

TRAIL BLAZER



NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Fall 2024

The Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club is a recreational hiking association of volunteers who preserve and improve the Appalachian Trail as the nation's premier, continuous, long-distance footpath.



Infrastructure Upgrade Construction project nears completion

By Pete Irvine
Kathryn Herndon-Powell, Interim
Regional Director (ATC)
and Ron Bradbury

A new footbridge for hikers is currently nearing completion at the intersection of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and Catawba Valley Drive (Virginia State Route 311). A hiker's pedestrian bridge will replace the dangerous "at-grade" road crossing which AT hikers currently use at the McAfee Knob trailhead parking area. McAfee Knob's widespread and growing reputation as an iconic, must-see point of interest on the AT has resulted in heavy and very dangerous pedestrian/vehicle congestion in this area.

Just north of the new bridge a new section of the Appalachian Trail is being constructed to connect the overpass to the existing trail.



A short, obviated section of the current A.T. will be obliterated and naturalized. This new section of the A.T. is approximately 1/4-mile long and meets the current A.T. on the main ridge of Catawba Mountain. A major stone staircase has been installed to sustainably gain elevation from the end of the new overpass to the trail.

Work on this new section of trail has been done by RATC volunteers and also by a crew from the Appa-

lachian Conservation Corps (ACC). The six-person ACC crew, ages 18-24, worked two 8-day hitches on the 25-step staircase in September. The re-purposed stone steps were purchased from a company in western New York that specializes in recycling and reusing stone and brick materials. These granite stones were originally the curbing of a parking lot at the Albright Knox Art Gallery built in 1905 in Buffalo, New York. Each stone measures approximately 36 inches wide, 18 inches deep, 10 inches high and weighs 600 pounds. The ACC crew moved each stone from the fire road using a highline rigging system in order to construct the 18-step stone staircase.

Additional finish work to connect the new hiker overpass to the A.T. will occur once construction work on the overpass itself is finished by the end of the year. Updates will be posted on the RATC facebook page and website.

With the parking lot closed during construction, the McAfee Knob Shuttle has been a popular service during this time. Ridership reports are frequently double the same period last year. The shuttle will operate through the end of the month of November (last day of service will be Sunday 12/1) and the shuttle will resume in March 2025. So far this year the shuttle has had over 4,000 total reservations while last year at this time that number was just over 1,500.

Continued>>



Photos, top left: Members of the Appalachian Conservation Corps stand behind the highline hoist used to move 600 pound granite steps.

Top right: Just over eight tons of granite has been crafted into this set of stairs. See the Trail Supervisor's report on page 8 for more details.

Right middle: Red flags mark the location of the new section of the trail being constructed to connect the bridge with the existing AT.

Bottom right: The hiker overpass will improve hiker safety by eliminating the dangerous Highway 311 road crossing. The trail crosses the road just this side of where the Jeep is in the photo. When the bridge is complete, hikers will enter and exit the parking lot from the trail, without having to vie with cars going 55MPH.

Below: A view of the new bridge from the west side, looking east toward the parking lot and in the direction of Salem, VA.



Hurricane Helene's Havoc *Regional impacts of hurricane*

The RATC's 120 mile long section of the AT did not bear the full wrath of Helene; nevertheless, local damage, mostly in the form of downed trees, was significant. Initially included in a section of Virginia's AT "closed" by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy due to potential damage, the club's section was soon thereafter "re-opened" as work was underway to clear the many blowdowns across the trail.

Sections of the trail south of Roanoke were more devastated but have gradually been cleared for hiking. As of October 25, 2024 ,

"Officials with the George Washington & Jefferson National Forests have reopened part of the Mount Rogers National Recre-



ation Area. This includes the A.T. from Elk Garden/VA 600 to VA 42 (NOBO miles 495.2 to 558.6)."

"The Forest Service warns that conditions are dynamic and constantly evolving. Visitors may encounter damaged or closed roads. The A.T. in this section has not been fully assessed for damage."

<https://appalachian-trail.org/trail-updates/ga-va-tropical-storm-helene/>

The southern-most section of the AT in Virginia, including the trail through and around the popular town of Damascus, remains closed.

Photo, top: One blowdown of a cluster of toppled trees blocked the way to Dragon's Tooth (Photo by Suzanne Neal)

Middle, left: the main street in Damascus was submerged down which the AT runs was submerged.

Middle, right: A tree strike on the Trimpi Shelter near Mt. Rogers was removed by ATC staff; possible structural damage has not yet been assessed. (Photo by Conner McBane)

(All photos from <https://appalachian-trail.org/> and are used with permission.)

Tim Shively and Suzanne Neal preparing to inoculate tree-of-heaven.



A sick tree-of-heaven is losing its leaves; the fungus is winning!



Inoculating the tree only takes a few drops.



Conner McBane inoculates a tree.



Conservation Supervisor's Report

Controlling Tree-of-heaven with a fungus

by Tom McAvoy
RATC Conservation Supervisor

Despite its inspirational, lofty-sounding name, Tree-of-heaven is an invasive species that displaces native trees; it came to the USA from China over 200 years ago. Tree-of-heaven trees are often found on the AT in disturbed areas.

A fungus, *Verticillium nonalfalfae*, was found in Virginia about 15 years ago to kill Tree-of-heaven under the right conditions. A PhD student from Virginia Tech, Tim Shively has been doing inocula-

tions of this fungus in Virginia. In May he inoculated 20 trees along the AT above Pickle Branch shelter and at the newly acquired land below McAfee Knob.

We visited these sites in July and found about a third of them were losing leaves and a few were dead. The fungus seems to be working! Since Tree-of-heaven is also clonal (meaning it sends up shoots from roots), the fungus can then spread from tree to tree through its roots. Tim will continue to monitor these sites to see if more mortality occurs.

These are the first inoculations of this fungus on the AT, and just one part of the battle against invasive species.

President's Report:

By Homer Witcher

I would like to thank everyone that has volunteered on the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club section in the past year. We had many volunteers assess and clear their sections after the hurricane. We also have many volunteers that contribute in ways other than hard physical labor. We are very grateful that RATC has many dedicated volunteers.

As shuttle drivers, we have been asked by numerous hikers why the Appalachian Trail has not

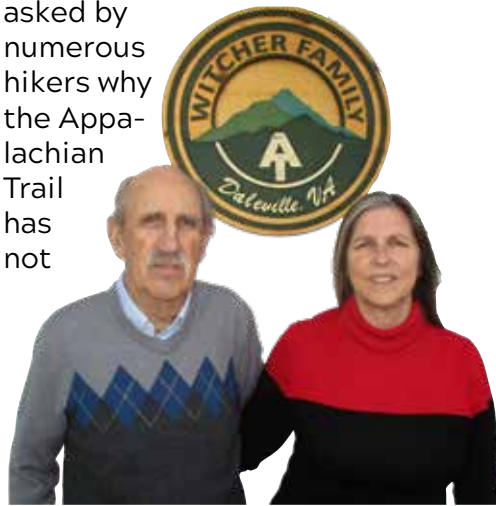
been moved away from the new apartments being constructed in Daleville just south of US 220. The answer is "bureaucracy."

In November 2023, Homer and I went out and flagged a relocation that was only 0.3 miles. The proposed relocation bypassed a very eroded piece of trail and also put the trail near the center of the narrow corridor. In January 2024, Kathryn Herndon-Powell with the local ATC office walked the proposed relocation and submitted a proposal to the National Park Service. She asked it to be fast-tracked due to the ongoing construction of the apartments since the AT is only about 60 feet away from the back of the new apartments.

On the application, she stated that no trees over 5" in diameter would be cut and that there would be minimal disturbance to the soil. We were told that a botanical review would need to take place when everything had greened up.

It is now October and the relocation has been caught up in a bureaucratic nightmare. What we thought would be a quick approval has now taken almost a year. With the hurricane, the resources to grant the approvals are busy with other matters. Meanwhile, the apartments are close to being rented.

Our opinion is that the layers of bureaucracy which we as volunteers have to endure is a deterrent to getting volunteers to step up to leadership positions. We have been with the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club for 40 years and it was not always this way. When we first started volunteering, the folks in the local USFS & NPS offices were much quicker to meet our needs and we did not feel unappreciated. As we prepare to step back from our current leadership roles, we are hopeful that the governmental agencies with which the local clubs must interact will move back toward a simpler, more efficient governance.



Trail Maintaining

Date: September, 2024

Location: Between Rte 611 and 608

Attending: George Dietrich
Linda Weatherly Shroyer, Mickey Pellillo, Carol Scott, Walter Shroyer

by Walter Shroyer

Early in September, five of us worked our section of the Appalachian Trail from Route 611 to Route 608 (near Bland). We did a thorough lopping of the trail corridor, covered up 4 new campsites next to the trail, dispersed one rock fire ring, sawed 8 trees that were across the trail, dragged away another 7 trees that were across

the trail, cleaned out two drainage areas, cleaned out the trash in two firepits, and picked up 18 empty one-gallon water jugs.

We had perfect weather and everyone had a great time. We also reported a broken privy door to the Roanoke AT Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club- RATC.



SAVE THE DATE
Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club
Holiday Potluck
December 14, 2024
 RSVP & Volunteer Opportunities Coming Soon on Meetup



or near the trail it was decided to purchase some. A quick search of the internet found some granite curbing acquired by an outfit that reclaims building materials from demolitions and renovations. This curbing (9" thick x 17" wide) was reclaimed from the Buffalo Albright Knox Art Gallery and transported to the Landscape Store Garden Store on Kessler Mill Rd. From there, RATC members Shannon Palmer and Liz Belcher conducted a relay of dump truck and forklift to transport the 10 skids (17000 lbs.) to the fire road. From the fire road the ACC crew (Jon, Daisy, Grace, Stephen, Sofia and Robinson) will haul them up to the trail location on the ridge and place them on the trail.

The other ongoing project occurs 2 miles north on the fire road and concerns the Black Locust logs delivered back in March and April of this year. These logs will be part of the planned tent pads near the Catawba shelter. The problem was how to move 56 logs weighing between 300-600 lbs. each down a steep bramble filled hillside, across the trail, across a dry creek bed and up the other side hill to the shelter. The solution is to fly them down.

Trail Supervisor's Report

by Jim Webb

Dates - 9/9 - 9/13

Location-Fire Road to McAfee's Knob

Attending - Fred Lashley

ATC - Conner McBane, Suzanne Neal, Kathryn Herndon Powell

ACC Crew - Jon, Daisy, Grace, Stephen, Sofia, Robinson

NPS - Brian Wilson

RATC - Shannon Palmer, Liz Belcher, Mike Vaughn, Pete Irvine, John Hvozdovic, Phil Sudol, Greg Stick, Tom Martin, Ryan Wagoner, Brian Boggs, Carol Rowlett, Diana Christopoulos, Jim Webb

After a lack of work hikes this summer due to the heat, the fall brought cooler temperatures and a variety of projects.

The first is that with the completion of the pedestrian bridge over 311, a connecting trail has been started on the trail north side of the road. The trail on this side will require the use of some steps to get to the top of the ridge. Since a number of suitable rocks for this purpose was not available on



A high line was set up above the road all the way to the other side. To do this the ATC hired a specialist in highlines and trail work, Fredrica (Fred) Lashley. Over the 5 days, logs were brought down the fire road to the high line, hoisted in the air, gravity fed to the opposing hillside and lowered to the ground. These logs will be moved this way again in the future down the hillside to the tent pad location.

Hikemaster Report

by Carol Rowlett, Hikemaster



Hike: Tinker Creek Trail/Carvins Cove
Date: 8/16/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Kathy DeCoster, Clive Hillyard, Lannie Kempnich, Daniel Montague, Debbie Steele

We had a pleasant day for a 5-mile hike from the Tinker Creek trailhead near Exit 146, over the ridge to Carvins Cove and back. A couple of our hikers had unfortunate encounters with bees but still seemed to have a good time overall.



Hike: Mill Mountain
Date: 8/17/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Mary Ellen Warren, Clive Hillyard

We started out to do a 7 mile wander on the Mill Mountain trails, but

the high heat and humidity made us rethink that plan. Instead, after visiting the Star we cut the hike to 5 miles and were well satisfied with our day.

Hike: Punch Bowl to James River
Date 8/17/2024
Participants: Keli Bradbury, Ron Bradbury, and Wyatt

Dropped at the intersection of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the AT, we hiked south and immediately climbed Bluff Mountain. Abundant warning from NOBO hikers as well comments in the Far Out app alerted us to a copperhead possibly inhabiting the base of an old fire watch tower; these warnings proved accurate (photo, lower right). Just south of old watch tower is a marker commemorating Ottie Cline Powell who in 1890 wandered away from his primary school and to the top of the mountain before succumbing to the elements. About seven miles into the hike and shortly before a decisive descent to route 501, east-facing cliffs below the trail open an inspiring vista of the James River and Apple Orchard Mountain. Our escape vehicle was parked at the magnificently-named Foot bridge which commemorates avid hiker



Bill Foot; we arrived at the parking lot simultaneously with dozens of college-aged people packing coolers and music--more likely swimmers than hikers.



Hike: Montvale Park Trails
Date: 8/20/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Debbie Steele, Clive Hillyard, Jane Baugh, Susan Terwillinger, Ed Chiado, Mary Streeper

What an adventure! Montvale Park has a variety of close-packed multi-use trails, mainly designed for mountain biking. We set out to do 6 miles on these trails. However, the trails quickly became a labyrinth, snaking back and forth and back and forth and with an assortment of blazing and signage. Ed kept All Trails pulled up to verify that we were not going in circles on trails we had already traversed.

We wandered back to our parking lot after 5 miles and were all relieved that we were not lost in the



woods in a Twilight Zone episode. LOL. Other than that, we had a great time.

During our wandering, we passed by a field with a large flock of wild turkeys.

Hike: Roanoke River Greenway - Bridge Street
Date: 8/19/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Kathryn Hopkins, Dee Case, Pam Reed, Debbie Steele, Ruth Conkling, Laurie Spangler, Janice Metzger

We were excited to welcome back a couple of people who had been off the trail for a few months due to injuries! Together, we did a little over 6 miles along the Roanoke River Greenway, from Bridge Street to Salem and back. We also had the pleasure of seeing a plump and healthy-looking feral cat from the colony under one of the bridges along the way - these cats had also been least in sight for a few months. The day was warming up substantially by the time we got back to our cars, but the greenway was mostly shaded and we all survived.



Hike: Otter Lake
Date: 8/26/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Nancy Reid, Lannie Kempnich, Debbie Steele, Madeleine Taylor, Laurie Wyatt, Alison Robinson, Diane Conner

A hot day was the perfect time for an expedition of about 6.5 miles along Otter Creek. After carpooling up to the James River Visitor Center, we hiked along Otter Creek up toward the old Otter Creek Campground, now sadly permanently closed.

We crossed the creek several times on excellent stepping stones and went through a couple of echoing, spooky underpasses. Rather than go up to the picnic area of the abandoned campground, we decided to stop on some rocks in the creek and cool our feet in the water.

On the way back, we walked around Otter Lake and enjoyed the cool air at the little dam.

Hike: Roanoke Mountain
Date: 08/27/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Laurie Spangler, Clive Hillyard, Ed Chiado

Our Roanoke Mountain hike turned out to be on one of the hottest days of the summer. Because of this, we shifted our route somewhat so that all of the uphill was at the beginning, and did the hike completely on asphalt rather than having some of it on up-and-down rough trail. This revised route cut our hike from 5 miles to about 4.5 miles, but meant that we had a lovely, deeply shaded downhill as the morning warmed up. We really didn't suffer from the heat at all.

Along the way up the mountain, we noticed a couple of huge caterpil-

lars, which Laurie Spangler later identified for us as hickory horned devils, which turn into regal moths.



Hike: Catawba Greenway Trail/ Sawtooth Ridge Loop
Date: 09/04/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Dave Grimm, Ed Chiado, Laurie Wyatt, Rich Coleman, Janet Rankin, Maggie Riley, Jane Baugh

We took a 5-mile hike up from the Catawba Sustainability Center to the AT, down the steps to the Route 311 crossing, up to the views at Sawtooth Ridge, and then down the greenway trail back to the Sustainability Center.

The relatively short hike suited our need to get out and do SOMETHING even in the heat! We paused at the 311 crossing to admire the progress being made on the pedestrian bridge construction. The trail for the initial climb up from the Sustainability Center was in generally good shape. The greenway trail back down from Sawtooth definitely gets less traffic, but the overgrowth didn't slow up down too badly.

Hike: Reservoir Hollow
Date: 9/13/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Madeleine Taylor, Kris Peckman, Bob Peckman, Lannie Kempnich, Clive Hillyard

And sometimes an adventure goes awry and a 6.5 mile hike turns into a 9.5 mile hike. "There's no way to get lost - the trail goes straight to the view point", I said repeatedly. Famous last words. There was a turn that I had not noticed the only other time I had done the trail, and we did indeed go the wrong way. Sigh.

Clive tried to tell me that we were going the wrong way, but the group had spread out and I didn't understand what his texts meant until we all met up again and he told me in person. Oops. I will be apologizing to everyone on that trek for a while yet.



Hike: Tinker Cliffs
Date: 10/07/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), John Grant, Cathy Li, Rich Coleman, Madeleine Taylor

How can you go wrong with a hike to Tinker Cliffs on a fall day? We had an excellent time, and were pleasantly surprised to find the trail in great condition so soon after the remnants of Hurricane Helene blew through.

The day was warm enough that we didn't even have to desperately throw on extra layers once we reached the top. On the way back down, we met a large black snake right beside the trail. We told him what a fine snake he was as we slowly edged past him, and parted ways peacefully.



Hike: Carvins Cove - Gauntlet/ Trough Loop
Date: 10/14/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Laurie Wyatt, Jane Baugh

We had our first day of actual fall weather for this 6.5 mile hike at Carvins Cove. Although we still were sweating on the climb up Gauntlet trail, the wind was too

chilly for us to enjoy the bench at the top of the trail for more than a couple of minutes. Once we started moving again, we had a beautiful walk along the ridgeline and then down the mountain on Trough.

It was one of those days where you almost hate for the hike to end.



Hike: Hay Rock Views
Date: 09/12/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Jane Baugh, Laurie Wyatt, Carl Mitchell, Clive Hillyard, Madeleine Taylor

We used this 6.5 mile hike to go up to all the best views along the way to Hay Rock, but did not make the

full trip to Hay Rock itself. The hike had been set up a couple of weeks earlier when the heat made long hikes somewhat miserable as the day progressed. However, temperatures had come down somewhat by the time we actually made this trek, and we had a lovely day.

RATC @ GoFest

A three-day celebration of everything outdoors

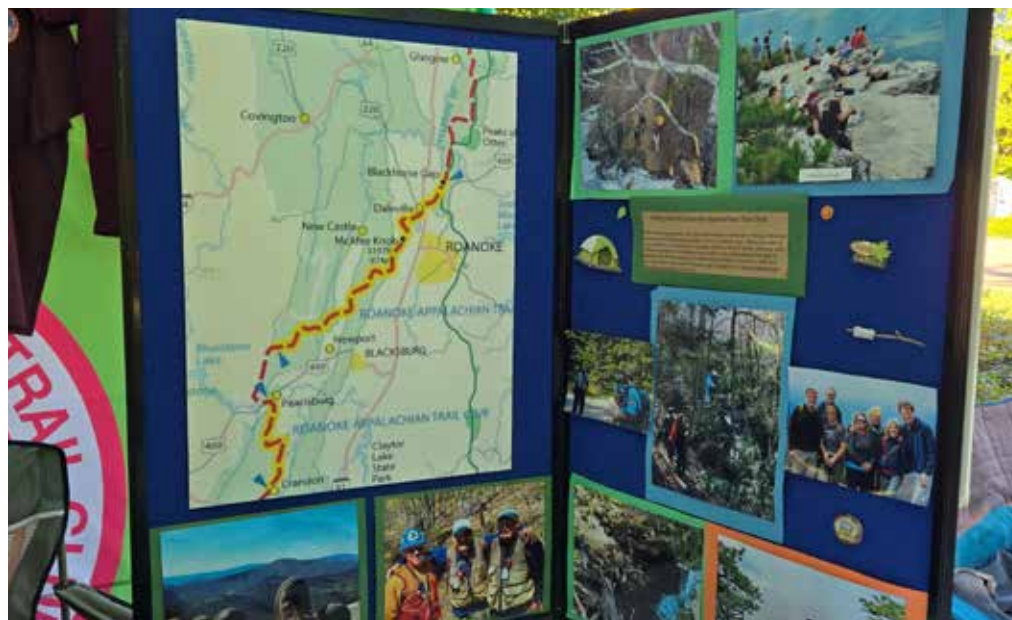
by Cathy Butler, GoFest Coordinator

The Go Outside Festival (GoFest) is an annual three-day celebration of everything outdoors in Virginia's Blue Ridge. For three days in October (18th-20th), streets are closed down and parks and open spaces are purposed to accommodate an exciting mix of vendors, demonstrations, events, concerts, food, and competitions. RATC participated and shared much information about our club with festival attendees.

At the RATC booth we had hand-outs on our club, the Triple Crown hikes, AT maps, McAfee shuttle information, etc. Several club members were available throughout the festival to answer questions about our recreational hikes, work hikes, McAfee task force, and even our monthly happy hour. We had candy for kids (and adults) in a bear canister--provided they could figure out how to open the canister! This provided great entertainment for everyone around.

We look forward to this opportunity each year to meet with people in the community who share an interest in the outdoors. Our club grew by 10 new individual members, 10 new family memberships, and 9 renewals.

A big thank you to the many RATC volunteers, the GoFest organizers, and everyone that attended this awesome event.



Sign-Making CNC System

By Linda and Kelly Mulheren

Thanks to a generous grant from the AT license plate fund, the RATC sign-making CNC (Computer Numerical Control) system is in full operation! After a number of field trips, lots of reading, and more than a few YouTube sessions we are ready to hit the ground running. A few new signs have been completed and we are pleased with the results.

Although the learning curve has been some work, we now have a fantastic tool for creating top-notch signage. A huge advantage of the CNC router is the ability to add art or the traditional National Forest script font, as well signs

with a lot of text. In the past such signs had to be ordered and were expensive.

We are in the process of inventorying all existing RATC signs and keeping a database of GPS locations and content. We are also working with US Forest Service and the ATC in setting consistent styles for use in our region and elsewhere.

If you need a sign that should be repaired, updated, or added please contact us at signs@RATC.org.



Boundary Stewardship Looking for a new outdoor adventure?

By Linda Mulheren

Have you ever heard the term “boundary monitoring”, and not really known what it was about? You are most likely familiar with trail work, but have you thought about what lies beyond the trail? Well it’s the land that surrounds the trail that is necessary to maintain a wilderness experience.

According to Ed Garvey, legendary thru hiker, author and trail advocate, “This piece of land that we called the Appalachian Trail is NOT a mere footpath. It is a multi-state national park, a multi-state nation-

al forest, a multi-state national recreation area, or a little bit of all three.” And, just as you have a boundary of your home property, the Appalachian Trail lands have a boundary as well.

“Whereas the trail maintainers are only responsible for blazing and clearing a 4-foot-wide swath, the corridor monitors must tend to the other 996 feet in the 1000-foot corridor. Corridor monitors have no trail to follow, but must use a map and compass to go from one boundary marker to another, checking for timber theft, trash dumping, and even the presence of squatters along the way,” wrote Mr. Garvey.

My husband Kelly and I decided to



volunteer on a boundary monitoring work trip in 2022. The ATC had stepped in to help out local clubs with the task of boundary monitoring, which had been somewhat neglected. We found an adventure like no other. When I try to describe the work to others it usually begins with “like an adult scavenger hunt” and includes climbing straight up the sides of a mountain. Think orienteering combined with a mud run, but in the winter. I’m afraid that I sometimes scare people off, so then I mention I’m no young’un nor marathoner. Anyone who can bushwhack through the woods is a candidate in good standing. We paint, hang signs, chop back overgrowth, search for

monuments, and record encroachments. We have a lot of work southwest of Blacksburg this year, as well as some in the Catawba area.

Are you up for an off-the-beaten path adventure? We hope so. We can sure use some dedicated volunteers. Our work trips run

November through March and are posted on the RATC Meetup site, so keep a lookout there. Feel free to text or call 757/705-1335 if you are not able to use Meetup.

For more information about this work, check out the excellent “A.T. Corridor Stewardship Field Book” at <https://appalachiantrail.org/>

[wp-content/uploads/2020/04/a-t-corridor-stewardship-field-book.pdf](https://appalachiantrail.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/a-t-corridor-stewardship-field-book.pdf)

Ed Garvey’s history of the land acquisition and management is [The New Appalachian \(Appalachian Hiker III\)](#) by Edward B. Garvey

RATC TRAIL MAINTAINERS

1. VA 611 to Va 608 (4.3 miles): Steve Yonts (sawyer) Walter Shroyer Mickey Pellillo : **2. VA 608 to VA 606 (5.3 miles):** Matthew Barnett Todd Coake : **3. VA 606 to Ribble Trail (5.9 miles):** Mike & Jennie Reilly Denise & Bill Hendon Stephanie & Jack Buffet : **4. Ribble Trail to Big Horse Gap (7.7 miles):** Bill & Leslie Kay Floyd : **5. Big Horse Gap to Doc’s Knob (3.8 miles):** Craig McNally Tim Shively **6. Doc’s Knob Shelter to Power Line (3.8 miles):** Matt Gentry Tim Ligon (sawyer) : **7. Power Line to Wilburn Overlook (2.4 miles):** Greg Still : **8. Wilburn Overlook to Cross Road (2.2 miles):** Julie Petruska Lydia Wilkinson Amber Miller Blake Adkins Sue Terwilliger : **9. Cross Road to US 460 (1.7 miles):** Blake Adkins Lydia Wilkinson Amber Miller : **10. Pine Swamp to Bailey Gap (3.9 miles):** Dave & Lori Jones (sawyer) : **11. Bailey Gap to VA 613 (3.7 miles):** Jim Chambers Jeremy Spicer : **12. VA 613 to War Spur Trail (3.1 miles):** Eric Giebelstein (sawyer) Greg Hardwicke Fred Meyer Lisa Garcia Kurt Stephenson Ryan Wagoner : **13. War Spur Trail to Johns Creek Rd (2.8 miles):** Eric Giebelstein (sawyer) Kelly and Linda Mulheren Molly and Fred Jones : **14. Johns Creek Road to Rocky Gap (2.1 miles):** Terry Shipley : **15. Rocky Gap to field N of route 42 (4.4 miles):** Brian Kelley (sawyer) : **16. Field N of route 42 to Route 630 (1.9 miles):** Not Assigned : **17. VA 630 to Sarver Shelter Trail (3.3 miles):** Chase Davidson Nancy Reid Kathryn Herndon-Powell Susan Herndon-Powell (sawyer) Lowell Moore Paul Goodwin David Anderson Amanda Yoder : **18. Sarver Shelter Trail to N. end of Ridgeline (3.4 miles):** Chase Davidson (sawyer) Nancy Reid Kathryn Herndon-Powell Susan Herndon-Powell (sawyer) Lowell Moore Paul Goodwin Dave Grimm : **19. N. end of Ridgeline to VA 621 (4.1 miles):** Eric Hanson Molly Brunner Josie Demarce : **20. Va 621 to Audie Murphy Monument (3.7 miles):** Erik Leedom : **21. Audie Murphy Monument to VA 620 (3.8 miles):** Lee Hipp Will Mackinnon **22. VA 620 to Ridgeline (2.4 miles):** Josh Wolsey Jan-Erik Zeller (section sawyer) : **23. Ridgeline to Dragons Tooth (3.4 miles):** Tom McAvoy Tom Ewing John Grant Jan-Erik Zeller (section sawyer) : **24. Dragons Tooth to VA 624 (2.5 miles):** David Poteet : **25. VA 624 to VA 785 Tree line (3.2 miles):** Bo Carneal Becky Carneal **26. VA785 Tree line to VA 311 (2.8 miles):** Roger Holnback (sawyer) Brad Clay Bo Carneal Becky Carneal : **27. VA 311 to Fire Road (2.3 miles):** Bill Neilan (sawyer) Jim Webb (sawyer) Terry Shipley Dee Case Joey Johnson Greg Stick Warren Elsea : **28. Fire Road to Campbell Shelter (2.2 miles):** Bill Neilan (sawyer) Jim Webb (sawyer) Terry Shipley Warren Elsea Joey Johnson Greg Stick : **29. Campbell Shelter to Brickeys Gap (3.1 miles):** Bill Gunn Mark Farrell (sawyer) Brian Buccola : **30. Brickeys Gap to Ditch Trail (3.7 miles):** Kevin Witcher : **31. Ditch Trail to Angels Gap (3.5 miles):** Bryon Lane Mike Phillips : **32. Angels Gap to Power Line (3.1 miles):** Mike Vaughn Jeff Armstrong : **33. Power Line to US 220 (2.1 miles):** Rob and Cathy Butler Nancy and Leonard Galvan Robert & Jeanie Bomber : **34. US 220 to VA 652 (2.1 miles):** Homer & Therese Witcher : **35. Va 652 to Fullhardt Knob Shelter (3.1 miles):** Dave Horst (sawyer) : **36. Fullhardt Shelter to Salt Pond Road (2.8 miles):** Not Assigned : **37. Salt Pond Road To Wilson Creek (2.9 miles):** Jim Mesler Max McCrary : **38. Wilson Creek to Black Horse Gap (2.9 miles):** Theresa McDaniel Ken Bunning : **39. Andy Layne Trail (3.1 miles):** Daniel Howell Randy Fuller **40. Dragon’s Tooth Trail (1.7 miles):** Donna Logan : **41. War Spur Trail (1.1 miles):** Anja Whittington : **42. North Mtn Trail, Route 311 to Grouse Tr. (4.7 miles):** Jeff Hoepfner Jonathan McGlumphy **43. North Mtn Trail, Grouse Tr. To CV Trail (4.9 miles):** Hugh Craft Joe Brabant **44. Catawba Valley Trail (CVT): (2.5 miles):** Jonathan Harris Michelle Cook Sean Cook **45. Ribble Trail (1.9 miles):** Bill & Leslie Kay Floyd **46. Boy Scout Trail (0.5 miles):** Donna Logan **47. John’s Creek Mountain Trail (2.9 miles):** Emily Piontek Caleb O’Brien **48. McAfee Fire Road, Rte 311 to AT crossing (2.5 miles):** Pete Irvine Emma Land Caelyn Andrews Gary Larson Ashley Curtice

Mountain Valley Pipeline and the Appalachian Trail

by Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist

Officially, the Mountain Valley Pipeline is completed and in service. Here is a quick look at...

- The project and its impacts on the AT
- What we learned from the experience
- What RATC did to help gain \$19.5 million in voluntary stewardship funding from MVP
- What we couldn't do
- The results and future steps

The project and its impacts on the AT

MVP is a 303-mile, 42-inch diameter pipeline in West Virginia and Virginia with filled with highly explosive natural gas under more than 1,440 pounds per square inch of pressure. The majority owner of the pipeline is EQT, a fracking company based in Pittsburgh.

The pipeline is bored under the AT on Peters Mountain on the Virginia/West Virginia border and is visible off and on from the AT for almost 100 miles, especially from Angel's Rest, Peter's Mountain and Kelly Knob. [It traverses steep, landslide-prone slopes](#) and valleys full of karst, caves and underground streams, all within an active seismic zone; so there is [significant risk](#) of a pipeline rupture that could start a large wildfire in dry, windy conditions.

What we learned from the experience

None of us had any experience with large interstate gas pipelines

before MVP. RATC leaders like Bill Gordge had led a successful fight to prevent AEP from constructing a large electric transmission line on Peters Mountain in the 1990s and early 2000s, but that had involved permits from state officials and Jefferson National Forest.

MVP's permitting is largely under the control of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which has a much more chaotic and permissive process than any other federal agency we have encountered.

What RATC did

In 2015 RATC President Roger Holnback and I established a Task Force on Pipelines, and I became the lead volunteer on the MVP. We followed the ATC's lead, working closely with Andrew Downs and Laura Belleville, and they had a [new policy on pipelines](#).

In April 2016 our volunteers made a site visit to Peters Mountain along with staff from the ATC, USFS and MVP. We learned that MVP was careless about facts:

- I asked the MVP construction supervisor (wearing a red shirt in photo) to show me the AT on



his map so that I could orient my AT map. He gave me a cold stare and walked away. I don't think his map included the AT. MVP proposed to bore underneath the AT, with the two bore pits each 100 feet from the Trail. They stated that the pits

would not be visible from the AT. USFS staff brought a long tape measure (see photo) to the site visit, and it was obvious that MVP's statement was grossly incorrect.

In an early filing to FERC, MVP identified the AT as a dirt road owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

After our report on the site visit, the [RATC board unanimously voted to oppose the MVP](#). The USFS, ATC and RATC also told FERC that the proposed crossing on Peters Mountain was too close to the AT, and it was moved back to 300+ feet on each side.



We began building the case that MVP would have significant visual impacts on the Trail. I took a photo from Angel's Rest showing that the MVP route on Peter's Mountain (red arrow in photo) would be visible from that location, an opinion that was verified by USFS staff during the site visit. We took a leadership role working with local landscape architects at Hill Studios to develop visual simulations of MVP's negative impacts, RATC and the ATC identified [over a dozen locations on the AT](#) that would likely suffer negative impacts This would help lay the groundwork for later concessions by MVP.

In addition, RATC worked very closely with local community members (many of them club members) and staff from the ATC, NPS, FERC, MVP and numerous environmental organizations to explore effective strategies. We filed over a dozen extensive comments to FERC, spoke at coalition meetings and rallies, and visited elected officials from both parties at the local, state and national levels.

We appeared with landowners in an excellent [2017 ATC video](#) - "Mountain Valley Pipeline: A Threat to Our Trail, Our Water, and Our Jobs."

What RATC we couldn't do

Although both RATC and ATC offered to be party to lawsuits, environmental lawyers told us that visual impacts to the AT and other issues we had raised such as [steep slopes in an active seismic zone](#) were not strong enough to stop the pipeline.

The US Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals did [withdraw MVP permits](#) received from the USFS, US Fish & Wildlife Service and US Army Corps of Engineers due to agency [violations of their own environmental regulations in 2018](#),

stopping construction off and on for several years. The project appeared ready to collapse under the weight of its own debt until Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia successfully attached a [rider to a funding bill](#) that largely exempted MVP from federal laws and regulations in 2022.

Results and future steps

We could not stop the project through lawsuits, but we did not walk away.

First, MVP agreed to soften the visual impacts to the AT through a five-year restoration effort that includes having a smaller final cleared area, undulating rather than straight lines on the edges and other special efforts. RATC and ATC will be involved with USFS and MVP in this effort.

Second, after much negotiation MVP agreed to provide [\\$19.5 million voluntary stewardship funding](#) to the ATC to help local communities and purchase lands in the AT viewshed. RATC was kept informed of the discussions. Details of actions to date can be found [here](#). Less than half the funds have been spent, but the ATC has already:

- Acquired almost 4,000 acres of land, including 15 new parcels in the viewsheds of McAfee Knob, Dragon's Tooth, Tinker Cliffs, North Mountain and Brush Mountain.
- Awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars in Community Impact Grants to groups in Monroe County, WV and Giles County VA.

This certainly does not make up for the presence of a dirty, dangerous, unnecessary project - but it is better than walking away with nothing.

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**Roanoke Appalachian
Trail Club Application
New and Renewal**

IF ACCEPTED FOR MEMBERSHIP, I AGREE TO:

1. Support the objectives of the RATC
2. Abide by the rules of the national and state parks and forests
3. Respect the interests of the owner when on private property
4. Keep trails and woodlands free of litter, and
5. Abide by the instructions of the leader on group hikes and trips

Name(s)	New Member Packet Fee:	\$5	_____
Address	Individual # of years	x \$15	_____
	Family # of years	x \$20	_____
City	State	Zip	Individual life membership x \$250
			Family life membership x \$300
Phone		Donation	\$ _____
Email		Total Amount Enclosed	\$ _____

Dues are payable in January of each year. Make checks to "RATC" or use PayPal at ratc.org

Please send dues and any questions about money or membership to:
Treasurer, PO Box 12282, Roanoke, VA 24024

RATC is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Membership dues are tax-deductible.

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