

# A JOURNEYS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

September — October 2012

INSIDE: Appalachian Ambience | Bears Den | Unlimited Expectations



# A JOURNEYS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

Volume 8, Number 5  
*September — October 2012*

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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail — ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come.

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FROM THE EDITOR |

## HEARTS AND MINDS. THERE IS NEVER A SHORTAGE OF HUMAN INTEREST

stories, or human interest in general, when it comes to the “people’s Trail.” From the sultry, southern woods of Georgia to the striking landscape of Maine — the Appalachian Trail is both defined by and defines those who set foot on it.

Not far from the harried and swiftly moving world of the D.C. metropolitan area is a section of the Trail that leads directly to a quintessential haven of escape and rejuvenation for visitors of any ilk. Bears Den Trail Center, often referred to as the “Castle in the Woods” (page 20), has a fairy tale-like effect on those who have stayed, worked, and happily volunteered there. “The joy for me is that the Appalachian Trail Conservancy owns one of the premier properties on the Trail where folks can gather and share their love of hiking and the outdoors,” says Mary Sue Roach, who has been the co-overseer of Bears Den since 2009 and was involved as a volunteer for years before that. “What stands out to me about Bears Den is when you volunteer there, every day is different. There are guests from all over the world. In 1998 Cirque du Soleil came to D.C. for a week and made Bears Den their home. They gave us all passes to attend a performance and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the hikers. It was such a special time!” And for a young couple who recently finished a thru-hike it certainly fits the fairy tale scenario. “We had two dreams — to thru-hike the A.T. and to get into the hostel business; and we accomplished both in 2011,” says Justin LaVigne, who, along with his wife Patrice, is a current live-in caretaker at Bears Den.

Another young college graduate, and inspired A.T. hiker, with a business degree found a similarly fortuitous situation when he became the lodge manager of the Len Foote Hike Inn at the southern end of the Trail in the Chat-tahoochee National Forest (page 36). This is not to say that the A.T. offers magical clarification to all those who hike it; sometimes, instead of a lead role, it is the indispensable supporting character in life’s often crooked path. Such was the case for Russell Gutterson who explains, “[hiking the A.T.] was the best decision that I’ve ever made, though not because I sorted any plans out. In fact, I’d say if anything I became more confused, mainly because I underestimated the quality of the Trail community and the impact it would have on me. The number and diversity of people that I met opened my eyes to more walks of life (so to speak) than I’d ever experienced before.” (page 46)

Opening minds and not limiting expectations are two important objectives for Maurice Peret and his wife Lou Ann Blake — both of whom are blind. Their recent, 41-mile A.T. hike honed in on that purpose (page 26). As a rehabilitation trainer, Maurice works with children, youth, adults, and seniors in, as he puts it, “teaching them to get lost. Among the greatest fears in especially newly blinded people,” he says, “is the fear of getting lost.” “This fear can be paralyzing until they can gain the confidence and the mastery of alternative skills. For blind people, hiking the Appalachian Trail requires [mastering these skills and having] the essential confidence to go wherever our hearts and minds will take us.” And perhaps the A.T. also *gives back* that essential confidence — to all who hike it — to go, as Maurice so perfectly puts it, wherever our hearts and minds will take us. ♡

**Wendy K. Probst** | *Managing Editor*

*A.T. Journeys* welcomes your comments, story suggestions, and photographs. Queries may be submitted via e-mail to [editor@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:editor@appalachiantrail.org).



Inset: Justin and Patrice LaVigne “at home” at Bears Den Trail Center. Photo by Laurie Potteiger. A.T., Snowbird Mountain, North Carolina. Photo by Bob Visintainer.

## On the Cover: Sunset, Bears Den Rocks.

“After working on a project to document the landscape just on the other side of the ridge [from Bear’s Den Trail Center], I took the opportunity to photograph this dusk transition from the spectacular vista at Bears Den Rocks,” says photographer Sam Kittner. (“Castle in the Woods,” page 16)

A Washington, D.C. based photographer for more than 20 years, Kittner’s architectural, portrait, and scene-setting photographs have appeared world-wide in publications such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *National Geographic*.

[www.kittner.com](http://www.kittner.com)

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Nestled in northern Virginia, the Bears Den Trail Center is a historic stone lodge turned hostel that provides a cozy respite for A.T. hikers, and an ideal retreat for families.

Participants in the 2012 "Ruck" Trail Festival enjoy the sunset at Bears Den Rocks. Photo by H. Dean Clark.



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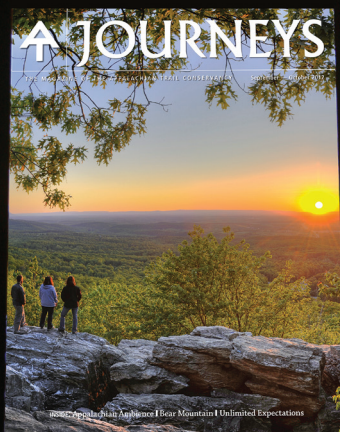
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# GO PAPERLESS!

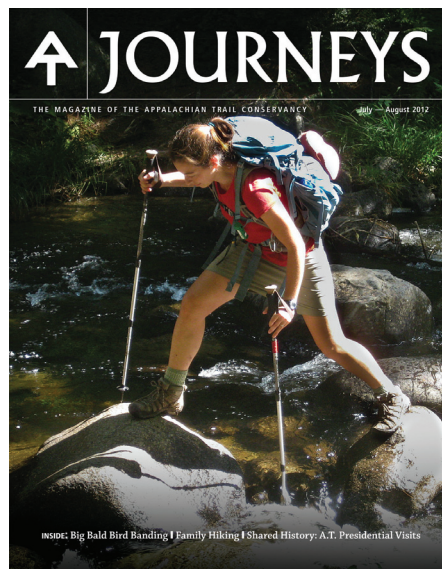


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## I LETTERS



**I JUST READ THROUGH THE ON-**line July/August issue of *A.T. Journeys*. Although I now live in Washington state, I grew up in New York, and I love looking at the photos and reading the excerpts of places along the Trail. I especially took note of the article about the A.T. Museum at Pine Grove Furnace State Park. On a cross-country trip in 2010, my sister and I went there with a cousin from Hanover, Pennsylvania. I was interested in the A.T. at the time, not only in the history it encapsulates, but because my son was planning to eventually complete the Triple Crown. (He's planning the Pacific Crest Trail for 2013.) For the last year and a half, he has been encouraging me to join him on the A.T. in 2014. Having visited the newly opened A.T. Museum in 2010 was an inspiration to me. With each "*Journeys*" issue, I am even more inspired to walk through these beautiful and historic places, and to reconnect with the wonders of the eastern states. Thank you for the beautifully illustrated magazine.

Marilyn Walther  
 OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

### FACEBOOK COMMENTS

[To mark] the 75th anniversary of the completion of the Appalachian Trail, we want to send our best wishes to our friends at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. The [ATC's] work preserves the historic Trail and allows us to con-

tinue to explore the A.T. year after year. Every year, L.L.Bean employees volunteer to help maintain a section of the Trail that runs through Maine, and we think it's one of the most rewarding hikes in the country.

L.L. Bean

I was a little early for the [A.T. 75th] celebration, but not too late for starting my goal. On August 3, 2012 I stepped on the Trail at Harpers Ferry. What an exciting day. Thanks to all at the ATC for being so nice and helpful. Can't wait to finish, one awesome section at a time.

Lisa Yarnell

Been a member since 1990. The journey is the destination. Such a wonderful adventure. The Trail is breathtaking and the people so memorable. Let's get out there, but don't forget to support the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

David Grim

### CORRECTIONS

The caption for the inset image on page 4 of the July/August issue (Table of Contents) was incorrectly identified as a sharp-shinned hawk. It was, in fact, a red-tailed hawk.

A typo was made in the July/August feature "One Shared History," concerning the year of John Brown's raid (page 20), which occurred in 1859.

The photo on the back page of the July/Aug issue (of Michael McClure) was taken by Peter "Twigg" Woitas. 🌲

*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.

Please send them to:

E-mail: [editor@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:editor@appalachiantrail.org)

Letters to the Editor

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0807

## CONGRATULATIONS ON THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL!



As the preeminent nature organization in the Delaware region, we applaud your efforts in education, conservation and advocacy. Thank you for letting us be part of your celebration.



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Bob Almand and Mark Wenger on McAfee Knob this past spring during the ATC's Southern Partnership Meeting's partnership hike.



**A VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE FOR CLUB LEADERS** was held in August. This event, formerly the Club Presidents Meeting, had not been held in more than 10 years. Thanks to sponsorship of the National Park Service and REI, we were able to bring club leaders together to discuss common issues and A.T. management, explore tools to recruit new volunteers and volunteer leaders, and get acquainted with the ATC staff, agency partners, and board and Stewardship Council members.

The ability to attract new volunteers is an important issue every club faces. A presentation by the Temple University Inter-generational Center provided an overview of the challenges created by having multi-generational volunteers. There are at least five generations represented in our volunteer base. There is a wide diversity of values, qualities, and motivations; and learning how to work with those differences will help improve volunteer recruitment and retention. The presentation included insight into how to create effective marketing messages, ideas for recruiting, and techniques for managing different generations of volunteers. As club leadership is passed on to a new generation of volunteers, it is important to understand the generational differences for a smooth transition while keeping club knowledge and traditions intact.

Break-out sessions were held that focused on “leadership essentials.” The discussion topics included “club development,” “community and youth engagement,” “risk management,” and “Trail project planning.” Our hope is that the conference gave the attendees tools for being better volunteer leaders. Our goal

was to strengthen our volunteer system and provide a forum for leaders to exchange ideas. Volunteers are the soul of the A.T., and their efforts are what make our programs successful. Volunteer leaders direct the work of thousands of volunteers — and fulfilling a leadership opportunity is a rewarding experience. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities in all of our clubs, and we hope you will step up to the challenge of taking on one or more of them. Thanks to those of you who attended our Volunteer Leadership Conference, and we hope you will use the tools provided to build better clubs.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the completion of the A.T. The task of building the original Trail took more than 15 years and involved hundreds of volunteers, state and federal agency partners, local Trail-maintaining clubs, workers from the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Today, volunteers manage, maintain, and protect the A.T. and contribute thousands of hours of volunteer time to this effort. We hope you have the chance to get out and enjoy a hike on the A.T. and to marvel at the incredible job our volunteers do. If you are one of them, give yourself a pat on the back and know that the work you do is what keeps the A.T. strong for future generations. ⚡

**J. Robert Almand** | Chair  
**Mark J. Wenger** | Executive Director/CEO

*“We hope you have the chance to get out and enjoy a hike on the A.T., and to marvel at the incredible job our volunteers do.”*

# DISCOVER THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL



## IN THEATERS FOR A LIMITED TIME

Join us as we explore the National Geographic film  
***America's Wild Spaces: The Appalachian Trail***  
During our 2012 Fall Membership Drive

Every dollar raised goes to support the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and maintainer club efforts to conserve the footpath, viewsheds, and environmental and cultural resources along the A.T.

**Event Highlights:** Admission to view this breathtaking film | Interact with a 2,000 miler  
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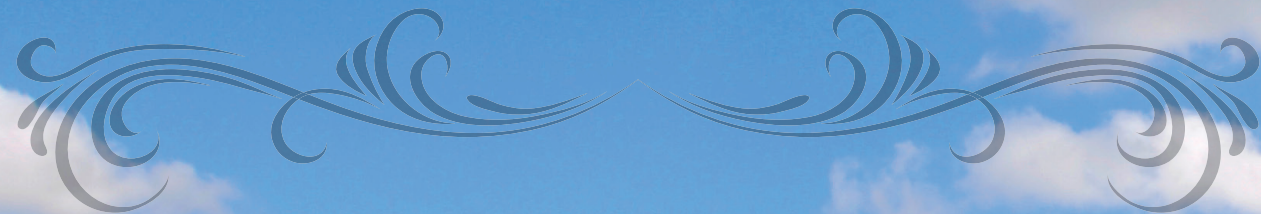
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# APPALACHIAN AMBIANCE

WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA IS A SHOWCASE OF THE ALLURING  
SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS.



Flush with high peaks, waterfalls, and mist rising from the valleys in early mornings, western North Carolina is poised to welcome A.T. enthusiasts from across the country to explore the Southern Appalachian forests, culture, and the Appalachian Trail at the 2013 Biennial Conference. The event is scheduled for July 19 to 26 on the 600-acre campus of Western Carolina University in Cullowhee.

BY LEANNA JOYNER

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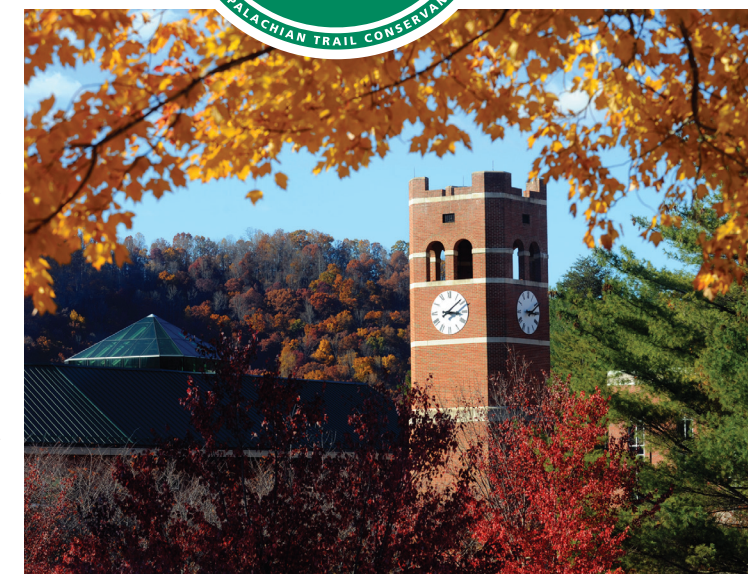


Clockwise: Whitewater rafting on the Nantahala River; Local Cherokees share the stories of their people through *Unto These Hills* at the Mountainside Theater – Photo courtesy of Greater Cherokee Tourism Council; The Western Carolina University campus is centrally located between a handful of A.T. trailheads; A rewarding hike to Wayah Bald's Observation Tower offers a stunning, 360-degree view; Previous page: Sapphire Lake literally reflects the area's raw Appalachian beauty. WCU campus, WCU hikers, and Sapphire Lake photos are courtesy of Western Carolina University.



The campus is centrally located in western North Carolina between a handful of A.T. trailheads that provide access to unforgettable and breathtaking A.T. destinations, including Albert Mountain, Standing Indian, Charlies Bunion, the Nantahala River, and the 360-degree views found at Wayah and Wesser balds, Max Patch, and Mount Cammerer.

The area is a showcase of the distinct Southern Appalachians, which, according to the Highlands Biological Station, are home to more than 10,000 known species of flora and fauna, making it one of the most biodiverse regions of the temperate world. The reason this region is able to host such a variety of species, each in such abundance, is due to the mild summers, cold winters, a landscape of deep gorges and high peaks, plus enough precipitation to qualify the area as a temperate rainforest.



## HIKING

Beyond the opportunity to hike more than 100 miles of the A.T. during the weeklong event, there are hundreds of other trails in the area that unveil the beauty of the Nantahala National Forest, traverse the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and lure visitors to step into the vistas found along Blue Ridge Parkway.

Other organized walks as part of the Biennial will explore the cultural history of villages and farms of the Smokies, the unique heath balds characteristic of high elevation peaks in the region, two wild and scenic rivers, and ten waterfalls, including the rushing torrent of 411-foot Whitewater Falls. Family-friendly hikes are planned for Max Patch, the Little Tennessee River Greenway, Fontana Lake, and Graveyard Fields.

## EXCURSIONS

On the 56,000-acre Qualla Boundary, Cherokees share their stories of their people through *Unto These Hills* at the Mountainside Theater, and describe their culture and way of life at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. The opportunity to delve into this history during a day trip to Cherokee County is just one of the excursions planned for the Biennial. Organizers plan to include other excursions to Asheville for art walks, tours of the Biltmore Estate, the Carl Sandburg National







Family friendly excursions are planned for the 2013 Biennial Conference; WCU's 600-acre campus in Cullowhee, North Carolina; A group from WCU enjoys one of the many hiking trails. Photos courtesy of Western Carolina University.

Historic Site, horseback rides, a railroad tour of the Great Smoky Mountains, and higher energy outings such as ziplining, tubing, and whitewater rafting.

Beyond the outdoor exploration and activities, the programs of the Biennial are critical to the conservation of the Appalachian Trail. The ATC's membership is convened to vote on the ATC's Board of Directors. Workshops are held on ATC programs, volunteer coordination, and Trail management. A.T. club members have the chance to network Trail-wide, connect with friends, dine together, and meet new people who are passionate about the Trail and its maintenance.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

For the first time ever the Trail to Every Classroom Summer Institute, designed to train teachers to utilize place-based education and service-learning in developing curriculum to advance awareness and preservation of the A.T., will run concurrently with the Biennial. Other first-time events at this Biennial include a community contra dance and a photo contest. Evening entertainment will include southern folk and bluegrass bands, as well as presentations on hiking other long-distance trails. The Carolina Mountain Club, Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, Nantahala Hiking Club, Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing Club, and the ATC look forward to welcoming you to Cherokee country in 2013 with a warm "Si-Yo" (Hello!) upon your arrival. ⬆



### SPONSOR THE BIENNIAL

Become a sponsor soon for maximum exposure in *A.T. Journeys* and event materials.

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For more information visit: [appalachiantrail.org/2013biennial](http://appalachiantrail.org/2013biennial)

# Family Hiking Day

## September 29, 2012

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy invites families of all ages and hiking abilities to get outside and experience the adventure of being active on the Appalachian Trail.

Held on National Public Lands Day and coordinating with the Let's Move initiative, Family Hiking Day is an opportunity to introduce your children to America's premier footpath, and all of the benefits that come from being active and spending time outdoors.

To plan an A.T. hike for your family visit: [appalachiantrail.org/FamilyHike](http://appalachiantrail.org/FamilyHike)





# 1 TRAILHEAD

FALL LEAVES BY BOB VISINTAINER



## CELEBRATION FESTIVITIES

**EVER SINCE THE A.T. WAS ROUTED INTO HARPERS FERRY,** West Virginia on the eve of the Trail's 50th anniversary, the home of Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) headquarters has been content to be a sleepy Trail hamlet. That all changed with the designation of Harpers Ferry and neighboring Bolivar as official A.T. Communities. With support and encouragement from the town, a local "A.T. Friends" subcommittee was formed from the Harpers Ferry-Bolivar Trail and Town Alliance. The A.T.'s 75th anniversary provided just the catalyst needed to energize ATC staff members and interns, A.T. ambassador Kweli Kitwana, volunteer Jeff Haass from Pennsylvania, and members of the community to plan an ambitious two-day festival this past August.

A significant boost came from Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, which provided the space for most of the activities in a scenic and historic location high on the campus of the former Storer College. The skilled park staff built a stage and erected a 30' x 60' tent. The town of Harpers Ferry gave the ATC a grant, and one council member hosted out-of-town speakers. The National Park Service's Mather Training Center donated the use of their facilities for indoor programs, and the town of Bolivar the use of their community center. Local merchants donated services, lodging for volunteers and speakers, or offered discounts to festival participants. Friendship Fire Company and Harpers Ferry-Bolivar police department — with assistance from Harpers Ferry NHP police — took care of traffic control, and the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows provided refreshments. The Potomac A.T. Club contributed in multiple capacities. The Delaware Nature Society loaned animal skins and artifacts, REI offered a light-weight tent, and ENO offered a hammock, to raffle off to new members.

On the weekend of the festival, 75 volunteers had assembled from as far away as Oregon. The highlight of the celebration was the parade. The dedication was given by the mayor of Bolivar, then led by the mayor of Harpers Ferry. A procession, 150-strong, consisted of fire trucks, police cruisers, Smoky Bear, A.T. maintaining clubs, local environmental groups, thru-hikers (from Gene Espy in 1951 to 2012 thru-hikers who had just finished), Girl Scouts, a contingent from the National Federation of the Blind in Maryland, the Harpers Ferry Middle School band, and the Excalibur Marching Band from Washington, D.C. The fire company's "fire princesses" — crowned only a few days before — made their first public appearances. Grandma Gatewood's youngest daughter — Lucy Seeds — and a great great nephew — Ben Montgomery — marched wearing Keds' tennis shoes in her honor. Fourth grader Ethan Haskiell and his brothers walked with a banner that read: "the Appalachian Trail: Dream to Reality." For half a mile, hikers and community members marched as one. Afterwards, festival participants heard inspirational remarks by Trail and town leaders, listened to a wide variety of music, attended programs, took hikes, learned about Leave No Trace, animals of the A.T., and volunteering on the Trail. Kids could walk a 14-state mini Trail, and if they chose, scale Katahdin — represented by a climbing wall donated by local outfitter River Riders. By the festival's end, close to a thousand people had come to help celebrate this historic and momentous occasion.

For more information visit: [appalachiantrail.org/75](http://appalachiantrail.org/75). To view more photos visit the ATC's Facebook page.

Clockwise from this page: LNT demonstration; Past and present thru-hikers in the parade; Gene Espy and Harpers Ferry's Mayor lead the parade; Excalibur Marching Band; Girl Scouts; Live music; local fireman; Lucy Seeds and Ben Montgomery; A.T. animal education. Center photo: Ethan Haskiell. Photos by H. Dean Clark, Dan Innamorato, Nick Ulbert, and Wilderness Escapades.







## Hunting Season Safety

Hunting regulations vary widely along the Appalachian Trail. Although the A.T. is a unit of the National Park System, it traverses many different types of public lands. Hunting is permitted along approximately 1,250 miles of the A.T. Both hikers and hunters are advised to “know before you go.”

- ▶ Know local hunting seasons
- ▶ Wear blaze-orange
- ▶ Use extra caution near roads and in valleys
- ▶ Avoid deer firearm season from October through January by hiking in one of these national parks:

C & O Canal National Historical Park, Maryland, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, West Virginia, Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee and North Carolina.

For more information and to see the ATC’s “2012-2013 Hunting Season Guide by State” visit: [appalachiantrail.org/hunting](http://appalachiantrail.org/hunting)

| TRAILHEAD *continued*

# RECORD NUMBER OF THRU-HIKERS REACH HARPERS FERRY

**THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY VISITORS CENTER IN** Harpers Ferry, West Virginia photographed a record 1,012 northbound thru-hikers this year — hitting the 1,000 mark for the first time (2011 set a record at 849). Based on preliminary analysis of the register at Amicalola Falls State Park (signed by roughly half of northbound thru-hikers), an estimated 2,500 prospective thru-hikers started at Springer Mountain, Georgia this year. That number is higher than any year except the millennium year of 2000, when an estimated 2,900 started.

This year’s number of northbound hikers is 65 percent higher than just five years ago, and more than seven times higher than 30 years ago. Southbound thru-hikers and thru-hikers following alternative itineraries together typically add up to only a quarter of those following the more popular Georgia-to-Maine itinerary. All hikers who complete the A.T. can report their hike by filling out a 2,000-miler application. 🏔️



Amelia “Songbird” Couture was the 999th northbound thru-hiker to pass through Harpers Ferry this year.

To fill out a 2,000-miler application visit: [appalachiantrail.org/ATcompletion](http://appalachiantrail.org/ATcompletion).

Share your love for the A.T. with a gift membership



## 2013 ATC Biennial Photo Contests

**For the first time, ATC’s 2013 Biennial Conference and Membership Meeting will feature a juried photo contest and exhibit!**

Help us show and archive the beauty, diversity, meaning, and fun of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and its users through photographs. Two opportunities to show off your A.T. photos at the 2013 Biennial will be provided:

1. Photographs taken during the meeting (e.g. on hikes and at workshops) will be displayed daily via computer slide show at meals.
2. Photographs taken since April 1, 2011 and submitted by April 1, 2013 will be screened by a committee of avid photographers for final judging by a noted photographer. Winning photos will be exhibited during ATC’s 2013 Biennial. These photos must be either taken from or taken on the A.T.

(Digital images only, 300 dpi or greater; no date or other stamps.)



For complete rules contact: [2013photocontest@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:2013photocontest@appalachiantrail.org) with 2013photocontest in the subject line.





# CASTLE in the WOODS



BY CLAIRE HOBBS

**IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA, THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL** follows a long, low ridge, and is famous for a 13.5-mile section nicknamed “the roller coaster” for its challenging pattern of 10 ascents and descents. Bears Den Trail Center is nestled at the northern end of this section, just a tenth of a mile from the A.T. This historic stone lodge turned hostel is now a home away from home for A.T. hikers, as well as an ideal retreat for families and youth groups. Owned by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and operated by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC), this gem along the A.T. is definitely worth discovering.

Today, the “castle in the woods,” as it is fondly called, is a welcome stop for weary long distance hikers to enjoy the “hiker special,” which includes a bunk for the night, shower, laundry, pizza, Ben & Jerry’s ice cream and a soda for \$27.50. “Bears Den is 8,000 square feet, so there is a lot of space for people to spread out and make themselves at home. They can hang out in the dining room and eat pizza and ice cream, play the guitar and piano in the living room, watch a movie in the hiker room, or go out to the overlook to enjoy the sunset,” says Justin LaVigne, who re-

Sunset view from Bears Den Rocks — Photo by Sam Kittner; Bears Den Trail Center; Caretakers Justin and Patrice LaVigne welcome visitors to the spacious lodge — Photo by Laurie Potteiger.







## Its purpose has always been rooted in rejuvenation and escape.

cently took over the role as caretaker with his wife, Patrice. “Our home is their home.” Guests also have access to shuttles, day- and long-term parking, a small resupply and souvenir store, and mail drops.

Bears Den is also a perfect place for youth groups, scout groups, and families to escape. Guests can decide to stay the night in the stone lodge, use the primitive campground, or rent the rustic private cottage that can only be accessed by a hiking trail. The 66 wooded acres are the perfect outdoor playground for kids and families to explore together. “Bears Den is especially a great place for families who have never spent time in the out-of-doors to come and bring their kids for the weekend to camp and hike,” explains Mary Sue Roach, who has been the co-overseer of Bears Den since 2009 and was involved as a volunteer long before that. “We have lots of youth groups who camp at the primitive campground, and then they go home and tell their parents about what a great time they had and end up coming back with them.”

Although Bears Den wasn’t originally built as a hostel, its purpose has always been rooted in rejuvenation and escape. The stone lodge was built in 1933 as a summer home for Washington, D.C. residents Dr. Huron Lawson, a professor in obstetrics and

gynecology at the George Washington University, and his wife Francesca, a soprano singer. At that time, it was popular for wealthy capital residents to take the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad to Bluemont to cool off in the mountains during the summer months. Bears Den was one of several summer homes built along the Blue Ridge during the late 19th and early 20th century.

Huron and Francesca were world travelers and modeled their summer home after the castles they visited in Europe. Local stonemasons constructed the lodge and added unique architectural touches, like the stone tower and dramatic entrance gates, which give the lodge its majestic feel. Once used as Francesca’s recital hall, the round common room

From top left: The fridge beckons visitors to indulge after a long day of hiking on the A.T.; Participants in the “2012 Ruck” enjoy each other’s company around the dining room table; Northbound thru-hiker Elliot “Hot Shot” Clavino plays the community guitar in the common room; A Portrait of Dave Appel that hangs over the fireplace is a constant reminder of the importance of volunteers at Bears Den; A photo board displays the many volunteers, hikers, and visitors who give the Trail Center its warmth and character. Photos by H. Dean Clark and Laurie Potteiger.

was built to accentuate acoustics and features a large, stone fireplace. Throughout the years, music has continued to be an important part of Bears Den. The Bluemont Concert Series had its beginnings there and now guests are encouraged to play the piano or guitar that are kept in the common room.

Dr. Lawson capitalized on the beauty of his property and turned it into somewhat of a tourist attraction. He even built a ticket booth — which has now been converted into a mini nature center — and installed a petting zoo. Rumor has it that he would charge guests a nickel to tour the property and watch the sunset from Bears Den Rocks, a scenic vista located just a short distance from the lodge on what is now the A.T. This westward facing overlook of the Shenandoah Valley is still a favorite among visitors to Bears Den and A.T. hikers.

The Lawsons passed away in the 1960s and a development company purchased the property. The company had plans to create a planned neighborhood with several houses and a community center with a swimming pool, but Clarke County turned down their proposal due to septic issues. The company cut their losses and put the entire 620-acre tract, stretching from Route 601 down the west side of the ridge almost to the Shenandoah River, up for sale. It remained on the market for many years.

After the National Trails System Act passed in 1968, which granted federal protection to the A.T. as part of the National Park Service (NPS), Bears Den became especially crucial to the protection of the A.T. in northern Virginia. The Bears Den property rested right on the proposed federal route, over Bears Den Rocks. “During the early 1970s, over 800 miles of the A.T. was still on private property,” says

Tom Johnson, past president of PATC. “In northern Virginia from Harpers Ferry to the northern boundary of Shenandoah National Park, there was no public land at all. The biggest problem area was from Snickers Gap to Ashby Gap where the Trail was basically on a paved road, Va. 601, for 14 miles.”

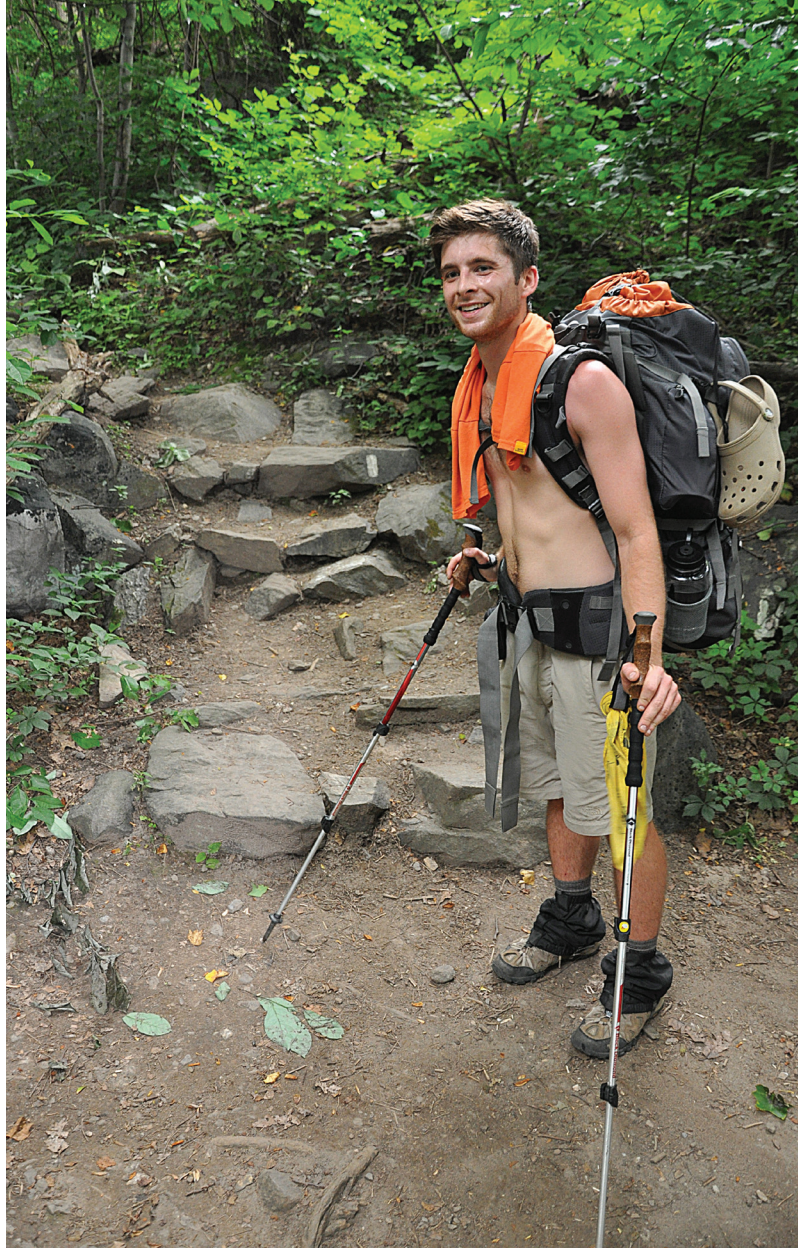


The original owners, Huron and Francesca Lawson, were world travelers and modeled their summer home after the castles they visited in Europe.

The ATC and PATC worked diligently with NPS to come up with a way to purchase 66 acres of the original property, including the Lawsons’ stone lodge, in order to move the A.T. off of the road shoulder and into the woods.

After years of negotiations, the ATC purchased the property from PATC in 1984. For many years the property was managed under an agreement with American Youth Hostels (AYH). In 2006, PATC took over day-to-day management of Bears





Den after several volunteers committed to do much needed maintenance work. “The coordination between the two organizations has gone incredibly smoothly over the years as everyone appreciates just what a gem Bears Den is to the hiking community,” says Vern Conaway, who assumed the role as overseer when PATC took over management. “I am proud to be a member of both organizations.”

Dozens of volunteers contributed countless hours to restore Bears Den and make it the premier hostel it is today. Dave Appel, whose portrait now hangs above the fireplace in the common room, committed his summers to Bears Den’s restoration for 10 years. Along with other volunteers, he took the lead on several major maintenance projects, including work on the roof, windows, driveway, new privies, and basically anything else that needed to be fixed — he also made substantial financial contributions to the facility.

For Dave, a Wisconsin resident who visited Bears Den on a whim during a backpacking trip with his

From left: Each year, hikers sign their Trail names on a portion of the wall in the hiker hostel bunkroom; Visitors can purchase a Bears Den patch, as well as resupply items for hikers, at the lodge; Alex Neal anticipates arriving at Bears Den after an 18-mile hike from Harpers Ferry; Hikers enjoy lunch and the view at Bears Den Rocks. Photos by Laurie Potteiger.

wife in 1998, becoming a volunteer was a response to an obvious need. “We met Steve and Betsy Reisinger who were managers at that time and realized that they could use help on maintenance as handling guests in the busy season was more than a full time job,” he explains. “We stayed two or three nights while I continued my hike south. By then I knew I had to return later to volunteer.”

Volunteers are the backbone of Bears Den and they continue to be its sustenance. “Bears Den could not exist without its volunteers — plain and simple,” says Justin. “And it would be difficult to quantify the number of hours and people who have

been dedicated to Bears Den over the years.” Patrice adds, “the amazing thing to me is that the volunteer base just keeps growing. Often, Bears Den guests turn into Bears Den volunteers. We love that!”

To Justin and Patrice, who completed a southbound thru-hike in 2011, the transition from hiking the A.T. to managing Bears Den was a logical one. “We had two dreams — to thru-hike the A.T. and to get into the hostel business,” says Justin. “And we accomplished both in 2011.” The couple researched hostels during their 2011 thru-hike to learn all they could about the business. “We thru-hiked southbound and stayed in 23 hostels, talking to each and every owner or caretaker about their business,” Patrice explains. “When we stopped at Bears Den and found out the current caretakers were leaving, it seemed like a

perfect opportunity for us to test out the lifestyle and learn and grow with Bears Den.”

Justin and Patrice continue the tradition of providing a warm and welcoming environment at Bears Den. “What we noticed the most about hostels on the A.T. was the cleanliness of the place and attitude of the caretakers. You really want to feel like you are being welcomed into someone’s house when you come to a hostel, and we feel that Bears Den offers that and more,” says Justin. “Bears Den is such a draw for long-distance hikers and day-use visitors and has so much potential for growth. We love that it acts as a gateway to connect people to nature. It is particularly fun to watch people’s eyes brighten when they walk into the building and think, wow, I’m standing in a true castle in the woods!” 🌲

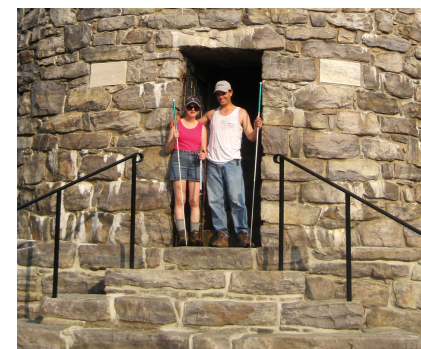
The Bears Den Trail Center is offering a Long-Distance Hiking Workshop on November 10 — A one-day workshop hosted by the ATC. More information is available at: [appalachiantrail.org/events](http://appalachiantrail.org/events). For more information and to make reservations, visit: [www.bearsdencenter.org](http://www.bearsdencenter.org) or call Bears Den Trail Center at (540) 554-8708. To become a volunteer at Bears Den, email: [friendsofbearsden@hotmail.com](mailto:friendsofbearsden@hotmail.com)



# Unlimited *Expectations*

For blind people, hiking the Appalachian Trail requires the confidence to go wherever their hearts and minds will take them.

PHOTOS BY GEORGIA HARRIS



**THE 41-MILE STRETCH OF THE A.T. IN** Maryland is often referred to as “the Maryland challenge.” This past July, Lou Ann Blake and Maurice Peret took on that challenge — and challenged some common misperceptions — with gusto during a four-day hike of that section of Trail, which runs from the border with Pennsylvania to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. What made this adventure unique was that the husband-and-wife hikers, who are residents of Baltimore City, are blind.

The genesis of this adventure began in May of 2012, when members of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) partnered with Blake and Peret to lead 43 blind people from the National Federation of the Blind on a two-mile journey of the Seneca Greenway Trail in Montgomery County, Maryland. This entire idea was conceived by PATC member Tom Johnson and his old friend and the chair for the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), Sharon Maneki. For most in the group, it had been the first time they had ever hiked along a trail in the woods and therefore was a unique and memorable experience for them. After that hike a number of the hikers had lunch in Harpers Ferry and visited the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) headquarters, just up the street, for a lengthy, and enjoyable chat with the ATC’s information services manager

Sections of the A.T. in Maryland offer some challenging terrain for any hiker; Representatives of the National Federation of the Blind joined the A.T.’s 75th anniversary celebration in Harpers Ferry this past summer; Lou Ann and Maurice on the Trail at Washington Monument State Park.



“It was amazing to watch them approach a tree or boulder in the middle of the Trail, and at the last moment, step around or over the obstacle. It is obvious that they have honed their skills and senses to a level that most sighted people never do.”

Laurie Potteiger. “When Maurice and Lou Ann left the building and walked up the somewhat rutted path that runs alongside it, I remember watching their feet,” says Laurie. “Their steps had just the slightest bit of caution to them, and yet their stride seemed self-assured and resolute. Their feet seemed to be more aware than other feet, almost as if they were looking with their feet as other people look with their eyes.”

Maurice Peret and Lou Ann Blake have a number of things in common. In addition to their advocacy efforts to help integrate the blind into all aspects of social, professional, and recreational life pursuits, they both enjoy hiking. In fact, married for just over one year now, they spent part of their honeymoon on the A.T. in July 2011. Blake is a law-degreed former environmental engineer currently working for the



National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute. There, she coordinates an annual disability law symposium, edits an on-line *Journal of Blindness Innovation & Research*, and also manages the Help America Vote Act grant for the NFB, which helps to insure the private and secret vote of all citizens, including those with disabilities.

Peret is a rehabilitation trainer and is National Orientation and Mobility certified. He works with children, youth, adults, and seniors in, as he puts it, “teaching them to get lost.” While Peret uses humor fastidiously in what he does every day, there is also method to his apparent madness. “Among the greatest fears in especially newly blinded people,” he says, “is the fear of getting lost.” Often, for a time, this fear can be paralyzing until they can gain the confidence and the mastery of alternative skills of independence as blind people. Peret has been teaching for nearly 13 years and has spoken widely on the subject of civil rights of the blind and of others with disabilities. He served as base camp commu-

nications manager for the 2001 NFB Mount Everest expedition, which featured Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind mountain climber to reach the summit of the highest peak on earth. Blake is a long time equestrian, who rode competitively since childhood, winning a number of trophies and ribbons for her performance. She and Peret are avid supporters of the arts, symphony, and theater in Baltimore. “We firmly believe that the real problem of blindness is not in the relative or total inability to see but rather in the pervasive societal misperceptions and basic misunderstandings about the capabilities of the blind,” says Maurice.

As well as being a long-time dream of the couple, the purpose of the most recent hike on the A.T. through Maryland was to raise awareness of what is possible for individuals who are blind, when the positive attitudes and high expectations of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland are coupled with proper training in the alternative techniques of blindness (Blake and Peret are both members of the Greater Baltimore Chapter of the NFB of Maryland, an affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind). The couple began their section hike each day at 6:30 am. Instead of staying in the shelters along the Trail they were picked up and deposited at strategic road crossings by Blake’s father. They were accompanied on their landmark journey by two members of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Randy Motz and Georgia Harris, also a husband and wife team and 2006 A.T. thru-hikers who wrote about their experiences as a couple in a book entitled *Solemates — Lesson of Life, Love & Marriage from the Appalachian Trail*. Motz and Harris camped on the Trail and met Blake and Peret each morning.

Together, the foursome covered between eight and twelve miles each day, with Blake and Peret often leading the way. “Our decision to hike with Maurice and Lou Ann was birthed from our experience with the NFB hikers we helped guide along the Seneca Greenway Trail several months earlier,” says Randy Motz. “We were amazed at how readily they adapted to this unfamiliar environment and how excited they were to be part of such a unique adventure. Their ability to negotiate the varied terrain was quite remarkable and it was seldom that we needed to give instructions, except when we approached places where a wrong step could have disastrous results.” Motz continued, “the same went for our time with Maurice and Lou Ann on the A.T. It was amazing to watch them approach a tree or boulder in the middle of the Trail,

and at the last moment, step around or over the obstacle. It is obvious that they have honed their skills and senses to a level that most sighted people never do. They were so adept at making their way from Pen Mar Park to Harpers Ferry, that we often wondered if they needed us there at all.” But Blake and Peret did benefit largely from the thru-hiker couples’ considerable wisdom, knowledge, and experience, not to mention their endearing friendship. As Blake noted the painful toll the Trail took on her person, she earned the Trail name “Bum Knees.” Given his profession and personality, Peret’s Trail name was the same as his Twitter nickname: “BlindWanderer.”

In an article from the NFB Web site, posted during their hike, Blake stated, “most people don’t know someone who is blind, so they only know the stereotypes of blind people as helpless and incompetent, which pervade society and the media. Unfortunately, even today, the misconception is that a blind person cannot cross a street on his or her own, let alone hike the Appalachian Trail.” Peret added, “for blind people, hiking the Appalachian Trail requires the mastery of the nonvisual skill of traveling with the long, white cane combined with the essential confidence to go wherever our hearts and minds will take us.” The NFB promotes the full integration of the blind into every aspect of community life.

Commenting on the NFB Web site, Melissa Riccobono, president of the Maryland affiliate of the NFB explained, “blind persons can enjoy outdoor experiences and benefit from physical exercise along with our sighted peers. What they need is the proper training, the right attitude, and the opportunity to succeed.”

Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland greeted the two couples when they arrived at the Trail’s end in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, on Thursday, July 12. “We are not sure which section of the Trail was the most difficult for them; but for us, it was the final miles on the C&O Canal Towpath as we attempted to keep pace with them,” says Motz. “We got a big kick out of Maurice’s sense of humor,” Motz continues, “each time we approached a scenic overlook, Maurice would ask other hikers leaving the site how it was. Most, before realizing he was blind, said, ‘It was awesome. You will love it!’” After the hike, the group also had their photo taken in front of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy headquarters much like the many A.T. thru-hikers who stop by on their 2,000-plus-mile trek from Georgia to Maine. “I don’t think it hit me until just now how extraordinary it is what Maurice did,” explains Laurie Potteiger. “I don’t think cognitively I connected the eyes, that appear not to see anything, with what he had accomplished. On the other hand, I think his and Lou

Ann’s message is about what blind people are capable of doing — not how extraordinary they personally are. They want to change perceptions that the public has about blind people.”

In light of the efforts of both couples as well as other members at PATC and Potteiger at the ATC, there exists a continuing development of this partnership between the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland and the ATC and PATC. Lou Ann Blake and Maurice Peret are also members of the Mountain Club of Maryland. This past August,



members of the NFB marched in the A.T.’s 75th anniversary parade in Harpers Ferry, and also had a table at the festivities with information about their organization. Blake and Peret also attended the Trail Patrol meeting that weekend at PATC headquarters, to discuss a possible joint workshop to coincide with the annual state convention of the NFB of Maryland. “We are presently contemplating the idea of hiking the 100-mile Shenandoah National Park sometime in the next year or so,” says Peret, “assuming we can find some remedy for Lou Ann’s knees.”

The purpose of their recent A.T. trek was encapsulated in a chance meeting on the last day of the hike. While taking a break on Weverton Cliffs, overlooking the Potomac River, the group met a grandmother and her granddaughter who had hiked to the cliffs to also take in the view. As the foursome negotiated their way down the steep and narrow section of the Trail from the cliffs to the C&O Canal Towpath, the grandmother and granddaughter came up behind them. When Blake and Peret stepped aside to let them pass by, the grandmother said that they would keep following them because she wanted her granddaughter to see just what was possible for people with disabilities when they put their mind and passion into it. It was a true teaching moment, one the young girl will not soon forget. ♡

For more information visit: [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org).





## CREATIVE PRESERVATION

Chris Bennett was raised in rural Maine and spent much of his childhood in the woods behind his house. “My love of photography grew out of my love for the outdoors,” Chris explains. “As I grew older, my weekends were spent driving north to hike on the Appalachian Trail. I was constantly looking for ways to permanently preserve the awe and inspiration that I felt while in the wilderness, and photography provided the medium.” Chris went on to study photographic imaging arts and sciences at Rochester Institute of Technology. He also spent some time working as an A.T. ridgerunner at Piazza Rock near Rangeley, Maine in 2006. These days he works as a professional freelance photographer, but even on his days off he says, “... you can find me with my camera in the Mountains.”

[www.cbennettphoto.com](http://www.cbennettphoto.com) and [www.chris-bennett-photo.com](http://www.chris-bennett-photo.com)

From left: Hiker on the summit of Moxie Bald, between Caratunk and Monson, Maine; October leaf on the roof of the Piazza Rock lean-to, Maine.





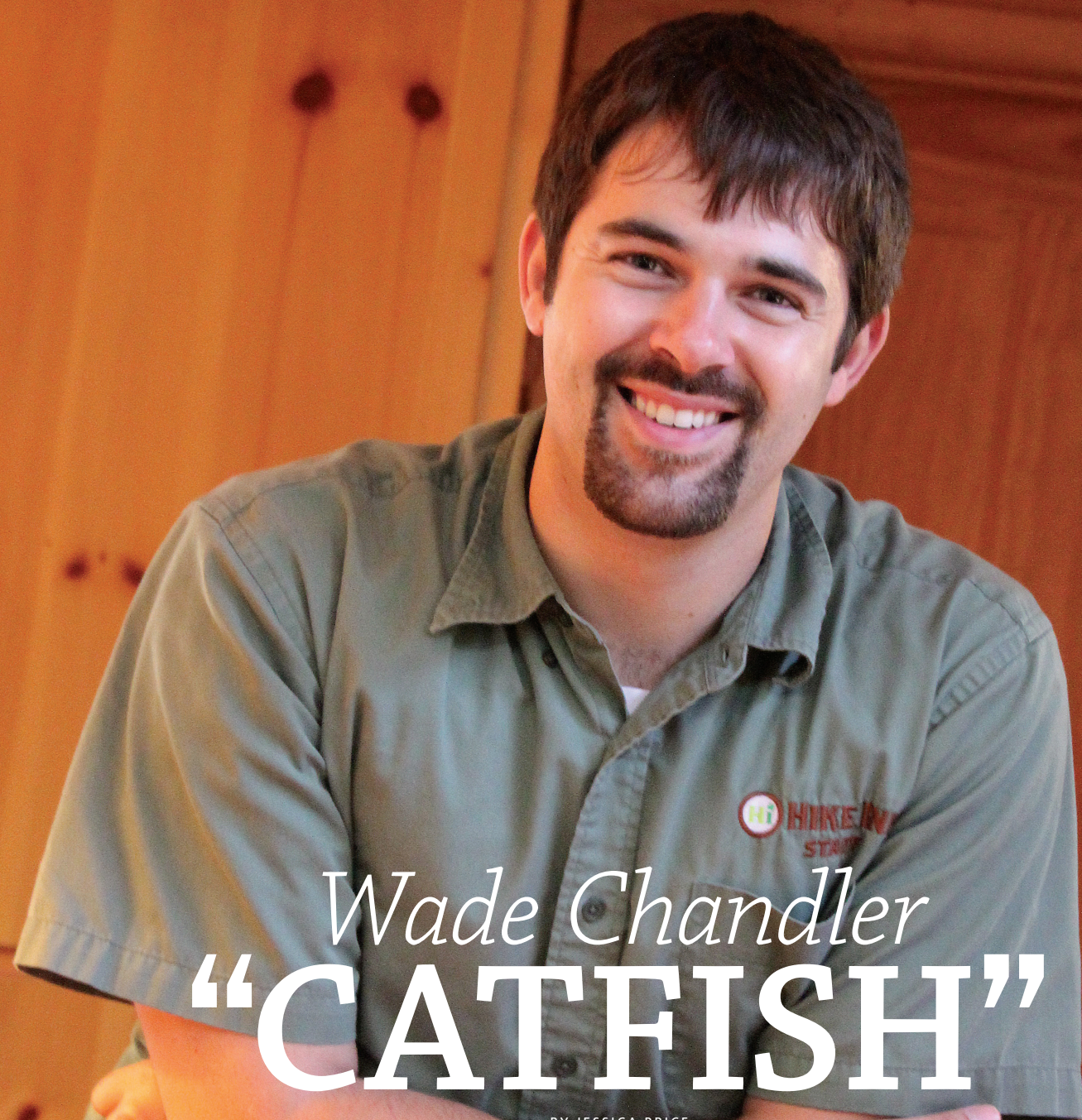
Moxie Bald and Bald Mountain Pond,  
between Caratunk and Monson, Maine.





A cairn marks the A.T. near the summit of Moxie Bald, Maine.





# Wade Chandler “CATFISH”

BY JESSICA PRICE

**TRAIL MAGIC — IT’S AN UNEXPECTED RIDE TO TOWN, AN** encouraging word from a fellow hiker, an awe-inspiring sunrise the morning after you’ve decided to quit. Coined by distance hikers, Trail magic is any event that lifts a hiker’s spirits. Little things make big differences on the Trail: free lemonade, water, or ice cream can be all it takes to convince a thru-hiker to keep going. Trail magic spreads like fire. It can burn inside a person who spreads it to others — perhaps, without even knowing so. Having experienced more than his fair share of it as a thru-hiker on the Appalachian Trail, Wade “Catfish” Chandler is dedicated to sharing trail magic with others.

A north Georgia native, Wade speaks with undercurrents of a southern drawl. When you first meet him, he’ll greet you with a smile, and when he asks you “how’s it going?” his eyes will tell you that he really wants to know. Within minutes of meeting him, you’ll feel like two old friends sitting on the front porch swapping stories and sharing laughs. Wade’s smile fades only when in concentration, usually with his camera in hand while framing the perfect shot — trying to capture a bee’s wings in flight before it lands on a blooming hydrangea. Photography is one of Wade’s favorite pastimes; nature his beloved subject. Nature photography became a greater focus for him during college — a love cultivated while helping on his father’s farm as a child.

Though he grew up fewer than 50 miles from the start of the A.T., Wade didn’t plan to be a thru-hiker. Actually, he gave the Trail little thought until he graduated from college. “As I got closer and closer to graduating, I had less and less an idea of what I wanted to do,” Wade says. “So I thought, I need to go out and do something for myself.” And three months after graduation, at 22 years old, he did just that.

But that isn’t much time to plan a thru-hike, especially for Wade, who had only been on one overnight backpacking trip. When he left Springer Mountain to follow the white-blazed Trail on March 25, 2008, he carried with him reminders of home: his camera and his Trail name. As a child, Wade was nicknamed “Catfish” by his father. Armed with new boots and little experience, Wade toted a whopping 48-pound pack. Confessing to carrying extra clothes,



food, and fuel, Wade describes his heavy pack: “I was this nervous novice hiker going out there having a backup for a backup.”

What Wade lacked in physical preparedness and backpacking experience, he made up for in attitude. As thru-hikers well know, the Trail is as much of a mental challenge as a physical one. And Wade had

the perfect Trail attitude. He was flexible at times and stubborn at times. He listened to his body. When his feet were badly blistered at the start of the A.T., he took a few zero days to heal. But when it was raining so hard he felt it was bouncing up to soak him from both ends, he pushed on. He was determined to enjoy every day. An interesting rock or a green lizard scurrying across the Trail could be all it took to create excitement. The days when



Clockwise from far left: Wade, ready to greet great guests, behind the front desk at the Len Foote Hike Inn; Focusing in on a close-up shot — Photos by Samara Linnell; A photo taken by Wade of two diamondback rattlesnakes; Armed with new boots and little experience at Springer Mountain, Wade toted a whopping 48-pound pack at the beginning of his thru-hike in 2008.

temperatures were in the 40s, and the puddles of water were sloshing in his boots, he admitted, were harder to enjoy. For Wade, crummy weather days often turned in to big mileage days, giving him a sense of accomplishment to overshadow the miserable conditions.

But making big miles didn’t overly concern Wade. Part of Wade’s philosophy was to take his time. Unlike many thru-hikers, he didn’t even have a schedule: “I wanted to experience what I could because, unfortunately, I may never get to do another long trip like that again,” he says. So he didn’t plan more than a week ahead. He never wanted to



## IF YOU ASK WADE WHAT HE LIKES MOST ABOUT HIS JOB, HE'LL GIVE YOU THE SAME ANSWER AS WHAT HE LIKED MOST ABOUT HIKING THE A.T. — THE PEOPLE.



feel like he couldn't go into town or say yes to an invitation just because his schedule said he needed to make so many miles that day. In town, instead of hitting up the cheapest buffet, Wade purposefully sought out small diners and stayed to chat with locals. His lack of scheduling and chatty nature definitely paid off — stopping for hot dogs led to a trip to New York City and stopping for free ice cream landed him in Boston. If a day passed with nothing interesting to be found, Wade simply reminded himself that hundreds of people would love to be hiking and enjoying the outdoors like he was. "There are a lot of people that sit in offices all day every day who wish they could be out there hiking, and here I was, living the dream," he says.

This message — that there is more to life than making money — is one of the many life lessons Wade learned as a thru-hiker. And learning is one of the things Wade loved most about the Trail — gaining a better understanding of himself, nature, and fellow hikers: "It's really neat to have that classroom out there on the A.T. to learn about social culture and be in the Appalachian ecosystem — to see everything as it changes with the seasons." He also found out more about backpacking in general. Wade quickly realized that he didn't need to carry a rain suit, an extra fuel canister, or eight-days-worth of food. He scaled down his gear and felt his confidence

rise. Though he still had days of doubt, days when he wasn't sure he could go any farther, he slowly became more and more assured that he could make it and that he would, in fact, succeed. He developed an appreciation for simplicity: a weekly shower, freeze-dried food, and clean clothes. He knew he could live comfortably (and happily) with the few things he could carry on his back. So, he hiked on.

Hail in Vermont gave way to sunny skies above the tree line in Maine. The end was near. At first sight of the weather-beaten sign at Katahdin, 177 days after he started the Trail, Wade stopped. He almost turned around. Partly in disbelief, partly in denial, he didn't want his experience to be over. His six-month hike was full of ups and downs, gains and losses. "You sweated, you bled, you had good times, you had bad times," he reminisces. Coming down the mountain, done with the Trail, Wade had a full beard and a shaggy head of hair, and weighed 50 pounds less than when he started. The first man he ran into told him, "Congratulations." Wade's response: "It's over." And then he broke down crying.

"The Trail is a major part of my life experience," he says; then he laughs, "I'm sure my friends get



annoyed with me because a story will come up, and I'll be like, 'oh, on the Trail this and that happened.' Everything can tie back into something I learned on the Trail."

Today, Wade lives on a mountain in the Chatahoochee National Forest in north Georgia. From his room, Springer Mountain is just a four-and-a-half-mile hike away. His commute to work is all of



40 feet. As lodge manager of the Len Foote Hike Inn, Wade combines his business degree with his love of the Trail. The inn is owned by Amicalola Falls State Park, but Wade is not a ranger. He works for the Appalachian Education and Recreations Services, Inc. (AERS), a non-profit that manages the operation of the lodge. When Wade interviewed for the job two-and-a-half years ago, he had to get there the same way guests do — by hiking five miles. On his way up the mountain that first time, sweating and hot in the Georgia July heat, Wade thought, "how cool is this?"

As you can imagine, working at a remote location lodge is quite different from working at a hotel in the city. Besides greeting sweaty guests and feeding red wiggler worms (used for on-site composting), Wade has found that many regular "duties" in his job were not listed on the original posting. "The first time I had to pick up snake tongs and go catch a big old rattlesnake," Wade recounts, "I thought, *'oh my goodness, what am I doing here?'*" By now, Wade is used to his snake wrangler duties (and he should be, considering it's an almost weekly occurrence during the summer). He also has to ward off the fire ants, yellow jackets, and the occasional curious bear. Not many people can say they've come home from work to find their room was ransacked by a bear—but Wade can (and he still has the wallet with teeth marks to prove it). Wade also acts as on-site photographer for guests,

and though he's a professional photographer, he takes, in good humor, advice from tourists on how to frame the shot. Wade also mans the front desk, mops the floor, and helps in the kitchen. And he credits his co-workers for the inn's successful operation. "Everybody has picked up a broom and mop," he explains. "It's a lot of team work up here."

If you ask Wade what he likes most about his job, he'll give you the same answer as what he liked most about hiking the A.T. — the people. "That was the best part, sitting in camp or hiking up the Trail, and just talking," he says. And then admits that he tends to be a bit of one — a talker, that is. At the Hike Inn, he loves meeting new people and sharing stories. Oftentimes, Wade recounts his A.T. experience during nightly presentations at the inn, and since more than 9,000 guests are projected at the inn this year, many people will likely hear his tales. Hike Inn executive director Eric Graves says, "Most of our guests are interested in learning more about the A.T., and we are lucky to have a thru-hiker on staff. Guests love talking to Wade about his experience on the A.T. and really enjoy his A.T. presentation." During these presentations, guests ask: *Were you ever scared? How many bears did you see? Did you sleep in the shelters?* Wade responds: *"The Trail is like a family — everybody takes care of everybody. I saw six bears, all in Virginia, and I learned a big lesson: Do not throw rocks at bears. And by the way, there is a rumor*

From left: Hikers enter the inn; Wade on Katahdin at the completion of his thru-hike; Visitors enjoy the inn. Photos of Len Foote Hike Inn by Samara Linnell.



**"IT'S REALLY NEAT TO HAVE THAT CLASSROOM OUT THERE ON THE A.T. TO LEARN ABOUT SOCIAL CULTURE AND BE IN THE APPALACHIAN ECOSYSTEM — TO SEE EVERYTHING AS IT CHANGES WITH THE SEASONS."**

*going around that Virginia is flat; it is not. If you sleep in open-air in the summer, don't expect to wake up in the same spot, the mosquitoes will pick you up and tote you off. The White Mountains are incredible. Go there, hard hiking but worth it."*

Wade also tells guests about the inn's mission — one very near and dear to his heart — to bring others to love and respect nature. During the nightly tour of the Hike Inn, he teaches guests all the inner workings of the facility. From the native plant garden and the solar panels that heat the water to the composting toilets and rain barrels, the inn exemplifies sustainable living. And Wade (along with the other six on-site staff members) is committed to the same. On the tour, he introduces guests to the lesser known "staff" of the inn — the red wiggler worms. The worms do their part in reducing the inn's waste by transforming food scraps,

paper shreds, and old linens to rich soil. This demonstration leads to a lesson in zero waste: "Hey, it does take a lot of effort and energy and resources to get food to our plate; we probably ought to conserve that a bit more." Wade tells guests their waste goal for the meal that night — and that it will be recorded on a board in the dining room with either a smiley face or a sad face. By making a game out of conservation, he teaches guests that sustainable living is both doable and fun.

Wade also encounters other thru-hikers while working at the inn. Living near that first white blaze, he easily keeps close ties with the Trail. "Being here at the inn is the perfect place to get to still live in the Trail culture," he says. When he meets thru-hikers beginning their journey to Katahdin, he gives them advice, telling them of his experience or keeping in

*Continued on page 46*

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Show your appreciation and support for the Trail each and every day with an Appalachian Trail (A.T.) license plate. A portion of all proceeds will help manage and protect the A.T.



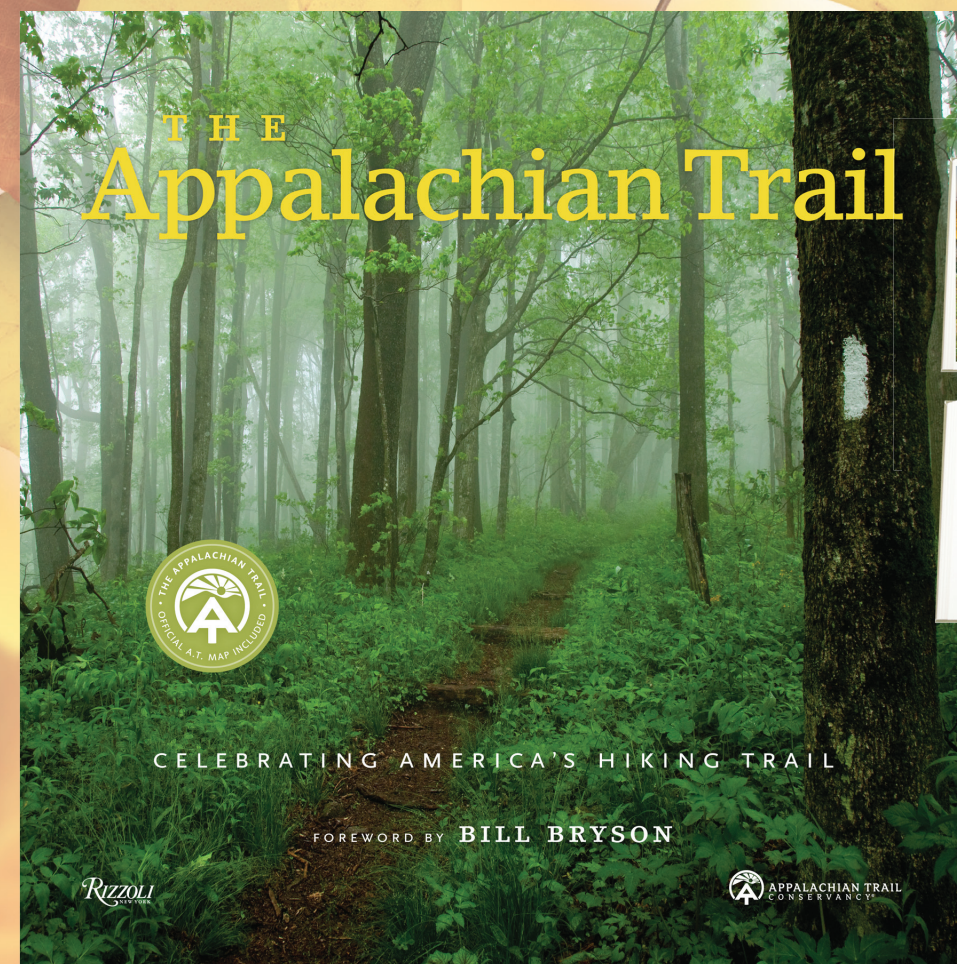
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# ATC Interns

BY BEN JORDAN

**THE COZY TWO-STORY OFFICE ON WASHINGTON STREET WAS A WHIRL OF ACTIVITY AS** staff and planned, organized, and executed projects this past summer. Thrown into the mix were fresh interns ready to gain valuable on-site experience while thrusting productivity into overdrive. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s (ATC) headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia received more than 120 internship applications this year — the most it’s ever had. From there, they selected a team ready to tackle any task. Seventeen interns have participated in the ATC’s internship program since it began in 2009, working in the various departments and branch offices along the East Coast. Their assistance has allowed the ATC to host bigger events, gain more supporters and expand on hiking efforts across the globe. Being an intern myself, I quickly felt like part of the team — contributing to the enduring heritage of the Appalachian Trail so that future generations can enjoy its priceless beauty. Way better than the coffee runs and file arranging I expected.



**Lisa Brayda**  
*Community Outreach Coordinator*  
Lisa graduated from Messiah College in Pennsylvania with a bachelor’s degree in environmental sustainability. During her sophomore year, she took a semester off and volunteered at vineyards and gardens across northern Italy.

**What kind of work do you do for the ATC?**  
As an intern at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, I’m working closely with the South Mountain Partnership to create and manage events like South Mountain Outdoors, as well as running social media aspects for the South Mountain Partnership. My tasks vary from attending meetings to updating statuses on the Partnership’s Facebook page.

**Have you ever thought about thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail?**  
Every day. When the buzz of electricity, roar of engines, and honking of horns

starts getting to me (every few hours), the desire to pack my bag and hit the A.T. is tempting — maybe it’s not so good working just three steps from the Trail.

**Do you have any hidden talents?**  
I’m pretty good at beatboxing, with a special I like to call “the one man band.”

**Kirsten Dodd**  
*Events Intern*



Kirsten grew up near the ATC’s headquarters in Frederick County, Maryland. She recently graduated from Mount St. Mary’s University with a degree in English. Now she’s exploring her options to find a career she enjoys.

**What kind of work do you do for the ATC?**  
I help plan the ATC’s summer events, like Shepherdstown Street Fest, Junior Ranger Day and the A.T. 75th Anniversary Weekend Celebration. I write forms, take notes at meetings, organize documents, and do anything else that needs to be done.

**What do you enjoy about your ATC internship?**  
I can’t imagine working with greater people. The staff and volunteers at the ATC are all fun, personable, and unique. I love hearing everyone’s stories and learning about how everyone ended up at the ATC. It’s amazing how so many different people can come together for the love of the Appalachian Trail.

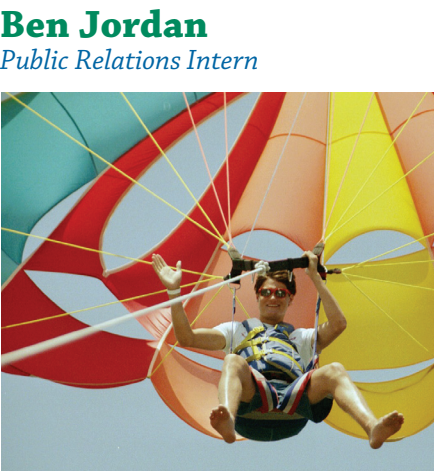
**Any sections of the Trail you would like to hike next?**  
I would love to hike in New Hampshire or Maine. Every landscape I see from this area always amazes me. I’ve visited northern states the least, and would love to get out there more.

**Patricia Essama**  
*Land Records Intern*  
Patricia is a senior studying environmental policy at American Military University in Charles Town, West Virginia and also works for the U.S. Census Bureau in Hagerstown, Maryland. She’s married and has two daughters.

**What kind of work do you do for the ATC?**  
I assist the land protection manager with research and reconciliation of ATC fee-owned lands and conservation easements. The lands and easements are a tool used to preserve the ecological and cultural value of the A.T. The position is a challenge because the A.T. stretches across 14 states.

**Do you have any previous hiking experience?**  
Yes, as a teenager I hiked from Boonsboro, Maryland, to the end of Skyline Drive. I learned quickly that there is a lot a map can’t tell you.

**What’s your favorite food on and off the Trail?**  
Hot dogs. They may kill me, but I love ‘em!



Ben is a senior at Kent State University in Ohio, studying public relations. He’s originally from northern Virginia, and one day hopes to start a Public Relations career at a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C.

**What kind of work do you do for the ATC?**  
Most of my time is spent writing press releases for upcoming events, updating media contact lists and editing copy. Other than that I try to help out the marketing team any way I can.

**What valuable skills do you bring to the ATC team?**  
The biggest strength I bring to the table is writing. Being a journalist for Kent State’s student newspaper and taking multiple classes for business and media writing has really helped me out. I’ve always enjoyed writing, and doing it for the ATC is a fun and interesting challenge.

**Outside of the ATC, what are you passionate about?**  
I love helping people. I’m very involved with my fraternity, Phi Delta Theta, at Kent State. We’re always doing different community service events, with one happening almost every weekend. I’m always busy promoting and participating in philanthropies and nonprofit events, which has really strengthened my public relations skills outside of the classroom.

**Nick Ulbert**  
*Marketing Assistant Intern*



Nick grew up in Des Plaines, Illinois and recently graduated from Western Illinois University with a degree in journalism. One day he hopes to work in the marketing and communications department of an organization he respects.

**What kind of work do you do for the ATC?**  
I do a variety of things, such as handling the organization’s social media efforts, creating and proofing various marketing materials, and providing logistics for this fall’s membership drive.

**What have you learned from this internship so far?**  
I’ve learned how to correctly handle marketing and communications campaigns. The intricate tracking of communication efforts is something that really intrigues me.

**Is there anything quirky about the office that you like?**  
I’d have to say the marketing department’s extensive coffee making devices, thanks to our graphic designer and “coffee aficionado,” Jon Riley.

With our internships completed, most of the interns are preparing to begin new endeavors. Now we can look back with pride at the time we’ve spent working here and appreciate everything we have learned. 🌱

To learn more about the ATC’s internship program, visit [appalachiantrail.org/internship](http://appalachiantrail.org/internship).





PHOTO BY JOHN CAMMEROTA

**SOME APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY (ATC) LIFE** members were inadvertently omitted from being noted as such in our most recent annual report. Life members who also contribute to the different annual fund societies should have been noted with an asterisk. I apologize for the error and extend my thanks to those that called it to my attention. Life membership is a great way to ensure your membership is always current and help the ATC reduce the costs of renewals. Annual Fund donations enable the ATC to meet critical needs and fulfill our mission to preserve and protect the Appalachian Trail. To find out more about the Annual Fund Societies or to become a Life Member visit [appalachiantrail.org/annualfund](http://appalachiantrail.org/annualfund).

The following are life members who should have been designated as such along with their Annual Fund societies in the 2011 Annual Report. A corrected report can be found at [appalachiantrail.org/reports](http://appalachiantrail.org/reports). 🌱

Thanks to everyone for your generosity!  
**Royce W. Gibson** | *Director of Membership & Development*

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MAY — JUNE 2012

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**Fred Birchmore** by Fred Stephenson  
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**Bruce Estridge** by Craig McKee, Pat McKee, Terry Lee  
**Becky Finch** by Glenn & Martha Voss  
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Wade “Catfish” Chandler

Continued on page 39

touch with them as they hike — perhaps giving those hikers their first taste of Trail magic. Wade wishes all hikers who start the A.T. could finish it. But that’s not the case, and he knows it. So he tries to teach them a few of the lessons he learned: “Take care of yourself; don’t skimp on food. And find enjoyment in every day — a story shared, a cool-looking salamander, a pretty flower, a beautiful view.”

With thru-hikers and guests alike, his message is about living life to its fullest and appreciating the little things. It’s a message about having the right attitude, and smiling more often. Through his stories, his laughs, and even his smile, he leaves a quiet trail that sparkles and shines, a gentle reminder to care for the world and those in it, a subtle hint to make the best of each day. He hopes that this trail he’s left behind will ignite a spark in others, and that they, too, will begin spreading that magic. Maybe they’ll conserve more resources, vow to get outdoors and hike more, or teach others about sustainable living. Maybe they’ll even decide to hike the A.T.

In the future, Wade plans to continue working with people and the environment. Loving his time at the Hike Inn and living so close to the Trail, he will never forget the A.T. no matter where his career takes him. “Even if I move 3,000 miles away, I will still have that Trail inside of me,” he muses. But Wade doesn’t plan to move 3,000 miles away. He plans to stay in the north Georgia area and says he wants to be involved in an eco-friendly company where he can spend time outside and continue to do his part to help the environment. Board president of AERS, Richard Judy, thinks Wade should do just that. Richard explains, “I think Wade is a potential leader in the environmental field” and credits his business sense, knowledge of flora and fauna, and good-natured personality for his future success. No matter where life’s path leads Wade, one thing is certain: Wherever he goes, he’ll be spreading Trail magic. ⬆

I PUBLIC NOTICES

Hiking Partners

Female **68-year-old section hiker** looking for hiking partners in September. Plan to start in Damascus and hike north to Waynesboro. Prefer to day hike with car shuttle but also willing to backpack for part. Hiking up to 10 miles per day. Contact: Barbara at barbararall@gmail.com.

Experienced **61-year-old female A.T. section hiker** seeks hiking partners for Springer Mountain to Bland, Virginia for spring/summer 2013, and for New York/ Connecticut/Massachusetts/ Vermont fall 2012 and/or 2013. Prefer slacking (2 cars) unless not practical. Approximately 16 miles/day slacking; 10 packing. If interested, contact: ellen.atsectionhiker@gmail.com.

Female, age 57, **looking for women in similar age range to do a section hike**, shelter-to-shelter, from Hot Springs, North Carolina to Damascus, Virginia sometime in spring 2013. Contact Bev at: (828) 883-9278 or rokclmbr1@yahoo.com.

For Sale

A.T. **Maps and Books:** complete set of Trail maps and guide books. Never used. Still in original packaging. Make

offer. Shipping paid. Contact: dotsecor@hotmail.com.

Log **home for sale close to A.T.** just north of Luray, Virginia. Move-in ready! Flexible floor plan yields four or five bedrooms, three baths. Many upgrades including kitchen, five porches, A.T.-style shelter in rear of property. Three partially wooded acres, parking for eight vehicles, nicely landscaped. Views from porches of Blue Ridge, Shenandoah National Park, Skyline Drive, Massanutten. See photos at: ShenandoahDreamHome.com or to tour home ask for Jim: (866) 893-1490.

Lost and Found

**Lost camera** on the Appalachian Trail at the Delaware Water Gap on June 26, 2012 on the New Jersey side. Kodak M853; black with a black case. If found, contact: lboop26@comcast.net or jollymon17\_2001@yahoo.com.

For Your Information

**The Appalachian Long Distance Hiker Association “Gathering.”** October 12-14 in Athens, West Virginia. The 31st annual “Gathering”

will include workshops about the A.T. and trails around the world, a hiker fair, and a contra dance. The Friday night session will include a class year roll call and a special ceremony to recognize 2011 southbounders, 2012 thru-hikers, and 2012 section-hikers. A meet-and-greet with the ATC’s executive director Mark “Animal” Wenger will be offered Saturday afternoon; the featured Saturday night speaker will be ultra-light backpacker Justin “Trauma” Lichter, who recently completed a 2,500-mile trek across the Himalayas. For more information visit: [www.aldha.org](http://www.aldha.org).

**A.T. Jack-o-lantern Contest:** October 27, 2012, ATC Headquarters, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Create an A.T.-related Jack-o-lantern and enter it just in time for Halloween. The top three designs will win prizes and all will be displayed on the ATC’s Visitor Center front porch. For more information visit: [appalachiantrail.org/events](http://appalachiantrail.org/events). ⬆

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**“WHEN IN DOUBT, HIT THE woods.”** It’s an approach that is widely applicable in life, and one that I, like many others, have trusted on numerous occasions. I decided to take time off from school after my first semester at college in the hope of sorting out my academic and life plans before continuing any further with my education. I had been hiking since middle school and was familiar with the A.T., which seemed like the perfect way to spend the time: a beautiful trail, a physical challenge and lots of time to think. Also, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t to some degree driven by a need to match my best friend from home, “Swedish Chef,” who completed a southbound thru-hike in 2009. He called me in November, almost done, and I asked him if he thought I should do it in the spring. All he said was that it was the best decision he’s ever made.

And it was the best decision that I’ve ever made, though not because I sorted any plans out. In fact, I’d say if anything I became more confused, mainly because I underestimated the quality of the Trail community and the impact it would have on me. The number and diversity of people that I met, both on the Trail and in town, opened my eyes to more walks of life (so to speak) than I’d ever experienced before. For this reason, it was, again, the best decision I’ve ever made. It was also simply a fantastic lifestyle to live, one more fulfilling than any other I’ve experienced.



From left: “Branch” with “Appleseed”; Posing at the A.T.’s 2,000-mile mark.

With respect to my Trail name, “Branch”: on day one of hiking the approach trail to Springer, my hiking partner, “Appleseed,” and I had decided to find our own hiking sticks along the way, but I was growing impatient at having not found a suitable one yet. In a moment of tired frustration, I called out, “come on, I want a hiking stick!” and not 15 feet up the Trail, leaning against a tree, was a perfectly shaped one. After a look around to make sure I wasn’t stealing away with a poor pit stopper’s hiking stick, I grabbed it, and with a few duct tape repairs, used it all the way to Katahdin. Though I suppose it might have been more appropriate, I was spared the name Stick, and Branch it was.

These days, I’m studying political science at Cornell, focusing on political philosophy, for which the Trail offers more relevant reference material than one might think (unwritten rules of the Trail, definitions of community, etc.). I’m also leading trips with Cornell Outdoor Education, for which the Trail experience has been invaluable. I believe that taking a gap year/semester off before college should be considered not only a possible option, but a strongly encouraged one. And, in my humble and completely biased opinion, there’s nothing better than the Appalachian Trail. You might come away with more questions than answers, as well as a new and extraordinarily eclectic group of friends to whom you can direct them. ⬆

*Russell “Branch” Gutterson*  
LIVES IN ITHACA, NEW YORK.

“As I See It” is a monthly column from guest contributors representing the full range of ATC partners, members, and volunteers. To submit a column for consideration, please email [journeys@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:journeys@appalachiantrail.org) or write to Editor/As I See It, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425.



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Send photos (2MB or larger) of hikers, shelters, campsites, and scenic shots from Maine to Georgia to: [editor@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:editor@appalachiantrail.org).

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2011 THRU-HIKER "GO" IN THE BARREN-CHAIRBACK  
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