY OF THE A.T. EXPERIENCE

The concept of the A.T. experience begins with Benton MacKaye and his 1921 article. However, MacKaye’s thinking on the Trail would change dramatically between the time he wrote “An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning” and sixteen years later, when the A.T. became a continuous footpath from Georgia to Maine. MacKaye’s initial concept for a system of labor camps, contemplative retreats, and mountaintop agricultural communities transformed until “the whole point was to preserve the primeval environment.” Many attempted to define the A.T. experience since, but few were as effective as a group in the late ’70s including Dave Richie, director of the A.T. Project Office for the National Park Service, Chris Brown, one of the primary authors of the A.T. Comprehensive Plan and 1960s visionary volunteer Stan Murray — who documented the concept in a way that spoke to its philosophical nature, but was useful to land management agencies. In 1977, they wrote in a document titled “A.T. Management Principles”: was appropriately captured in the Comprehensive Plan for A.T. management (1981) and the National Park Service’s “Nature and Purpose” statement for the Trail (2015). This statement, along with the ATC policy on the A.T. experience, are the best descriptions of the Trail experience to date. Documentation by the Trail’s administering agency (the National Park Service) helps ensure that anyone’s experience, anywhere on the A.T., can involve the simplicity, self-reliance, reflection, challenge, and natural and cultural elements that form the A.T. experience.

THE A.T. EXPERIENCE TODAY

Why is preserving the A.T. experience important today? Why not allow the Trail’s purpose to change over time as society changes? The answer to that question is based on two assumptions. First, with equitable access and opportunity, anyone can enjoy and benefit from the A.T. experience. Second, the A.T. experience provides a feeling of being connected to something larger — a feeling that cannot be replicated in the eastern U.S. These assump-

tions drive much of our work. Providing equitable access is critical to the long-term viability of the Trail and to a just, free, and healthy society. This work manifests in multiple ways — from outreach to Trailside communities and beyond, to programs and educational workshops for younger and more diverse audiences, to education focusing on the individual and institutional racism which has made the A.T. less safe and less accessible to people of color. This work harkens back to the original intent of the A.T., as envisioned by Benton MacKaye: to be a solution to some of the societal problems we face as a country. In 1921, MacKaye's concern was that our society was becoming too urbanized and disconnected from the outdoors. Today, these challenges remain but are further complicated by decades (even centuries) of inequity and disproportionate privilege.

Sometimes, clear lines can be drawn from threats to the A.T. to appropriate responses. A pipeline, for instance, that isn't sited in consideration of the A.T., makes a clear case for the ATC's opposition; or hikers writing on white blazes or rocks are opportunities to engage law enforcement. But often, threats come from incremental management decisions that change precedent, create barriers to access, or add to cumulative impacts that undermine the A.T. experience over the longer period.

This slow experiential erosion is difficult to detect, and even harder to address.

Complicating the matter is that a decision might set a negative precedent for the Trail but might also be of significant benefit when considered in a more isolated context, such as the addition of a shelter, or even a picnic table. What guides us through these decisions is not only the language of our founders, pioneers and forerunners, which has been thoughtfully crafted into a rich collection of policies, but also the voice of new people and new partnerships. These policies, developed since the beginning of the Trail, have operationalized the philosophical roots of the A.T. experience into something that volunteers, staff, partners, and agencies can apply to the challenges, threats, and decisions in their day-to-day work of preserving and protecting the A.T. Case in point, the 1995 policy on Managing the Trail for a Primitive Experience directs land managers to ask themselves, when considering the construction of a shelter or bridge: "does this action unnecessarily sacrifice aspects of the Trail that provide solitude or that challenge hikers' skill or stamina?" Given that direction, managers might opt for a campsite instead of a shelter, or a wet crossing instead of a bridge.

THE FUTURE OF THE A.T. EXPERIENCE

Our society needs access to a broad spectrum of outdoor opportunities, varying in size, scale, location, and activity. Activities on the A.T. exist across that spectrum, but the A.T. experience supports a specific combination of characteristics including scale, connectivity, immersion nature, simplicity, self-reliance, and physical beauty that is available in only a precious few places. Protecting that experience for all to enjoy is the work of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.



*From left: A.T. in
Virginia near Rice Field
Shelter – By Sarah Jones
Decker; A.T., Lehigh
Gap, Pennsylvania – By
Raymond Salani III*



TRAILHEAD

ATC DIRT / HIGHLIGHTS / EVENTS / UPDATES



A red eft newt on the A.T.
in Connecticut — one
of the Trail's smaller
residents — By Sarah
Jones Decker



The Largest Trail System in the World

AMERICA'S NATIONAL TRAILS

By Ron Tipton



In 1968, the National Trails System Act created the Appalachian National Scenic Trail as America's first National Trail. Since then, Congress has established 29 more National Scenic and National Historic Trails that, when completed, will include nearly 60,000 miles of trails in all 50 states. This is by far the largest trail system in the world. ¶ An estimated 200 million people live within an hour's drive of at least one of these trails. The 11 National Scenic Trails and the 19 National Historic Trails provide excel-

lent outdoor recreation opportunities, promote resource preservation and public access, and

encourage the appreciation of the great outdoors and America's history and cultural diversity. ¶ Of

course, the A.T. is the best known and most heavily used of all the National Trails. However, the Pacific Crest Trail, Continental Divide, Ice Age, and the North Country Trail, among others, are all attracting more long-distance and day hikers and have strong non-profit organizations working closely with their federal partners. Examples of National Historic Trails that represent and interpret important historic events include the Lewis & Clark, Santa Fe, Oregon & California, Trail of Tears, Selma to Montgomery, and the Overmountain Victory. ¶ After I retired at the end of 2017 as the president/CEO of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), my interest in and passion for protecting and managing trails led me to the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS). PNTS is organized similarly to ATC: it represents and coordinates the non-profit partners for the 30 National Trails as the ATC does with 31 affiliated Trail clubs. ¶ With the PNTS, I now organize and lead a multi-year National Trails campaign. During 2019, I worked with a team of experienced and talented conservation and trail leaders to create a multi-year National Trails Action Plan that includes four goals for protection and effective management of these trails:

- ❶ Increased federal funding for trail land conservation to protect National Trails priority sites and segments
- ❷ Sustainable federal funding and support by the federal agency partners for trail operations & management
- ❸ Increased state & local government support for land and resource protection and trail management
- ❹ A National Trails communications strategy to promote National Trails as special feature of the American experience



WILD EAST WILDLIFE

WHILE HIKERS ARE VISITORS WHO are fortunate to enjoy the Trail experience, part of that experience includes other creatures that call the A.T. and its surrounding landscape home — from insects, reptiles, and amphibians to mammals of all sizes, myriad native plants, and migratory birds and raptors. Part of loving the A.T. is preserving the Trail and respecting this amazing realm by following Leave No Trace principles and respectfully enjoying this over 2,000-mile swath of path and corridor that is unlike any other in the eastern U.S.

As one of 30 National Trails, the Appalachian Trail will benefit from this action plan. More importantly, the model for success for these trails is the A.T. I interviewed leaders of almost all of the National Scenic Trails and was struck by what I heard about comprehensive plans,

segment maps, optimal locations reviews, creating trail communities as partners, and efforts toward increased government support. These are ideas and strategies that have resulted in strong protection and effective sustainable management of the A.T.

For more information visit:

appalachiantrail.org/culturalresources

ATC BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION AND ANNUAL MEETING

Election Process and Important Dates

FIVE RETURNING DIRECTORS HAVE BEEN NOMINATED FOR open positions on the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Board of Directors for the 2020-2023 term. Two other candidates are nominated for the 2020-2023 term. Elections will be conducted electronically prior to the organization's annual meeting, which is scheduled from 10:30 a.m. to noon EDT on September 12, 2020. ¶ Like last year, the annual meeting will be conducted on a virtual basis. Visit: appalachiantrail.org for more

information on the candidates, including their biographies, and further information on the meeting and election process. ¶ Additional nominations may be made via petitions signed by at least 100 members of the ATC in good standing and received 20 days prior to the annual meeting. They should be addressed to Sandra Marra, president and CEO, at ATC headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Additionally, any motions or resolutions relevant to the corporate affairs of the ATC for consideration at the annual meeting should be sent to: resolutions@appalachiantrail.org by August 28 or by mail to ATC headquarters to be received before that date. ¶ We will be adding more information including the agenda and other updates — so check back frequently as we get closer to the meeting. ¶ Your membership must be current to vote. To check on your membership status, contact us at (304) 535-6331 or e-mail: membership@appalachiantrail.org. Elections will occur online. Online voting will open at noon EDT on August 29 and continue until 8 a.m. EDT on September 12. All members in good standing will receive an e-mail with voting instructions in August.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE:

View the meeting live: appalachiantrail.org

View the meeting and submit questions during the event: membership@appalachiantrail.org

Renew your membership: appalachiantrail.org/renew

Learn more:

appalachiantrail.org/MembershipMeeting2020



Can't Get to the Trail?

The "Walk the Distance" app tracks your steps and shows how far you would have walked on the A.T. Users can walk along with the thousands of other people who are also "hiking the Trail" using the app. It can be used to stay motivated to keep up with the people around you, or just aim to reach the next virtual shelter or landmark positioned along the Trail as you walk, hike, or run in outdoor areas close to home. ¶ The app was created by John Zaccane, a Virginia Tech graduate who — during his college days — often hiked and backpacked on the A.T. in the area. "I have come to appreciate the system and organizations in place like the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) that preserve the awesome places I've been lucky enough to hike in," says Zaccane. ¶ The app reads walking distance from the health app on your iPhone (soon to be available on Fitbit and Garmin) and automatically starts working as soon as you start your activity. "There are people who are unable to walk the A.T. due to physical, financial, or time constraints as well as people who have hiked the A.T. already and use the app to remember their experience," says Zaccane. "And even people who are out hiking the Trail in real life can invite their friends and family to hike with them virtually." The app contains pictures and text about shelters, landmarks, and Trail clubs along the route. Checkpoints along the way highlight the work of the ATC and different Trail clubs with links to their websites to learn more. There is also a link in the settings to learn more and to donate to the ATC directly, encouraging users to give back.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) Proud Person Award — the ATC's highest recognition for outstanding performance by a staff member — was established in 2015 to recognize the profound and enduring contributions of Bob Proudman who served the A.T. for 50 years in a variety of roles, including 35 years of employment with the ATC. The award criteria are based on demonstrated excellence in each of the ATC's five core values: Cooperation, Integrity, Inclusion, Dedication, and Empowerment. The recipient is chosen by fellow ATC employees through a nomination and committee deliberation process. ¶ ATC was pleased to present the 2019 Proud Person Award to Matt Drury, ATC's resource management coordinator in the southern region. Natural resource managers are some of the unsung heroes of the Appalachian Trail. Their work to protect sensitive ecological areas and restore habitat often goes unnoticed by hikers, but it is critical to the long-term viability of A.T. plants, animals, and the A.T. experience. ¶ Matt's personal commitment and enthusiasm for his work is a catalyst for motivating volunteers to participate in his fieldwork. "Getting volunteers to do the hard, hot work of pulling invasive plants at Fontana Dam is a tough sell," says Kristin Cozza, the ATC's southern regional office administrator. "Matt turned the work event into a party (Kill the Dam Invasive Plants!) with music, beer, sponsors, and T-shirts. Everyone has fun and the native species have a chance to survive." ¶ Two recent projects exemplify Matt's cooperative management skills. He became aware that emerald ash borers were moving into the Southern Appalachians, then led the

charge to accelerate compliance work by our national forest partners, and secured funding, so that treatment could begin before the narrow window to treat trees had closed. He worked with multiple partners to identify, inject, and save over 800 ash trees along the A.T. in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. Matt's passion for A.T. appropriate forestry was displayed at a recent ATC southern Regional Partnership Committee meeting — a presentation about Spruce Forest Regeneration at Roan and Unaka mountains. By the end, the many A.T. partners in the room were excited about helping restore this ecosystem. ¶ Matt makes everyone at ATC feel part of the team. He mentors young staff — from conservation corps members to interns to recent college graduates working for ATC part-or-full-time, offering wisdom and encouragement. Matt has a good sense of how to make people feel valuable, involved, and celebrated. "Matt went out of his way to make me feel welcome and help me," says Trail facilities manager Stephen Eren. "It wasn't his job to onboard me but he was always there to help and get the job done." ¶ From Kentucky, Matt attended Warren Wilson College near Asheville, North Carolina. Afterwards, he joined the Peace Corps and lived on the South Pacific island, Vanuatu for three-and-a-half years where he coordinated establishment of Mount Tabwemasana Conservation Area and built friendships on the island,



Proud Person Award

*Matt at work treating ash trees
in the Southern Appalachians
— Photo courtesy of Chris
Gallaway/Horizonline Pictures*

who he stays in touch with via their native tongue. After the Peace Corps, he was a crew leader searching for ivory-billed woodpeckers in the swamps of South Carolina, and just prior to coming to the ATC, was the Yancey County Ranger for the North Carolina Forest Service. ¶ With wide experience, Matt's work for ATC is a path to the bigger role his work provides, stewarding the natural resources he cares so deeply about. He can name all the plants (the good, the bad, and the extremely rare), navigate the fruiting bodies of fungi, celebrate the special qualities of animal species (like the golden winged warbler), and identify trees with ease. His knowledge of and enthusiasm for the natural world is inspiring, as he rattles off reasons to care and ways to appreciate this vast responsibility we have for the A.T.

Better Brush Busting

Proper pruning is pinnacle to your hiking experience
By Stephen Eren

My favorite nickname for the Appalachian Trail is the Green Tunnel. Nothing brings such fantastical feelings of a fictional forest fantasy as a sculpted path just for your special day. As magical as it would feel to pretend it was naturally occurring just for your adventure, the truth is just as joyous. Proper care of the vegetation along the A.T. is the real magic that makes it a reality. Without the diligent and careful work of A.T. volunteer maintainers, the green tunnel would collapse. Yet if the Trail was over trimmed or brushed, there would be no tunnel but a clear cut like you see with utility lines. The true allure of the A.T. is in the passion of well-educated maintainers. With the proper techniques, volunteers are set up for success to trim in a way that is good for the tree and the Trail. As we encourage volunteers to join or continue to the ranks of maintainer greatness, or just learn how the Appalachian Trail Conservancy does it best, we thought you might benefit from deep diving into the sophisticated art of trimming and brushing. As a Trail crew champion, it's important to know when to trim, where to trim, and how much to trim.

To learn more about Trail maintenance volunteer work visit:
appalachiantrail.org/get-involved



Pruning cuts should be made just outside the branch collar.



On a dead branch that has a live collar, cut just beyond the outer edge of the collar.

WHEN TO TRIM

Before going out to do Trail maintenance, you should know who you are clearing for. Mountain bikers and horse packers have different needs than hikers. It's essential to have a corridor in mind that everyone who is maintaining agrees upon. Most maintainers will try to brush their section before spring and during the first slush of new growth. If you are new to a section, pay attention to fast growing plants like blackberries or smilax that might thrive in an opening in the forest canopy. You will have to revisit these areas more often. Always make sure to check in with fellow maintainers and land managers regularly for new obstacles that are difficult to predict. Check with land managers to make sure you aren't about to trim a random new endangered species that may be found within the corridor (this is a literal example, not a hypothetical).

THE RIGHT CUTS IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Trimming can be done surgically with respect to the tree being trimmed, or rushed and sloppy like a battlefield amputation. The effects on the tree would be like a person, with sloppy cuts more likely leading to infection and death. Luckily, trees are much better suited to lose limbs and grow in anticipation of the possibility. Looking at a branch meeting a tree, you may see a woody collar at the base of the branch. The branch collar makes it possible for trees to grow long branches to harvest sunlight one leaf at a time.

The branch collar has two effective functions for the limb. The bulge often noted in the branch bark ridge is an indication of a dense and unique wood grain of interlocking fibers unlike the rest of the plant. This is to provide additional support to a limb that may be weighted with hundreds of pounds of snow at a time and/or survive gail force winds every hurricane season. The collar also provides protection from the inevitable day that the branch leaves the tree.

The branch collar is designed to react and close the wound with callus tissue before decay spreads to the trunk. Cutting into the collar or branch bark ridge makes it a lot harder for the tree to fight off potential infection from the open wound.

HOW MUCH TO CUT?

With the corridor in mind, trim brush back to and even past the corridor as most areas are not brushed more than a few times a year. Take branches you are trimming back to the limb, branch, or trunk while anticipating future growth into the corridor. **Never cut more than 30 percent of a tree's foliage at a time as it may cause the tree to stress and put out advantageous shoots in every direction in a panic to make up for its loss.**

COME PREPARED

Make sure you have the right tools for the job. The trimmers that you have at home might be functional but may not be optimal for a long day of use in the backcountry. Having quality hand snips, two-handed loppers, and/or a folding hand saw are great options depending on the type of work you are anticipating. As with any task, personal protective equipment is for protecting you and setting a good example of maintainer culture. Hardhat, eye protection, and leather gloves keep you coming back to the Trail and having safe workdays. If you hope to have a long tenure trimming on the Trail, you will see many sticks that try to poke out your eyes and splinters that want to come home with you. Wear your PPE before learning lessons the hard way. Happy Brushing. Keep your tools sharp and well lubricated.

2020 Appalachian Trail

HALL OF FAME

THE A.T. HALL OF FAME WAS DEVELOPED by the A.T. Museum in Pennsylvania's Pine Grove Furnace State Park to honor persons who have made exceptional and positive contributions to the Appalachian Trail or the A.T. community. A class of honorees has been selected each year since 2011.

The Tenth Class of the A.T. Hall of Fame includes Chris Brunton of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; the late Thurston Griggs of Baltimore, Maryland; Warren Doyle of Mountain City, Tennessee; and the late Jim Stoltz of Helena, Montana.

Soon after emigrating from England, **Chris Brunton** joined the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC). Chris has been a dominant force in Trail construction and maintenance for PATC ever since. Known to most as "Trail Boss," Chris has served for decades as district manager for an A.T. section in West Virginia and Virginia, including three miles that he personally maintains. Among his many achievements, Chris is known for helping to acquire the land and then build the "rollercoaster" section of the A.T. in northern Virginia, as well as renovating and then managing the Blackburn Trail Center with his wife — and current Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) president/CEO — Sandi Marra.

In his spare time away from teaching at the University of Maryland, **Thurston Griggs** worked to preserve the A.T., joining the Mountain Club of Maryland in 1959 and serving two terms as its president. He served as the first editor of ATC's newsletter *The Register*, and a member of its Board of Directors, including vice-chair. He expedited the purchase

of the Bagtown Road parcel, on which was later built the Thurston Griggs Trail, a side trail to the A.T. Shortly before his death in 2011, the National Park Service's Appalachian Trail Park Office awarded him the Golden Service Award for 50 years of service and the A.T. Museum gave him its initial Lifetime Achievement Award.

Warren Doyle ranks high on the list of those who have inspired others to attempt a hike of the A.T. His personal hiking exploits include setting an informal record by traversing the A.T. a record eighteen times, including nine thru-hikes. Warren also played a leading role in founding the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association (ALDHA). Founded in 1983, ALDHA is devoted to encouraging long distance hiking and promoting the interests of hikers. Through his Appalachian Trail Institute, Warren educates prospective hikers on the proper strategies to successfully hike the A.T. and other trails. He covers not only physical conditioning and proper gear, but also the emotional and psychological aspects necessary for a successful thru-hike. Scores of thru-hikers credit Warren with inspiring and guiding them to complete their lifelong goal.

Over his 45-year career, **Jim Stoltz**, universally known as "Walkin' Jim," was a musician, author, photographer, artist, and environmental activist. His long-distance trips totaled over 28,000 miles, including a thru-hike of the A.T. in 1974. Between treks, Jim would create, produce, and perform original shows of his travels with photography and music, always incorporating his keen sense of environmental awareness and justice for all things wild. Jim produced eight musical albums, one music video for children, and a book of poetry. In a front-page story, *The Wall Street Journal* called him the "Music Man of The Wilderness." Walkin' Jim passed away in 2010.

For more information visit: atmuseum.org

A.T. Museum – By Nathaniel Shank



Striking a Balance

BY KATHRYN HERNDON-POWELL

Yoga poses. Coordinated jumping. Marriage proposals. Lion King “pride rock” re-enactments. Taking care of McAfee Knob, long considered the most-photographed spot on the Appalachian Trail, means that just when you think you’ve seen everything — you haven’t.

McAfee Knob at sunrise – By Kevin Delonas





THE SLAB OF ROCK

that juts like a diving board into the vast open space above Catawba Valley isn't the only place along the Trail to view that picturesque landscape. But it is the only place you can see the view and take a picture that will make your mother's heart stop for fear you're about to fall off. In the era of Instagram and viral videos, this iconic landmark near Roanoke, Virginia just keeps drawing more visitors. It's not unusual to see 20 or more states represented on the license plates of cars in the parking lot on highway 311 between Salem and Catawba. Many visitors have no idea they're on the Appalachian Trail, or what the A.T. is. Often, they don't realize it will take them four-to-six hours to make the eight-mile round trip hike for that coveted photo, and they show up without the most basic of hiking gear — water and appropriate footwear.

When asked about the crowds at McAfee Knob, Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club (RATC) volunteer Jean Warren says, "There have been so many times after volunteering on the A.T., I have come home energized and appreciative of the opportunity to meet locals as well as those from around the world. The exchange of dialogue enhances their experience as well as mine. We come together to be inspired by the beauty of this area."

Before 2015, it was less common to hear a volunteer from the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club speak so favorably of visitors at McAfee Knob. The local Trail maintainers have always been proud of the crown jewel of their 120-mile A.T. section — it's featured on the club's logo — but visitation was increasing about 55 percent each year. The visitors came with enthusiasm, but some of them left graffiti, trash, illegal fire rings and trampled vegetation. RATC volunteers were doing all they could to clean up behind the crowds, and still watching their most beloved stretch of Trail get trashed every weekend. The same thing was happening at nearby Dragons Tooth and Tinker Cliffs, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) seasonal Catawba Mountain ridgerunner couldn't be in three places at once.

The Catawba Mountain section of A.T. — often referred to as the "Virginia Triple Crown" these days — has been patrolled by an ATC ridgerunner since 1986. A ridgerunner is a seasonal employee who hikes a popular section of Trail during periods of peak use, educating visitors about Leave No Trace practices, mitigating impacts like litter and fire rings, and reporting on Trail conditions. From Georgia to Maine, about 30 ridgerunners are deployed along the Trail each year to talk to hikers about how the small choices they make — like where to camp or how to store their food at night — can make a big difference to the natural resources and the next hiker's experience. Part park ranger, part Trail maintainer, and all hiker, ridgerunners share the "why" behind local regulations and the Leave No Trace principles to encourage low-impact habits in the backcountry. Since it's impossible to prevent all impacts

through education, they also protect the resource by minimizing damage when they find it.

Since the A.T. along Catawba Mountain is on a narrow corridor of National Park Service land, camping and campfires are restricted to shelters and designated campsites for about 27 miles. The Catawba Mountain ridgerunner's role was originally designed to keep things friendly with adjacent private landowners by making sure a few hundred backpackers each year knew about those regulations. For the first 30 years, it was a part-time position patrolling the Trail on weekends only, in the spring and the fall.

A TASK FORCE IS BORN

I'VE BEEN SUPERVISING

the Catawba Mountain ridgerunner position since 2013, and it was apparent even then that one weekend ridgerunner couldn't begin to fix all the challenges related to visitor use at McAfee Knob. This portion of the Trail was designed for the experienced backpacker, but about 85 percent of visitors were day hikers — and of the 15 percent who were backpacking, many were novice weekend hikers. In addition to all the trash and fire rings, local first responders were spending entirely too much of their time and resources helping lost and underprepared hikers. People were parking in dangerous places when the parking lot overflowed. Human-created wildfires were entirely too common, bears and other wildlife were becoming habituated to human food, and certain spots were popular for alcohol-soaked parties incompatible with the families and scout troops hiking through.

Fortunately, a strong partnership already existed for the management of this section, and that partnership has grown both broader and deeper in the years since. In 2015, the ATC, RATC, and National Park Service (NPS) partnered to create the McAfee Knob Task Force — a special group of RATC volunteers dedicated to untangling the knot of challenges related to visitor use at McAfee Knob. It was quickly determined that volunteers were both able and interested in doing the same work as the staff ridgerunner, and the volunteer ridgerunner program was born.

Diana Christopulos, who was president of RATC at the time, led the effort and recalls, "I started thinking about it when I filled in for the ATC ridgerunner when he was out West fighting wildfires in 2014. Most of the hikers had never been to McAfee Knob, and they kept getting lost or attempting the hike without water or proper footwear. We needed more than one ridgerunner, and it is actually a lot of fun to meet college students, their extended families, people with babies, thru-hikers, new doctors in local medical school, and people from all over the world who modify their travel plans just to do this hike. Sometimes



Hikers on Tinker Cliffs
By Greg Lester

there is a lot of trash and frustration, but then you are on top of McAfee Knob and get to enjoy the view again, just like everyone else. It never gets old for me. And I enjoy helping them get the picture from the right spot. It's also the perfect volunteer activity for busy people, since we sign up on our own and try to go out at least one day a month."

The Roanoke County Fire and Rescue Department was a crucial partner as well. Chief Stephen Simon, while serving as a Deputy Chief in those days, witnessed a significant number of emergency calls to the A.T. with the increase of cell-phone coverage in the area. Chief Simon developed a partnership between Roanoke County Fire/Rescue and the ATC to provide improved Trail markings/signs and support the ridgerunner program. "Both of these initiatives have proved to be an invaluable resource to Roanoke County by reducing emergency calls by close to 70 percent while at the same time reducing injuries and the potential loss of life through enhanced educational services to visitors of the Trail," says Chief Simon.

That first year, 18 volunteers were trained to be volunteer ridgerunners — and five years later, 99 volunteers have been trained. While some volunteers have come and gone, new folks have stepped up so that in 2019, 52 volunteer ridgerunners reported 211 patrols on the A.T., at both Dragons Tooth and McAfee Knob. In 2019, they spoke with over 15,000 visitors and removed 468 gallons of trash and 56 fire rings. That's in addition to the work of the ATC staff Catawba Mountain ridgerunner, which is now a full-time position for eight months of the year. Where the ATC ridgerunner used

to be a lone ranger whose main contact with the management partnership was a weekly report sent by email, the Catawba Mountain ridgerunner now spends about 20 percent of their time training, supporting, and communicating with a vibrant community of volunteers who patrol the same stretch of Trail each weekend. This means that David Youmans, the staff ridgerunner, spends more time sitting at a desk or attending meetings than before, but with the needed support, can focus more when out on the Trail. "Having motivated volunteer ridgerunners patrolling the very high use areas has proved invaluable," says Youmans. "I spent every week on the hot spots, but the volunteer ridgerunners allowed me to get out on the more remote areas of my section. They definitely had my back on what were always crazy weekends."

GREAT MINDS RESOLVE "HOT SPOT" ISSUES ALIKE

AS THE TRAIL BECOMES

more popular, especially in hot spots like McAfee Knob — and places like Max Patch, North Carolina; Carvers Gap/Roan Highlands, Tennessee; Annapolis Rocks, Maryland; Bear Mountain, New York; Franconia Ridge, New Hampshire; and Baxter State Park in Maine — the ATC's approach to visitor use management has necessarily become more comprehensive and collaborative. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for a site that has everything from parking lot safety concerns to lost hikers to human/bear conflicts. But as multiple high-use

areas along the A.T. encounter the same types of problems, we can share successes and lessons learned while building strong coalitions of stakeholders to take on specific local challenges. Among other wins, McAfee Knob offers a model for how concerned local citizens, properly equipped and supported, can make a huge difference through visitor education. The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club and Nantahala Hiking Club have similar programs to help manage crowded conditions in the spring in their A.T. sections, with volunteers known as Trail Ambassadors working alongside ATC staff ridgerunners.

Of course, education can't address every problem — not even over 60,000 friendly conversations this amazing team of volunteer ridgerunners has had over the past five years. Over the same time period, the ATC has regularly convened meetings and conversations with our partners in the RATC, NPS, and U.S. Forest Service, as well as a much larger group of stakeholders known as the Triple Crown Partnership. In groups large and small, we've brainstormed solutions, pooled our resources, and made some seemingly pie-in-the-sky dreams come true.

Thanks to the volunteer ridgerunners' documentation of the need for a law enforcement presence, a new NPS Ranger position was created with shared duties between the A.T. and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Brian Wilson, who filled that position starting in the fall of 2018, has made a huge difference with both his presence on the ground and

attesting to the hazardous nature of the road crossing. Brett Randolph is the VDOT Salem assistant district traffic engineer and championed the application process with the Federal Highway Administration. "The project was introduced as a proactive safety measure where obvious pedestrian safety concerns exist including limited parking area, lack of a safe pedestrian crosswalk, and limited sight distance due to a sharp horizontal curve where the Appalachian Trail crosses the highway," says Randolph. "Luckily, no one has been seriously injured when crossing Route 311 from the trailhead parking lot. Too often organizations are reactive in nature, and the proactive development of a project application is a testament to the camaraderie that has formed over the years with the ATC's Triple Crown Partnership Committee."

MAKING IT OFFICIAL

IN 2016, AFTER REVIEW

by all 31 ATC Trail clubs and approval by the Stewardship Council, ATC adopted a Policy on Visitor Use Management that outlines our values and strategies Trail-wide. A cornerstone of that policy is our commitment to use the framework developed by the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council. This adaptive process is a planning and decision-making tool approved by five federal land management agencies, including the NPS and U.S. Forest Service. Visitor Use Management planning, using this framework, is well underway in many places on the A.T., including the Virginia Triple Crown. Appalachian National Scenic Trail superintendent Wendy Janssen has secured NPS support for this process, which kicked off in the fall of 2019 with a three-day meeting facilitated by visitor use planning experts from the Denver Service Center. A better design of the McAfee Knob parking lot quickly emerged as one of the most pressing issues for the partnership to tackle next.

Science is also playing an important role.

Dr. Jeff Marion, a U.S. Geological Survey scientist stationed at Virginia Tech, has been working with colleague and Stewardship Council member Jeremy Wimpey on completing a comprehensive Trail-wide study of visitor impacts and sustainable "Best Management Practices" for the A.T.'s tread and campsites. Results will inform the Visitor Use Management process and decisions, while also providing guidance for club members on sustainable Trail and campsite design and management. Luckily for the Triple Crown Partnership, Dr. Marion is local to the area and is advising our local Visitor Use

McAfee Knob offers
a model for how concerned
local citizens, properly
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visitor education.

his coordination between local Trail volunteers, first responders, and land managers. "Working as part of the cooperative management system has been the most rewarding assignment of my career," Ranger Wilson says. "Maintaining a safe and enjoyable A.T. experience requires a group effort."

In a few years, the Virginia DOT plans to build a pedestrian bridge over Virginia highway 311 — thanks to federal highway safety funding that was secured with the help of dozens of letters of support from local organizations



*The start of the climb
up to McAfee Knob
By Sarah Jones Decker*



*McAfee Knob Task
Force ridgerunners
on McAfee Knob*

Management process as well. Marion has consulted the partnership on re-designing a high-use shelter site with sustainable sidehill campsites, as well as a proposal for a new group-use campsite, which the high school youth in his BSA Venture Crew may help construct and maintain.

Reflecting on the process so far and the work still to be done, Diana Christopulos says, “To me, the McAfee Knob Task Force is a perfect example of the A.T. cooperative management system at its best. The RATC volunteers are doing most of the work (and having most of the fun) while ATC staff are the glue that holds everything together. They make sure we are trained and operating in coordination with our partners, including the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, the ATC ridgerunner, and local fire and rescue crews. I guarantee you that this task force would not still exist, let alone have over 50 active volunteers, if not for ATC staff support.”

Rather than adding an extra burden to the always-busy Trail volunteers, the volunteer ridgerunner program has turned out to be an effective recruitment tool for the RATC. New members have joined the club who might not see themselves building Trail structures or wielding a chainsaw, but love to hike and want to protect special places like McAfee Knob. Each time we’ve trained a new cohort of volunteer ridgerunners, I’ve been delighted to see the

variety of folks who show up — from college students to retirees, folks who have thru-hiked the A.T. and folks who haven’t actually hiked to McAfee Knob yet, lifelong Roanokers and those who just moved here. Some members who joined RATC to become volunteer ridgerunners have gone on to volunteer in other ways, from boundary maintenance and invasive species control, to serving on the club’s board.

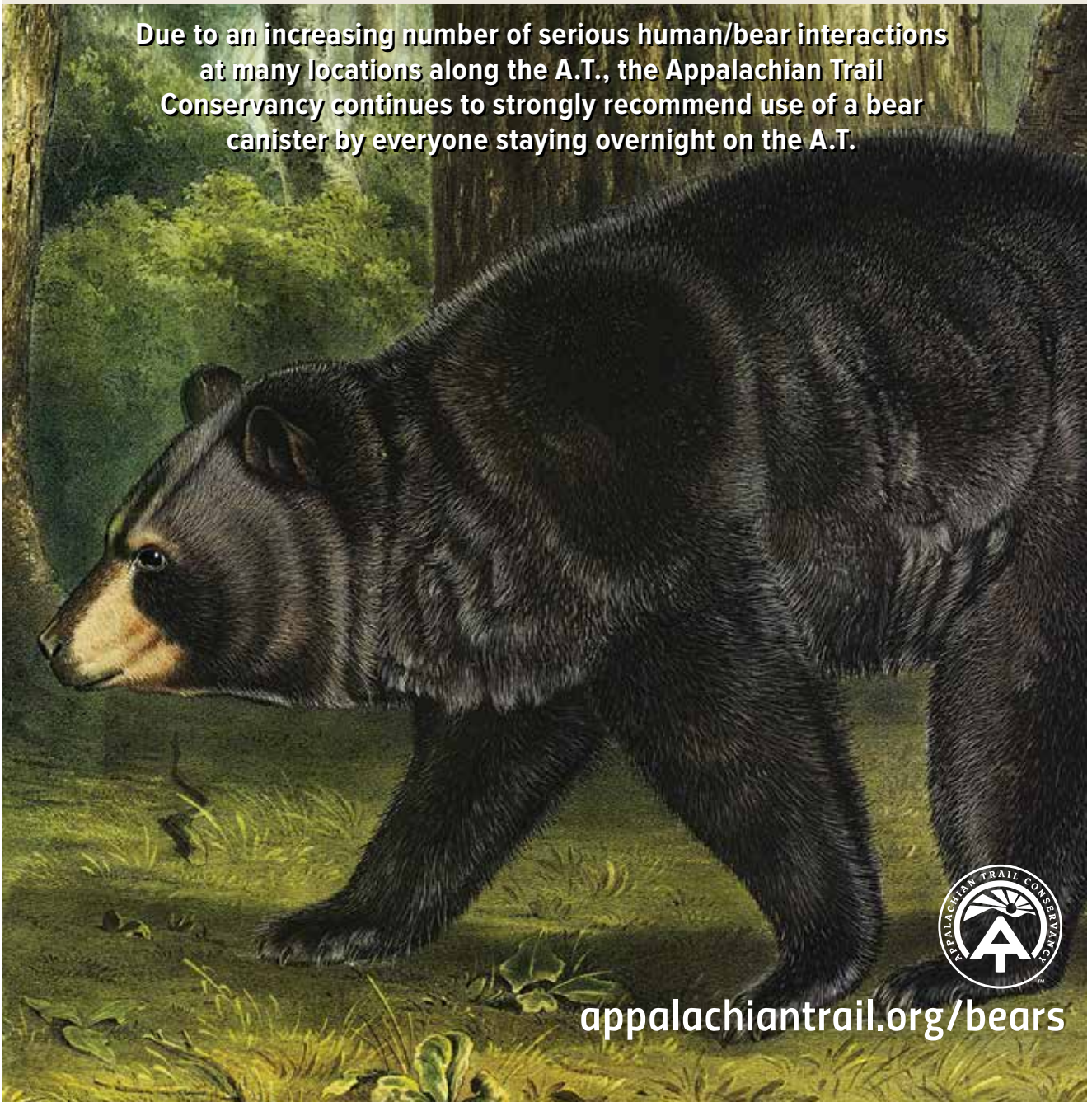
Susan Terwilliger, who has been part of the McAfee Knob Task Force from the start, says it is truly a labor of love. “It is so gratifying to be a resource to people new to our section of the A.T. Being a ridgerunner has taught me the value and fragility of wild places,” she says. “Encouraging the public to practice Leave No Trace and to tread lightly is one way to help protect wilderness trails.” Like a well-constructed rock wall that supports a weak spot in the Trail’s tread, the McAfee Knob Task Force took many hands to build and is a source of pride to everyone involved. We hope our solutions-focused, collaborative approach is a model that can help protect beloved places all the way from Georgia to Maine.

For more information on A.T. Visitor Use Management visit:
appalachiantrail.org/trail-management



BEAR RESISTANT CONTAINERS AND BLACK BEAR AWARENESS

Due to an increasing number of serious human/bear interactions at many locations along the A.T., the Appalachian Trail Conservancy continues to strongly recommend use of a bear canister by everyone staying overnight on the A.T.



appalachiantrail.org/bears



first encounters of the TRAIL KIND

MARCIA HUGHES
BILL HODGE
CINDY ROSS

No matter when
or how a person
discovers the A.T.
— the power of its
impression can have a
positive ripple effect,
spurring adventures,
creativity, and shaping
a path and devotion to
the wild outdoors that
can last a lifetime.

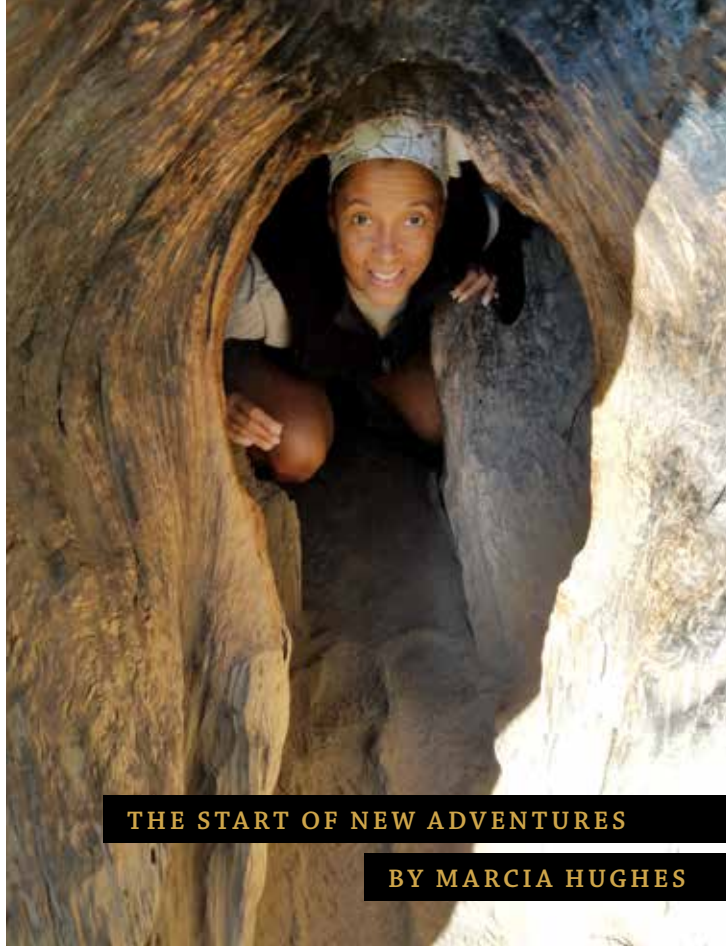
THE outdoors has always beckoned me, from the days of walking to school in Washington, D.C. and taking off-road streets and trails to find new ways to get home, to deliberate searches of footpaths and places to explore. But it was the summer of 1992 when I had organized a group of adults to go whitewater rafting in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia that I was initiated into the lure of real outdoor footpaths. As I passed the road for the turn on Shenandoah Street, I noticed a sign for the Appalachian Trail and on a whim decided to take my group for a short hike the next day to add a “land” experience to the weekend.

Although we only hiked a mile up the steep incline off route 340 heading southbound towards Virginia, something about the deep breathing and sweat was exhilarating. That afternoon, I visited the Appalachian Trail Visitor Center. The 3-D display of the entire Trail along the back wall captured my attention and I was mesmerized. A volunteer at the center offered the last signed edition of a book about a couple who had hiked the Trail, which I immediately began to read. By the time I had reached home, I was already thinking about what it would take to for me to hike the Appalachian Trail.

I have been called a “serial planner” and this intrigue of the Trail sent me out purchasing books and maps initiating my plot of how I could do this. I knew I wouldn’t have time to do a thru-hike but the thought of section hiking made sense given my parental and demanding work responsibilities. Therefore, the journey began in 1993 and was mapped out to complete over a 15-year period.

To assist with my journey, I organized many “walks in the woods” programs to get others out on the Trail through my outdoor adventure organization/company Fresco Adventures (Fresco stands for: Fun Reasons Everyone Should Come Outdoors) where I promoted outdoor programs — first through newsletters and then through the Fresco Adventures website and virtual meet up site. This introduced and excited thousands of people to the world of hiking.

I also quickly began to realize that the A.T. was not only a footpath through the forest, but it had become my therapeutic partner, a place of solace and peace for others, and sacred place to rejuvenate and connect the mind, body, and spirit. Was it just a coincidence that every time I had a multi-day trip planned out on the Trail to knock off some miles that there were major life issues that I had to solve and that being out in nature was just what I needed to get the answers? This became the trend and I began to look forward to my journey to the Trail for the meditation time needed to reflect on the many things going on in my life. Not only was it my aid in problem solving, an inspiration for creativity, and a developer of confidence in my abilities, it provided an unexpected opportunity to explore America in a way I would



THE START OF NEW ADVENTURES

BY MARCIA HUGHES

Marcia Hughes at a national park in California

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■

have never considered. The visits to small towns, the drives up and down the interstates and back country roads, the great food discoveries, and eventual establishment for my favorite stops along the way added to what had begun as adventures of a lifetime.

Since my completion of the Trail in 2008, I have continued to organize local outdoor programs for new and experienced seekers and have extended the explorations and land and water adventures throughout the country and the world. Now, the serial planner in me is preparing for other upcoming journeys on long-distance trails to include the Continental Divide, Pacific Crest Trail, and the American Discovery Trail as I am going for the Triple Crown.

I have been grateful to be able to share my experience as a member of a hiker community but also to share my skills to influence operations by being part of a support team through the Appalachian Trail Conservancy as a two-term board member and part of various committees to help promote need for the Appalachian Trail and as place for everyone. Although I didn’t know much about the Trail on that first step back in 1992, that one step has allowed me to recognize the spiritual connection to the world and others through nature as I continue to live life as an adventure.



FIRST CONNECTIONS

BY BILL HODGE

Bill Hodge on Hawksbill Mountain in the Linville Gorge Wilderness – Pisgah National Forest

THE first time I remember hiking on the Appalachian Trail was in my early teens, hiking from Newfound Gap to Charlies Bunion in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. That hike was part of a childhood full of camping trips with my family across the country. I was hooked on public lands, and was ready to pursue a career that would keep me high in the mountains. Life is funny, and just when you think you have a pathway — you take a different turn. My turn led to a career in marketing faraway trails and wild places. I would still spend my vacations exploring our public lands, but work led me elsewhere.

I came back to the Appalachian Trail as I came back to public lands. While taking what I thought would be a mid-career break, I began to volunteer for a wilderness designation campaign called Tennessee Wild. The effort to expand wilderness protections on the Cherokee National Forest would include an expansion of the Big Laurel Branch Wilderness, and that would bring me full circle back to the A.T. The Trail bisects the Big Laurel Branch Wilderness and proposed addition, and my life would quickly become about addressing concerns around Trail maintenance in the new wilderness acres.

While considering how to alleviate concerns about capacity for Trail maintenance, it would be an Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) workshop on youth and diversity issues that would provide the “lightbulb” moment I needed. I left the workshop energized and committed to an idea of addressing wilderness stewardship challenges by engaging a younger

and more diverse generation. That idea would become Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS), an organization now serving over 80 wilderness areas in the Southeast. SAWS roots will always grow deep in the nine miles of Trail that passes through the Big Laurel Wilderness.

I never went back to that other career, and spent a decade growing SAWS and fighting for wilderness in the Southeast. Together, with my ATC family and our friends in the U.S. Forest Service, we built an army of new stewards of public lands through a partnership called the Wilderness Skills Institute. The SAWS family and the Appalachian Trail community remain intertwined to this day.

A year ago, I left Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards to follow my new public lands career westward as the executive director of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation. I carry with me in this new role a passion born in the folds of Appalachia, and guided by the partnerships that made my work in the Southeast so rewarding and productive. The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex is some of the best of the National Wilderness Preservation System and I can’t believe my good fortune to continue my wilderness work for such a special place and successful organization. My connection to a national scenic trail, the Continental Divide Trail (CDT), continues with the CDT passing through the heart of the complex.

**TOGETHER, WITH MY
ATC FAMILY AND OUR
FRIENDS IN THE U.S.
FOREST SERVICE, WE
BUILT AN ARMY OF
NEW STEWARDS
OF PUBLIC LANDS.**

MY parents did not hike. I had a teenage boyfriend whom I went hiking with. As he had no money, we even went on night hike dates. This led me to join a local hiking club. I was fifteen, out for a day hike with Reading, Pennsylvania's Blue Mountain Eagle Hiking Club, when I saw my first thru-hiker. He was a short guy and his huge pack towered over his head. Fresh fruit dangled from plastic bags and swayed as he hustled up the Trail. He had no interest in stopping to chat. Someone in our group called after him, "Where are you headed?" and he yelled back, "Maine!" I was speechless. He was on a mission — on a grand adventure and I decided that very moment that someday, I would do that too. The hiking club was great as I couldn't yet drive and all I had to do was pay my \$1.50 for gas contribution, meet at a parking lot, and have dozens of "hiking elders" teach me everything they knew. I have been a member of that club for exactly 50 years now.

When I finally stood on the summit of Katahdin in Maine back in 1979, I knew that, with enough perseverance and passion, there would be few limits in my life. Hiking 2,000 miles teaches you that, along with a slew of other life lessons. I kept a journal because I read the classic book in the '70s, *Appalachian Hiker: Adventure of a Lifetime*, by Ed Garvey, and thought if this was going to be as monumental and life-changing as it sounded, I had better record it. I was a landscape artist with a formal education in the fine arts, so I carried a sketchbook and drew my memories as well as wrote them. I was encouraged to write and illustrate a book, and share this amazing journey with the world. Attaining Katahdin taught me to set high goals and believe I could meet them. My first published book, *A*

■
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■

Woman's Journey, has been in print for 38 years. But my story is really about what came afterwards, because my A.T. hike influenced my life path more than anything else. It gave me a life — a husband (thru-hiker, Todd Gladfelter), an occupation (writer/author), a lifestyle philosophy, a way to raise and educate our children, and a hugely satisfying way to give back to the world. I wanted my A.T. thru-hike to be the beginning of an entire lifetime of adventures. Why stop at one?

Our life on the A.T. revealed to Todd and I, that freedom and independence were paramount to our happiness. We did not need material things, but we did need to be in charge of our days. Hard work was not something we avoided but rather embraced. Since we could not remain on the Trail forever, we designed a life that delivered the same gifts: a simple lifestyle, a connection to the natural world, exercise and health, and a sense of community.

After Todd and I completed the Pacific Crest Trail, we moved close to the A.T. in Pennsylvania and ran the Eckville Shelter. While we hosted hikers, we were on an immobile journey — building a log home from raw trees. We toiled for four years to create a work of art, teaching ourselves how to do every construction job over and above the logwork.

Once we had children, (Sierra and Bryce), Todd and I were not willing to give up our passion for long distance hiking. We chartered a new path and with the aid of llamas, completed the entire 3,100-mile Continental Divide Trail. This adventure

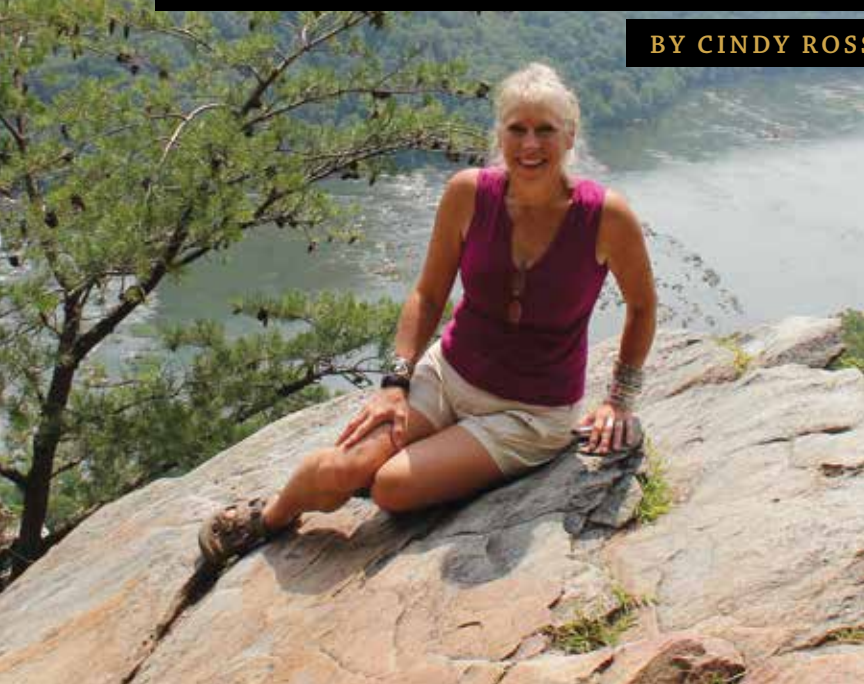
spanned five summers, as we covered 500 miles each year, beginning when the kids were

one and three. Sierra and Bryce spent their formative years in the lap of wilderness, directly impacting the type of amazing adults they would become. This was the beginning of alternatively raising and educating our children.

Since our children have grown, Todd and I began a non-profit, River House PA, where we share our love of nature and knowledge of the Trail with challenged veterans in rehab. Working closely with the local VA hospitals and their recreational therapists, we lead vets down the Trail on their path towards healing. Some of their stories, hiking both long distance and short, will be shared in my newest book: *Walking Towards Peace- Veterans Healing on America's Trails*. In recent years, Todd led the Blue Mountain Eagle Hiking Club in building two log A.T. shelters and is currently busy building moldering privies at four of their A.T. shelters. And so, our adventure continues.

ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME AND A LIFETIME OF ADVENTURES

BY CINDY ROSS



Cindy Ross on the Trail at Jefferson Rock in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

A person wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt with an 'SCA' logo, a blue hard hat, and work gloves is standing in a wooded area. They are holding a pickaxe vertically. The background shows trees and a dirt path. The text 'The Engagement Spectrum' is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

HOW WE ENGAGE
WITH THE TRAIL
AND ITS VAST
COMMUNITY
— FROM TRAIL
ENTHUSIASTS,
HIKERS,
MAINTAINERS,
VOLUNTEERS,
ADVOCATES, AND
SUPPORTERS — IS
UNIQUE TO THE
INTERSECTION
OF HOW WE
DISCOVERED
IT, HOW WE SEE
OURSELVES AND
EACH OTHER AS
PART OF THAT
COMMUNITY, AND
WHAT WE LOVE
ABOUT IT.

BY DEIDRA GOODWIN

The Engagement Spectrum



From left: Deidra at work with the Mid-Atlantic Trail crew; On the "Ridge to River" A.T. side trail on Rolling Ridge Conservancy Land – West Virginia

Everyone finds the Trail

in their own way. Some of us find it in less direct ways. Sometimes, the best part of a hike is that less direct way—taking some time to explore a side trail, or even taking extra time to experience the Trail itself. My path to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) Next Gen Advisory Council was far from direct. I had always respected the Trail...from a distance.

That isn't to say that options never arose. I spent my childhood camping and hiking, but with two Army parents who were more interested in car camping than carrying gear again. When I was a trip leader at Florida Gulf Coast University, Outdoor Pursuits ran a spring break trip to hike the Trail in Georgia. Did I undertake this trip? Hard pass—too much of that "elevation" stuff. My flat land excursions were just as outdoorsy. Yet, here I am, with bits and pieces of ATC memorabilia so that as I settle into this misadventure

called adulthood I maintain a piece of that community everywhere.

The truth is, I met the Trail many times after that initial pass—New Hampshire, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina. A "formal" introduction occurred in 2019. I volunteered at the Flip Flop Festival to stay involved with the national park system—but it turned into that unexpected hike. I found myself wondering why I wasn't part of the A.T. community after only a few hours.

The easy thing would be to continue to pass off that lack of belonging as "because I'm Floridian and we don't do that kind of outdoors." That's far more attractive than "because, despite how much I wish it wasn't true, lack of representation influences me more than I'd like to acknowledge." I didn't see myself in the Trail community—so I chose to insert myself.

That event led to volunteering at the A.T. visitor center as regularly as my bizarre schedule would allow. I'd witnessed a piece of the connection at the Flip Flop Festival in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, which celebrates those who choose a more flexible style of A.T. thru-hike—but my days volunteering in the ATC's Harpers Ferry Visitor Center connected the dots. Every day there were new stories. I encountered so many hikers with 2,190-mile stories about "hiking their own hike" that I started to develop a complex: I would perpetually be a visitor and nothing more without those 2,190 miles.

Sometimes "why" is not the most critical question. I discovered another: "What does Trail engagement look like?" Does your answer involve boots, a beard, a pack, a 2,190-mile determination, or some combination thereof? Mine did, but only briefly. A new answer came during the week I spent on the Mid-Atlantic Trail crew. When a seasoned Trail maintainer was asked if they planned to or had ever thru-hiked, they simply acknowledged that they'd put in their miles differently.

It clicked. I didn't have to grow a beard and dedicate, at minimum, six months of my life to the Trail. I could hike the same mile many times, and that connection would be enough.

The realities of the greater A.T. community were around me every volunteer day: the historians, the encouragers, the maintainers, the connectors, the families. All shared one constant with hikers: they had a connection, and that connection made them part of the community.

Working in experiential education, I'm really big on metaphors. Maybe "hiking your own hike" extends beyond thru versus section. I found another question to ask outside of "why": "How can I possibly hike my own hike if I'm another barrier in my way?"

There are always barriers—some more subtle than others. When I pass others hiking, they don't see this rich entanglement of life experience and the Trail. They don't see time spent maintaining it, physically and intellectually. They don't see an advisory council member. Maybe, just maybe, they see that I too love the Trail. Every time I step out onto the A.T. I have to hold onto hope that this is true, for my safety—physically and mentally.

I already carry a pack weighted by external judgments of people who merely see me as certain checkboxes. A pack that I put on simply by existing in the ways that I do. Why add the unnecessary weight of judging my "hike"?

I'm incredibly thankful for all the wonderful people who have seen beyond where they easily could have stopped. While they welcome me to this incredible community, I still can't help but feel like a stranger sometimes.

In the end, we are all "that" kind of outdoorsy because of a shared appreciation for the Trail. That's why I applied for the Next Gen Council. My question moving forward is how do we, as a community, start to communicate that this appreciation really is enough?

My question for you is what are you actively doing to lighten the load for everyone to hike their own hike—yourself included?





help people start to think about these types of questions before they begin their journeys on the A.T.

What's Your Impact?

GOOD DECISIONS ARE PARAMOUNT TO BEING A CONSIDERATE A.T. VISITOR

BY CHLOË DE CAMARA

WHAT'S

the greatest Leave No Trace faux pas you've ever committed? Mine was my choice to sleep with my food and not carry a trowel during my thru-hike in 2015. For perspective, that's 142 days of going to the bathroom and digging shallow catholes with whatever tool I could find; and sleeping with my food tucked neatly underneath my head the majority of the 141 nights I spent on the Trail.

I often tell people that the worst thing that ever happened to me regarding this faux pas, was that nothing ever happened to me. Meaning, I never had a critter come into my tent and steal my food, and I never had to deal with the unintended, albeit gross, consequences of my shallow catholes. Or at least, I'm unaware of the negative consequences because I had places to be, Katahdin specifically.

In hindsight, I got lucky, and I have since learned that my choices could have led to negative experiences for those who came after me. What really put things into perspective for me was two years after my thru-hike, I got bluffed charged by a bear and had over \$4,000 worth of collective gear destroyed in our group campsite in the Smokies. The scary part was that our group was practicing Leave No Trace to a tee. Yet this bear was acclimated to the point of aggression because he had associated our site with leftover food, or perfectly toasted snacks haphazardly left behind in a firepit from hikers who came before us.

It got me thinking. How many people suffered the negative consequences of my choices during my thru-hike? Unfortunately, I'll never know the answer to that question, but now I can

To practice Leave No Trace while hiking is to practice decision making. While I hear people expressing that they go to the outdoors to "get away from it all," the responsibility of making decisions is not something anyone can escape when they go outdoors. Leave No Trace is a part of every decision we make from the time we decide we want to go outside to the time we get home and call it a day. For example, where am I planning to hike? Is this an overnight hike or a day hike? What will the weather be like? How much food do I need? How will I go to the bathroom along the way?

I start every Leave No Trace training with ground rules ensuring a safe space, then pose the question about our Leave

No Trace faux pas. I believe that this starts off any training with a sense of equilibrium. While I assume that most people have at least heard of Leave No Trace before they set foot on the A.T., I rarely meet people who can recite all seven principles without having attended some formal training, and that's understandable.

That's because no one is born knowing Leave No Trace, especially if your upbringing doesn't involve adequate access to the outdoors. The good news is that every single one of us starts off as novice, and no one has all the right answers (this includes Leave No Trace master educators). Even without formal training, the principles of Leave No Trace are really just common sense.

HERE'S

a challenge for you, without the support of Google, write down each of the seven principles of Leave No Trace. Don't cheat, and don't get too caught up in the wording, rather write out what you think they are. Once you have completed that, take the Leave No Trace online awareness course* and see how your answers compared.

Typically, when I challenge people to do this exercise, they are surprised with how close they got to the official list. Like I said, common sense. My goal is for A.T. visitors to see how the choices we make aren't necessarily right or wrong but fall on a spectrum regarding the amount of positive or negative impact on the Trail.

For example, when we decide to go on a day hike, we can choose whether to bring a trash bag with us while we hike, or not. If we choose to bring a trash bag, then we're able to pack out the trash from our snacks and lunch, which falls on the less impactful side of the spectrum. If we choose to forgo

our trash bag, then we may be tempted to throw a banana peel into the woods inviting critters to nibble on our leftovers, inherently changing the wild behavior of that animal. Thus, the opposite end of the spectrum.

If we make the decision to not read the signs at a park entrance kiosk and allow our dog to be off-leash, then we are actively choosing to not be considerate of other visitors. A campfire that is not tended or extinguished could lead to a wildfire. And improperly stored food can lead to campsite and shelter closures and bears being euthanized.

Our decisions are our choices; some have a greater negative impact than others.

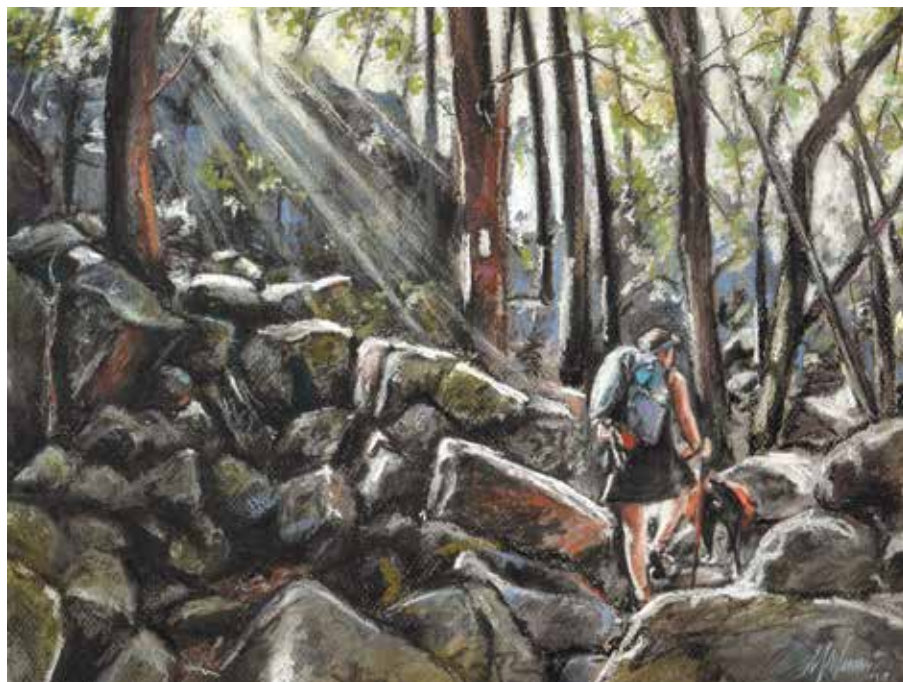


Chloë de Camara is the ATC's Trail education specialist in the southern region

Learn more about Leave No Trace at: Int.org

*To take the Leave No Trace online awareness course visit: Int.org/online-awareness-course

trail connections through art



illustrator / painter

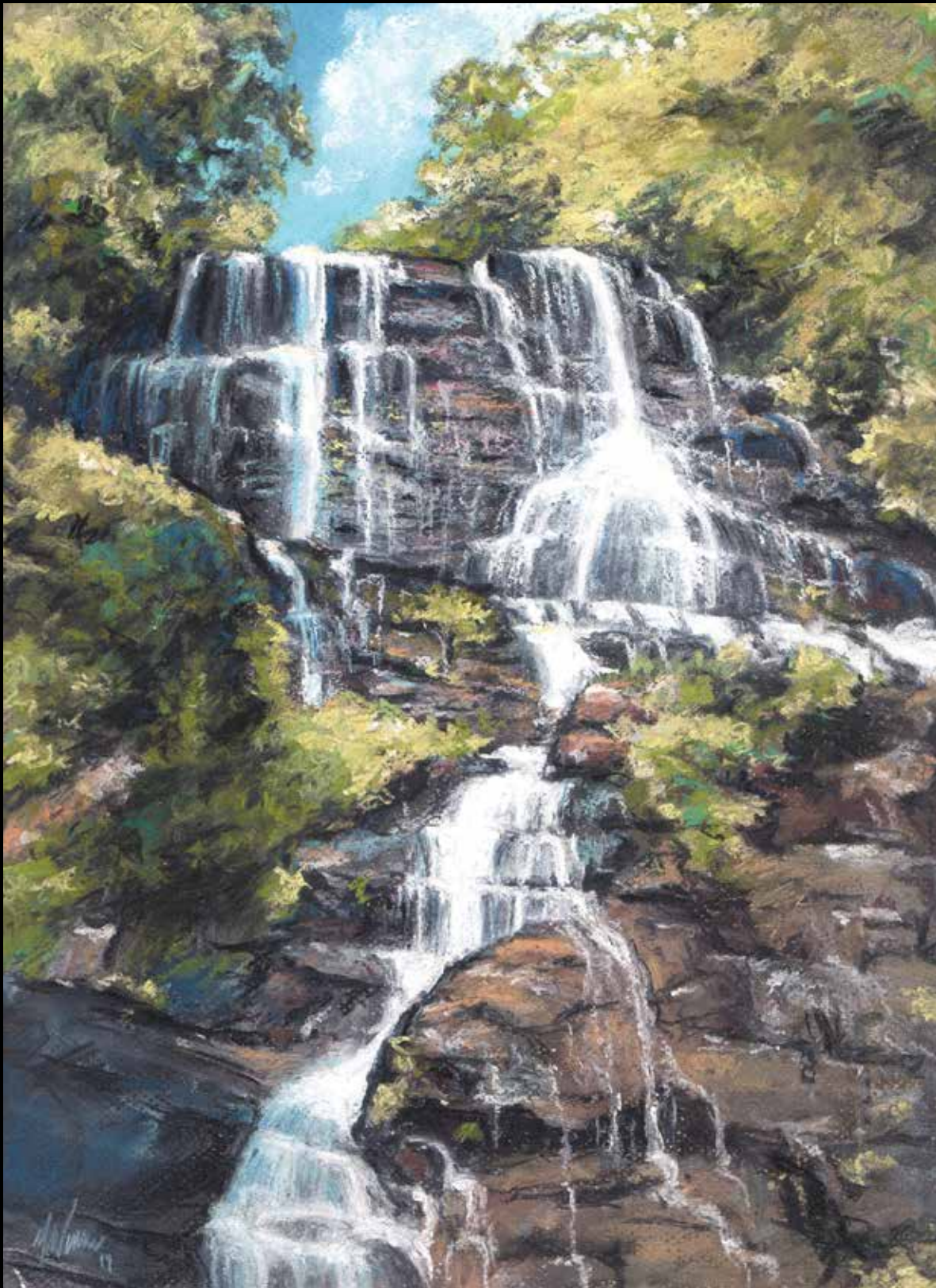
Mike Wurman



Find more of Mike's work at:
[Instagram.com/asketchandaprayer](https://www.instagram.com/asketchandaprayer)

In 2014, self-doubt as an artist caused Mike Wurman to pack up his drawing supplies and call it quits. In May of that same year, he met his destiny on the summit of a mountain named Max Patch. As he took a photograph of a weather-beaten post marking the Appalachian Trail, his desire to draw was immediately restored. Two months later, with two sketchbooks in his pack, he headed north to journey the 2,200-mile pilgrimage himself. *"The A.T. is far more than a dirt path. To me, it's a door that opens directly to the inner core of my creativity. There are more times than I care to admit, that self-doubt as an artist creeps in and overwhelms me to the point that I want to throw in the towel. That's when I grab a sketchbook and head out the door, because I know I will rediscover the true nature of being an artist and accept imperfections as beauty. It doesn't matter whether it's a day hike of a few miles or one that extends several hundred miles, once I'm reunited with that first white blaze, my attitude shifts, and I'm in complete awe of the Trail's wonders, from the smallest salamander to the grandest vistas."* ~ Mike Wurman

Amicalola Falls - Georgia



A historical marker sign along the Trail in Hot Springs, North Carolina is demonstrative of the intersection of history along the Trail





View of the Hot Springs bridge from the A.T. – North Carolina

photographer

Cappy Phalen



Find more of Cappy's work at:
cappyphalen.com

Cappy Phalen has been obsessed with photography ever since she can remember, from the faded tones of her grandmother's Polaroid to the family albums full of moments frozen in time. Whenever she wanted to lift up the curtain of mystery that was her loved ones' lives before her, those photo albums offered her that chance. It was in this way that Cappy first learned to appreciate what an image can mean, and through experiencing that meaning for herself, fell in love with the transformative magic that is photography. Cappy's goals are to create images that are honest and unifying, and to be a compassionate and calm presence while doing so. *"When I set out for what ended up being a three-month adventure hiking an 800-mile section of the Appalachian Trail, I did not consider myself an activist. I disagreed with viewpoints that harmed other people, such as racism, sexism and homophobia, but I still viewed activists through a sort of extremist lens and thought that maybe their methods weren't really necessary for change. This was before I realized that the things I'd come to the Trail to escape were inescapable, a part of the Trail just as much as the city. The Trail made me an activist. The way I move through the world outside the Trail is a direct result of my experiences on it coupled with the time that hiking the Trail granted me to mindfully process those experiences and distill them into art."* ~ Cappy Phalen



The Visitor Experience

NO TWO HIKES ON THE
TRAIL ARE THE SAME

*Text and photos by Sarah
"Harvest" Jones Decker*

DESPITE WALKING THE SAME narrow path through the woods, the A.T. experience is different for every visitor to the Trail. No two hikers have the exact same adventure, even if they hiked the whole Trail side by side and in the other's footsteps. Severe weather, seasonal challenges, physical limitations and an ever-changing cast of characters are all factors for a unique experience on the A.T. We all remember

the special days spent among the white blazes. That perfect sunset. That endless view. We also remember the tough days. The terrible sideways rain storm. The miserable, everything hurts, I can't believe I made it to camp days. It is all part of the greater A.T. experience. The good, the bad, the snoring bear. It's what keeps us coming back.

The first time I visited Rice Field Shelter in Southwest Virginia, it was over 100 degrees in the stagnant July heat. Hiking along the West Virginia border, it was the kind of heat you can see rippling along a still horizon. A heat that hung onto us as we climbed the stile to the shelter. The water source, down a steep side trail, was

bone dry and everyone in our group was without water after the long climb up from Pearisburg. We took a siesta in the shelter for hours waiting for the heat to subside so we could hike into the cooler hours of early evening to the next source.

Just before bedtime on that sweltering night I heard loud, heavy footsteps in the leaves to the left of my tent. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. I sat straight up in my sleeping bag. My first thought was that it was one of our friends who kept hiking and were coming back to mess with us. My second thought was that it was just a deer. The footsteps got louder as they grew closer. Thump. Thump. Thump. Sounded bigger than a deer. No. Definitely a deer, I reassured myself. The steps came closer. Stomp. Stomp. Now, only a few feet from my tent, the footsteps abruptly stopped. Silence. Some sniffing sounds. Then quiet again. A few agonizing seconds later, the footsteps moved on. It shuffled away as I could hear it walk back towards the woods away from our tents. I laid back down.

Then, abruptly, the steps turned around and began to shuffle back through the woods towards my tent. The moon was high and bright that night. As the sounds moved closer, a large shadow started to materialize on my single-wall tent. Silhouetted on the other side of the thin fabric was a large black bear. Its nose rubbing and sniffing along the nylon as it moved along the vestibule side. The bear slowly sniffed its way to the foot of my tent, before letting out a deep sigh and then laying down on top of it. THUD. My backpack crushed under its weight. Thankfully, my food was far away from camp and securely tied up in a tree and not in my pack...which was currently under a bear.

My hiking partner, Scout, at this time was asleep a few short feet away. I was sure she would hear what was going on, or at least be woken up by my

pounding heart beating inside my chest. The slow, repetitive breathing, grunting and, eventually, snoring continued outside for hours. Finally, at 4 a.m. (I know because I was still very much awake), the bear stood straight up. I watched its large shadow stretch and bend and, with one more long, muffled growling yawn it strolled off back down its trail.

Ten years later, I hiked that section in a heavy March snowstorm with my boots sinking in to the shin-deep snow with every step. I arrived to the shelter to find three hikers shivering in their sleeping bags with a ground cover flapping in the wind in a poor

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”

attempt to cover the open side. They were waiting out the storm and predicted they would probably just be staying there for the night. Two very different experiences in the same beautiful place.

As the Trail continues to evolve and more hikers are drawn to its magic, it is more important than ever to be good stewards. To leave the Trail better than we found it for the next visitor. Whether we spend an afternoon, a night or months on the A.T., it is our responsibility to protect and conserve our national treasure for future generations and all visitors.

Early on in my thru-hike in Georgia, I met a man at a trailhead and his kind words stuck with me. “You are only borrowing the Trail for a short time. The animals live here. We are simply passing through,” he said. If the Trail in the age of COVID has showed us anything — it is that we love the Trail. Like, LOVE it. We are passionate about it. For some, it is a way of life. It is a part of us. The memories we make with each step stays with us and we miss it when we are away. It isn’t one visitor’s Trail more than another. It belongs to all of us.



From left: Sarah at Katahdin with hiking partners Melissa "Click" Goodwin and Emma "Sprout" Hileman in 2019 after a two-year section hike; A.T. near Rice Field Shelter in Virginia

Sarah Jones Decker's work can be found at: sarahjonesdecker.com and: rootbottomfarm.com



★ MONSON / MAINE ★

AN EXEMPLARY
VISITOR
DESTINATION

By Wendy Weiger



*Above: Summer sunset over
Monson town cove – By Isaac
Crabtree; Right: Visitors
enjoy a guided hike to Tobey
Falls – By Wendy Weiger*

MONSON (POPULATION 686) IS A small town that plays a large role in the lore and culture of the Appalachian Trail. Located 115 miles south of the Trail's terminus atop Katahdin, the town serves as the gateway to the Hundred Mile Wilderness, the most remote section of the entire A.T. Monson offers northbound thru-hikers the last opportunity to resupply for their final push toward their goal. For southbounders, still developing their Trail legs, Monson serves as an oasis to rest and regroup before hiking on toward the rugged mountains of southern Maine and New Hampshire. In 2012, Monson was officially designated as an Appalachian Trail Community.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) Monson Visitor Center first opened its doors in June 2016. We typically welcome more than 4,000 visitors over the course of each season, which runs from early June through mid-October. A primary reason for the center's founding was to educate northbound thru- and section-hikers about the exceptional natural values of Baxter State Park, home to Katahdin. From 1930 to 1962, Governor Percival Baxter purchased land around the mountain with his own funds, then donated it to the state of Maine with the stipulation that it be kept "forever wild." Human use remains secondary to preservation of the park's wilderness character. In recent years, as growing numbers of northbounders trekked through the park toward Katahdin's iconic summit sign, concerns developed about their cumulative impact. Busy rangers found it challenging to meet the needs of A.T. hikers while fulfilling multiple other duties.

The goal of Monson Visitor Center staff is to ensure that northbounders arriving in Baxter understand the regulations that protect the park's extraordinary qualities. We've even developed a flow chart that explains options for camping and how to obtain a permit to climb Katahdin. In 2019, two thirds of all northbound thru-hikers came to the visitor center for in-person education. Other northbounders connected on the Trail with either our visitor center ridgerunner or a Maine Appalachian Trail Club ridgerunner equipped with our chart. Throughout the season, we

remained in close touch with Baxter staff to ensure that we provided hikers with the most up-to-date information and to give rangers a heads-up regarding projected hiker numbers on busy weekends.

When hikers come into our visitor center, or speak with our ridgerunner on the Trail, it gives us an opportunity to talk with them about skills for safe hiking and Leave No Trace principles. Over the course of each season, we teach hundreds of hikers how to minimize risk while crossing streams. Another issue that comes up frequently is fire safety: we emphasize that fires along the A.T. in Maine are allowed only in official fire rings at designated campsites. As temperatures drop toward the end of the season, hikers may be strongly tempted to build a fire during a break or at an unofficial "stealth" campsite — but illegal fires sometimes burn out of control, endangering the forest, the Trail, other hikers, and the men and women who are called to extinguish the blaze.

Of course, the A.T. is not just for long-distance hikers. Many people — young and old, solo hikers and families, local folks and people from much farther away — come to the visitor center seeking help in choosing day hikes or short section hikes that suit their interests and level of ability. As a registered Maine guide, I especially enjoy introducing local people to the A.T. and other nearby trails through guided hikes, ranging from slow-paced mindful nature walks, to explorations of dramatic waterfalls, to a challenging climb up the flank of a mountain offering sweeping views. I always allow plenty of time to study trees and flowers, listen to birds, and learn more about the ecology of the forest along the way. Participants have ranged in age from 3 to 81. I'm delighted when folks who have joined me on these adventures follow up to let me know that they've returned to spots we visited to share them with friends or family.

Over the past three years, Monson, long known as a Trail town, has been developing a reputation as a center for the

arts as well. The new Monson Arts program offers residencies who bring visual artists and writers from around the country. Nature has inspired artists throughout history, and residents often come to the visitor center for advice about getting onto local trails. One artist who joined a guided hike to Vaughn Falls, on the A.T. north of Monson, was so struck by the interplay of light and water that it inspired her to create an abstract paper sculpture expressing her interpretation of its beauty.

This April, the Maine Community Foundation awarded a \$70,000 grant to Monson as part of its Community Entre-



preneurship Program, intended to foster an innovative environment that attracts creative entrepreneurs to start new businesses in town. The town manager and business owners who wrote the grant application named the visitor center as one of the town's strengths. This is a great affirmation that, through the visitor center, the ATC is giving back to the town that has given so much to the Trail.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, outdoor recreation — with strict attention to social distancing precautions — is an excellent way to relieve stress and support physical and mental well-being. The Monson Visitor Center looks forward to another season of serving hikers and promoting safe and responsible enjoyment of the A.T. and Baxter State Park.

Wendy Weiger is the Monson Appalachian Trail Visitor Center manager.

INDIGENOUS

HABITAT / ECOSYSTEM / CONSERVATION

RUSTY PATCHED BUMBLE BEE

THE FIRST BUMBLE BEE SPECIES LISTED UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

By *Conner McBane*

A HIKER ALONG THE Appalachian Trail could see up to 18 different species of bumble bees from Georgia to Maine, oftentimes seen buzzing from flower to flower in spring through late summer. Bumble bees, although small in size and rarely seen for more than a few seconds, are yet another integral piece to the A.T. experience that often go unnoticed. These keystone species in the genus *Bombus* are some of the most effective pollinators among the entire suite of pollinating insects on the Trail. Hikers who stumble across a ripe blueberry or blackberry along the Trail may have the pollinating bumble bees to thank. Bumble bees also pollinate many important food crops such as tomatoes, peppers, raspberries, blueberries, chives, cucumbers, apples, strawberries, alfalfa, and more. To put these pollination services into perspective, the total economic

output of all pollinators in the U.S. is estimated at three billion dollars.

One species of bumble bee that historically spanned the entire A.T. landscape is the rusty patched bumble bee (RPBB). The RPBB is rather large compared to other species in the genus. The workers and males have a distinct rusty patch (hence the name) on the top of their abdomen. Unfortunately, the beautiful sounds of RPBB's bustling about has been silenced over the last three decades leading to the RPBB being the first bumble bee species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The RPBB's entire population has dropped by 87 percent since the 1990s, with the only current recorded (2007-2020) population near the A.T. occurring within Sky Meadows State Park near Front Royal, Virginia. There are many variables that scientists attribute to this

decline, including an introduction of deadly pathogens from European bees, the increased use of pesticides like neonicotinoids, climate change, small population dynamics, and habitat loss and degradation. Ill-timed or excessive mowing/tilling/grazing, monoculture farms, reforestation, invasion from non-native plants, and development are all forms of habitat loss and degradation. RPBB's are also ground nesters so soil disturbance has the potential of destroying a colony and/or a colony's queen.

Only five counties in the state have current RPBB occurrences, one of which is found along the A.T. in Sky Meadows State Park while all other occurrences are found west of the Trail in Central Virginia. The latest discovery of the RPBB in Bath County, Virginia, along an old Forest Service road pollinating Rhododendron at a higher elevation than is typical, has shed new light and a sense of optimism for this species known habitat requirements. Prior to this discovery, RPBB's were mostly expected to be found in lowland open fields with a wide array of flowering plants. With a decline in healthy early-successional habitats across eastern U.S.

forests, it was thought that the RPBB's fate was rather grim. Now that habitat requirements have potentially expanded, RPBB could be found in many small canopy openings or even along many portions of the A.T. This discovery also provides further recognition that the over 5,000 acres of early-successional habitat that the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) cooperatively manages is increasingly important and has the potential to harbor additional RPBB populations.

This exciting news still comes with the realization that a lot of work must be done. Fortunately, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed and released a draft recovery plan in September of 2019, which land managers along the A.T. will utilize in high priority locations. One way hikers and volunteers can help is by participating in a new citizen science effort led by the Xerces Society called Bumble Bee Watch in which citizens all over the country can survey and inventory bumble bee species with no previous entomological experience required. As the recovery effort for this species continues, ATC staff alongside our partners will continue to search for this



As the recovery effort for this species continues, ATC staff alongside our partners will continue to search for this elusive bumble bee while also providing suitable habitat in high priority areas along the Trail.

*Rusty patched bumble
bee near the A.T.
in Virginia – By
Ellison Orcutt – Field
Zoologist for Virginia
Department of
Conservation and
Recreation Division of
Natural Heritage*

elusive bumble bee while also providing suitable habitat in high priority areas along the Trail.

The RPBB is a seemingly small part of the A.T. visitor experience, but one that

could disappear from the Appalachian Trail completely. This steep decline is not an unfamiliar story for many pollinators across the United States and more specifically for a lot of endemic species across the Appalachian Trail landscape.

But what is the value of these declining species to the Trail experience? The value of the A.T. is most often represented as a human resource for

recreation, recuperation, and in Benton MacKaye's words "a refuge from the scramble of everyday worldly commercial life." What is commonly overlooked is the fact that the health, value, and uniqueness of this refuge is inextricably linked to the health and intrinsic value of endemic species within the Appalachian forest ecosystem. Only through increased conservation and

cooperative management efforts can this refuge continue to be protected and it can start with something as small as the rusty patched bumble bee.

For more information about bumble bees visit:
xerces.org/bumblebees

INSPIRED LEADERSHIP



COLLEEN PETERSON

Having spent over two decades working in the higher education space, Colleen “Teala” Peterson finished that career as vice president for Advancement and transitioned to a new role as CEO of a not for profit business-led organization focused on improving the economic climate in a three-state, five-county rural region. “I’ve always lived in rural, mountainous areas. I grew up in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York and found my way to the mountains of western Maryland 40 years ago,” says Peterson. “For me, the mountains are always calling.” That calling led to an Appalachian Trail thru-hike attempt in 2012, a retirement gift to herself with a desire to “quiet” the noise of a busy professional life and the challenges of being a single mother. “My son, Christian, paused his life at age 33 to join me on this adventure,” she says. “My daughter, Rebecca, and life partner, Mike, added tremendous support. Despite the fact that I left the Trail 1,500 miles in due to Lyme disease, the experience reminded me that nothing great is ever accomplished in a vacuum.” That lesson spurred Peterson to expand the singular way she was supporting the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, through an annual contribution, to serving on the Board of Directors. “I truly think that this aspect of my A.T. journey is the most rewarding and also the most challenging,” she says. “To be one of the legions of volunteers — the undeniable bedrock of a complex cooperative management system upon whose shoulders the Appalachian Trail exists—is a great opportunity and a greater responsibility. Each of us has a role to play in ensuring the Appalachian Trail continues to be a resource, forever and for all.”



ROBERT E. RICH

For Robert Rich, the Appalachian Trail in all its complexity and diverse landscapes is an escape from people who don’t see the world as he sees it and from activities that tend to destroy his peace and quiet. “A few days on the Trail, which I have done four or five times a year over the past 21 years in long weekends, restore my faith in people, my vocation, and my need to be the best person I can be to all those around me,” says Rich.

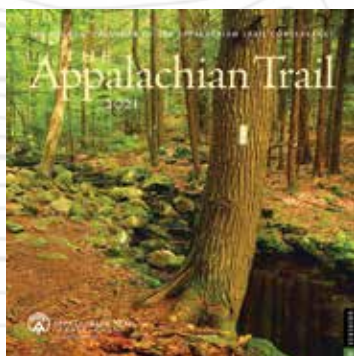
Rich has enjoyed serving on the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s (ATC) President’s Leadership Circle since its inception in 2014. “It is good to work and interact with dedicated and engaged people who understand and appreciate the goal of preserving and conserving the natural world and using it wisely for the enhancement and beautification of life,” he says. “I have found that designating a portion of my retirement benefits for the ATC is a painless and fulfilling way to support the Trail.

Rich is drawn to the ATC as an organization dedicated to the preservation and well-being of the Trail because it is a public-private partnership. “I fear that governmental resources will be more and more called upon to provide basic life-sustaining needs of social welfare, education, healthcare, and environmental protection,” he says. “Life enhancement experiences and the preservation of natural areas must be the responsibility of all of us who truly appreciate the need, desirability, and truth of the Appalachian Trail experience and the benefits of interaction with nature.”

Rich says that his interest in history and environmental concerns teaches him that the inspiration and vision of the Appalachian Trail is an idea that will not die and must be preserved and supported. “The Appalachian Trail Conservancy gives us the opportunity and the incentive to do that through volunteer maintenance organizations, interested and concerned individuals, and generous donors,” he says. “It is the vehicle for carrying out our most inspired goals and desires.”



Take in the Trail Experience...

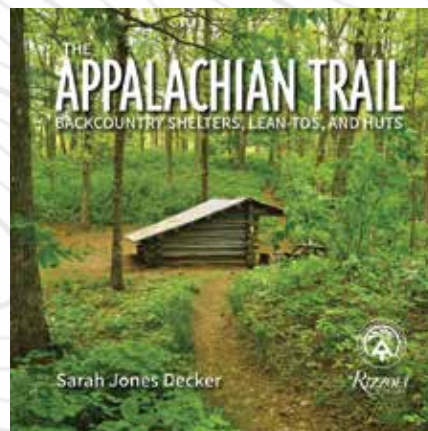


2021 A.T. Calendar

Every official Appalachian Trail Conservancy wall calendar for the last 33 years has featured scenes of or from the Trail by its visitors, all of whom do extraordinary jobs of presenting its assets with love. Captions include interpretive information about points of natural and cultural history protected within the Trail's corridor by the ATC and more than 6,000 volunteer maintainers in local Trail clubs.

For 2021, the cover features the "green tunnel" through the Berkshires of western Massachusetts, as prelude to scenes from seven other states. Co-published by the ATC and Rizzoli International/ Universe Publishing since 2011.

Available to members
for \$13.49



The Appalachian Trail: Backcountry Shelters, Lean-tos, and Huts

Photographer and writer Sarah Jones Decker thru-hiked the A.T. in 2008 and re-hiked it in 2018 and 2019 for this massive documentary project. Working with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy—and in collaboration with the Trail community of hikers, historians, photographers, writers, and clubs—to produce this first-of-its-kind resource, Jones Decker organizes and assembles every single shelter for the first time. The book is packed with Trail and shelter photos, history and information, and detailed maps.

Co-published by the ATC and Rizzoli New York.
Available to members for \$24.75

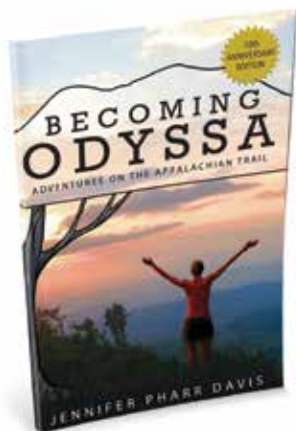
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GRACE AND GRATITUDE

REFLECTIONS ON A TRANSFORMATIVE AND ONGOING A.T. ADVENTURE STORY A DECADE IN THE MAKING.

"In many ways, I have spent the past fifteen years trying to outgrow the naïve character that fills the pages of this book — you know, the one with her unfiltered judgments (and water), inexperienced skill set, and limited world view. But in a way, all the things I would want to change about myself in *Becoming Odyssa* are the same reasons why this book matters. I did change; I have changed. This book matters — it resonates with people — because it isn't really about me. It's about the transformative properties of spending time in nature."

That's how Jennifer Pharr Davis begins the 10th Anniversary Edition of *Becoming Odyssa: Adventures on the Appalachian Trail* — with a new chapter entitled "Gratitude," reflecting on how far the author has come since thru-hiking the A.T. in '05, fresh out of college with next to no experience in the woods, let alone on a 2,000-mile footpath.

Pharr Davis has worn many hats since becoming "Odyssa" (her Trail name in '05). Or maybe more accurately, she's worn many different pairs of walking shoes. She's been an Appalachian Trail Conservancy board member and an ambassador for the American Hiking Society; she set the FKT (fastest known time) on the A.T. in 2011; she started a successful guiding service (Blue Ridge Hiking Company) in her native Western North Carolina, and had a role in this year's IMAX film *Into America's Wild*; but most importantly to her, she's used her platform to encourage women

not just on long distance trails but in the male-dominated outdoor industry as a whole. (If you want to hear her message in a 15-minute nutshell, check out the short film *Positive Forward Motion* on YouTube, which she released this spring.)

Whoever Jennifer Pharr Davis is — whatever shoes she's wearing — can be traced back to that first A.T. thru-hike. The original paperback cover from 2010 had her holding a yellow mop stick, marching determinedly across Max Patch in North Carolina. For the 10th anniversary edition, that image has been replaced by Pharr Davis taking in a rose-colored sunset, standing next to a stylized, hand-drawn tree (complete with white blaze, of course), arms raised in... gratitude? awe? relief? Whatever the meaning of the pose, it's clear this is a woman who is happy to be exactly where she is. And that holds true even today, in the midst of quarantining.

"It's funny, I just wrote that new intro chapter a couple months before COVID hit," says Pharr Davis. "It's not like I would have changed what I wrote. I mean, I might have addressed our current situation. But the lessons I mentioned — the things we take away from the Trail — have only been reinforced by all this. The Trail's always been a crucible for me and has taught me lessons I never would have learned otherwise. That's why I love it so much — why the A.T. will always be my favorite Trail and why I have this intense desire to give back to it and to keep hiking it more and more."

The new intro chapter concludes: "The gift of backpacking is much bigger than learning to navigate the outdoors; it is the realization that you can continue to walk

freely when you return home. My journey doesn't end with a recent college graduate reaching Katahdin, but it starts with a twenty-one-year-old setting out from Georgia. And for that, I will always be grateful."

Becoming Odyssa is the story of a young woman finding herself. But Pharr Davis makes it clear that that journey is far from over. Her first thru-hike just helped her to begin a path she's still on. And for that, we should all be grateful.



Jennifer at Springer Mountain in 2008 – By Maureen Robinson

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View from Riga Shelter in Connecticut – By Sarah Jones Decker

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Black and blue butterfly – A.T. Shenandoah National Park, Virginia – By Raymond Salani III

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Michael Arwe by Barry Glass
Jane & Walt Daniels by Estelle Anderson, Robert Jonas
Kate Hoffmeyer by Janet Corpus, John Hoffmeyer
Terry "Serial" Klott by Lauren Anderson
Glenn Martin by Lois Underwood
Conor McIntyre by Lisa Miller
Tanya Mislowsky by Ronald Mislowsky
Benjamin "Bey" Young Montgomery by Mallory Danley, Andrea Kuhlman
Jason Pitcher by Leah Glickman
Kate R. by Lisa Ardery
Turi Reeves by Clarence Kelly
Marisa Sprowles by Michael Sprowles
Betsy Thompson by Sarah Best
Carol Vassey by Raleigh Durham Chapter ALA
Ryan Vinyard by Michael Martin
Patsy Wooters by Sarah Horn

IN MEMORY OF

Michael by Rita Romayev
Kevin Austin by Mona Czupak
Frank & Hazel Beitler by Don Beitler
Ken Bordwell by Paul Beebe
Lynn "Brad" Bradford by Newcomers & Neighbors of Greater Winston-Salem, Joseph Scango
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Bradley Frieras by DJ Frieras
Jeffrey Gabriel by Andrea Woodbury
Barbara Hudson by Sarah Howell
Robert Johnson by Dexter & Cyndi Taylor

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A.T. near Hanover, New Hampshire – By Raymond Salani III

EARLY IN JUNE, THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY (ATC) shared a letter titled “A Commitment to Justice,” orienting our mission and work to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI). This commitment was based on the understanding that every individual and organization has the responsibility to work toward justice — including the ATC. It is also based on the understanding that this work will be a journey. As stated in the letter by Sandi Marra, ATC’s president and CEO: “We have taken some steps... but a lot of work remains.”

Part of this work belongs to the ATC Board of Directors. As the group that provides oversight and guidance to the organization, the board will undertake the same journey toward justice as ATC staff and will give it our full and purposeful attention.

The ATC began this journey several years ago with an initiative we called “Broader Relevancy.” ATC staff made significant progress in educating themselves, engaging with diverse groups, forming partnerships, forming the Next Generation Advisory Council, and setting the stage for the current attention on JEDI which, as a result, has been a focus in ATC’s strategic planning process over the last year. I am proud of what they have accomplished and view their progress as an aspiration for the ATC Board and broader Appalachian Trail community.

Collectively, the board’s work is based on an acknowledgment that we have much to learn, and we must be willing to be

educated. In light of this, several months ago, the ATC Board initiated its own JEDI journey; we have formed a task force whose purpose is to establish the framework for this work and bring forth meaningful actions based on a thorough and thoughtful dialogue. While this work can be uncomfortable, the greatest and most durable lessons are often uncomfortable.

We also have undertaken a review of our nominating and recruiting practices given the lack of diverse representation on the ATC Board. Our aim is to broaden the board’s profile with thoughtful people whose life experiences offer a breadth of perspectives. Authentic inclusion creates an environment for more meaningful discussions.

We must “walk the talk.” ATC’s Board is committed to this learning, to opening our minds and hearts to listen and, finally, to acting. We do not view this as optional. We must embrace justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in everything we do.

Colin Beasley

Chair / Appalachian Trail Conservancy Board of Directors

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