

TRAIL BLAZER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Spring 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.



Suzanne Neal, ATC's Catawba Ridgerunner, instructs about garlic mustard identification.



The kids had a great time!

Place-based Education

Kids and conservation

by Tom McAvoy
RATC Conservation Supervisor
Conservation Supervisor's Report

On April 4, 2024, about 45 6th graders from Central Academy Middle School in Fincastle, VA came out to the Andy Layne trail for an environmental field trip along Catawba Creek. Suzanne Neal with the ATC led the invasive species group with Brian Wilson of the National Park and Tom McAvoy assisting. Suzanne talked with the students about the negative impacts of non-native invasive species, especially garlic mustard.

Garlic mustard is a damaging invasive species from Europe, displacing our native plant species. Each of four groups then collected as much garlic mustard as they could, to see which group could collect the most. They collected a total of 323 pounds! The first group pulled up the most with 110 pounds and the winners each got an AT sticker.

There were also classes on stream macro-invertebrates led by the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, Stream Chemistry by Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District, and soils by Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA). Then pizza (with no garlic) was ordered for lunch.

Troutville Trail Days

Troutville Trail Days will be held at Troutville Park on June 1st from 10 AM to 4 PM. RATC and ATC will have booths. Kathryn Herndon Powell will be leading an edible plants hike at 10:30 AM. RATC will lead a short hike over Humbert Hill at 1 PM.

The fair will feature music, local vendors, activities, and food.

Please come support the town of Troutville and the hiker community!
(Troutville Park is an alcohol and pet free park)

President's Report:

By Homer Witcher

Just over a year ago I took the position of president of the RATC. Prior to assuming this role, Homer and I had decided to step back from our leadership role on the board after having served as Shelter Supervisors since 2012. When no one stepped forward to take the positions of president and vice-president, Homer suggested that I take the role of president and he would serve as vice president.

This first year has been a learning experience, but thanks to Bill Neilan's support and advice, I have survived. I was blessed to have outstanding board members who knew what to do and were always willing to take on any tasks that I asked them to do.

My main goals this past year were to bring back our three annual social events and to comprehensively recognize RATC's many volunteers.

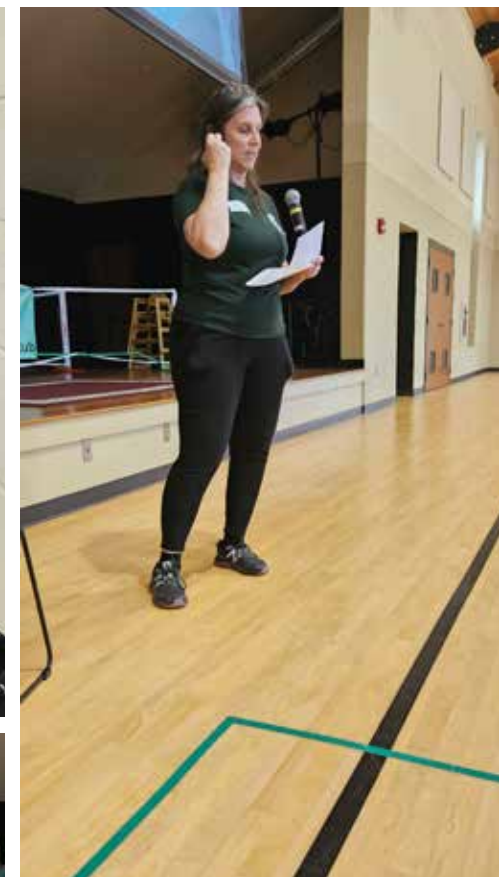
At the annual meeting, we recognized the hike leaders who had led over 4 hikes and maintainers that had contributed over 72 hours.

We gave out 9 ATC awards for 25 and 50 years of service. We also gave out ATC awards for cumulative hours of service to over 60 people.

The National Park Service provides a Volunteer Recreation pass for volunteers who have accumulated 250 hours of service. The "America the Beautiful" Inter-agency Volunteer Pass provides fee-free access to federal lands for 12 months after issuance. As a club, RATC has not kept a good record of cumulative hours, so if you feel that you did not receive an award that you should have, please let me know. If you qualify and would like to receive this pass, please send an email to president@ratc.org.

Homer and I plan on serving one more year on the board and hope that we can find someone willing to fill our positions next March. Our goal for this year is to get more young people involved in RATC.

To everyone who has contributed to RATC in various ways, a special thanks to you.



**-MARK YOUR CALENDARS-
RATC Annual Cornboil
June 29, 2024 at 5:30pm**

This year will be at a new location: Whispering Pines Shelter - 3551 Absalom Smith Rd, Salem, VA

Bring your favorite potluck dish to share and come enjoy an evening with fellow lovers of the AT and the Konnarock trail crew.

Volunteer opportunities along with a chance to RSVP will be added to the Meetup closer to the date.



Member Notes

by Ron Bradbury

Fifty-eight RATC club members convened in a church gym in Daleville for the club's Annual Meeting, an event which combines club business and volunteer recognition with the best of Southern pot-luck gathering traditions.

In what may be a nod to a different era, the RATC conducts business under the purview of formal by-laws. In addition to the monthly board meetings, the bylaws mandate an annual gathering in March, and the primary business conduct-

ed each March is the installation of the new board (listed on page 21, below). Most of the "exiting" board members had agreed to serve additional terms, but John Kelly was formally installed as the new Membership Coordinator during this meeting.

Additional business conducted was the recognizing of the many volunteers who support the AT in various avenues. A variety of awards, mostly in the form of RATC swag, accompany the various hourly levels of service performed over the previous twelve months. Vol-

unteers come from all walks of life but share an interest in hiking and in the perpetuation of the Appalachian Trail.

A final highlight of the evening was a talk by RATC Archivist Diana Christopolus on the guardians of McAfee Knob. Diving into history, Diana provided a fascinating glimpse into the people for whom McAfee meant more than an iconic hiking destination. In the not-too-distant past, McAfee knob and the adjacent area was dotted with houses and properties that many local families called "home."

Welcome New Members!

by John Kelly

We are going to renew the tradition of welcoming new members into the RATC in the Blazer. We are so happy to have you part of our club and look forward to seeing you on one of our hikes, maintaining the trail or at a social gathering. Please join us in welcoming new members who have joined since January 1st, 2024!

Family Members

Denise Alexander & Landon Arrington

David Groce & Family

Daniel Lucas & Family

Ulrike McLellan & Family

Individual Members

Christy Arthur

Daniel Burnette

Mary Frye

Carolyn Gould

Erik Leedom

Christopher Marshburn

Jacqueline Mayrosh

David Schoendorfer

Kailee Sesler

Jeff Stewart

Lauren Stroud

Eve Taglang

Downs addresses Kiwanis Club of Roanoke

by Ron Bradbury

Andrew Downs, Senior Regional Director—South of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) was invited to speak at Roanoke's Kiwanis Club on April 17 during the Kiwanis regular lunch meeting.

Comprised of a cross section of local citizenry, the Kiwanis Club is a civic organization through which civic-minded volunteers pursue various avenues to enhance their local communities.



Board Member Bio

While I was born on the East Coast, I grew up camping, hiking and kayaking in the glacial foothills of Northern Illinois and Southwest Wisconsin. Pursuing a job I moved to Roanoke in 2020 with my wife Wendi and golden retriever Molly. We quickly discovered the Daleville section of the AT and a few months later became lifetime members of the RATC.

I am currently pursuing the 113-Mile Club and recently snuck away

from an Ireland bus tour to walk a few miles on the International Appalachian Trail near Donegal. I have helped out with our Hiker Happy Hours, managed our Meetup group and other informal responsibilities over the past few years.

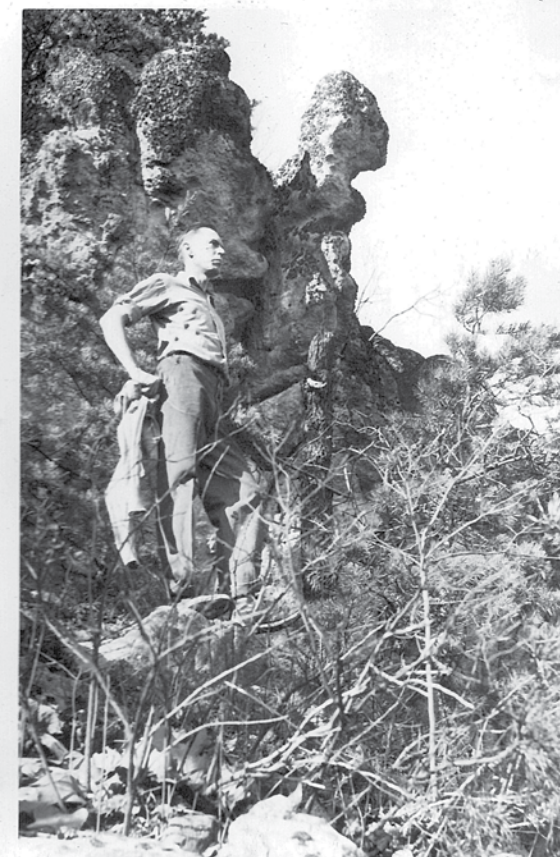
I am honored to be asked to serve on the board as Membership Coordinator and look forward to working with and getting to know everyone better at our hikes and events!

updates on the bridge project to carry the AT across Route 311.

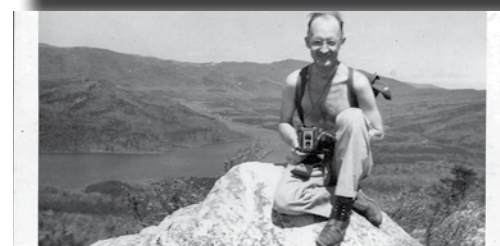


Dentons, Campbells AT names: Dragon's Tooth and Scorched Earth Gap

By Diana Christopulos, RATC Archivist



J. Denton - Tinker Mtn.



Tom Campbell - Tinker Mtn 1940 M.D.

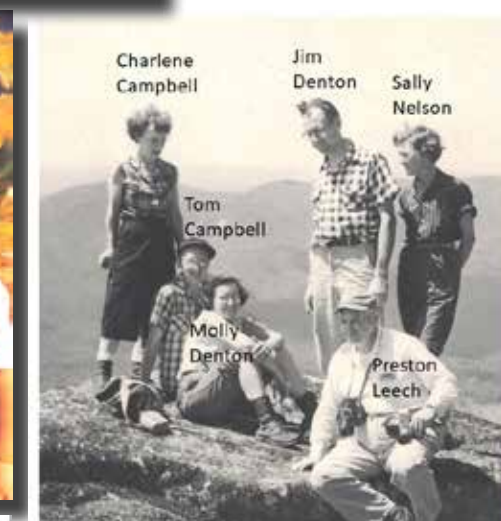
Four people who figure prominently in the earlier history of the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club are Jimmy and Molly Taber

Denton and Tom and Charlene Campbell. In 1942, when Jim joined the RATC, he recalled, there was a corps of very strong hikers he fell in with. This group, which included Molly, used to hike 14 miles every Thursday evening (just to warm up for the weekend?). The club also took their maintenance responsibilities seriously, having a work trip once a month, every month. Perhaps such activities prepared him for the efforts he later put into the relocation of the entire Appalachian Trail in Southwest Virginia.

Jim first met Tom on a street corner in Roanoke while both were on their lunch breaks. "That was the greatest meeting I

But theirs is not the only story. Molly was not only a member of the club before Jim, she was also one of its later presidents. An avid hiker and A.T. enthusiast, she laughingly bemoans the fact that "he got all the credit (for the relocation work) while I was home raising three children. He was out nearly every weekend, knowing that I liked to hike, too!" Charlene revealed a similar sentiment, in a separate interview, saying she felt like an "Appalachian Trail widow" during that period. The fact that Charlene likes to hike, too, is obvious when you meet her - and she could still put many a younger hiker to shame!

Tom had a knack for naming certain areas along the Trail which somehow seemed to stick. The rock formation on Cove Mountain, known to all those familiar with the area as "Dragon's Tooth," used to be another "Buzzard's Rock" until Tom decided it needed a more appropriate epithet. Another area got its name when Tom described a certain hike on which Jim was leading the way. Bushwhacking off the side of Tinker Mountain, one of the hikers was not too pleased with the leadership. As Tom described it:



"No one had suspected the wealth of vituperative epithets contained in the vocabulary of one of the women of the group, but this soon came to light as the brush thickened. Backlashes from numerous branches encountered her anatomy, and a flow of words directed at our expert increased as we descended. By the time the gap was reached, this flow had reached flood stage, and our expert beat a strategic and hasty retreat. It was averred by a number of those present that the very ground was seen to smoke beneath the force of her imprecations. Hence the name 'Scorched Earth Gap,' which has lasted to this day."

ever had as far as I or the A.T. was concerned," Jim exclaims. Jim and Tom became the mainstays of the southwest Virginia relocation effort in addition to becoming members of the ATC Board of Managers.



Date: 2/19/24
Location: Sawtooth Ridge
Attending: Terry Shipley, Mike Vaughn, Mark Farrell, Ron Bradbury, Gary Moore, Greg Stick & Jim Webb

The main purpose of the hike today was to hike out the tools and repair the steps at 2 switchbacks and add some cribbing to eroded parts of the trail. The hike started out slowly when the sawyer, in his attempt to bring down a locust tree, ended up hanging it up. After spending half an hour bringing the tree down and cutting it into steps, we proceeded to replace three rotten steps with five new ones.

We also widened the trail in various places and added cribbing in 2 places. Job done; we hiked the tools out.



Trail Supervisor's Report
by Jim Webb

Date: 2/2/2024
Location: Dragon's Tooth Trail
Attending: John Grant, Susan Terwilliger, Mike Vaughn and Jim Webb

While we were up there and had the tools, we were able to place three rock steps and clear a very narrow section between a tree and some rocks.

The main reason for the hike today was to mitigate a hazard of a large rock looming over a section of the trail that was very narrow with no room to maneuver. On top of that, it was also being used as a hand-hold on a step. I noticed a crack on this rock last year that was about 1/2" wide. On a recent trip, the crack had widened to 2-1/4".

The tools used to mitigate this hazard was to use our hammer drill and rock bars. By breaking it into smaller manageable pieces we were able to roll the pieces off the trail.



Date: 2/14/24
Location: Sawtooth Ridge
Attending: John Garris Mark Farrell, Mike Vaughn, Gary Moore and Jim Webb

This hike was the last of the rock work that we are going to do on this section of the trail. We worked putting in 10 rock steps in 3 different locations on a short part of the trail.

In two of those locations, we had great difficulty in clearing the path of smaller rocks before we could put in larger rock steps. Having finished all the rock work, we ended the day by hiking the rock tools back to the vehicles.



Pictures (left to right) show before and after a 5-rock staircase and a smaller 2-rock stairs.

Date: 2/17/2024
Location: Sinking Creek/ Lugar Valley
Attending: Linda Mulheren, Kelly Mulheren, Terry Shipley, Ron Bradbury

Armed with maps, compasses, paint, paint brushes, maps, and a strong sense of purpose, the four of us set out to re-mark the boundaries of the AT's corridor in this section. The Mulherens have many miles of marking to their credit, and Terry and Ron were willing, if short on experience. A bit brisk this day in February, boundary work is best done when foliage is minimal in the early spring, but after snow and ice have more-or-less abated.

While sections of the trail are steep and difficult, the terrain adjacent to the trail can be even more treacherous and difficult to traverse.



Linda Mulheren, Terry Shipley, and Kelly Mulheren (l to r) use maps, eyes and a metal detector in the quest for the monument. "It's gotta be right here," was an oft repeated but not always accurate sentiment.

The gist of the boundary marking duty is to locate, based on old topographical maps, certain round brass disks (referred to as "monuments") which were placed shortly after the creation of the earth. These monuments delineate the property line of the buffer zones on either side of the trail.

Sensibly placed in the day, ensuing decades have seen terrain changes which effectively hide many of the monuments from all but the most intrepid explorers.

Upon discovery, paint is applied per very official protocols to help the next volunteers find the monuments thirty more years down the



road. Importantly, as in relationships, clear boundaries make for healthy interactions between trail authorities and the many neighbors with adjacent properties along all 2100ish miles.

(Left photo) Kelly Mulheren directs Terry Shipley so Shipley can begin clearing offending brush from the re-identified boundary. While not required exhaustively, clearing the boundary of brush, when possible, further helps identify where the boundary actually is to anyone on site.

With unabashed alignment to all the stereotypes associated with "bureaucracy", either yellow or red paint is required for marking boundaries, depending on the entity (e.g. USFS, NPS, etc.) responsible for the boundary. Marking in the Lugar Valley required we carry both yellow and red paint, alternately applied per direction from Linda and Terry.



Date: 2/18/2024
Location: Near Audie Murphy Memorial
Attending: The Witchers - Homer, Therese, Kevin, Bennett, Brenin and Ryan

We received a couple of reports that there was a really bad blow-down (a huge oak tree) just south of the Audie Murphy memorial that was completely blocking the



trail. We recruited 4 members of the Witcher clan. We knew it was in a Wilderness area, so we came prepared with a silky, an axe, a pulaski, a hand axe and loppers. We all set to work on different parts of the tree and in short order, we had the trail completely reopened.

Date: 2/27/24
Location: Black Horse Gap
Attending: Erik Leedom, Gary Moore & Jim Webb

In my experience, it has always been difficult to get volunteers to work on the extreme parts of our section of the AT. It is even more difficult if the weather forecast is for rain. Such was the case for this work hike.

About 25 areas had been flagged beforehand for a variety of reasons. Some were, very narrow treadway, extreme out slope, rocks or roots in the trail and sagging sections of the trail. Starting at the parking lot we worked southward down the trail, fixing area after area.

By the time we had fixed the 8th area, a light rain had started, and it was time to leave.



Catawba Shelter Tent Pad Project

Moving logs via high line

by Ron Bradbury

Dates: March 14, 15, 16

Attending 1 or more days: Fred Lashey, Jim Webb, Pete Irvine, Greg Stick, John Garris, Ryan Wagoner, Craig McNally, Phil Sudol, Ron Bradbury, Conner McBane, Austin Gerbers, Suzanne Neal, Megan Martin, Brian Wilson, Kathryn Herndon-Powell

Trail work takes many forms, from painting blazes to removing blow-downs to breaking rocks—and more! Volunteers all demonstrate a willingness to work but bring varying degrees of expertise and experience to a project, and the synergy of a group of volunteers is part of what makes volunteering energizing and effective. Such synergy was evident on this project when professional trail consultant and stone mason Fred Lashey led a group of volunteers tasked with moving piles of locust logs from their staging area toward their eventual home at Catawba Shelter. While moving logs may sound simple enough, the particulars of this project required Lashey's very special set of skills.

The logs to be moved had been stacked in several piles on and near the fire road above Catawba Shelter. Of various sizes, old fashioned, brute strength "pick'em up and move'em" would have only been an option for some of the lighter logs, even if anyone was interested in such an exhausting adventure. Preserving the terrain was another deterrent to that option, as dozens of trips carrying logs down a raw, wooded hillside would have had a visual and lasting impact, even if done on foot and without a machine. Enter Fred Lashey and her skillset. Over the course of the three days, Fred instructed, demonstrated,



Stone mason and highline guru Fred Lashey prepares to engage.



and helped operate a highline system to move logs down a hill toward the shelter. Incorporating the highline and a gizmo called a grip-hoist allowed moving even the heaviest of the logs while preserving the landscape and not defeating the volunteers. Effort was required of the crew, but the work was far more manageable than would have been manual hefting of logs.

A highline is very much like a zipline with a key difference being that a zip line remains constantly taut, stretched between two points. A highline alternates between slack and taut; once rigged between two points (origin and destination), a log is attached to the slack highline via pulleys. The grip-hoist, essentially a hand-operated winch designed for a rope, is then used to tighten the highline and raise the log off the ground. Once lifted, gravity and physics allow the log to traverse the length of the highline with ease. The simplicity and elegance of operating a highline belie the forces which come into play, and so expertise

and training are fundamental to safety and efficacy.

Day three of the project was entirely spent on the job site, but days one and two were split between classroom time and actual work. Familiarity with the various pieces of equipment was foundational to communication, and clear communication was foundational to actual accomplishment. Camouflaged in denim and flannel, among this particular crew were some formally-educated engineers who delved deeply into the math and physics of the system, the results of which were some unexpectedly complex conversations in both the classroom and in the woods.

The bottom line of the instruction, however, was sufficient knowledge to operate the system safely and move the logs successfully. On the worksite, volunteers fell into a rotation between these three general tasks; attaching the logs at the top, operating the grip-hoist to lift the logs, and receiving and unhooking the logs at the bottom.



Operating the grip-hoist to lift the logs was the most physically demanding of the tasks. Attaching and detaching logs was fairly simple, and log peavies facilitated positioning the logs for lifting at the top as well as stacking for storage at the bottom. Controlling the logs' rate of descent via a belay line was critical for operational safety but was pretty simple. Effective communication between the three "task groups" took patience and practice, but once honed the crew was able to move one log about every 6 minutes with relative ease.



The decision to create steps using wood vs using stone is most often a function of which is available in the immediate vicinity.

Step-by-step ...and quid pro quo

by Pete Irvine

When you ask the RATC Trail Supervisor for a resupply of RATC “business cards” because you handed out your last one to a curious potential new Club member recently, and he says: “Trade ya, for a ride to the end of the Fire Road”; well, you kinda suspect there’s gonna be more involved than just a casual drive in the woods. And when he starts loading sawyer gear and trail tools in your personal SUV at the meet-up spot, you realize that this probably ain’t gonna be some sort of casual inspection or assessment drive-by trip. Six locust log steps later on a heavily entrenched section of the water trail at Campbell Shelter, and with leaf-cover scattered over the work area as reveal, we’re ready for the ride out.

#Duh-HeIStheTrailSupe!
#WhatDidIExpect
#KindaFigured



Pictured at Campbell Shelter, L to R: Pete Irvine (RATC), Conner McBane (ATC), Ed Clark (NPS), Suzanne Neal (ATC), Virginia Mooney (ATC), Brian Wilson (NPS) Not pictured: Jim Webb (RATC), Andrew Downs (ATC).

Hosting Ed Clark

Appalachian National Scenic Trail Superintendent visits

RATC and ATC were honored to spend time with NPS Appalachian National Scenic Trail Superintendent Ed Clark recently. February 29 was the ribbon-cutting in Salem for the expanded McAfee Knob

Hikemaster Report

by Carol Rowlett, Hikemaster

Hike Leader Resources

Ever wonder where to get ideas and support for setting up a hike? Check out the Hike Leaders section of the Members/Documents portion of our website - <https://www.ratc.org/documents/>. Topics are shown below.

In particular, note the new Hike Resources section.

This has links to sites with descriptions of a variety of hikes you might have forgotten about or never even heard of.

Shuttle Service and the next day included damp site visits to the VA-311 hiker overpass (pedestrian bridge) construction site, the Catawba Shelter overnight site, and the Catawba Mountain Fire Road.

By popular demand, this includes **Bob Peckman’s list of historic RATC hikes!**

Additional resources include the following:

- Hike Leader Guidelines
- Overnight Hike Guidelines
- Hike Leader Checklist
- How to create a hike event in Meetup
- Waiver and Sign Up Sheet
- Hike Resources



Hike Summary - Overall

From January 1 through the end of March this year, RATC hosted 30 recreational hikes led by a total of 10 amazing hike leaders.

Our sincere thanks go out to the following individuals who posted hikes in Meetup:

- Allison Robinson
- Carol Rowlett
- Clive Hillyard
- Dave Gloude-mans
- Dee Case
- Jeanine Bomber
- Kris Peckman
- Larry Austin
- Molly Armistead
- Daniel Burnette

We are expanding our offerings this year to include a range of hikes from slow-paced forest bathing to faster paced hikes and even backpacking. Stay tuned for more exciting opportunities in the coming months.

Hike: Hike Leader Safety Hike

Date: 2/24/24

Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Dee Case, Larry Austin, Donna Brinkman, Ed Chiado, Carl Mitchell, Daniel Burnette, Dave Gloude-mans

Hike leaders met for a discussion of hike safety issues while enjoying a 5-mile out and back hike from the Hollins Trailhead of Tinker Creek Greenway across the ridge line and over to the picnic area at the Carvins Cove boat dock.

We held frequent stops along the way to discuss various issues we had encountered in keeping hikers safe, and practice our hike leadership skills. We continued these discussions in more detail as we had lunch at the Carvins Cove picnic area. Major topics of discussion included:

- wording for hike descriptions to help potential hikers make wise choice,
- ways to encourage our hikers to trek responsibly and look out for each other
- glitches in the Meetup hike reservation process

These discussions were somewhat abbreviated due to the cold weather. Although we discussed a number of different “rating” systems for hikes, there was no consensus on the best method for our group. We will continue to work on hike descriptions that explain the length, terrain, pace, and other pertinent aspects of the hike.

Hike reports

Date: 02-18-24

Hike: Saltlog Gap/Saddle Gap Circuit

Distance: 8 miles

Leader: Larry Austin

Participants: Mike Vaughn, Mark Ferrell, Jen Schaffer, Madeleine Taylor, Lynn Smith and Steve Smith

This circuit hike was on trails rarely listed on the hike schedule. The weather was cold and breezy to start with but improved throughout the hike with sunshine helping us out.

The climb up Saltlog Gap was a good workout but all did fine. At the gap we went south of the AT about 1.1 miles to its junction with the Saddle Gap Trail where we had lunch since we could sit on the south-facing slope out of the wind.

The Saddle Gap Trail is about 2.5 miles long and was once the route of the AT. That trail now exits onto Hercules Road and there was about one-tenth of a mile back to our vehicles. This is a great hike with several outstanding views.

Date: 02-25-24

Hike: Apple Orchard Mountain Discovery Circuit

Distance: 8.5 miles

Leader: Larry Austin

Participants: Jen Schaffer, Maya Bohler, Sharon Holland, Chad, Julie Buchikos, Adam Smith, Linda Hensel, Daniel Burnette and Rebecca Reiff

After meeting most of the group at Peaks of Otter Visitors Center, we drove to Sunset Field on the Blue Ridge Parkway where two others were waiting. This hike went down the gated road to the former Camp Kewanee. We went into the camp area to visit some of the building sites to learn a bit more about the camp’s history.

We proceeded down an old road that came up to the camp to its junction with the Glenwood Horse Trail. Unfortunately, Adam stepped on a branch that flew up and scratched his face causing it to bleed. We continued north on the horse trail which comes back into the camp area. At this point, Julie and Adam decided they should exit the hike due to his injury. They proceed from here back to their vehicle at Sunset Field. The remaining eight continued on the hike.

We stopped for lunch on the second off-trail piece of this hike near a stream. The rest of the hike was on a gated road to the parkway and then the AT over Apple Orchard Mountain back to Sunset Field. It was a beautiful day to be outdoors with fellow hikers.

Hike: Jennings Creek to Bryant Ridge Shelter
Date: 1/29/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), John Grant, Steve Smith, Lynne Smith, Ana Anderson, Tommy Yambrick

We had a beautiful hike today to Bryant Ridge Shelter. This was an 8-mile strenuous out and back hike from Jennings Creek to Bryant Ridge Shelter.



This famously 3-tired shelter is a marvel - possibly the most exquisite shelter in our part of the state. We were down to base layers for much of the trip back, especially once we started the stiff climb up Fork Mountain.

Hike: Murray Run Greenway
Date: March 30, 2024
Participants: Jeanine Bomber, Robert Bomber, and Deanna Doyle

The Murray Run Greenway walk was slow and easy which allowed for great conversations, nature observations, and time to enjoy the beautiful weather. The walk was approximately 3.16 miles out and back with a minimal gain.

Hike: Roanoke River Greenway - Bridge Street
Date: 1/30/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Laurie Spangler, Kathy DeCoster, Brian Boggs, Christine Wickham

We had an excellent walk on the Bridge Street section of the Roanoke River Greenway. This was an open-ended out and back hike originally envisioned as 5-6 miles.

However, once we had gone over, under, and along side of various bridges (including the bridge of feral cats), we had done about 7 miles once we got back to our cars.

Hike: Rice Fields Shelter
Date: 2/9/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Fred Meyer, Dee Case, Daniel Burnette, Madeleine Taylor, Rebecca Reiff, Janet Rankin, Clive Hillyard



This roughly 5-mile out and back hike provided meet and greet opportunities and on-the-trail training for new hike leader Daniel Burnette. Daniel plans to specialize in overnight backpacking trips.

We had a great slow hike up to Rice Fields Shelter. Even though there was hardly any wind anywhere else, the overlook was cold and breezy.



Hike: Hay Rock out and back
Date: 2/20/2024
Participants: Debbie Robbins, Nancy McFadden

While hiking the AT section to Hay Rock overlook we met 2 through hikers heading to ME. Trail name Finn from Finland making his way to ME. Second hiker from OH who showed us a big smile when we told him we saw Finn earlier. I asked his trail name--he had no trail name but I thought I heard him say "Zen" as our distance passing grew loner. It was a perfect day on the well maintained trail.



Hike: Spec Mines
Date: March 14, 2024
Distance: 7.5 miles
Leader: Larry Austin
Participants: Molly Armistead, Randy Blevins, Bob Peckman, Carol Rowlett, Clive Hillyard, Ana Anderson, Dave Gloudemans, Steve Smith and Tracy Nelson

We met at the Montvale Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway to begin this hike down the Spec Mines Trail. It was a beautiful but warm day. Going into the mine area off of the Forest Service Road required a number of creek crossings but the stream was quite beautiful.

Hike: Curry Creek/Black Horse Gap Circuit
Date: March 24, 2024
Distance: 11 miles
Leader: Larry Austin
Participants: Steve Smith, Lynn Smith, Dave Gloudemans, Jen Schaeffer and Daniel Bunette

It was another sunny but cold start for this hike. We started this hike on Forest Service Road 634 above Camp Bethel and followed it to its junction with the Curry Creek Trail. We had about six creek crossings on the Curry Creek Trail and spotted several wildflowers.

Once near the mines we looked at a couple of the storage buildings they apparently used during the mining operation. When we got to the actual mines we were able to look into them a bit and had some snacks there before heading out from the mines on the old rail bed back to the Forest Service Road. From there we had to climb back up the Spec Mines Trail with a steep ascent at the beginning. By that time it had gotten quite warm which made the climb a bit more difficult. After returning to the Overlook we had some much deserved refreshments before departing our separate ways.

At its junction with the AT we then headed north on the AT. We stopped at the Wilson Creek Shelter for our lunch and then continued on to Black Horse Gap. At that point we headed down the Old Fin-castle Road back to our vehicles.

Along the way we again spotted several wildflowers. We did not see anyone else on any of these routes while hiking. After some refreshments we headed back to our original meeting location. It was a good hike with a good group of hikers.



Hike: RATC Hike #8, Sinking Creek Mountain, Rt 621 to Rt 630
Date: 3/11/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Mark Farrell, Wilma Vargas, Carolyn Gould

This was a “key exchange hike” with the Rt 630 to Rt 621 version led by Alison Robinson.

Alison’s version went up literally hundreds of stone steps near the beginning of the hike; Carol’s version went down those steps at the end of the hike but had a loong uphill at the beginning.

For this 11-mile hike, Carol’s group went up past Niday Shelter, then continued going up up up to the

Hike: Explore Park
Date: 3/5/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Rob Clark, Christine Wickham, Ana Anderson, Ken Myers, Carolyn Gould, Mark Farrell, Kathy DeCoster, Ed Chiado, Linda Osbourne, Connie Tyree

Our group had set out to hike the AT between Mills Gap and Black Horse Gap along the Blue Ridge Parkway, but the Parkway was closed for maintenance.

The ranger was polite but firm that we needed to move somewhere else IMMEDIATELY, so we diverted

Eastern Continental Divide at the ridge line, going across the ancient remains of one of the largest landslides discovered on the east coast.

We walked along the pointy ridge line of Sinking Creek Mountain, going back and forth between using all our layers on the windward side to sweating on the leeward side.

Eventually we passed numerous rock cairns, then descended down the hand-hewn rock steps to the Keffer Oak, the second largest oak tree on the AT, finally arriving at our cars at the Rt 630 parking area.



to Explore Park, where we had a wonderful time wandering around the trails. We even had a moderately tricky stream crossing on a poorly trav-



Hike: Carvins Cove - Trough/Brushy/Hinchee Trails
Date: 2/6/24
Participants: Carol Rowlett (lead), Molly Armistead (co-lead), Kris Peckman, Bob Peckman, Christine Wickham, Kathy DeCoster, Linda Osbourne, Jane Baugh, Ed Chiado, Clive Hilyard, Laurie Spangler

Because a couple of our hikers had time constraints, our Carvins Cove adventure had two groups - a fast paced group led by Molly Armistead, and a more leisurely group led by Carol Rowlett. It was a beautiful day to be out in the woods. We met at Orange Market and shuttled to the Timberview parking lot. We warmed up with a one mile climb up Trough trail to the ridge line, then had a long ridge line hike along Brushy Mountain fire road, followed by a gradual downhill on the Hinchee portion of the same fire road to our cars at the Orange Market. Total distance was about 7 miles.

eled section of trail, where we ended up throwing rocks and branches into the water to help us across.



Hike: Andy Layne/Tinker Cliffs
Date: 3/17/2024
Participants: Beverly and Basil Edwards, Keli and Ron Bradbury

Our annual anniversary hike, normally scheduled for March 21, happened a few days early because of a calendar conflict. Bev and Basil Edwards, not avid hikers but very good friends, gamely committed to accompany us.



Hike: AT Apple Orchard to Jennings Creek
Date: 4/7/2024
Participants: Keli and Ron Bradbury, and Wyatt the Lab

Although this hike has more net descent than climb, the two big climbs capture your attention, especially the climb from Bryant’s Creek Shelter heading south. Availing ourselves of a shuttle with President Witcher, we parked



Wind was the story of the day; so windy was the west side of the mountain that the thought of eating our meal there was untenable, so we retreated to the lee side of the mountain and dined while sitting on an east-facing rock.

About the time we were ready to head down, several members of Clan Witcher passed by heading north and hauling a chain saw, intent on clearing a new blowdown. I think I heard whistling as they passed...

low, commuted up, and made our way the 11.4 miles back to the car. Heading south against the flow of thru-hikers at this time is fun.

On this hike, about 7 of the 10 NOBO thru-hikers were grizzled men with full white beards who could have been brothers. In fact, we wondered if perhaps a flock of Mall Santas had wintered in Georgia and were now making their way back north.



Hike: AT Rte 611 to Pearisburg

April 1- 4

Date: 4/1-4/2024

by Daniel Burnette

Day 1: 9.5 miles

I got HB Shuttles to drop me off at the AT crossing on Route 611 in Bland County after parking my vehicle in Pearisburg at the Pearis Cemetery lot on Route 100. The weather was fantastic all day long, hitting a high of 75-77 that afternoon. The trail section for the first day was relatively smooth, without any outrageous climbs or descents. The highest elevation for the day was a little over 3000ft. I decided not to stop in at Jenny Knob, due to the shelter being a good ways down from the AT.

Coming down to Route 608 at 11:00 AM, I decided to cook one of the several Mountain House meals I brought along. From there, it was time to climb Walker Mountain, which made the rest of the mileage for the day.

The trail on top of Walker Mountain is relatively easy, mostly following the ridge for about 2.5 miles, then dropping down towards Kimberling Creek. Before getting to Kimberling Creek, I decided to try out a hiker hostel that I had heard good things about, the Weary Feet Hiker Hostel.

I arrived at Weary Feet about 3pm and was greeted by owner Julie Sloop. The hostel was very well kept and clean, with nice bunk rooms and clean bathrooms. Dinner and breakfast were offered, and I gladly opted to try out the food that was highly praised by many hikers. When staying at the hostel, I met some awesome folks either section hiking or thru hiking. Their trail names were Dirt Note, Spark Plug, Sticks, and Sergeant Major.



Day 2: 9.5 miles

On day 2, I opted for a change of route, deciding to walk up paved road Route 606 to Trent's Grocery to pick up some sodas and snacks that I didn't have in my bear canister. When coming out of Trent's, I remembered that the gravel road to the right intersects with the AT about 3 miles upstream on Dismal Creek and also offers access to Dismal Falls, all while offering better views than the AT along that stretch. I decided to hike the gravel road, rejoining the AT after about 3.5 miles. (You'll notice my picture of Dismal Falls was from

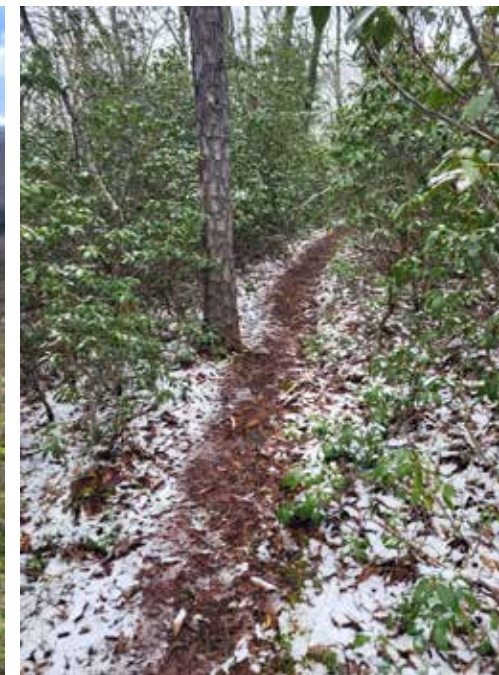
the side with the gravel road.) Rejoining the AT, I dropped back into the Rhododendron tunnels that would cover many more miles of this hike. The trail crisscrossed Dismal Creek several times, occasionally running up the smaller ridge on the northern side of the creek. Once at Wapiti Shelter, it was time to setup inside the shelter as I didn't want to deal with repacking my tent in the rain the next morning. I met a couple more thru hikers: Hard Left and Blewbs. We all stayed in the shelter that night, waking up to the sound of rain at around 6am.



Day 3: 8 miles

Hard Left and Blewbs hiked out before 7am. I relaxed a bit more since I was only planning on hiking 9.5 miles. The rain eased up about 7:30, almost beckon-

ing me to get on trail. The initial climb out of the creek bottom was pretty steep, gaining about 1500ft in about 2 miles. Once on top of Sugar Run Mountain, I was treated some spectacular views, offering great views down into Wilburn Valley from various points along the ridge line. About 5 miles in, I came to an unmarked side trail that led to a communications tower on the summit of Sugar Run Mountain at about 4000ft. This was the highest elevation of the entire 4 day hike, with just enough time in between wind gusts and some rain to soak up some good views into Giles County. I also decided to make some Mac and Cheese while the wind wasn't blowing too hard. Not much better than hot food on top



of a mountain with a great view! I had to decide if I really wanted to stay at Doc's Knob Shelter knowing that the temp would likely be below freezing with snow by the next morning. I elected to cut that day short at 7.5 miles on the AT, taking Sugar Run Road about 5 miles down the mountain to Wood Hole Hostel. Woods Hole turned out to be everything that thru hikers had told me about, with awesome food, hot showers, a warm bunkhouse, and some very friendly pups.

Day 4: 12 miles

Day 4 dawned with freezing temps and snow falling. It was a rather picturesque scene at Woods Hole. Breakfast was just as amazing at dinner was the night before, giving me lots of fuel for the longest mileage day of the hike. I hiked out of Woods Hole at about 8:30 AM, with the snow still coming down, and dreams of my own hot shower dancing in my head. The scenery on top of Pearis didn't offer any expansive views for the first few miles, with the trail going in and out of snow-covered rhododendron groves. The wind stayed pretty mild while the snow was falling, enabling me to strip off the gloves that I thought I needed when starting the day. The trail stayed mostly on top of the

ridge, making one small dip down to Doc's knob Shelter. Next was a short climb up to the power line right-of-way, which offered some great views. About 2 miles past the power line, my cell phone decided that the battery wouldn't hold up in the colder temps. Pearis Ledges offered some nice views south into Giles County, with Angel's Rest 1 mile farther showing me the town of Pearisburg. I could just barely make out the highways coming into town. Coming down from Angel's Rest was very steep, so I took my time, not wanting to slip down the somewhat slippery trail. About 2.5 miles later, I came into sight of vehicles at the cemetery lot on Route 100, signaling to weary legs that the hike was nearly finished. I had great timing getting down the mountain, as a massive snow flurry landed on Pearisburg less than a minute after I climbed in the driver's seat. All in all, it was a fantastic hike, and I hope folks from RATC will join me on more of these trips in the future.

Author's note: I want folks to know that the stays at the hostels will never be mandatory, and were simply me indulging my curiosity. I will be covering the entirety of the section of the AT that RATC maintains, with some hikes in the section that NBATC covers.

If you are interested in joining me on these backpacking trips, please message me on meetup or attend one of the Backpacking 101 classes that I will be offering throughout the year. All are welcome, from beginners to experience backpackers. For this backpacking trip, I decided to not push the mileage too hard, going for 37 miles in 4 days. Since I ended up on this hike alone, it did give me some leeway in how to decide on camp sites. With that in mind, please know that the hostel stays can easily be omitted due to either budgetary concerns or the desire to camp outside instead.



Hike: Backpacking 101 @ Dragon's Tooth

Date: April 6, 2024

Participants: Rebecca Rieff, Amy Powell, and Laurie Wolf

by Daniel Burnette

We started the day by meeting at the Exit 140 Park and Ride, then carpoled to the Dragons Tooth trailhead. The weather was absolutely gorgeous all morning, with the highs being around 60 degrees with clear skies. Starting from the parking lot, we set out, along the way discussing the various types of gear needed for backpacking. The first 1.5 miles up to Lost Spectacles Gap was nice and smooth as usual. From there we turned right onto the AT and continued up to Dragon Tooth, taking our time so that everyone could keep solid footing going over the various rocky spots.

The views from the rocks were fantastic; we could easily see that spring was just starting with a few trees getting their leaves before the rest. At Dragons Tooth, we took a break for water and snacks, where I went over the various options for camp cooking such as propane/isobutane fuel (Jet-boil, Peak One, Coleman, etc.) and alcohol stoves. The wind was a bit much on top of the mountain, so we didn't stay long.

Coming back down to Lost Spectacles Gap, we stopped and everyone in the group set up their tents and sleep systems, mostly to ensure that they knew exactly how their tent would be set up, and also to ensure that all the necessary parts were in the package. Apparently, I'm carrying a "Hiker Hilton" in my pack. After everyone had their



311 Pedestrian Bridge update: construction on target, more shuttle stops and a visit from Senator Tim Kaine

by Diana Christopulos

As of April 2, Roanoke County staff report that construction of the pedestrian bridge over Virginia 311 at the McAfee parking lot is "pretty much on target." The foundations have been laid. Next will be patterned concrete and wall faces. They hope to lay beams across Virginia 311 in June.

The McAfee Knob Shuttle (mcafeeshuttle.com) is up and running, now including on-demand service in Salem (Longwood Park and South Broad Street) as well as the I 81 exit 140 Park and Ride. The shuttle resumed service on March 1, and ridership is increasing every weekend now that the McAfee parking lot is closed and the weather is warming up. The shuttle had 486 reservations in March 2024 - compared to 444 in peak season October 2022 and 555 in October 2023. The state has allocated \$1.5 million in funding to improve parking at the Orange Market, which will include paving and marked spaces. The shuttle should be adding a Dragon's Tooth stop later this year. They cannot take the bus into the parking lot

All in all, the hike was fantastic, and it seemed like everyone got some new information to use on future backpacking endeavors. For anyone interested in backpacking (an overnight adventure, vs. a day hike) with RATC but without much experience, attending one of these classes is a chance for a low-key, low-stakes learning opportunity to help set you off on the right path.

but will drop hikers on the other side of the highway, requiring them to walk up the driveway.

On March 26 several of us met Senator Tim Kaine at the Exit 140 Park and Ride and rode the shuttle with him to the McAfee parking area. We were met by plenty of local media and additional volunteers and staff. Kaine committed to introducing federal legislation to pay for parking lot improvements at McAfee Knob, though he could not guarantee passage in the first year.

He also gave us copies of his new book - Hike, Ride, Paddle - containing the journals he kept between 2019 and 2021, when he hiked the entire AT in Virginia, biked the entire Blue Ridge Parkway and Skyline Drive in Virginia, and paddled the entire James River. The book contains many stories about our section and mentions both RATC and Homer Witcher, who provided Kaine and his son a shuttle. It also has a picture of him and his son on McAfee Knob, and the caption describes it as his favorite photo of the entire three-year adventure.

Diana Christopulos and Jim Webb represented RATC at this event.

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2. Abide by the rules of the national and state parks and forests
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4. Keep trails and woodlands free of litter, and
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