



# A JOURNEYS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

November — December 2011

INSIDE: Accessible A.T. | Speed Hiking | Harrisonburg, Virginia

# A JOURNEYS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

Volume 7, Number 6  
November — December 2011

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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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**On the Cover:** An icy A.T. in January (alternate view above), just north of the Interstate 70 footbridge in Maryland — captured by Photo Essay photographer and thru-hiker Martin Scott “Sanford” Wilson. (“Spilled Images” page 28)

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**ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE. BECAUSE WE ARE ALL PRETTY COMPLEX,** it would be hard for any of us to describe ourselves in one or two words. But when asked to do so, far more joy can be conjured up by using those words that describe the best in us all. We can use words like hiker, runner, kayaker, sailor, biker, which are still broad, but create an instant connection to others with similar interests. This positive description of ourselves, and the connection it creates, then serves to elevate everyone's mood.

On the flip side, one label, one description, when construed as negative depending on opinions, can be vastly misleading. When we decided to run a feature about speed hiking (page 24) — which the Appalachian Trail Conservancy neither encourages nor discourages, as long as the Trail and other hikers traversing it are respected — we were afraid it might be a point of contention. In an effort to dispel any negative correlation to the subject, I asked repeat thru-hiker, and Trail to Every Classroom instructor Jennifer Pharr Davis to write about her own A.T. experiences (page 38). She did so with such style and grace that what she conveys should strike a sweet spot in *anyone* who loves the Trail.

As Jennifer says, “the Trail promotes positive self-growth.” Ironically though, while the Trail endures, it does so with the neutrality of any inanimate object. As I See It author Tom Moose (page 47) puts it well this way: “I learned that the A.T. wasn't there for me to conquer ... it was just there. ... every day there would be challenges for me to adapt to and overcome. I just had to be open enough to receive the gifts that the A.T. [offers].” With all the emotion the Trail evokes, it remains itself, detached, unable to judge or label the hikers who traverse it — leaving them to decide for themselves what words describe *them* at their best.

As Dave Startzell ends his 25-year chapter as the dynamic and dedicated executive director for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (page 10), he might, in non-work conversation describe himself with many other words that do not include his professional title — especially considering his fervent love of kayaking, sailing, yoga, and world travel, to name those that are just at the tip of the preverbal iceberg. To me, Dave is a true Renaissance man with whom every conversation is engaging. His kindness, knowledge, and intelligence always leave me to want to learn more, no matter the subject of discussion. Yet my description of Dave only scrapes the surface. To label anybody in one or two words is always a bit of a disservice to the complexity of that person; but if we must, I would suggest we “accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, and don't mess with mister in-between.” ▲

**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).



Jennifer Pharr Davis on Cold Mountain in Virginia during her most recent thru-hike. PHOTO COURTESY BLUE RIDGE HIKING COMPANY



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After her third thru-hike, Jennifer Pharr Davis found that "the more of yourself you are able to pour out, the more you will receive in return."

#### 47 | AS I SEE IT

As a young child, Tom Moose ran away from home twice; as an adult hiking the Trail, he realized there was never any need to run at all.



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**▲ I HEARD ABOUT FAMILY HIKEING DAY** through the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) e-mail newsletter. We had a great day! [My husband, Russ, and I] had it on our calendars for the past two weeks and our children, Cade and Mirella, were looking forward to it. We stopped by the ATC headquarters first — this was Cade and Mirella's first time there. Russ and I had been there to see Kevin Gallagher's Green Tunnel Video (he ended up coming to our school for a presentation and hiking with 170 Sixth-graders last June...he was amazing). [The kids] went straight to the snacks and grabbed a handful of M&Ms. They loved the relief map and Cade announced that he wanted to hike the entire Trail. After getting our pictures taken by an awesome photographer, we headed down to the footbridge that crosses over the Potomac River. Cade and Mirella loved the sign that showed which way to Georgia and which way to Maine. After crossing the bridge, we encountered "the stairs." Our dog, Coral, took one step and turned right around. Russ and I told our kids that we weren't going to force Coral if she was too scared. After the kids fussed and whined, Coral took a deep breath and went down the stairs, only to pause halfway when a train went by. When we got all the way down, the kids were so proud of her (we were too)! We continued our hike for about another 20 minutes before turning around. We stopped off at a restaurant in Harpers Ferry and had our first dinner at a restaurant with Coral! She did great. We all slept great that night! Thanks again for a wonderful day!

*Roberta Pomponio*  
KEARNEYSVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA

**YOUR SEPTEMBER COVERAGE OF** shelters in the Smokies ("Give Me Shelter," *A.T. Journeys* September/October) brought back many fond memories. My wife and I moved to the mountains of western North Carolina as a result of years of camping and hiking in the Smokies. I've section hiked about 650 miles of the southern part of the AT. In my 1999 trek through the Smokies I found many shelters under construction. Many still had the chain-link fencing and some had cable hoists. The upside of the shelters was that they were well done, comfortable, and near water. Also, I very much appreciated benches or anything else to sit on. After a long day sitting on the ground just didn't hack it for me. Thanks to the many volunteers that made all of this happen.

*Jack James*  
VILAS, NORTH CAROLINA



**▲ WHILE READING THE LATEST** issue of *A.T. Journeys*, I was motivated to pass along several pictures I took of my sons on the A.T. in Georgia during the "Great Atlanta Christmas Day Snow Storm of 2010" — a very rare, white Christmas. We had but one 16 mile sec-

tion of the 80 miles in Georgia to complete, having section-hiked it over the last few years in conjunction with my older son Max's boy scout activities. We had [hiked] other sections in lighter snow conditions, so when we heard Atlanta was going to get a Christmas snow storm, I couldn't resist the idea of completing the last piece in what I thought would be just seven to nine inches of snow.

Well, that was accurate for only the first afternoon of our two-day trip on December 26th — a relatively easy (but cold) five miles north from Unicoi Gap to Tray Mountain Shelter. We had arranged for my wife to pick us up at Dick's Creek Gap the next evening, so we [had] to try to maintain a schedule. We arrived at [the shelter] two hours after nightfall, whereupon the conditions had transitioned to nothing short of a howling blizzard. We had the right equipment (we're boy scouts, remember), but putting up a tent in 25 mph winds proved to be a major challenge of man versus nature. Fortunately, our zero degree sleeping bags won the battle! The next day we awoke to calm winds and drifts along the Trail of almost three feet. We plodded through [this] for 11 miles that day. Hiking that night in two hours of darkness, we finally made it to Dick's Creek Gap at about 7:30. If we were anywhere else but Georgia, I suppose these pictures might not be unusual. But for my sons and I, we'll never forget the experience. ▲

*Dale Conrad (54), Max Conrad (15), Elliott Conrad (11)*  
CANTON, GEORGIA

*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.

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Bob Almand, ATC regional directors Laura Belleville and Karen Lutz, and Dave Starzell on Capital Hill in 2010.



**THE END OF THIS YEAR MARKS THE END OF AN ERA FOR THE Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC).** Dave Starzell will retire after more than three decades with ATC, the last 25 years in service as our executive director. His focus for most of his career was to put the A.T. on public lands so it can be passed down to future generations. His accomplishments to protect the A.T. are without equal for any conservation effort worldwide. Thousands of land tracts have been acquired to protect the A.T. footpath. Dave leaves us not with just a legacy of land conservation but positioned to build upon his legacy and to enter the next phase of A.T. conservation. Several recent programs, which began under Dave's leadership, will keep his love of the Trail alive. Three programs, stand out for their wide ranging impact on the future of the A.T. and ATC.

Threats to the environment of the A.T. include encroaching development, acid rain, invasive species, water quality, and climate change. The A.T. MEGA-Transect program is a collaborative environmental monitoring and research effort. It is designed to assist cooperative management partners in the development of adaptive management strategies to ensure the long-term health of all natural resources along the Trail.

The Trail to Every Classroom program focuses on students and promotes stewardship of public lands, community engagement, recreation, and volunteerism. Since the program started in 2006, almost 300 teachers have been trained. These teachers, along with volunteers and agency partners, have engaged thousands of students in A.T. activities. Trail to Every Classroom promotes volunteerism in students that will continue into their adult lives. We feel the program is building future Trail volunteers.

The Appalachian Trail Community designation program is designed to recognize communities that promote and protect the Trail. Towns, counties, and communities along the Trail's corridor are considered assets by A.T. hikers and many of these towns act as good friends and neighbors to the Trail. The program serves to assist communities with sustainable economic development through tourism and outdoor recreation while preserving and protecting the A.T. We want Trail communities to view the A.T. as a community asset that enhances the community as an economic development tool, a recreational opportunity for residents, and a quiet retreat from the pressure of everyday living. Communities that view the A.T. as an asset will become partners in protecting it.

Dave's legacy will always be the land acquisition program that put the A.T. on public land. He leaves us with a framework that will allow us to preserve and manage the Trail — ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. Very shortly Dave will be leaving us. Thank you, Dave; we are grateful for your 34 incredible years of leadership. ⚡

J. Robert Almand | Chair

*He leaves us with a framework that will allow us to preserve and manage the Trail — ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come.*

**Saturday, December 3rd**  
**WARM UP**  
 with hot cider, homemade cookies, and shop for holiday gifts at **ATC's Open House.**

**9 am — 5 pm**  
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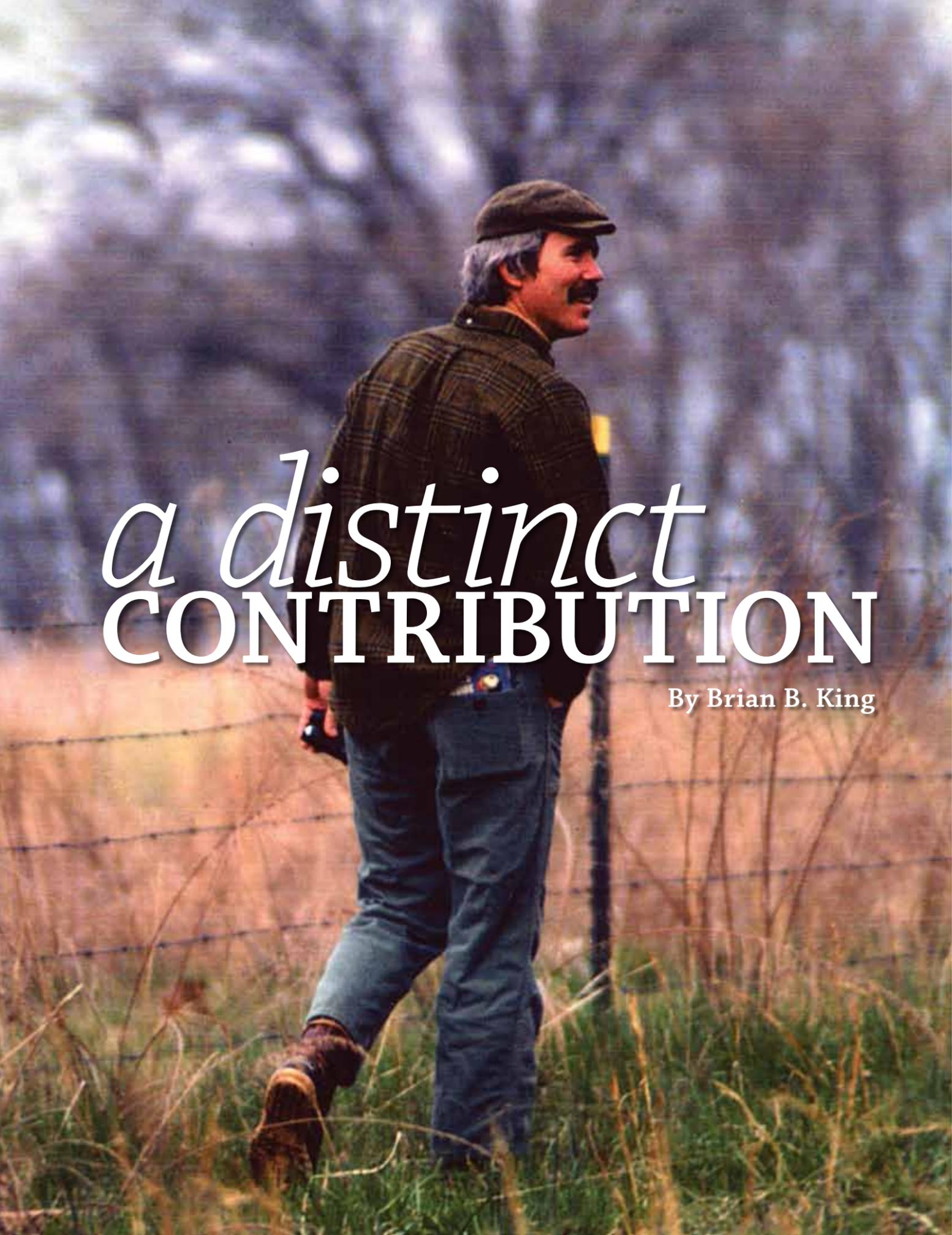
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A man with a mustache, wearing a dark cap and a plaid shirt, is walking away from the camera in a field. He is looking back over his shoulder. The background is a blurred landscape with trees and a fence.

# a distinct CONTRIBUTION

By Brian B. King

*This Trail might well, instead of 'Appalachian Trail,' have been termed, 'The Anonymous Trail,' in recognition of the fact that many, many people ... have labored on [it]. They have asked for no return nor recognition nor reward. They have contributed to the project simply by reasons of the pleasure found in trail-making and in the realization that they were, perhaps, creating something which would be a distinct contribution to the American recreational system and the training of American people.*

**LEGENDARY APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONFERENCE** (ATC) chairman Myron Avery wrote that in 1951 as he prepared to officially "reopen" a repaired and relocated Appalachian Trail after 13 years of disruption due to hurricane damage, unavoidable wartime neglect, and the intrusions of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Poignant as those thoughts are for many who have read them since, probably only the last half of the last sentence is strictly true. Avery, who joined the project in his late 20s and left it as a Navy captain known for his bark as well as his trail, became anything but anonymous. That was true as well for many in the small clans that forged the footpath. And, while volunteers ruled, the occasional off-season ranger was paid to scout trail, and the Civilian Conservation Corps was paid.

David N. Startzell, who came to the project in his late 20s too, shares with those pioneers that enduring allegiance to the idea of contributing something "distinct ... to the American recreational system." He has mentioned it whenever someone asked why he did what he did for the last 34 years. It has been as constant as the appearance in his speeches of "obligation," "responsibility," and "opportunity." No longer anonymous, he came to the project as a volunteer — in 1974 as a graduate student in planning at the University of Tennessee, heading into the woods above Wesser, North Carolina, with Jim Botts, a future ATC vice chair, and Arch Nichols, who would serve on the elected ATC board longer than any other person. That spring day, Startzell wrote after Nichols died in 1989, "I began to realize that people like Arch Nichols represented a very special breed .... It was, for me, a dawning of appreciation for both the 'body' and the 'soul' of the Appalachian Trail project. And, I wonder to this day how many other people Arch infected with his love of the outdoors." It was something they brought equally to bear on their Trail work.

Retiring early next year as executive director since November 1986, the longest-serving officer of the ATC, Startzell still is "truly amazed at what [volunteers] do." One of the few regrets he mentioned recently was not having as many opportunities lately to get out with clubs on the ground. "Whenever I have gone out, I've enjoyed it," he says. Startzell received a series of accolades

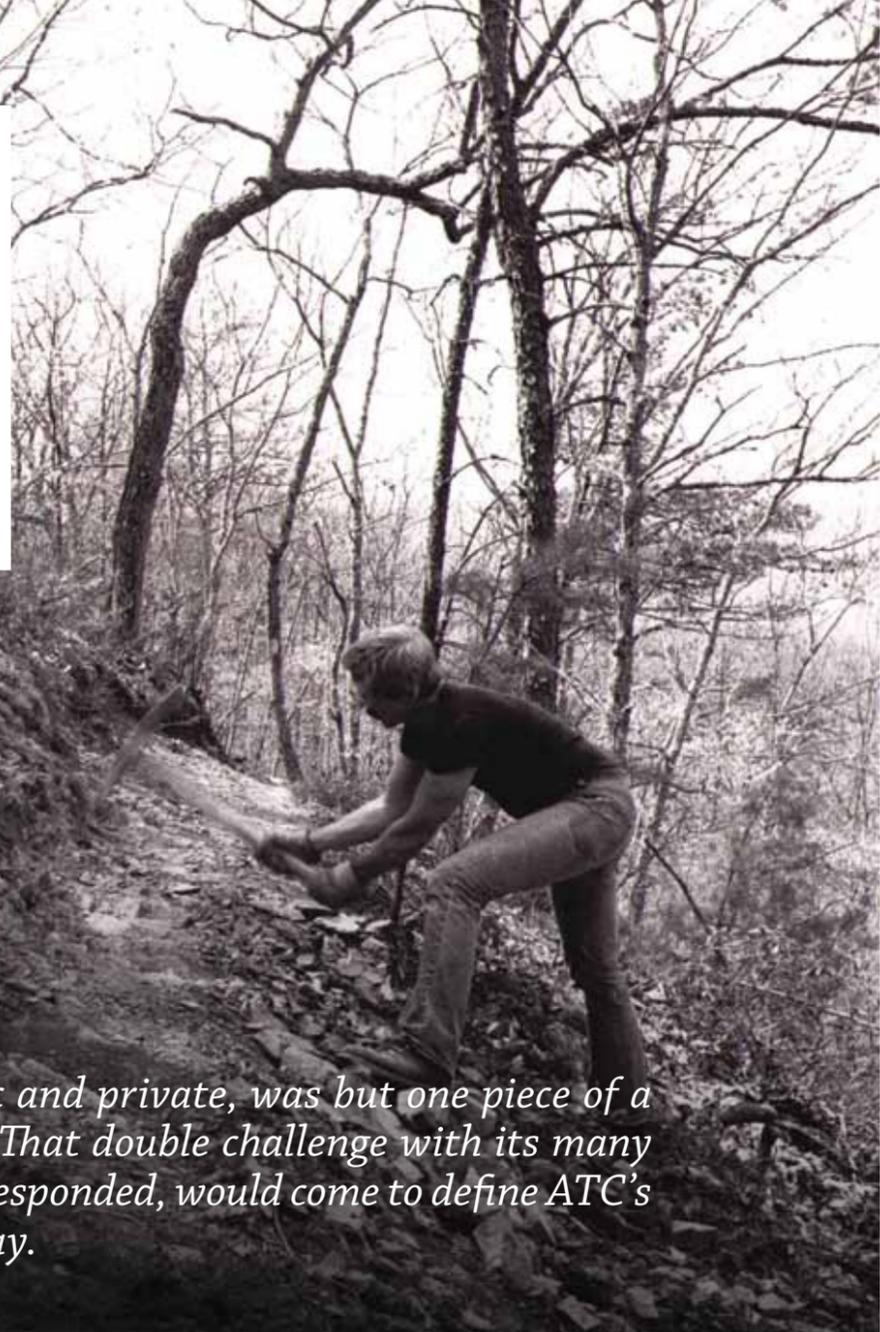
ATC's unassuming leader enjoys an outdoor jaunt in the mid eighties; "Startzell will take credit individually for hardly anything...; it is always 'we,' usually referring to a volunteer leader or agency counterpart or a manager on the staff."

this year — from the National Park Service (NPS), the USDA Forest Service, the ATC Board of Directors, the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association, the International Appalachian Trail, and 25 U.S. senators from Trail states. As did numerous awards in the past two decades, they focused on his lead role for three decades in securing about \$200 million in federal funds for arguably the most complicated land-acquisition program in U.S. public-lands history. A.T. park manager Pamela Underhill said of her "calm, insightful, pragmatic" counterpart for more than 15 years: "We kept slaying the dragon .... The whole nation owes you a debt of gratitude."

Slightly more than two months after Startzell started at ATC, President Jimmy Carter signed into law amendments to the 10-year-old National Trails System Act, the statute that brought the footpath into the national park system and authorized acquisition of lands to protect it. Those ATC-sought amendments added teeth to the original authorization and a wider land buffer. They also authorized more money and reestablished the volunteer-based ATC's role in its care. At the time, 41 percent of the Trail was on private land. Except for what lay inside other park-system units, the National Park Service had acquired nothing. In the next 10 years, more than 500 miles were bought by NPS alone. Other agencies added to their acreages, but land prices had more than doubled. The project still had 100 miles to go in 1989. Today, fewer than six miles remain "unprotected," much of that in one spot that has been in negotiation for years and the rest crossing municipally owned watersheds.

Startzell testified every spring before a House appropriations subcommittee from soon after his hiring in January 1978 through 1998. Later joined by Appalachian Trail Conservancy staff members, he also led a squad of volunteers on congressional office visits, armed with briefing packets that detailed both landmarks acquired and land sought in each state. In 1998, the subcommittee chairman, an Ohioan converted to the cause, called Startzell from the House cloakroom right after the last Trail-wide appropriation passed. But, securing the funds, public and private, was but one piece of one prong of a two-pronged challenge posed by the 1978 amendments and accepted by ATC. That double challenge with its many pieces, and how Startzell responded, would come to define ATC's work and nature to this day.

The acquisition side, beyond funding, meant redesigning and reconstructing much of the official 1971 route and corridor. Tak-



*Securing the funds, public and private, was but one piece of a two-pronged challenge ... That double challenge with its many pieces, and how Startzell responded, would come to define ATC's work and nature to this day.*



Former president of the Nature Conservancy and Yale University forestry-school dean, Charles H.W. Foster, described Startzell in 1986 as "planner, amateur ornithologist, and, reputedly, the most consummate technician on the staff." Good disguise for a chief executive who later tried to hire good people, expected them to do their jobs, and let them do so. Clockwise from inset: With ATC staff during a 1980 work trip; Stepping in for some Trail work in the 80s; Showing relief map to Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan in 89; Speaking at the House Appropriations Subcommittee in the early 80s; Talking with Congresswomen Beverly Byron in 85; Meeting with Ray Hunt and USFS chief and deputy chief in 88.

ing that official route down to the level of individual parcels (nearly 3,000 in all) meant sometimes rowdy local public hearings for Startzell, Pam Underhill, and the NPS land-acquisition chief. (A quarter-century or more later, some of the communities that opposed a "government takeover" then were among the first to seek the cachet of designation as an A.T. Community.) It meant an official comprehensive management plan (1981) that begat more plans for all partners and a land-protection plan, all of which he had a hand in crafting. The route would change, in small degrees, constantly. That meant not just more paperwork, but a decision-making process to choose the best spots, given both the Trail's values and local realities. Every time a forest or park had to redraw its own management plan or go through the environmental-review process for a particular action, more often than not it was Startzell going through those reams of paper to ferret out the potential effects on the Trail. Then, he would draft official comments supporting or opposing the plans.

All along were many smaller projects, from the 10-foot-long relief map of the Trail that remains the signature item in the headquarters Visitors Center to serving as hands-on "general contractor" for rehabilitation of the Virginia Bears Den property ATC acquired in the 1980s. Constant adjustments in pursuit of "win-win" results were the norm for the top-priority work: Trail protection, whether acquisition or rebuffing threats across the strip of land everyone wanted. The "most satisfying" of the acquisitions? Startzell said recently that it was the corridor for the Trail across Saddleback Mountain in Maine, after two decades of bitter battles with the Boston-based owner of the Saddleback ski resort. Those battles were carried out at local hearings, within the Maine congressional delegation, inside NPS environmental-impact proceedings, and in the news media (and ATC's fundraising letters). Even though an "imposed settlement" in the waning days of the Clinton administration overruled the NPS/ATC position, "we ended up with a pretty decent corridor ... at a truly magnificent spot I had walked many times," he said.

The many aspects of, and players in, the acquisitions process were just one prong triggered by the 1978 act. Within its legislative history was a clear deal with Congress: ATC would manage, to the highest standards, the land Congress agreed to protect with taxpayers' dollars. Once the amendments were law, then ATC board chair George Zobelein called the only "special meeting" of the board on record, in the spring of 1978, to start planning "what it's going to take" to meet that obligation ... as if everyone knew then exactly what the obligation actually meant in day-to-day terms. "There were some disconnects .... Relations weren't great at that time" with the clubs, which were brought under that obligation by ATC, Startzell said. Other than a mostly social meeting every few years, club-ATC contact was minimal. A certain commonality of purpose had to be restored with clubs and agency offices outside Washington. ATC needed to become relevant again as a real force for the Trail as a whole, not as a meeting planner but as the essential hub of an ever more elaborate wheel in motion.

Regional offices followed, to provide a presence "in the field," along with *The Register* newsletter for maintainers, Trail crews,

volunteer-training programs, a grants-to-clubs program, and a biennial club-presidents meeting in the 1990s. Other assistance followed, including detailed management-planning guides, Trail assessments, and resource inventories to generate five-year work plans. Also, the board needed to be better served for its biannual meetings (and committee meetings in between), so the sessions could more efficiently focus on discussions and decisions rather than briefings. In 1987, "the big black notebook," as then-Chair Ray Hunt literally described it, was born: a relatively short paper for every program and every pending



Dave with his wife, and *Appalachian Trailway News* editor, Judy Jenner at Katahdin.

issue, with background (origin to updates) and decision options, all in a loose-leaf binder. It gave way this century to electronically transmitted "packages," but the concept has stuck. Twice a year, the package provides the single best snapshot available of ATC's business at hand.

Somewhat behind the scenes, the now-little-remembered Appalachian National Scenic Trail Advisory Council (ANSTAC) — a creature of the 1968 National Trails System Act meant to guide the secretary of the interior in policymaking — was working as something of a shadow ATC, a central body with all states, the major agencies, ATC, and a selection of clubs represented. It, too, worked on those "What is it going to take?" and "What do we do now?" primary questions. ANSTAC deliberations largely framed the contents of what is officially known as Amendment No. 8, National Park Service Cooperative Agreement No. 0631-81-01, "the delegation agreement" under which ATC assumed responsibility for the care of all A.T. lands acquired by NPS. Through its terms, today about \$1.5 million in federal funds flows to ATC in partial support of that responsibility. At the time, the ramifications of its other provisions were vastly less than fully understood.

Startzell helped support ANSTAC's work, which generated more than its share of white papers and recommendations, for the last half of its 1969 to 1988 existence. One of its chairmen, a former president of the Nature Conservancy and Yale University forestry-school dean, Charles H.W. Foster, described Startzell in 1986 as "planner, amateur ornithologist, and, reputedly, the most consummate technician on the staff." Good disguise for a chief



Clockwise from top left: With President Clinton and Vice President Gore during their 1998 visit to Harpers Ferry; In '98, helping with Jefferson Rock rehab work in Harpers Ferry; Addressing the audience at the National Geographic premier of *America's Wild Spaces: the Appalachian Trail* in 2009.

*A future historian might see Startzell's approach as a hybrid of MacKaye's focus on nature and ideal places and Avery's perfectionist focus on standards, training, providing information, and win-win routes.*



executive who later tried to hire good people, expected them to do their jobs, and let them, while he went about his mostly external-relations projects — stepping in only if something vital stalled. Not that he ever stopped being the copious note-taker; writer of detailed analytical, suggestive memos; craftsman of on-the-mark budgets; or believer that the “e” in e-mail stands for “exhaustive.” Good cover for mostly soft-spoken mediation through uncounted, tense meetings, internally and externally, toward an end result most, if not all, could swallow.

Early on in the process of building up the volunteer-based ATC management force, a top NPS park superintendent, in his keynote at the first club-presidents meeting in 1988, said, essentially: “You will fail. You have no idea what it takes to run a park” as envisioned by the delegation agreement. Challenge(s) accepted. The resources and skills of the entire ATC network needed to be raised. The corps of skilled, mostly highly educated volunteers, now 6,000 strong, needed to be trained to the new expectations, as noted. Internally, more employees needed to be brought in to facilitate that and, in part, to buffer volunteers from federal requirements. That role was and is shared by the initially one-person NPS A.T. Project Office (now Park Office or ATPO) when it first was formed in the agency’s Boston regional office and decamped for a time to an office adjacent to Startzell and the four other ATC employees. (Today, ATPO has about a dozen employees.)

Since Startzell succeeded Larry van Meter as executive director in 1986, the staff has been methodically increased from 18 to about 45 year-round (half in the field) and 12—15 seasonal employees. Annual revenue has increased at more than three times the rate of inflation, and income flows from more than a dozen sources instead of three. ATC has been debt-free for a decade. Net assets have increased at more than five times the rate of inflation — despite three recessions and two stock-market body-blows that hurt reserves, moved by him and the board from laggard bank CDs to mutual funds. That \$10.4 million in net assets includes 40 tracts of lands (two with significant historic structures) and 60 easements. He started the Stewardship Fund endowment in the late 1980s with a \$100,000 matching grant from a small family foundation. Tapped heavily in 2005 for organizational reorganizations, it now has net assets of slightly more than \$2 million, less than what Startzell says he still wants for it but double the operating budget when he took over. “I always wanted to get it to 10 to 15 million, to get us away from living hand to mouth every year,” says the man who came into an organization that basically had no reserves.

He also hopes ATC membership will soon grow to about 50,000 (from about 42,000 today and about 17,000 when he became director), acknowledging that organizational and footpath stability and the lack of threats to the Trail’s continuity — which helped attract members from the 1960s through the rest of the century — require different lures. Today’s

threats are threats to the integrity of the land itself and its resources, “and most people find it hard to understand the needs and challenges of stewardship,” he says. Over the years, surpluses obviously have out-registered deficits (by four to one). When they were significant, a good chunk went into infrastructure: an addition to, and three renovations of, the headquarters, for example, and the first computer network in late 1987. In the 1980s, ATC developed enviable benefits packages for underpaid employees; Startzell worked into the 1990s to make salaries competitive and develop a full array of modern personnel policies and practices, working with human-resources experts on the board. Startzell will take credit individually for hardly anything such as that; it is always “we,” usually referring to a volunteer leader or agency counterpart or a manager on the staff.

As he told members at the 2011 38th ATC meeting in July at Emory & Henry College, “The reality is that none of the achievements of the past 30-plus years can be fairly attributed to me or to any one individual. ATC is a big, far-flung, and sometimes-unruly extended family, but it is only through our collective action that we have been able to achieve so much. I simply had the good fortune to join the staff of ATC at a critical juncture in the evolution of the organization and the Trail project.” Most nonprofits are defined by their programs, and ATC’s have never stopped growing. “Our conservation programs have grown from nothing to more than 20 programs,” Startzell noted in those July remarks, “ranging from seasonal Trail-crew and ridgerunner programs to volunteer-training programs to resource management and monitoring programs to youth and community-engagement programs.” Because of that and the acquisition of 200,000 acres of mountaintop and valley land, he said, “I also believe the quality of the Trail experience is better today than it has ever been.”

In his first address to a biennial meeting as executive director, which also laid out many ideas that today are programs, Startzell said, “We are just beginning to realize the complexities of land management. It is an awesome task. And yet, I believe we can establish a very high standard of care, for the Trail and for Trail lands, based almost entirely on volunteer stewardship. It is both a challenge and, in a sense, an obligation. We have an opportunity to demonstrate that there are few limits to what can be achieved by a dedicated and well-organized network of volunteers.”

That definition of land management mostly in place, he still probably was not comfortable with the board’s accolade at the July meeting — a 20-minute video that placed him with Avery and Benton MacKaye in the pantheon of Trail leaders. Still, he shares with the Trail’s two mismatched founders that desire to contribute to America’s recreational treasures. A future historian might see Startzell’s approach as a hybrid of MacKaye’s focus on nature and ideal places and Avery’s perfectionist focus on standards, training, providing information, and win-win routes. Call it principled compromise. Without the epaulets. ⚡

To view a video of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Land Acquisition visit: [appalachiantrail.org/landprotection](http://appalachiantrail.org/landprotection)  
ATC’s publisher, Brian B. King has worked diligently alongside Dave Startzell for the past 24 years.

# | TRAILHEAD |

PHOTO BY COLLEEN CONTRISCIANE

## hurricane damage

Two hurricanes in early September — Irene and Lee — caused significant damage in some areas of the A.T., including flooding and washed-out bridges and boardwalks. The most significant impacts were reported in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Vermont, and Maine. Low-lying areas were hit hardest, and road access has been affected in some areas. Some temporary re-routes may be required. Carrying a map and compass is strongly recommended. Hikers to these areas are urged to check the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) Web site, and those of local land-managing agencies and Trail Clubs before contemplating a hike.

Fording streams and rivers may be the most dangerous challenge hikers confront, especially following inclement weather. River crossings can be deceptively hazardous. Even a very shallow, swiftly flowing body of water can pack enough force to knock you off your feet. Use caution and common sense. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them. If a section of the Appalachian Trail is closed or presents a serious safety hazard, hikers may take an alternate route or skip those sections entirely and still be eligible to receive 2,000-miler status. Read our "Safety Tips for Forging Streams and Rivers" article, which is posted on ATC's Web site, for advice.

For complete, current Trail updates, visit: [appalachiantrail.org/hiking/updates](http://appalachiantrail.org/hiking/updates)



## Family Hiking Day Recap

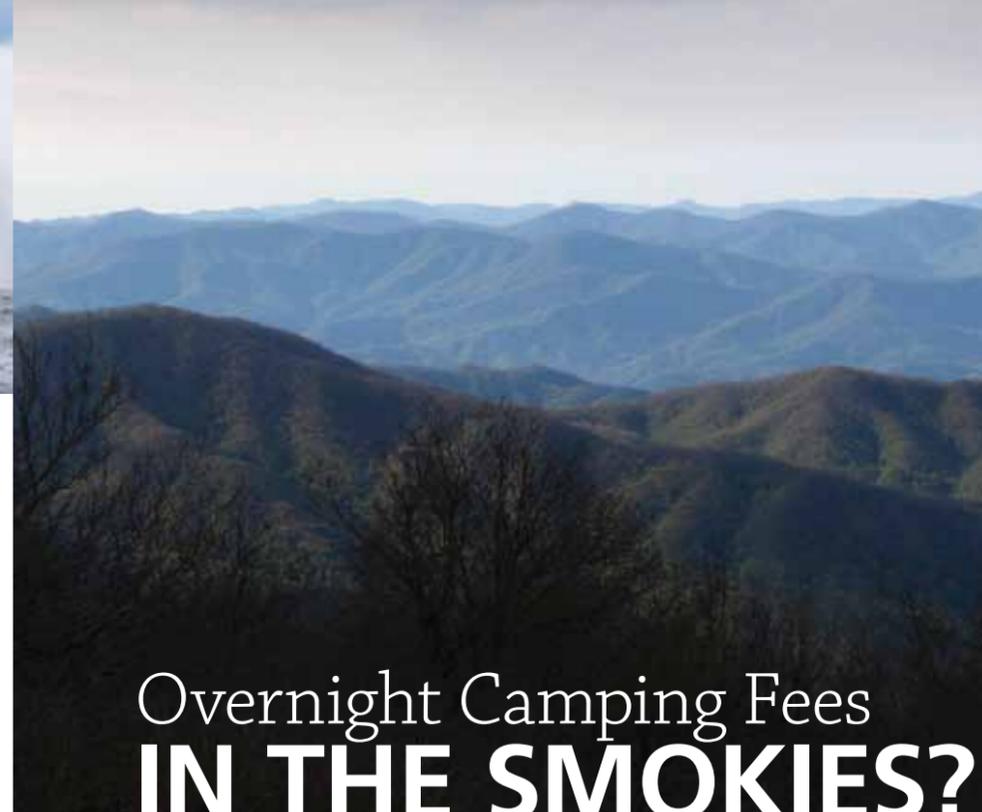
**THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY'S (ATC'S) INAUGURAL** Family Hiking Day was an opportunity to get outside and experience the Trail no matter the age, size, or skill of the hiker. Coordinating with National Public Lands Day on September 24th, families up and down the Appalachian Trail put their boots on for a day of adventure outside. ATC provided on-line resources, games and activities, and a list of hikes for families to choose from in order to explore the A.T. in a fun, safe, and engaging way. Families could choose from a self-guided hike that they felt most comfortable with, or from a hike led by a local volunteer.

From Maine to Georgia, families took to the A.T. on their own, or as participants in planned events. At ATC's headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia ATC hosted a guided hike from the historic district to the ATC visitor center. Kweli Kitwana, an energetic, local volunteer new to the area, worked with staff to create activities inside the center including a station for making gorp (trail mix); materials for an A.T. treasure hunt, temporary tattoos, and all the information and tips needed for a fun and safe family hike.

Chip and Ashley Donahue who founded KIVA, the Kids in the Valley, Adventuring club, led two hikes in Virginia. KIVA is a free, family nature club based out of the Roanoke Valley. "We live five minutes from the Appalachian Trail, but I had never stepped on it before we started our club," says Chip. It isn't too early to start planning for next year's Family Hiking Day, which will once again coincide with National Public Lands Day on (September 29, 2012) held each year on the last Saturday of September.

For more information about Family Hiking Day and family hiking resources visit: [appalachiantrail.org/familyhike](http://appalachiantrail.org/familyhike)

CHILDREN ENJOYING FAMILY HIKING DAY IN HARPERS FERRY. PHOTO BY KWELI KITWANA



## Overnight Camping Fees IN THE SMOKIES?

**MANAGERS AT GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK ARE** considering some changes in the process by which backpackers make reservations for overnight camping at the Park's nearly 100 backcountry sites and shelters. The proposed changes, which would update the reservation procedure as well as increase ranger presence on the Park's 800 miles of trails, would be covered by a minimal user fee. No fees are being contemplated for day hiking.

The Park currently requires that all those planning to stay overnight in the backcountry obtain a permit, and those wishing to stay in the park's 15 shelters and most popular campsites make a reservation either by phone or in person at the park's Backcountry Information Center located in the Sugarlands Visitor Center near Gatlinburg. The reservations ensure that the number of campers on a given night do not exceed the carrying capacity of the site. Many other, less sought-after sites do not require that a reservation be filed, but users are still required to self-register at one of 15 permit stations when they arrive in the park.

Due to limited staffing, the Backcountry Information Center is open only three hours a day and the phone line is often busy or is unstaffed, which makes the process excessively time-consuming and often frustrating. Once backpackers do obtain their reservations and arrive at their campsites, they often find the area filled by individuals without permits. In addition, site capacities are frequently exceeded, which results in food storage violations, increased wildlife encounters, and the need to close campsites to protect visitors and wildlife. Lack of staff in the backcountry severely limits the park's ability to resolve these issues.

In response to these concerns, managers are evaluating the implementation of a computerized reservation system, which would take reservations both online and via a call center for all its backcountry sites 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The reservations would be made by a contractor at: [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov), which is the site currently used to book frontcountry campsites. The park would also expand the operations of the Backcountry Information Center to provide quality trip planning advice to help users develop a customized itinerary that best fits their available time and ability. In addition, the park would hire additional rangers who would exclusively patrol the backcountry to improve compliance with park regulations as well as helping to curb plant and wildlife poaching and respond more quickly to visitor emergencies.

Park Superintendent Dale Ditmanson said, "We feel that the proposed changes offer better customer service to backpackers, as well as reducing impacts to park resources. In order to implement these changes we are considering several fee structures that would cover both the reservation contractor's fee and the cost of field rangers and staff at the Backcountry Information Center."

Details of the proposal may be found at: [www.nps.gov/grsm/parkmgmt/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm/parkmgmt/index.htm).

Information courtesy the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK. PHOTO BY JOHN CAMMEROTA

## NEW A.T. Parking Lot in Pennsylvania

The Cumberland Valley Appalachian Trail Club (CVATC) recently announced that it will break ground shortly on its new parking lot at the intersection of Trindle Road (PA Route 641) and the Appalachian Trail. Trindle Road is one of the busiest roads in Cumberland County. There has never been an official A.T. parking lot at Trindle Road. The informal lot there is used heavily by A.T. hikers, but has very poor sight lines and is frequently filled with mud. CVATC estimates that hundreds of thousands of hikers and walkers use the A.T. in the Cumberland Valley each year.

The new, official parking lot will have eight parking spaces, including one with handicapped access. It will also feature a sign kiosk with information about the A.T. and local attractions. The parking lot will be located in Cumberland County midway between Mechanicsburg and Carlisle. Jim Foster, president of CVATC, said: "This parking lot project represents a great partnership between a local municipality, a private business, county and state agencies, a charitable fund, and our club. Middlesex Township, where the lot will be located, is giving us in-kind services. They will excavate the lot, then haul and install stone and gravel. Tom Scully, a Club member and registered landscape architect with R.J. Fisher & Associates, Inc., designed the parking lot." CVATC received a generous grant from the South Mountain Partnership, which is affiliated with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. The Miles Fund, a charitable fund affiliated with Mountain Club of Maryland, has provided additional funding, and money for the sign kiosk is coming from the Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau. Club members will provide much of the labor as volunteers. "We are thrilled and humbled by the fantastic support we've received from the community," Foster added. ⬆

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



# CRAFTING AN ACCESSIBLE TRAIL

BY DAVE STARTZELL AND BOB PROUDMAN



The Appalachian Trail is well known throughout the U.S. and, indeed, throughout the world for its physical and mental challenges as well as its rewards, including the opportunity to experience, in a very intimate way, the extraordinary natural and cultural diversity of the Appalachian Mountain range and the varied landscapes of the eastern United States. This is especially true for those adventurous souls who set out to hike the full length of the A.T. from Georgia to Maine. But most of the estimated two million people who explore some portion of the A.T. each year experience those same challenges and rewards for periods of much shorter duration — for a few days, a weekend, or even just an afternoon stroll. Over the past ten years, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and a number of its affiliated Trail-maintaining clubs, with the support of several state and federal agency partners, have purposely sought to extend those opportunities to include visitors with disabilities — especially people with various mobility impairments, including wheelchair-dependent visitors.

Today, five segments of the Appalachian Trail have been designed and constructed to comply, in whole or in part, with the rigorous standards defined by the federal Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (known as the Access Board) for accessible trails in outdoor recreation settings

Trail enthusiasts try out the new accessible A.T. section of Bear Mountain in New York. PHOTO BY JEREMY APGAR

as an outgrowth of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Architectural Barriers Act, and other federal accessibility laws and regulations. ATC was introduced to the issue in 1996, when two representatives, Peter Jensen, a former ATC board member, and Dave Startzell, ATC's executive director, were invited to serve on an advisory committee charged by the Access Board with developing draft guidelines intended to improve access by persons with disabilities to what the Access Board termed "outdoor developed areas," including even remote, backcountry areas. For the next two years, through a series of public meetings held throughout the United States, this "regulatory negotiation" committee struggled to define guidelines for new construction and alterations to outdoor recreation elements and facilities that were capable of meeting the physical requirements and limitations of mobility — and sight-impaired users related to slope, cross-slope, surface condition, barriers, and other criteria, while at the same time preserving the special character of a full range of affected outdoor recreation settings.

Even before the advisory committee had completed its work, the late Dick Blake, a leader and active A.T. maintainer with the Connecticut Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club, set out to develop the first wheelchair-accessible segment of the Appalachian Trail along the shores of the Housatonic River at Falls Village, Connecticut. Blake, whose wife was wheelchair-dependent, understood the challenges faced by people with mobility impairments who nonetheless wanted to experience the great outdoors. Aided by Peter Jensen, a professional trail designer and builder armed with new-found knowledge of accessible design gained through the regulatory-negotiation process, Blake set out to raise the funds necessary for the project and, together with other volunteers from the Connecticut chapter, worked alongside Jensen to realize his vision.

In July 2000, the Falls Village accessible trail was officially dedicated during a well attended ribbon-cutting event. Since then, ATC and several Trail-maintaining clubs have gained much experience in the art and science of accessible trail design and construction through a series of significant, multi-year projects in a variety of settings, from mountaintops to wetlands, developing specialized techniques along the way, including helical-pier construction for boardwalk sections and ingenious approaches for transporting surfacing materials, such as gravel, to remote sites. These sections are remarkable, not only because they are accessible but also because they encompass a wide range of outdoor recreation experiences representative of the entire A.T.

### Falls Village, Connecticut 1.1 mile loop including 19 rest areas

As noted above, this pleasant woods walk near Falls Village, Connecticut, which affords occasional glimpses of the Housatonic River, was developed between 1997 and 2000. It incorporates a .57-mile section of the "white-blazed" A.T. footpath and two "blue-blazed" side trails, each providing a loop trail opportunity. The overall length is 1.1 mile for the longer-loop option or .8 mile for the shorter loop. The pathway is generally level with gradual slopes to provide adequate drainage and occasional short, steeper segments. It was initially surfaced in gravel and stone dust with widths ranging from 36 to 48 inches, and it includes a total of 19 rest areas, some with

benches, as well as interpretive signage. This section also has some historical interest, as portions of the Trail follow along or near a former harness-racing track that was popular in the early twentieth century. ▲ On cautionary note, unfortunately, in the course of recent trail-surface maintenance, a number of potholes and other poorly drained spots along this section were resurfaced with sand, which can prove challenging to wheelchair users.

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of US 7 and Connecticut Route 126 just east of Falls Village, follow Route 126 west. The road bypasses Falls Village, then turns sharp right. Go left, and proceed under the railroad tracks to Water Street and the parking area.



### ▲ Pochuck Creek, Vernon, New Jersey 1 mile including several rest areas

This approximately one-mile section spanning the expansive floodplain of Pochuck Creek near Vernon, New Jersey, required nearly ten years to construct, with contributions from many partners as well as more than 9,000 hours of volunteer labor. It's actually made up of several segments, including four boardwalks, a unique 140-foot suspension bridge and two smaller footbridges, and several short, gravel-surfaced segments. The most accessible segment is an approximately 2,500-foot boardwalk section that begins near the access point from Route 517 near the town of Vernon. The boardwalk itself is wheelchair-accessible, approximately 48 inches in width with several rest/passing pull offs at suitable intervals. Completed in 2002, this section provides marvelous views across the largest wetland crossing along the Appalachian Trail, with expansive views of the surrounding marshlands and opportunities for an "up-close and personal" experience of the diverse flora and fauna characteristic of wetland areas but uncommon along the A.T. It is especially popular with local area school children and townspeople from Vernon and other nearby communities. ▲ Hikers should, however, be aware that while the boardwalk itself is accessible, there is not yet an accessible parking area at the intersection of the A.T. and Route 517. It is necessary to go around or pass through an opening in the highway guard rail and then descend a rather steep, 15-foot section of earth-surfaced tread before reaching the boardwalk. Wheelchair or scooter-dependent visitors may require assistance in order to negotiate the short distance between the highway and the boardwalk.

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of Routes 94 and 515 in the center of Vernon, New Jersey, take Route 94 north about 1.6 miles and turn left on Maple Grange Road. Travel about one mile and turn right onto Route 517. In .75 miles, the A.T. crosses Route 517 with a distinctive, marked crosswalk. Park on the right shoulder. Use caution, as Route 517 is a busy road.



### ▲ Osborne Farm, Shady Valley, Tennessee .5 mile, easy to moderate grades

Situated at the south end of Shady Valley in east Tennessee, this .5-mile section of the A.T. begins at the crest of Cross Mountain and gently winds through a hay field to the summit of a ridge with a Sound of Music-style panorama looking northward toward the Virginia Highlands and Mount Rogers, as well as across Shady Valley, known for its cranberry bogs and large timber. It incorporates an unusual wheelchair-accessible stile and a short ramp from a farm road adjacent to a U.S. Forest Service accessible-parking area. The tread is surfaced in crushed gravel, generally to a width of 36 inches. The trail consists of easy to moderate grades of four- to five-percent or less with resting intervals and occasional drainage dips. It begins (and ends) at the junction of the A.T. with Tennessee Route 91. ▲ One cautionary note: while this section was constructed with geo-textile underlayment, surfaced in crushed gravel, and benefits from periodic maintenance, adjacent grasses can encroach on the pathway in some places, which can have the effect of reducing the width and/or creating greater resistance to wheeled devices.

**DIRECTIONS** From Laurel Avenue in downtown Damascus, Virginia, take Route 133 south and cross into Tennessee. Continue 14 miles to an intersection in the community of Shady Valley. Go straight ahead on TN 91 for 3.8 miles. The A.T. crossing is at the intersection of TN 91 and Cross Mountain Road. There is a parking lot on the left side of the road. Proceed to the farm road and take short ramp to the stile. Shady Valley also can be reached from Bristol, Tennessee, via US 421 east, and from Elizabethton via TN 91 north.

### ▼ Thundering Falls, Killington, Vermont .3 mile, amazing waterfall



This approximately .3-mile section incorporates a 700-foot boardwalk segment spanning the floodplain of Kent Stream and an approximately 500-foot gravel-surfaced segment extending to the base of Thundering Falls, a 100-foot cascade, reportedly the sixth highest waterfall in the state of Vermont. The accessible portion is part of a larger relocation of the A.T. between Thundering Brook Road and River Road.



Requiring about seven years from the design phase to completion, most of the project was constructed in 2005 and 2006 by crews from the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps and the Green Mountain Club's Long Trail Patrol, with support from ATC and the National Park Service. Some of the helical piers required to support the boardwalk had to be sunk to depths of as much as 90 feet, while the gravel surfacing material had to be lowered hundreds of feet from Thundering Brook Road to the valley below via an elaborate chute and zip-line system. It was opened in the fall of 2007 and provides attractive views across the wetland area as well as excellent views of the waterfall (during high-water releases from Kent Pond) and the site of a historic water-powered mill. ▲ Hikers should be aware though that this past September, an approximately 260-foot section of the boardwalk was destroyed as a result of flooding from Hurricane Irene and portions of the gravel-surfaced section below the falls also suffered some erosion damage. It may be some time before this section can be restored. For the time being, hikers have been advised to follow the former roadwalk route of the A.T., which will be reblazed during repairs.

**DIRECTIONS** River Road goes north from US 4/Vermont 100 in the community of Sherburne Center. This is 2 miles east of the point where the routes split and Vermont 100 goes south. The A.T. crosses River Road about 1.6 miles north of the highway and .1 mile north of the intersection of River Road and Thundering Brook Road. Parking at the River Road entrance to the boardwalk section is limited to two to three vehicles.



**▲ Bear Mountain, New York  
new .4 mile loop**

The newest wheelchair-accessible section of the A.T. was completed earlier this year and dedicated in June 2011. It is a .4-mile gravel-surfaced path, part of a larger 2.75-mile relocation of the A.T. in Bear Mountain State Park. The accessible section begins and ends at the accessible parking area adjacent to Perkins Tower at the end of Perkins Memorial Drive on the summit of Bear Mountain. The trail winds through a wooded landscape, meandering among a number of large boulders, and culminates with a breathtaking view northward over the Hudson Valley before returning via a loop trail to the Perkins parking area.

**DIRECTIONS** From the Bear Mountain Inn in Bear Mountain State Park, turn right on Seven Lakes Drive. Take the first right at the circle at 0.4 miles, staying on Seven Lakes Drive. At 2.7 miles, turn right on Perkins Memorial Drive and follow that winding road uphill to the top by the Perkins Tower. The trailhead is on the right-hand side at the beginning of the loop and parking around the summit.



*In addition to these sections, there are many other sections of the A.T. that, while not necessarily fully accessible, may be negotiated by mobility-challenged visitors. A few of these include:*

**Wayah Bald,  
North Carolina**

This .1-mile section includes a view of the picturesque stone fire tower at the crest of this heath bald, with excellent views to the east and the valley below near Franklin. In the late spring, the bald also features a display of flame azaleas. ▲ Hikers should note that, although the surface of the parking area is macadam, it is somewhat uneven, while the pathway to the fire tower consists of uneven flagstones with occasional gaps.

**Fontana Dam,  
North Carolina**

This 1.3-mile section of the A.T. consists of the access road shoulder on either side of the dam as well as a paved sidewalk across the dam. It affords excellent views of the Smokies and Fontana Dam and Lake. ▲ Take caution, as the paving is rough in places and there are a number of curbs with no curb cuts that must be negotiated. The access road also can be heavily trafficked at certain times of year.

**Hot Springs,  
North Carolina**

This .8-mile section passes through downtown Hot Springs (a designated Appalachian Trail Community) with a view of the French Broad River. ▲ While

the route utilizes a paved sidewalk for most of the distance, there is a gravel-surfaced parking area that must be negotiated as well as a railroad crossing, and not all of the curbs include curb cuts.

**Laurel Fork Gorge,  
Tennessee**

At the southern end of the gorge, a .7-mile section of the A.T. follows alongside Laurel Fork in the Pond Mountain Wilderness area. It is accessed from the U.S. Forest Service Dennis Cove trailhead near Hampton, Tennessee. ▲ While the grade along this former railroad bed is two percent or less, the section could prove quite challenging for many wheelchair- or scooter-dependent visitors due to uneven natural surfaces with occasional roots and rocks. Also, two narrow puncheon stream crossings must be negotiated near the parking area. For these reasons, this section may be more appropriate for mobility-impaired visitors who do not require a wheeled device.

**Harpers Ferry,  
West Virginia**

Visitors to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park can access the A.T. in the lower town and travel a short distance (less than .2 mile) on

the Trail across the pedestrian bridge over the Potomac River, with views of the river as well as Maryland and Loudoun Heights. Access to the bridge is gained near the site of John Brown's famous fort while other historical buildings and exhibits can be visited in the lower town by way of sidewalks. Harpers Ferry and the adjacent town of Bolivar are designated Appalachian Trail Communities.

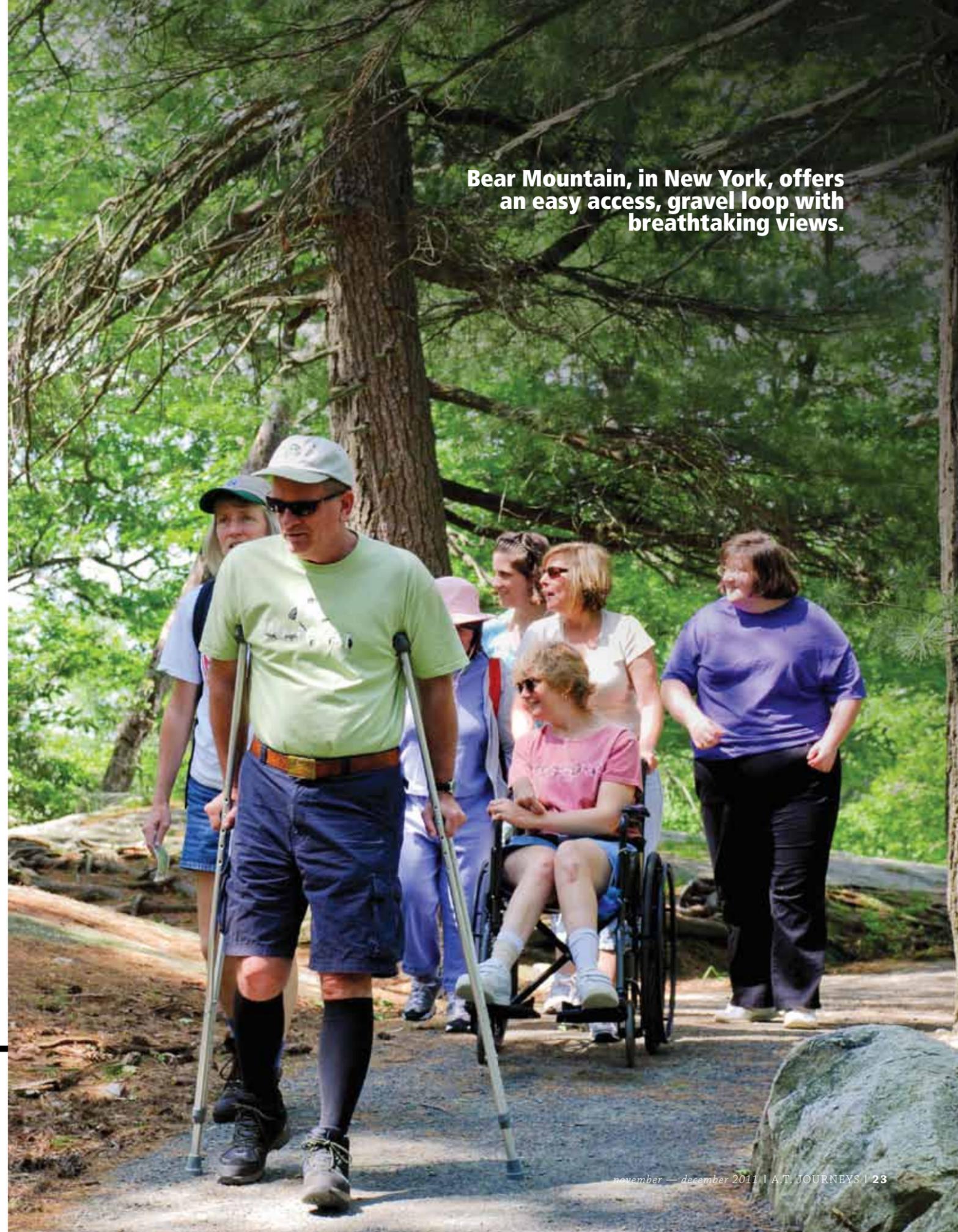
**Children's Lake, Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania**

This approximately 950-foot section follows along the shoreline of Children's Lake — a spring-fed lake that is the centerpiece of the historic town of Boiling Springs, a designated Appalachian Trail Community that also is home to ATC's Mid-Atlantic regional office. The pathway is surfaced in stone and stone dust and is firm and stable. Accessible parking is available at the ATC office adjacent to the pathway, and visitors also are welcome to stop by the ATC visitors' center there. ▲ Due to adjacent shrubbery and trees, there may be a few protruding branches that are lower than recommended clearance standards.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 46**

▲ Much of the Appalachian Trail traverses rugged, steep terrain that is not feasible for accessible trail construction, which generally requires gentle slopes and surface materials that must be brought to the site. Some of the Trail sections mentioned in this article are not suitable for wheelchair users, but may be appropriate for persons with other disabilities. ▲

**Bear Mountain, in New York, offers an easy access, gravel loop with breathtaking views.**





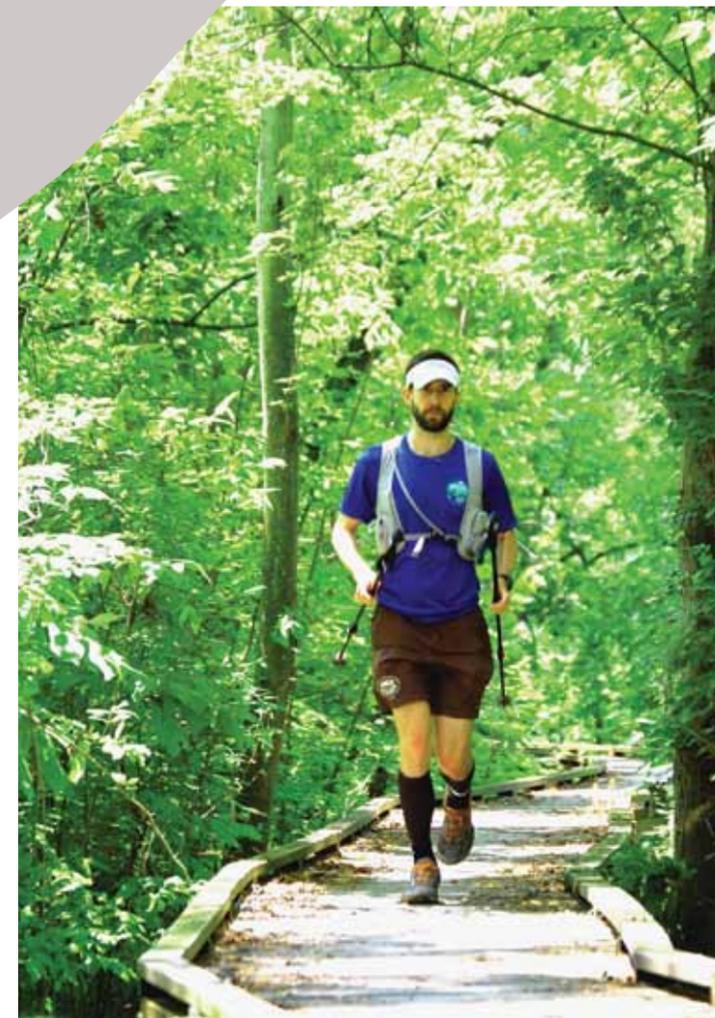
# SPEED HIKING

For ultra-trail runners the A.T. is an enticing challenge, but many steadfast hikers wonder what all the hurry is about.

**WHEN WARREN DOYLE WALKED THE APPALACHIAN** Trail in 66 days back in 1973, not everybody was thrilled with his quick pace. “I heard it all,” says Doyle. “You’re going too fast. It isn’t a racetrack. You won’t even see anything.” So this summer, when he served as a crew member during a friend’s effort to break the record he once held, Doyle was curious to see how people might view her attempt.

Before we get too far, let’s make one thing clear: in using the word “record,” in no way am I suggesting there is such an official thing. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) does not officially recognize speed-hiking records on the A.T. Unofficially, though, it has been 40 years since Bradley Owens set the first unofficially recognized mark by walking the entire Appalachian Trail in “71 or 72 days, I’ve never been able to pin it down,” says Doyle, who is part of the loose circle of folks who keep track of the unofficial record book.

In those four decades, gear has gotten lighter and hikers have gotten faster. The trail running shoes that have become the preferred footwear for many hikers are the same ones runners use in the booming sport of ultra-trail running. And those ultra runners have given birth to a new breed of hiker, one that runs the Trail. All that has fueled a growth in the speed hiking community, but



Above: During a 12-hour day, Adam Casseday runs along the boardwalk at Conodoguinet Creek in Pennsylvania. Casseday was not out to set any records. He was “just a guy who managed to find an 80-day window in his schedule to try to fulfill his dream of traversing the Trail.”

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS A. COUROGEN



From left: Adam Casseday trots through a field in the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania, just south of the Scott Farm; Elizabeth Thomas gets ready to cross the Kennebec River in Maine – photo by fellow hiker “Missing Link;” Karl Meltzer rests beside his support RV while crew member Billy Simpson, an A.T. thru-hiker, prepares to do some first aid work.

as he traveled through New England with his friend, Jennifer Pharr Davis’s support crew, Doyle found the more things had changed since he held the record back during the Nixon administration, the more they stayed the same.

“The resentment [for speed hiking] is still occasionally there,” he says. “It’s strange. It’s really strange.” But for the most part, these hikers get a lot of support from their fellow Trail enthusiasts. Davis, by the way, finished her southbound hike in 46 days, 11 hours, and 20 minutes. That is more than 26 hours faster than Andrew Thompson, the last person to hold the record, who set it back in 2005.

Because there is no official sanctioning body keeping a record book and verifying results, some refer to the marks as “fastest known times” instead of records. There are good reasons why the ATC does not recognize records, says ATC spokesman Brian King. “The reason we do not recognize records is pretty simple: we can’t verify them,” says King. ATC’s small staff has its hands full taking care of the Trail, so there is no plan to start looking for a way to serve as speed-hike record keepers. “We don’t think that is our role,” He says. He also makes an interesting point. “Every year the Trail is a different length. How would you measure the record? Would you have to track it in minutes per mile? I don’t know how you’d do it,” says King.

Those who track such things overlook the mileage differentials. Five miles here or there on a 2,100-plus -mile hike is not enough to be considered significant, at least not yet, since each

time a new fastest time has been recorded, it has been faster than the previous mark by a significant margin. While Davis was traveling south with a support crew, Elizabeth Thomas was headed north, walking alone. Thomas topped Katahdin on July 4, 80 days, 13 hours, and 31 minutes after she left Springer Mountain. That is the fastest known, unsupported thru-hike ever by a woman, according to the Fastest Known Times online discussion board ([fastestknowntime.proboards.com](http://fastestknowntime.proboards.com)). People told Thomas the same thing they used to tell Doyle; slow down,

you’re going to miss stuff if you go so fast. Thomas, who went much slower in 2007, the first time she hiked the whole Trail, disagrees. “I enjoyed it way, way more. It was so much more fun. Just because I am going faster doesn’t mean it wasn’t fun,” says Thomas, who has also completed the Pacific Coast and Continental trails. “I think I saw more because I was up earlier when the animals were still out. I hiked a lot by myself, and going solo gives you much more time to contemplate nature.”

Adam Casseday agrees with Thomas.

An ultra-trail runner, Thomas covered the A.T. in 71 days this summer with the help of his wife Kadra, who served as his support crew. Casseday was not out to set any records. “I want no part of that kind of pain and suffering,” he says. He was just a guy who managed to find an 80-day window in his schedule to try to fulfill his dream of traversing the Appalachian Trail. “I’m a runner, not a hiker,” says Casseday. “That’s why I ran.” He ran a lot. Around 12 hours a day, on average. During that time, the Trail provided lots of enjoyment, Casseday says.

*“People say you can’t see anything going fast ... but I think it’s just a different perspective.”*

“People say you can’t see anything going fast but I think I see more. It’s just a different perspective,” says Casseday. “I’m not going into towns to resupply. I’m more focused on the task at hand, [therefore, I am spending a majority] of my time on the Trail.”

It’s probably worth mentioning that not only is there a healthy disagreement between speed hikers and traditionalists critical of such a pace, there is also a split within the ranks of the speed hiking community. Doyle is a big proponent of the whole idea of record keeping and record attempts. But just as some Trail purists believe the A.T. should only be used for walking, and fear it will be turned into a race track, Doyle worries speed hiking will be taken over by highly sponsored professional athletes.

When Backcountry.com-sponsored ultra-runner Karl Meltzer attempted to set a new fastest time in 2008, Doyle decried the effort, which included a promotional Web site and a graphics-wrapped RV that served as Meltzer’s support vehicle. “He came in with this ultra-running attitude from out West,” said Doyle, who described Meltzer’s effort as “highly funded and highly commercialized.” Meltzer is aware of the criticism. “My friends in the ultra running community all thought it was cool. The hiker community, they saw it a little different,” Meltzer says. “I don’t think they hated it, but they were not all for it. They were more against the commercialization than me doing it. If I’d have been more under the radar, they may have been more [supportive].”

Meltzer finished the Trail, but failed to better Thompson’s time. He’d like to come back and try again some time. If he does, his approach will be different. Instead of stopping nightly at road crossings to sleep in the RV, he will have his crew set up camp along the Trail to avoid the artificial mileage constraints road crossing rendezvous create. “I’d do it more the way Jen did it. I’d go stealth,” says Meltzer. Davis didn’t

run much. Her mark was the result of endless hours of steady walking. Doyle says Davis was on the Trail an average of 16 hours a day. She is the first “record holder” since Doyle who is not an ultra runner. “I use the word ‘endurance’. This is not a foot race, it’s endurance,” he says. “I don’t think it is possible that an ultra runner will set the record. Running is more stress on the body. If they have a running mentality then they [could] get hurt and have to slow down.” And injuries are bound to come with the stress of trying to run nearly 50 miles a day every day for well over a month, Doyle figures. The human body can only handle so much pounding.

Injuries slowed Meltzer’s 2008 effort. They were partly caused by weather problems Meltzer encountered the first few days of his hike, when torrential rains turned the Trail into a stream in many places. Wet feet turned into trench foot, which caused Meltzer to alter his gait, leading to tendonitis, and so it went. Even though he was ahead of Thompson’s pace when he passed through the Mahoosucs, by the time he reached Vermont, Meltzer was forced to take four “zero days” to deal with the injuries and the record was beyond reach. Still, Meltzer is convinced if he stays healthy, and if everything fell close to place, he could do the A.T. in 43 days. If not Meltzer, perhaps some other ultra-runner will do it. As Meltzer points out, “The Appalachian Trail is the Disneyland of running trails.” That is fine with King and the ATC. “When the issue [of speed-hiking the Trail] first came up in the early 1990s, philosophically, we took the view that it is a public trail. As long as they obey the laws, people can hike it how they want to hike it,” says King. “As long as they are not destroying the resource or interfering with other hikers — those are our main concerns.” It is ATC’s hope, that every person who sets foot on the A.T. will enjoy their hike to the fullest, no matter the pace. ♠



## *Spilled Images*

Martin Scott Wilson owns a tent and sleeping bag and enjoys curling up beneath the stars. After finishing school, he spent about five years wandering through the U.S. and abroad, and becoming acquainted with the outdoors. His travels have taken him as far as the Czech Republic, where he spent a winter teaching English and beginning to stare into puddles — discovering their photographic mysteries. After significant explorations of Grand Teton and Glacier National Parks and Big Sky, Montana, his love of hiking only deepened. In 2006, he was given the Trail name “Sanford” by a guy named “Redneck” while thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. Since then, he has become sort of an A.T. junkie and often finds himself wandering along its meandering path. He currently lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife Angie.

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

“Dirt,” hiking northbound towards Madison Spring Hut, White Mountains, New Hampshire.



Rime Ice, Devil's Tater Patch, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



View of Rocky Top, elevation 5,441, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

# The Valley's friendly CITY

*A destination worth the trek.*  
HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA



Every hiker knows that simplicity is good for the soul. The draw of the Trail is a streamlined way to experience the world. Friendly encounters on the Trail, like a passing greeting or a supportive hiking group, often enrich a walk in the woods. It's as if the friendly nature of the Trail and the simplicity found there have spilled down the Blue Ridge and pooled in the Shenandoah Valley, in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Surrounded by large clusters of agricultural lands and nearly 2,000 farms in Rockingham County, Harrisonburg lives up to its moniker as "The Friendly City." Community takes center stage through a vibrant farmers market in a revitalized downtown, free concerts or movies at "Friday on the Square" events, and in the greetings of neighbors biking through town. From I-81 the town is bluffed by the commanding modern architecture of James Madison University (JMU), and beyond that, the small town, crisscrossed by railroad tracks, is rich with restaurants and entertainment in its quaint historic district.

The variety of dining options in this small town is as robust as any large city. Restaurants specializing in Italian, Thai, Vietnamese, Indian, Ethiopian, Greek, Venezuelan, and Peruvian cuisine all grace the streets of Harrisonburg. Local craft brewery Cally's offers more traditional American cuisine as does Dave's Downtown Taverna, Billy Jack's Wing & Draft Shack, and its sister establishment Jack Brown's Burger and Beer, which sells its signature, deep-fried Oreos. Locally sourced vegetarian fare at the worker-owned Little Grill is a favorite for breakfast, though it also serves lunch and dinner; and a Bowl of Good

near the Eastern Mennonite University campus offers internationally influenced food from its own garden. Klines Dairy Bar serves custard style ice cream that is made fresh daily in two locations in Harrisonburg.

With the emergence of more local bands, live entertainment can be found at the Artful Dodger, Clementine Café, and downstairs at the Blue Nile Ethiopian restaurant, while the Court Square Theater, Fobes Center for the Performing Arts, and the Oasis Fine Arts & Crafts Gallery are the cornerstones to Harrisonburg's Arts and Culture District. Daily attractions in Harrisonburg include the John C. Wells Planetarium at JMU, the Virginia Quilt Museum, and the Valley Turnpike Museum, which highlights the road's historical significance to pioneers and Civil War campaigns.

Harrisonburg's locals enjoy

TEXT BY LEANNA JOYNER



Clockwise from top: A.T. hikers at the Valley 4th parade, by Ana Maria Mendez; Folks enjoy live music at the Artful Dodger, photo courtesy Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance; View from EMU, by Leanna Joyner; Christmas on the Square, photo courtesy Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance.

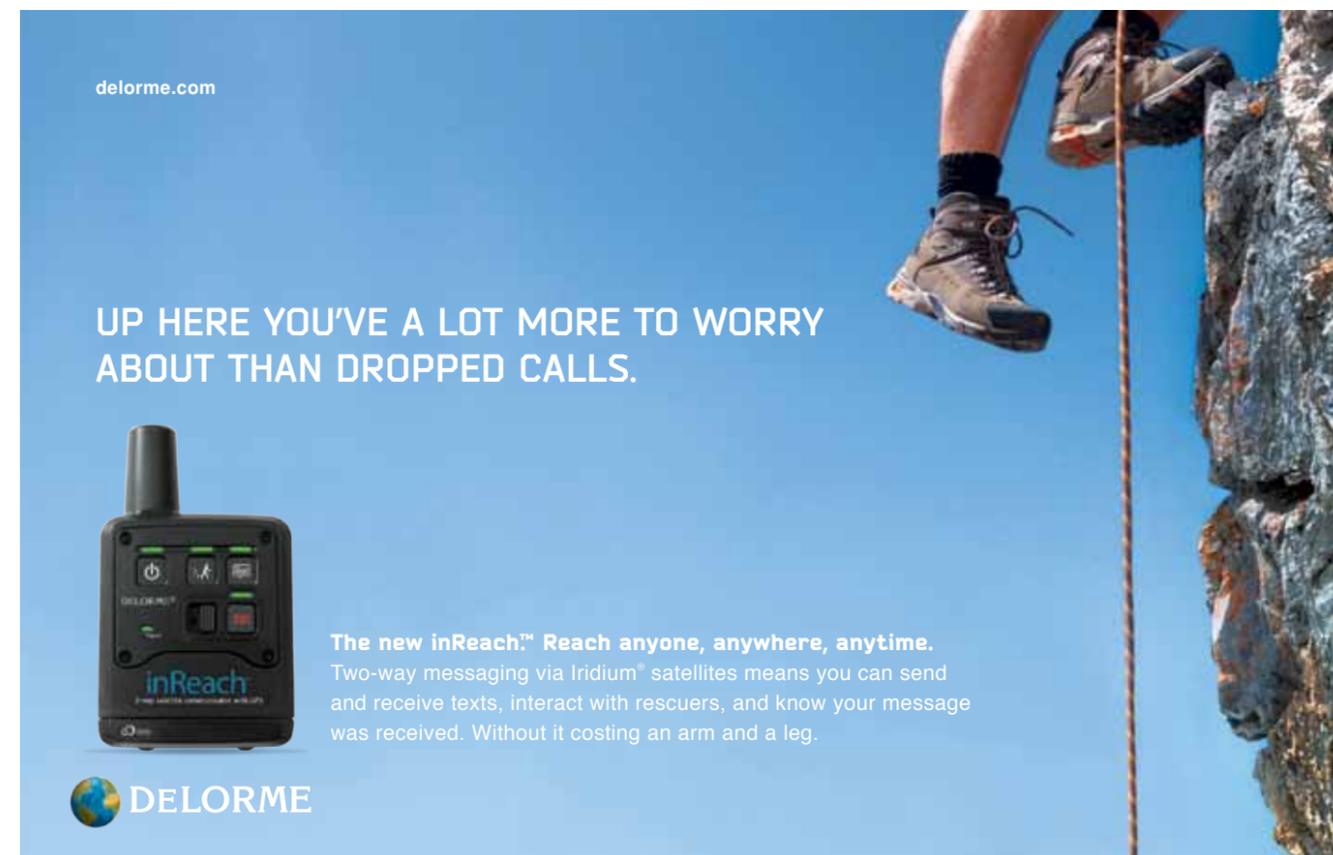
time spent at Purcell Park with their pups, biking the Rocktown Trails at Hillandale Park, and relaxing in the 125-acre public garden and forested green space of Edith J. Carrier Arboretum. When locals entertain their guests they frequently go to Skyline Drive where they can look down over the valley or take a hike on the Appalachian Trail. Adding to the town's amenities is its setting on verdant rolling hills, with the Massanutten range and Blue Ridge rising in the east and the Appalachians prevailing in the west. These ranges assure both locals and visitors that activities in nature are close at hand. Mountain and road biking, caving, rock climbing, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and winter skiing opportunities abound. In fact, the Summit, a workshop billed as the Nation's first women's hiking and backpacking conference, was held in Harrisonburg earlier this year by a hiking club for women called the Trail Dames.

Appalachian Trail visitors staging a section hike of the Trail or stopping in during a thru-hike can expect to find gear at the outfitter Wilderness Voyagers, an abundance of grocery stores, the large Massanutten Regional Library, and urgent care facilities. Though Harrisonburg is 18-miles from the Trail at Swift Run Gap, the route is direct and the services are likely to improve with its designation as an A.T. Community, which was made official during a ceremony in June 2011. As a designated A.T. Community Harrisonburg is actively working to invite more exchange between hikers and the town, welcoming their participation in the Valley 4th Independence parade, and collecting resources to ease the span from the Trail at Swift Run Gap. Similarly, a complementary alliance is budding as teachers utilize the Trail as an educational opportunity for place-based learning and

students have the chance to give back to their community through trail maintenance service trips.

Harrisonburg's genuine interest to protect the A.T. as a community resource and its hope to foster a positive experience for hikers is what makes it a Trail town. It is the town's revival that makes it far too unique a destination to miss. Seasonal events like the Valley 4th Celebration, Rocktown Beer and Music Festival, Bach Fest, and Harrisonburg International Festival showcase the distinctive aspects of the town and its community. [▲](#)

For a true taste of Harrisonburg anytime, visitors should rent a bike from Shenandoah Bicycle Company to explore the town, visit the Farmers Market, wander through shops, search the streets for tucked away fountains, dine heartily, and check the calendar of daily events at: [www.downtownharrisonburg.org](http://www.downtownharrisonburg.org).

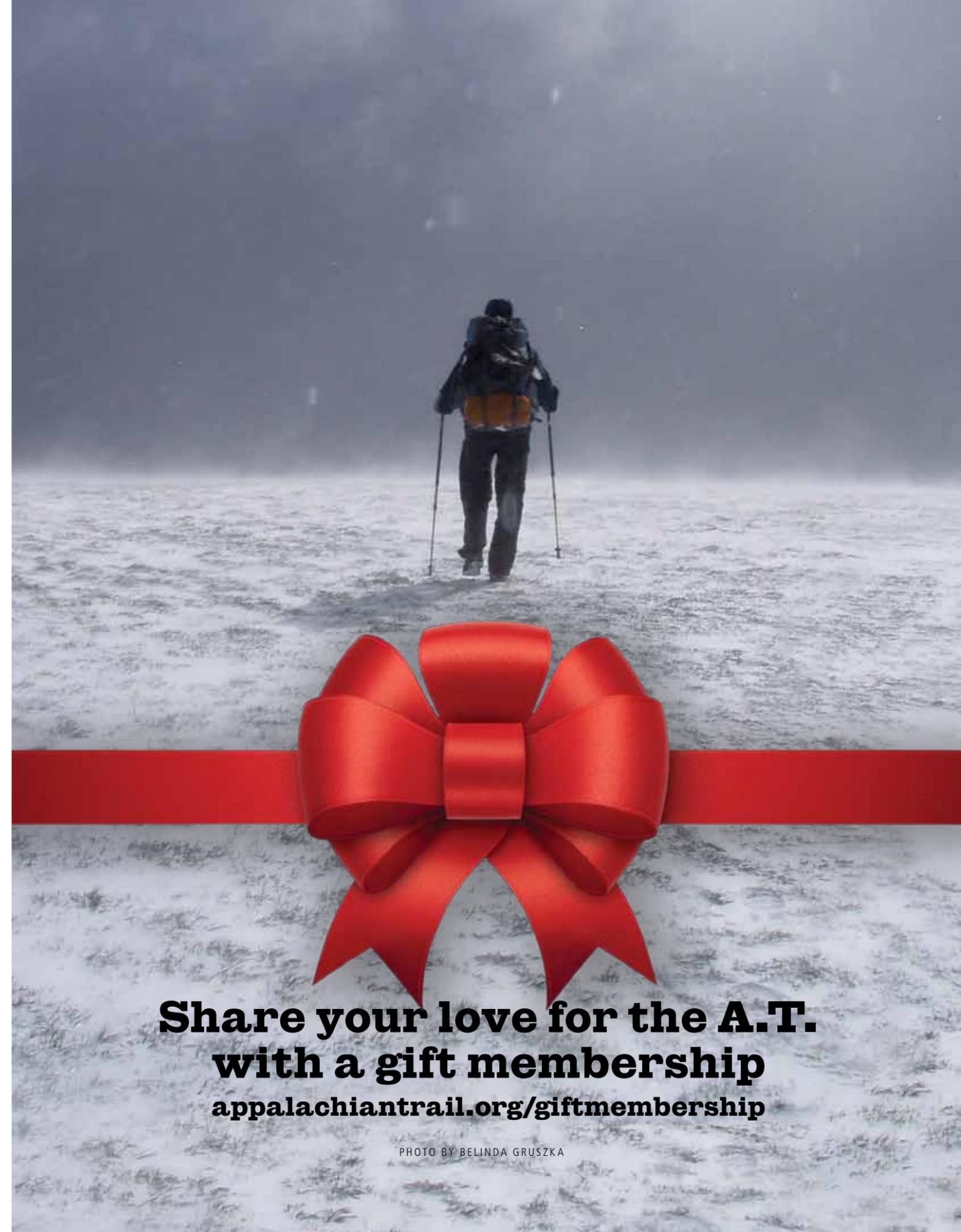


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PHOTO BY BELINDA GRUSZKA

# Enduring Experience

BY JENNIFER PHARR DAVIS



**I WILL NEVER FORGET REACHING THE** Nantahala Outdoor Center on my first thru-hike. The weather the past two days had consisted of rain, sleet, snow, and a lightning storm. I was exhausted because I had spent the previous night in an overcrowded Cold Springs Shelter shivering and listening to other hikers snore. And my knees ached from bracing my body and pack on the 3,000-foot descent into the gorge. At least now that I had reached the river, I could finally get a warm shower and enjoy a meal at the River's End Restaurant. When I walked into the eatery, I saw a large table of thru-hikers already established, and I was quickly invited over to join them.

Over a long dinner, that included appetizers, dessert, and any other side item we could find on the menu — the 12 of us laughed and smiled, and joked about the past two days as if they were a distant memory. But then one hiker took me off-guard, when he started talking about the similarities on his first and second thru-hikes. First and second thru-hikes? Was he crazy?! The hardships of the past two days weren't that distant!

Before I could stop myself or censor my thoughts, I spouted out in front of everyone, "why on earth would you want to hike the Trail more than once?" I spent the majority of my first thru-hike swearing off future expeditions, and I hiked down Katahdin resolved to enter the real world, find a real job, and leave the Trail behind. But when it came time to settle down, I found myself drawn to Charlottesville, Virginia because I would only be a 30-minute drive from the A.T.

My first year in Virginia, I wore out the stretch of Highway 64 that led to Rockfish Gap. I loved my job, and my friends, but there was a part of me that still longed to be in the woods. I realized that the Appalachian Trail had changed me. More than just completing a physical journey, the Trail had molded me into a new person. I now valued simplicity and hard work. I longed to be outside and if given the choice I would rather listen to the sounds of the forest than a radio or televi-

sion. I loved animal encounters in the woods and I believed that the only way to really get to know a person was to hike with him or her. The Trail awoke part of my soul that felt both primitive and peaceful.

I enjoyed taking day hikes and weekend overnights of the Trail, but eventually I decided that because I was young, unattached, and had a flexible work schedule this was the perfect time in life to experience other thru-hikes. Like many A.T. veterans I next set out on the scenic Pacific Crest Trail, then, after that adventure, I set my eyes on the country's oldest long-distance trail, the Long Trail in Vermont. I also traveled abroad, not to visit cities or museums, but to experience hiking trails in other parts of the world, including the Bibbulmun Track in Australia, Inca Trail in Peru, and Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Throughout all the travels and trails I started to recognize an undeni-



able desire to return to the A.T. All the hikes I completed were wonderful, all of them were beautiful, but there was something special about the A.T. that separated it from the other treks. Maybe it was because I grew up in the southern Blue Ridge Mountains, maybe it was because out of all my hikes I considered the Appalachian Trail to be the most difficult, or maybe it was because the Appalachian Mountain Chain was more ancient and wise than the rest. I believed, in my life, there was a more potential for growth on the Appalachian Trail than any other path.

Clockwise from far left: The author traverses Max Patch during her recent, and third — 46-day-long — thru-hike; Hiking after a thunderstorm with thru-hiker "Dutch;" Jen and Brew signing the Springer Register; Crossing a footbridge with repeat thru-hiker Matt Kirk; Brew and Jen study the *A.T. Data Book* during a break, photos courtesy Blue Ridge Hiking Company; Welcomed at Springer Mountain by friends, family, and fellow A.T. hikers, photo by Serena Smith.

It was time to go back. The only problem was — this time — I wasn't unattached. On our first date, I told Brew Davis that I was going to hike the Appalachian Trail the following summer. I certainly didn't think that we would be married by then. The year 2008 combined passion with practicality. I loved Brew, I wanted to be with him forever; 10 months wasn't a very long time to date, but he was a teacher and I was a hiker so we decided getting married right after school let out and immediately before hiking season. I

also loved the A.T., I wanted to hike the Trail, but I didn't have six months and I didn't want to be away from my new husband. I liked pushing my limits and hiking all day everyday, so we concluded that I would attempt a supported, women's endurance record. Problems solved.

The lessons that the Trail taught me on my second hike were very different from my first trip. In 2005, the Trail taught me to be self-sufficient. However, in 2008, it taught me to be completely vulnerable. In many ways the Trail acted

as a marriage counselor on my second thru-hike. By attempting a supported record, I gave up my backpack and depended on Brew to meet me at different road crossings throughout the day. The hiking wasn't new, but relying on someone else was. It took many states and many miles before Brew and I learned how to communicate and trust one another on the Trail. We began to intuit the other's actions, and by the time we reached Springer, 57 days later, it felt like we had been married for two years as opposed to two months — in a good way.

After 2008, Brew and I spent two summers shouldering full packs and hiking some of the most beautiful trails in the United States and Europe. (Did I

*The A.T. frees us from societal expectations and makes us believe that if we are willing to work hard and put one foot in front of the other, then we are all capable of achieving the impossible.*

mention I love being married to a school teacher with two-month vacations?) However, like before, a desire to return to Appalachian Trail pervaded my mind. Looking back to 2008, I chose to do a supported record because it meant that I could be with my husband and still complete the entire Trail. It seemed logical. There was nothing logical about trying it again. But isn't that one of the best aspects of the Appalachian Trail? The A.T. frees us from societal expectations and makes us believe that if we are willing to work hard and put one foot in front of the other, then we are all capable of achieving the impossible.



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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).

PHOTO BY COLLEEN CONTRISCIANE

*Maybe it was because the Appalachian Mountain Chain was more ancient and wise than the rest. I believed, in my life, there was more potential for growth on the Appalachian Trail than any other path.*

I knew that I loved the trail. I loved hiking all day everyday, and this was my opportunity to prove it. If there was one thing that the Trail had taught me, it was the more of yourself you are able to pour out, the more you will receive in return. I am still trying to process all the gifts and lessons that the Trail provided this summer. It is still difficult to comprehend that Brew and I were able to travel the length of the A.T. in 46 days. In part, it is hard to grasp the number, because the Trail isn't about the numbers — even on a record attempt — it is about the experiences you encounter along the path.

And oh, the experiences we had this summer! I had some of my worst weather on the Trail and some of the most beautiful sunsets. I was able to see 36

Bears this hike — that's more than on any of my other thru-hikes, and I saw 14 of the 36 in one day. I learned, once again, how to accept Trail magic and let others help you. I decided not to dwell in past mistakes or fear the upcoming obstacles, but to simply live in the present. Many days, I approached the Trail with one simple truth, in the face of pain, difficulties, or hardship, I would often repeat out loud, "I like to hike." My relationship with my husband was tested and strengthened. I learned to love him more and depend on him more fully each day we were on the Trail. And at the very end, when my body felt empty and I was emotionally depleted, my heart felt full and my spirit was renewed. The journey was worth it, I was a different and more

complete person because of the Trail, and I still really liked to hike.

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said, "You cannot step in the same river twice." Likewise, you cannot hike the same trail twice. You can follow the same path, go the same direction, take the same things with you. But you are a different person and you will experience the Trail in a different way. You will have rain where the last time it was sun, and you will experience hard days on sections that you previously thought were easy. It now seems very clear why someone would want to hike the Appalachian Trail more than once. The Trail promotes positive self-growth. The more you journey through the mountains, the more lessons you will learn. And, I'm thankful that I still have so far to go. ↗

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| TRAIL GIVING

**TIME IS A FUNNY THING. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT** five years have passed since I wrote my first column for this magazine. In that column I wrote about wanting to hike a section of the Trail that I had crossed everyday on my way to my last job. I finally got to do that section just a few weeks ago.

I was out there with a friend and we made the comment that you really didn't notice how long it took to walk a mile in the woods because everything is always changing. Working at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is like that. It sure doesn't seem like it's already been a year since Dave announced he was going to retire or five since he hired me. Dave, it has been great working with you and learning from you. I'll miss the parking lot conversations.

Because of Dave's service to ATC we now have a Trail that is protected for generations to come. Our job as members, volunteers, and staff is to steward that legacy. By now you have received Dave's year-end letter. I'm asking that you join Dave and I in giving a year-end gift above and beyond your membership gift to support the work that ensures that the Appalachian Trail is a timeless and priceless experience for all its visitors.

If you've already made your year-end gift to ATC, thank you. We often think of gift giving this time of year. A gift membership is a great way of sharing your enthusiasm for the Appalachian Trail and the recipient will be reminded of your gift every time this magazine arrives. Who knows — you might ignite a lifetime passion.

This Thanksgiving, I thank you for being a member of this great organization and helping to preserve and maintain an American treasure. Dave, thank you for your outstanding service, friendship, and commitment to ATC. ⚡

*Happy Thanksgiving everyone,*  
**Royce W. Gibson** | Director of Membership & Development

Royce Gibson at ATC headquarters.

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PHOTO BY MARIANNE PAGE

## Accessible Trails

continued from page 22

### Wayah Bald, North Carolina

**DIRECTIONS** From Franklin, follow US 64 west for four miles from the overpass, then turn right at signs for Wayah Bald and LBJ Job Corps. Turn left on Wayah Road (SR 1310). Follow that road for 9 miles to the top and look for signs to Wayah Bald. Turn right and follow the gravel road (USFS 69) for 4.3 miles to the parking area, which is just beyond and to the right of the paved path to the bald and the fire tower.

### Fontana Dam, North Carolina

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of US 129 and NC 28, follow the latter west, passing Fontana Village at 8.8 miles and reaching Fontana Dam Road at 10.5 miles. Turn left on Fontana Dam Road for approximately one mile to the visitors' center. From the intersection of US 74 and NC 28, follow the latter 21.3 miles and turn right onto Fontana Dam Road. Go 1.6 miles to Fontana Dam.

### Hot Springs, North Carolina

**DIRECTIONS** The downtown area can be accessed from U.S. 25/70 about 35 miles northwest of Asheville.

### Laurel Fork Gorge, Tennessee

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of US 19E and US 321 in Hampton, follow the latter north (compass East). In .8 mile, go right toward Dennis Cove. There are signs for Dennis Cove and the access road to the parking area, which is approximately 4 miles along this paved but winding road. The parking area is on the left.

### Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

**DIRECTIONS** Parking in the lower town of Harpers Ferry is limited, but accessible shuttle buses are available from the park visitors' center, which is a National Park Service fee area. Directions can be found at [www.nps.gov/hafe](http://www.nps.gov/hafe).

### Children's Lake, Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania

**DIRECTIONS** visit ATC's Web site for directions to the Mid-Atlantic regional office. ↗

## I PUBLIC NOTICES

### Hiking Partners

Experienced, 68-year-old female hiker needs hiking partner to start in spring (April/May) in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and hike north 10 to 12 miles a day. I have already hiked from Georgia to Harpers Ferry; will hike as long as you want. Contact: Carol at (828) 754-1665.

### For Your Information

**Have you completed your hike of the entire A.T. but not yet reported it** to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy? You can download a 2,000-mile application from our Web site at [www.appalachiantrail.org/thruhiking/after](http://www.appalachiantrail.org/thruhiking/after).

### 2012 Caretakers needed for Blackburn Trail Center.

Owned and operated by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, the Blackburn Trail Center is located on the A.T. 12 miles south of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Blackburn is a premier stop for A.T. thru-hikers and day hikers alike. It is also used for Trail Club meetings, training workshops, and large group rentals. The caretaker's duties will include maintaining the Trail Center, Hiker's Hostel, and campground. Should have experience in offering comfort and company to weary A.T. hikers. Flexibility and ability to get along with wide variety of people a must! Prefer couple with knowledge of the A.T. and hiker's needs. Very modest stipend offered along with a

fabulous summer experience. Dates run from April through October. If interested, send a letter of application, resume and professional/personal references to Chris Brunton, 6245 Walkers Croft Way, Alexandria, VA 22315 or e-mail to [trailboss-btc@msn.com](mailto:trailboss-btc@msn.com). If you have questions contact Chris at (703) 924-0406.

### Seeking Manager for Bear's Den Trail Center.

The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) is seeking a manager for the Bear's Den Trail Center to manage this premier hostel and trail center located along the Appalachian Trail in Bluemont, Virginia. This is an exciting opportunity for an enthusiastic and energetic management-minded individual or couple. Bear's Den Trail Center is a year-round 36-bed hostel, campground, rental cabin, hiking trail head and parking area for the well-known Bear's Den Rocks overlook of the Shenandoah Valley on the Appalachian Trail. Bear's Den is operated by PATC and owned by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. This is a full-time salary position with benefits and housing provided. For detailed information visit: [appalachiantrail.org/jobs](http://appalachiantrail.org/jobs) or email applications to [bearsdenapps@gmail.com](mailto:bearsdenapps@gmail.com).

University of Vermont senior Todd Stanley is collecting data for his thesis "Evaluating the Nutritional Status of the Thru-Hiking Community."

If you would like to participate, and enter for a chance to win \$50, visit: <https://survey.uvm.edu/index.php?sid=61964&lang=en> Questions about the survey or project can be addressed to [tstanley@uvm.edu](mailto:tstanley@uvm.edu).

### For Sale

Vacation or full time **three-level, three-bath home across from South Toe River** between Blue Ridge Parkway and Penland school of art in Yancey County, North Carolina. \$239,900. Try before you buy; weekends available as well as photos. Contact: Tom@[albaresources.com](http://albaresources.com).

### Forty years of the Appalachian Trail magazines

(*Appalachian Trailway News* and *A.T. Journeys*, early 1970s to the present); free to good home or school that can use them. Contact: Tom Dillon in North Carolina (336) 725-2760. ↗

Public Notices may be edited for clarity and length. Please send them to:

[editor@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:editor@appalachiantrail.org)

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



### I RAN AWAY FROM HOME TWICE WHEN I

was a kid. The first time I was nine, and had just got done reading a Davy Crockett biography. My plan was to head west, find a mountaintop in Tennessee, and live like a frontiersman. I packed a sleeping bag and four apples — and made it 60 yards from the house before turning back. The second time I ran away I had just finished reading a biography on Daniel Boone. My plan was the same; though this time I was headed for Kentucky and brought an ax. I made it almost twice as far.

I was born gypsy-footed, and for as long as I can remember I've felt connected to nature. I loved playing in the woods, finding edible plants, and building shelters. I also read a lot. That's the one place a kid can go to find real adventure. I read books like *Hatchet* — about a boy who survives a plane wreck in the Canadian wilderness, and *My Side of the Mountain* — about a young boy who runs away from home to live off the land in the Catskills. And do I even need to mention Jack London? These stories fixed in my head a vision of the north as a vast wilderness covered in spruce pine, and any adventure there being a rite of passage into manhood. So it should come as no surprise that I fell in love with the Appalachian Trail from the very instant I heard about it. I was only 13 at the time, but the idea of living in the woods, of hiking to that primordial wilderness called Maine, grew into a yearning that never left. I read books about the Trail, studied maps, and even let my love for the Trail dictate my choice of colleges. (I figured any college called Appalachian State had to be near the A.T.)

Finally, I decided to take spring semester of my junior year off and do a thru-hike. From then on any meager profit from my dishwashing job was put into savings or used to buy new gear. So, on a cold, rainy day in the middle of February I found myself on Springer Mountain with 60 pounds on my back. It

was a catastrophe from day one. I don't think there's ever been such a spectacular failure of a thru-hike in the history of the Trail. I had everything going for me; I was young, had awesome gear, the support of my family, and was in great shape. I could do 20 miles a day. I conquered those mountains the first few weeks I was out there, and the A.T. didn't care. There were always more mountains to climb. By the time I reached Virginia I was so worn out I found myself crying in the middle of the Trail. I quit after 500 miles. To say I was devastated is an understatement. Half my life had been spent dreaming, planning, and saving for a thru-hike. Now that I had gone out and failed I felt lost, purposeless. I went back to college and graduated after a few semesters, but still had no direction. I was caught in limbo and realized there was only one thing I could do: try again.

On a warm, sunny day in March the next year I was standing on Springer Mountain again, surrounded by family and friends. This time my pack weighed one-third of what it had before and I was starting with a friend from college, Ed. Ed's hiking style can best be described by the motto "don't let hiking get in the way of your thru-hike." It was the complete opposite of mine. We took our time, stayed in towns multiple days, made lots of friends; if we felt like hiking only four miles in a day, that's all we did. It was like I was on a different trail. I was a changed hiker. I learned that the A.T. wasn't there for me to conquer, nor was it there to challenge me, it was just there. I could bash myself against it in frustration, fighting against something that would take no more notice of me than an elephant does a grain of sand, or I could accept the fact that everyday there would be challenges for me to adapt to and overcome. And once I accepted that, the challenges seemed to disappear.

By the time I reached Maine I had changed. I just had to be open enough to receive the gifts that the A.T. has. But I was worried that when I reached Katahdin this life would end and things would go back to the way they were before. And they did — to a point. Nothing can ever compare to the beauty, the friendship, the life, the glory I found on the Trail. But the lessons I learned have stuck with me. The things that make me happy while hiking: quality time with good people, time in nature, good food, exercise — are all things I can get at home; I just have to work for them. I ran away from home when I was a kid to find adventure and happiness, but it wasn't until I hiked the Appalachian Trail that I realized it was at home all along. ↗

Tom "Grey Fox" Moose

LIVES IN MOUNT PLEASANT, NORTH CAROLINA.

A "changed" Tom on Katahdin.

"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.



**APPALACHIAN TRAIL  
CONSERVANCY®**

[www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org)

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

## **Help to preserve and protect the A.T.**

**Become a part of the A.T. community. Volunteer with a Trail Club or Trail Crew. Encourage your family and friends to get involved by giving them a gift membership.**

[appalachiantrail.org](http://appalachiantrail.org)

PHOTO BY COLLEEN CONTRISCIANE