

# A JOURNEYS



THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

September – October 2013

**INSIDE: Hot Springs Lodging | Vicious Vegetation | Common Ground in the A.T.'s Roots**

# A JOURNEYS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

Volume 9, Number 5  
September – October 2013

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## On the Cover:

"Appalachian Milky Way" — as viewed in September along the A.T. near Engine Gap in the Roan Highlands of North Carolina/Tennessee. By Daniel Burleson

More of Daniel's remarkable A.T. images will be featured in the January/February issue of *A.T. Journeys*.

[imagecarolina.net](http://imagecarolina.net)

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## DYNAMIC INTERACTION. WE CANNOT ALL BE LONG-DISTANCE HIKERS, OR TRAIL

maintainers, or non-profit employees, which is why it's important to acknowledge that there exists a broader spectrum of people who *also* help the A.T. to endure. Big business and small business professionals, U.S. military troops, artists, students, restaurant wait staff, scientists, and scholars — you get the picture. Whether one's enthusiasm is athletic or spiritual, the common factor for the A.T.'s success remains an alliance of ardor for its existence.

You've heard it before; the enduring spirit of collaboration wins the day — and it is true. That spirit and endurance is part of the very definition of the Trail. And far beyond the offices of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), the National Park Service, and the A.T.'s vital maintaining clubs and volunteers, it's particularly true of all of you who are collaborating to support the Trail (many of whom also fit into one or more of the categories above) — as our members.

It's also true of the A.T.'s history, as Sarah Mittlefehldt discovered during her thru-hike and research of the Trail. "Not being a particularly nimble-footed hiker, I often found myself tripping over mile after mile of tangled roots along the Trail. Somewhere in North Carolina I realized that tangled roots were the perfect metaphor for explaining the Trail's past," says Sarah (page 28). "Like the literal roots that I kept tripping over ... the metaphor of tangled roots also gave me a way to [understand] the relationship between the horizontal, dendritic roots of grassroots social action and the strong, centralized taproot of federal power. As the Trail developed, these two forms of power evolved in dynamic interaction with one another."

Some have even found and made new roots while hiking along the Trail. Exemplary of this are a handful of innkeepers and shop owners in Hot Springs, North Carolina, where visitors and hikers can both literally and mentally take a load off (page 18). "Known for its outdoor recreation opportunities, this Appalachian Trail Community of less than 600 is hemmed in by tall mountains in every direction," explains Sandra Friend. "An unusually high percentage of the residents are hikers."

The decision and desire of those hikers to initially explore the A.T. has to be born somewhere, and the ATC's Trail To Every Classroom program is one way to introduce young people to the often addictive quality of the Trail and its characteristic way of drawing people together. This was demonstrated recently when the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers maintaining club worked with area high school students to integrate Trail maintenance into the senior students' curriculum (page 10). "As part of his capstone project [one of the students] researched the interpersonal relationships that the Trail can foster," says author Leanna Joyner. "While each of their lives are taking a new course ... [the students] fondly recall their experiences on the A.T. and say they can see themselves returning to the Trail to hike and volunteer."

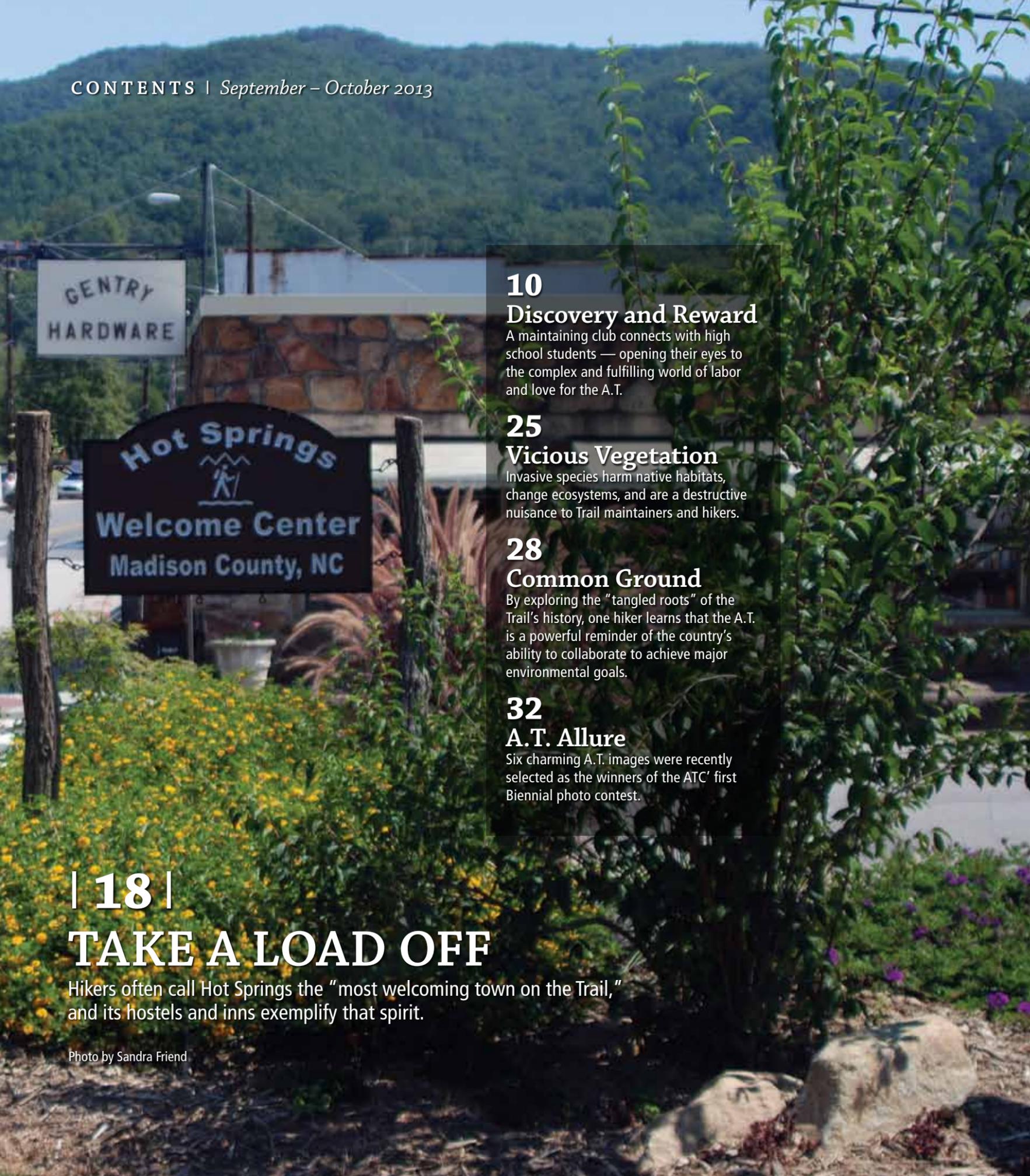
As the future constantly looms, it is nice to have an offer of something new and unknown as well as something old and comforting. Explaining the end of his first A.T. hike, Ben Poston nails that awkward feeling of putting oneself to a new challenge — a new experience, "I had to endure a teeth-gnashing bout with the blisters on the last few climbs. I even managed to slip and fall on the damp, wooden steps coming down to the road," says Ben (page 46). "Still, I've rarely been so carefree on that final mile along the river into town." Fifteen years of hiking later, Ben and his father look forward to every new jaunt they plan on the Trail.

Whether the interaction is simply between your feet and the varying landscape of the Trail, or a dream of those first or next steps on that long, skinny path, or working to keep that landscape clear and open, or sitting at a desk and collaborating with others to work through the complexities of keeping this source of inspiration protected and supported, this is the beauty of the Trail — a multifaceted group of people and organizations (past and present), who have, and continue to, put their heart and soul into the A.T. at all angles. This is dynamic interaction at play. ⚡

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).

A starry September night along the A.T. near the North Carolina/Tennessee border — by Daniel Burleson



# | 18 | TAKE A LOAD OFF

Hikers often call Hot Springs the “most welcoming town on the Trail,” and its hostels and inns exemplify that spirit.

Photo by Sandra Friend

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A maintaining club connects with high school students — opening their eyes to the complex and fulfilling world of labor and love for the A.T.

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Invasive species harm native habitats, change ecosystems, and are a destructive nuisance to Trail maintainers and hikers.

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By exploring the “tangled roots” of the Trail’s history, one hiker learns that the A.T. is a powerful reminder of the country’s ability to collaborate to achieve major environmental goals.

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Six charming A.T. images were recently selected as the winners of the ATC’s first Biennial photo contest.



| 25 | Japanese barberry is one of many invasive species that are “major offenders.” Photo by Michael Adamovic



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After 90 years, the Carolina Mountain Club has grown ever stronger and is looking forward to many more decades of hiking and Trail maintaining.

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Fifteen years ago, Ben Poston and his dad took their first awkward hike on the A.T. and were hooked.



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| LETTERS

**YOU GUYS ARE GREAT. I'VE BEEN** getting *A.T. Journeys* [as a member of] the Appalachian Trail Conservancy for years. It is a wonderful journal and has helped me so often with info about the Trail.

*Tom Troyano*

MANAHAWKIN, NEW JERSEY

**JUST A NOTE TO SAY HOW MUCH** we enjoy the magazine. We ("Ivanhoe and Lady Ro") were thru-hiking the Trail in 1990 and had progressed from Springer to the Slatington/Palmerton area before a [family loss and medical problems] forced us off the Trail. Reading the magazine always brings back fond memories (great people, "Trail magic", beautiful scenery). Just a quick note about the recent Gettysburg article ("Monumental History" *A.T. Journeys*, July/August) On page 23, there is a misstatement of fact: "Almost as many soldiers died in combat during this three-day battle than during the entire Vietnam War." "Casualties" may have been confused with "killed" given that the author references the loss of 51,112 men from both armies. There were 58,156 killed in the Vietnam War.

*Mark O. Vancil*

ROCKWALL, TEXAS

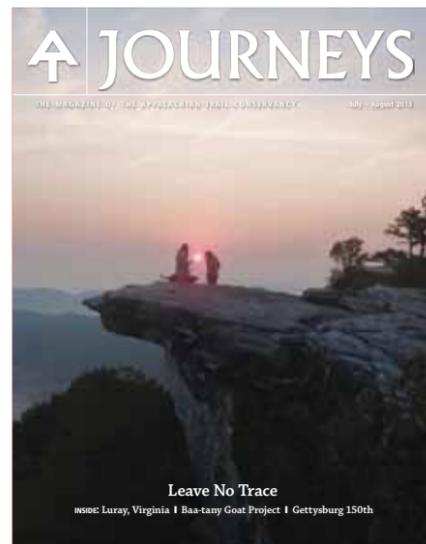
Note from the editor: The author, Sandra Friend's source for this information was the following website: [www.army.mil/gettysburg/statistics/statistics.html](http://www.army.mil/gettysburg/statistics/statistics.html).

**FACEBOOK COMMENTS**

**[THE WOUNDED WARRIORS** Project] was a brilliant idea from the beginning and it is wonderful to have the testament of a Wounded Warrior to speak to its success. Another hats off to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which has a strange way, despite the difficulties met along the way, of healing, reviving, and giving many hikers the motivation to begin living again!

*Jane Elizabeth Woods*

**THE JULY/AUGUST EDITION OF A.T. Journeys** is nothing less than exceptional! The editorial staff and all who contribute continue to amaze me with each and every issue. The Leave No Trace



article ["One Hiker at a Time"] could not have come at a better time. We all need to increase awareness, lessen man's impact, and protect the Trail and its surroundings. Also, I look forward to [visiting] the Balds of the Roan Highlands. It is my favorite section to hike. The Baa-Tany Goat Project ["Beneficial Browsing"] appears to have a positive impact. Thanks for sharing the article.

*Mike Yeatts*

**CORRECTIONS**

Photo credit for some images in the July/August article, "One Hiker at a Time" was incorrect. Three photos noted as "by Laurie Potteiger" were taken by Dan Innamorato.

In the July/August Photo Essay, "Hidden Gems" on page 31, "moth gathering nectar" was actually a "skipper" butterfly gathering nectar. 🌱

*A.T. Journeys* welcomes your comments. The editors are committed to providing balanced and objective perspectives. Not all letters received may be published. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Please send them to:  
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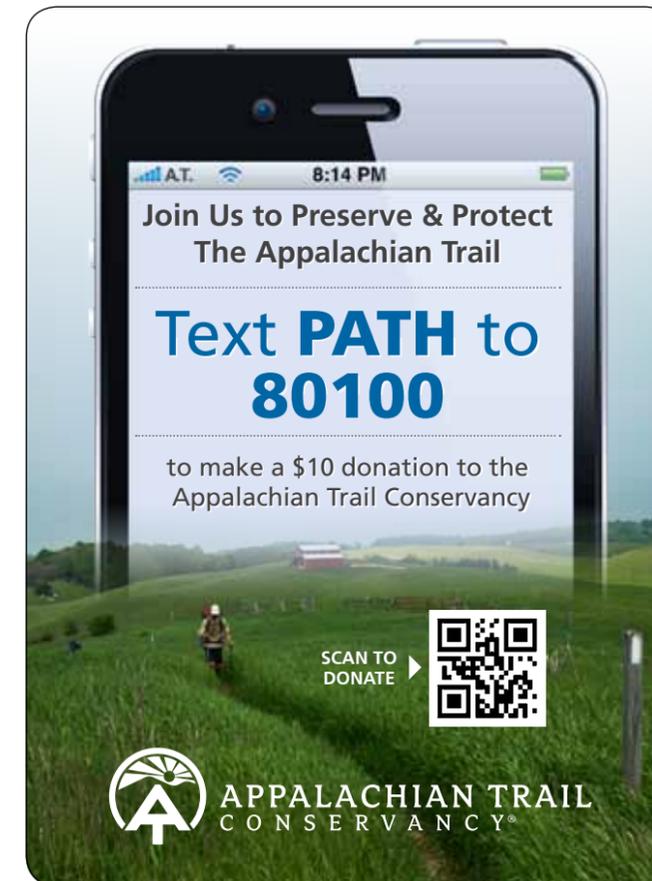
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*Together we can ensure that new volunteers and supporters can develop new roots right beside our older and deeper ones. Together we will keep the Appalachian Trail sturdy and strong.*

The ATC's new chair, Sandi Mara, at the recent Biennial Conference in Cullowhee, North Carolina. Photo by Stacey Marshall

maintaining clubs have a critical role to play, as do the board and staff of the ATC. Together we can ensure that new volunteers and supporters can develop new roots right beside our older and deeper ones. Together we will keep the Appalachian Trail sturdy and strong. In the coming months, as you learn more about the people who make up the ATC's leadership, you'll find they're not so different from you — and just maybe you'll step up and take on a leadership role in your local Trail maintaining club or in the ATC. We all do this because of Trail "roots" and we hope you will, too. ⬆

Sandra Marra | Chair

**MY ROOTS ARE SHOWING ...**

Having first joined the Board of Managers in 1999, I've seen a lot of changes in the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). One thing that hasn't changed, though, is the magnificent quality of the ATC Board. In the coming term, through this column and through other communications, I will introduce you to the talented and dedicated people who make up your board and share with you their connections and commitment to the Trail and to the ATC. Let me start by sharing a little about myself.

I joined the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) in 1984. I started with the Shelter Construction Crew and became the overseer for the Blackburn Trail Center in 1986. I assumed my first leadership role as general secretary in 1987 and continued to volunteer, becoming president of the club in 1996. I was also lucky enough to be mentored by A.T. icons such as Ruth Blackburn and Ed Garvey who were still active in the PATC during that time. I'm still active today and help to clear and blaze three miles of the A.T. in northern Virginia with my husband (a.k.a. "Trail Boss"). As a section hiker, I have completed 1,200 miles of the Trail to date.

My roots run deep and so does my commitment to envisioning the future of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. A primary ATC goal is ensuring that the idea of the Trail is appreciated and embraced by future generations. We are facing significant demographic shifts in this country and our young people are less involved than ever in outdoor activities. The Trail runs through the "backyard" of more than a third of the U.S.'s population. Perpetuity of this national treasure demands that we diversify and expand our circle of membership and leadership. Trail

# JOURNEY OF 2,000 MILES

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL



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<b>Philadelphia, PA</b> 10/17 @ 7:00 pm	<b>Franklin, NC</b> 10/18 @ 7:00 pm	<b>Erwin, TN</b> 10/20 @ 6:00 pm	<b>Pawling, NY</b> 10/20 @ 2:00 pm	<b>Raleigh, NC</b> 10/23 @ 7:00 pm
<b>Charlotte, NC</b> 10/24 @ 7:00 pm	<b>Atlanta, GA</b> 10/26 @ 11:00 am	<b>Hot Springs, NC</b> 10/26 @ 7:00 pm	<b>Carlisle, PA</b> 10/29 @ 7:00 pm	<b>Tampa, FL</b> 10/30 @ 7:00 pm



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



Clockwise from above: Classic A.T. scene — the trademark blazes at VA Hwy 622 — a short distance north of the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area headquarters near Sugar Grove Virginia; Charlotte, Bert, Austin, and Austin check out the step stones at a stream crossing; (from left) Kay, Destiny, and Samantha; The group about to head out to the Trail with tools in hand after a safety briefing at the PATH equipment barn. Photos by Destiny Giles and Greg Weaver



# DISCOVERY & REWARD

A group of high school seniors discover the beauty of and complexity behind maintaining the Trail.

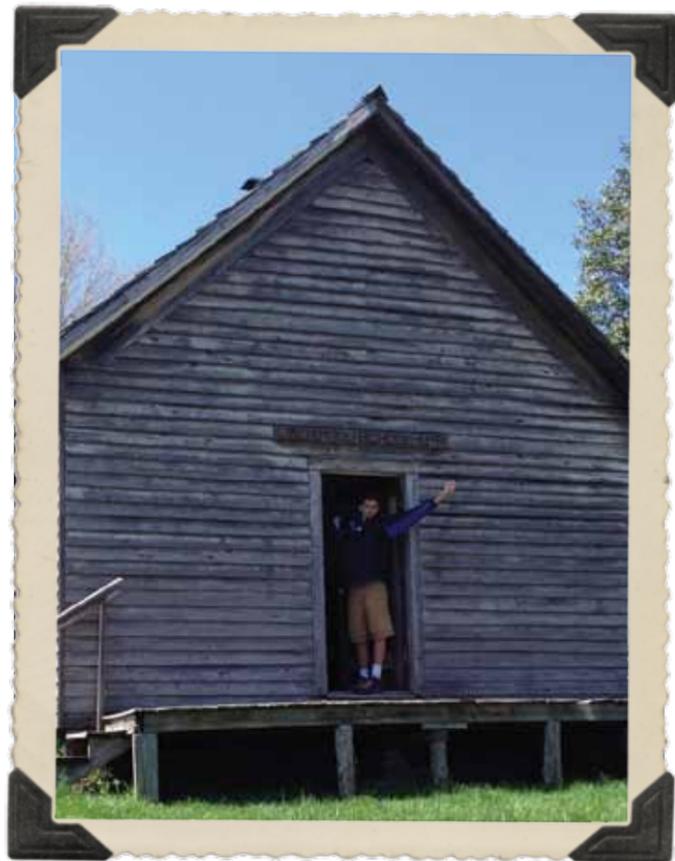
BY LEANNA JOYNER

**AFTER WORKING AT MCDONALDS FOR THREE YEARS** during high school, Destiny Giles started on a track for management with the franchise, just as she aced her senior project about the Appalachian Trail. The project was the final requirement for her graduation from Mooresville High School in North Carolina and an accomplishment she seems to have even surprised herself in achieving. Her interest in and knowledge of her subject matter was so profound that when she presented her project to the judges she spoke without needing her note cards and confidently answered questions presented by the panel grading her, when, just months before, the topic of the A.T. was brand new to her. "Honestly, I had no idea about it. One day I was sitting in class and guest speakers talked to our class about it. I figured I would love to do it. When I was little, I used to go hiking with my grandparents and my mom, so I picked that topic for my project," said Giles.

It's that kind of self-selected learning that made

working with five seniors of Mooreseville High School a success for the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers (PATH). PATH member Greg Weaver said that the positive outcomes of working with the students started when club volunteers Kay Laffoon and Charlotte LaFon showed up at the school to present the A.T. as a potential Trail To Every Classroom (TTEC) project to 120 students. "[The students] came to the table because they wanted to be there. They were interested, asked questions, cooperated, and were enthusiastic. All the things you want someone to have in that kind of environment," said Greg. Trail To Every Classroom is an Appalachian Trail Conservancy and National Park Service professional development program for K-12 teachers that provides educators with the tools and training for place-based education and service-learning on the A.T.

Kay and Charlotte served as mentors to the high school students and set the stage for their learning by helping them



From left: Visiting the one-room 1894 Lindamood School at the Settler's Museum in Atkins, Virginia – by Samantha Davis; Certificates of appreciation went to the students for projects well done — presented at PATH's monthly volunteer weekend dinner and program night – by Barbara Council



brainstorm for a focus of study, coordinating work trips (a required service component of the project), and lining up speakers. As newer members of the club, they called on Greg's ten years of experience with PATH to provide Trail maintenance orientation for the students and assist with planning some of the outings. "At first it was intimidating. I was the rookie going in. I was scared and I had a lot of questions," says Crystal of her experience. "[PATH] helped me understand everything. The first day we got there Greg showed us all the tools we were supposed to use and told us all the fancy names. He showed us how to use them. Now I have an understanding of it and can do [maintenance] with a group."

Similarly, Bert Kozoman says working with PATH was great because they were helpful and patient with him and the other students as they learned. "It was interesting to see what they were willing to do to keep the A.T. looking nice. They were willing to go out of their way and sacrifice a weekend at a time to go pick up litter and clean up the Trail," says Bert who recalls when Greg explained that volunteers actually try to make it look like they haven't come through, avoiding the impression of obvious man-made interference.

"I think it opened their eyes to a different world. They didn't realize it requires people to maintain the Trail. They had no idea of the expanse of the project," says Charlotte. As for the Trail itself, "they couldn't believe the variety of scenery, nor had they ever imagined what goes on in the backcountry." Kay says introducing students to the Trail and the club helped them form their own opinions about abilities and age, the grit required for a long hike, and how they can help the A.T. She gives the example of students meeting volunteers in their 70s who are in great

shape, demonstrating the importance of being active and being outside. "Whenever I was doing [Trail work] I had trouble doing eight miles. Some people in PATH go out and hike 50 miles at a time," says Crystal who was joined by her grandmother for the work trip. "I thought I was in shape and ready for it. I realized I was not. Even my grandma did it. She loved it."

Austin Bavery, 18, a former Boy Scout and the most experienced hiker who undertook the A.T. as a senior project, said he gained an appreciation for how hard it is to actually hike and clean up the Trail at the same time. Yet, he found it rewarding. "It makes me feel great. I can go back and say 'oh, I cut that tree,'" he says. Bert agrees, "It made me feel better about myself, actually. I was part of something historic. I can now say that I've hiked part of the Trail and that I've helped maintain it. That is very cool to be able to say."

As part of his capstone project, Bert researched the interpersonal relationships that the Trail can foster. He says he learned that the Trail brings groups of people together, something he experienced firsthand. "Before we were kind of quiet toward each other, but after the Trail we were more open about sharing our experiences and everything. You just have to learn to trust people when you're spending several hours a day with them." With high school complete, Bert has registered for the Air Force and Austin is saving money for college. While each of their lives are taking a new course, Austin, Bert, and Crystal all fondly recall their friends and mentors in PATH, their experiences on the A.T., and say that time and location permitting, they can see themselves returning to the Trail to hike and volunteer.

Kay and Charlotte look forward to doubling their efforts this year, working with sets of seniors in the fall and spring to collaborate on the stewardship of the Appalachian Trail. Kay says, "What better way to do some hiking and some good." ▲

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**- Family -  
Hiking Day**

**September 28, 2013**

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



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

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

# | TRAILHEAD |

OCTOBER WILDFLOWERS AT TRAILSIDE CROSSING, SINKING CREEK VALLEY, VIRGINIA – BY DAVID EDDY



## New ATC Executive Director

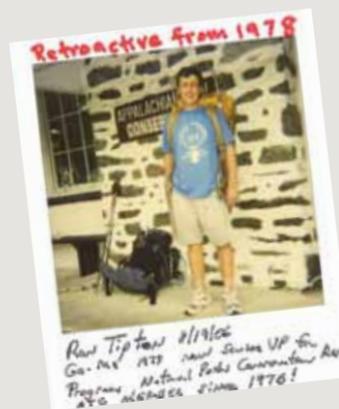
**RONALD J. TIPTON HAS BEEN APPOINTED AS THE NEW EXECUTIVE** director/CEO to lead the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) beginning in late August. Tipton has spent most of the past 30-plus years as an advocate for public land preservation and national park protection. A graduate of George Washington University with an undergraduate degree in American Studies and a law degree from George Washington University's National Law Center, Tipton first worked as a program officer at the National Academy of Sciences and on the oversight/investigative staff of the House Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee. Since 1978 he has been a part of the advocacy and/or management team of four non-profit national conservation organizations: The Wilderness Society, National Audubon Society, World Wildlife Fund, and National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA).

Tipton was the senior vice president for programs for NPCA from 2000 to 2008, when he became the senior vice president for policy, where he focused most recently on expanding the number of national park units to increase the natural and cultural diversity of the park system as the country approaches the 2016 Centennial celebration of the National Park Service. Bob Almand, long-time and now former chair of the ATC, stated, "Ron has the passion, management experience, and advocacy skills that the Appalachian Trail Conservancy is looking for, plus a strong connection to the Appalachian Trail and the Trail community. His high standards and experience will help move the organization forward to serve the next generation of Trail users."

Tipton is the recent past president of Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington, an organization founded and supported by Episcopal parishes in the D.C. metropolitan area, which provides counseling to individuals in need who want to improve their lives. He has been a member of the board or governing council of numerous recreation and trails organizations, including the ATC, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, and the Benton MacKaye Trail Association.

Tipton has been married for 34 years to Rita Molyneaux and has a son who is a firefighter. In 1978, he walked the entire length of the Trail. "I feel incredibly privileged and honored to be asked to be the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's executive director/CEO. Since I hiked the Trail I have served as a volunteer for more than 25 years with the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and helped found the Appalachian Long Distance Hiker's Association," stated Tipton. "I am especially proud of working with people like Ed Garvey and former ATC executive director David Startzell to secure permanent protection through public ownership of the Appalachian Trail corridor from Georgia to Maine."

Tipton enters the ATC at a time of growth and an expanding agenda for preserving the rich natural and cultural resources along the Trail corridor. The ATC currently has more than 43,000 members, a vast network of more than 6,000 volunteers, and an operating budget of \$7.3 million.



## National Public Lands Day Celebrates 20 Years



**NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY (NPLD) IS THE NATION'S LARGEST,** single-day volunteer effort for public lands. In 2013, the 20th Anniversary of National Public Lands Day will be held on Saturday, September 28. Join volunteers of all ages for NPLD's 20th Anniversary. Celebrate with volunteers in your community at parks and other public lands.



The Holland family enjoys a hike led by ATC Visitor Center volunteers in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia in celebration of National Public Lands Day 2012.

NPLD began in 1994 with three sites and 700 volunteers. It proved to be a huge success and became a yearly tradition, typically held on the last Saturday in September. Since the first NPLD, the event has grown by leaps and bounds. In 2012, about 175,000 volunteers worked at 2,206 sites in every state, the District of Columbia, and in many U.S. territories, making it the biggest NPLD in the history of the event.

NPLD educates Americans about the environment and natural resources, and the need for shared stewardship of these valued, irreplaceable lands. It also builds partnerships between the public sector and the local community based upon mutual interests in the enhancement and restoration of America's public lands and improves public lands for outdoor recreation, with volunteers assisting land managers in hands-on work.

Seven federal agencies as well as nonprofit organizations and state, regional, and local governments participate in the annual day of caring for public lands. National Public Lands Day keeps the promise of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the "tree army" that worked from 1933 to 1942 to preserve and protect America's natural heritage.

- NPLD VOLUNTEERS:**
- ▶ Collected an estimated 23,000 pounds of invasive plants
  - ▶ Built and maintained an estimated 1,500 miles of trails
  - ▶ Planted an estimated 100,000 trees, shrubs, and other native plants
  - ▶ Removed an estimated 500 tons of trash from trails and other places
  - ▶ Contributed an estimated \$18 million through volunteer services to improve public lands across the country

Text courtesy National Public Lands Day. For more information and to find a volunteer event near you visit: [www.publiclandsday.org](http://www.publiclandsday.org)



## HUNTING SEASON SAFETY

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

- ▶ Research local hunting seasons, which can start as early as September
- ▶ Wear fluorescent orange (hat or clothing)
- ▶ During hunting seasons, you may want to hike in these national parks where hunting is prohibited: C&O Canal National Historical Park, Maryland; Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, West Virginia; Shenandoah National Park, Virginia; Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia; Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina/Tennessee

For more information and to see ATC's "2013-2014 Hunting Season Guide by State" visit: [appalachiantrail.org/hunting](http://appalachiantrail.org/hunting).

## New Era Launched at ATC Cullowhee 2013

BY LEANNA JOYNER

### Gold and Silver Volunteer Service Awards

Congratulations to the volunteers who were honored at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's 39th Biennial Conference. We salute their hard work and dedication to the Appalachian Trail and their A.T. maintaining clubs.

Dick Ketelle of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club (SMHC) received the Gold Service Award for 50 years of active volunteer service. His involvement with the Trail began when his parents took him on hikes before he could walk. Dick became an A.T. maintainer in the early 1960s and has served on the club's A.T. maintainers committee since 1986. A certified sawyer who manages blowdown removal for SMHC, Dick and his wife, Ann Farrar, are section leaders for part of the A.T. in the Smokies. Forty-three other volunteers received Silver Service Awards in recognition of at least 25 years of active service.

For the complete list of 25-year service award recipients visit: [appalachiantrail.org/serviceawards](http://appalachiantrail.org/serviceawards)



Biennial attendees had hundreds of hikes to choose from, including this one to Siler Bald. Photo by Laurie Potteiger

**THE 39TH BIENNIAL MEETING OF THE** Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) drew more than 900 people, ranging from infants to nonagenarians. A robust program ensured that there was something for everyone, including 153 organized hikes. Sixty-nine workshops focused on cooperative management, maintenance, hiking, and outreach all highlighted the event's tagline: "Our Land, Our Trail, Our Community." Additionally, 26 excursions showcased the best activities in western North Carolina, including unique opportunities to visit and learn about the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

The general business meeting of the ATC membership on Saturday, July 20 included the election of a new board of directors, chaired by Sandi Marra. In her remarks, Sandi said she believes the ATC and its maintaining clubs are facing some of their biggest challenges and greatest opportunities in the history of the Trail. She said that like all national parks and environmental organizations, the ATC is facing significantly reduced and harder to find funding, changes in Trail-users' experiences and expectations, and too much work with too few resources. Yet, she said, the ATC, and its clubs and partners, are uniquely positioned to lead the way for other parks and recreation areas facing similar challenges and set the standard on how to manage these incredible resources. Sandi emphasized

her faith in the talented and dedicated board members elected by the ATC's membership, who she said will diligently support the ATC's ongoing and ever-evolving efforts.

Also at the business meeting, Appalachian National Scenic Trail superintendent Wendy Janssen said, "There's nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer, and the spirit of service and generosity," as she recognized the power of one and many during the presentation of gold and silver awards for service to the A.T. Forty-six volunteers were recognized for 25 years of service, and Dick Ketelle of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club was recognized for 50 years of volunteering. Ann Christensen, of the U.S. Forest Service presented the service awards with Janssen. Betsy Thompson presented a genuinely surprised, recent, long-time ATC board chair Bob Almand with an Honorary Membership award for his years of service to the Appalachian Trail. ATC members had the chance to meet and welcome the ATC's incoming executive director Ron Tipton during his brief remarks in which he expressed his enthusiasm for the role. Finally, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club's Lee Sheaffer announced the site of the 2015 Biennial, planned for Winchester, Virginia, and invited participants to join the event, "Hiking Through History," as a participant or volunteer.

Speaking to many of the 324 volunteers at a reception in their honor, biennial steering committee chair Lenny Bernstein said that it may take a village to raise a child, but it takes a small city to put on a biennial conference, a sentiment echoed in chortles throughout the crowd. "What a great Biennial! Workshops, hikes, many friends, entertainment...all super," expressed Sharon Van Horn on the Facebook group page dedicated to the A.T. Biennial, where participants have posted pictures of ATC Cullowhee 2013 and are already talking about the next conference. "I have been told these biennials are addictive and I have to agree. Can't wait to see what happens in Winchester."

Share your experience and plan for the 2015 Biennial Conference by visiting: [facebook.com/groups/atcbiennial](https://facebook.com/groups/atcbiennial).

# 2012 Annual Report

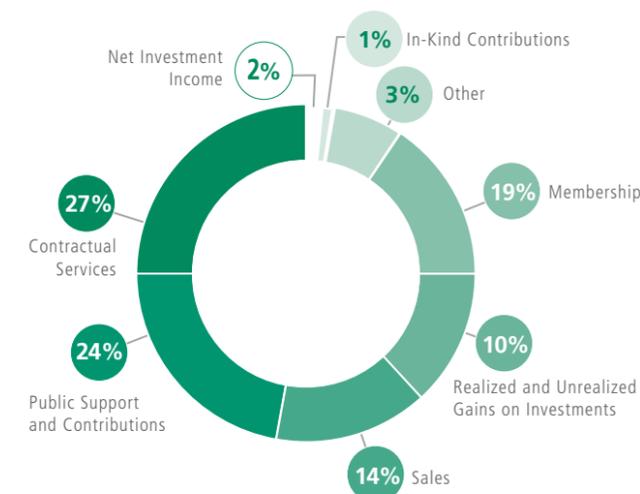
## Comparison of Revenue and Expense

**OVER THE LAST FEW DECADES, THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY (ATC) HAS BEEN THE UNIFYING** force that builds partnerships along the A.T. while preserving the Trail's natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage. As we celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the Trail's completion, we stayed true to our mission and invested in traditional and innovative programs to reach a broad range of constituents while instilling passion and cultivating future stewards of the Trail. We are proud to report our many accomplishments in 2012.

For the ATC, 2012 was a year of transition and focus. Throughout the year we focused on honing the strategic framework of our organization. Even though 2012 was a year of great change, the ATC was able to increase net assets over all funds by \$832,623.

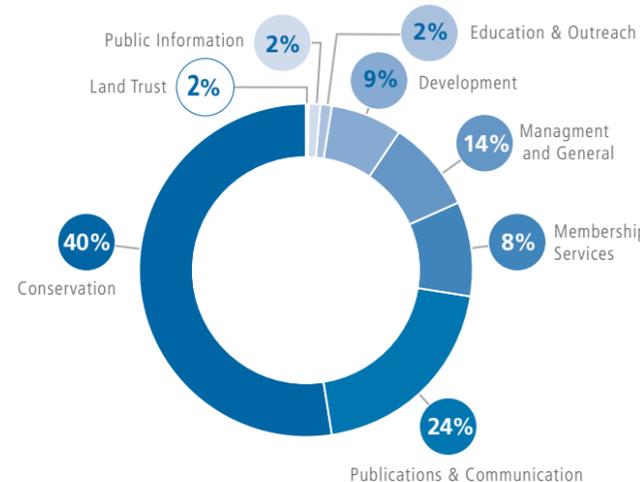
### Revenues

	2011	2012
Public Support and Contributions	\$1,479,794	\$1,781,648
In-Kind Contributions	\$190,225	\$96,671
Memberships	\$1,189,228	\$1,363,254
Contractual Services	\$3,630,007*	\$1,953,075
Sales	\$975,515	\$1,039,421
Net Investment Income	\$117,188	\$134,906
Other	\$596,755	\$228,246
Net Realized and Unrealized Gains (losses) on Investments	\$(175,698)	\$714,121
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$8,003,014</b>	<b>\$7,311,342</b>



### Expenses

	2011	2012
Conservation	\$4,145,502*	\$2,589,774
Land Trust	\$39,992	\$103,452
Membership Services	\$750,083	\$532,178
Public Information	\$77,594	\$115,690
Education and Outreach	\$117,171	\$120,918
Publications and Communications	\$1,569,626	\$1,522,884
Development	\$602,756	\$566,064
Management and General	\$793,806	\$898,872
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$8,096,530</b>	<b>\$6,449,832</b>
Actuarial Adjustment	\$29,890	\$28,887
<b>Increase (decrease) Net Assets</b>	<b>(\$123,406)</b>	<b>\$832,623</b>



\*1.5 million a result of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy acting as a pass thru agent for the purchase of 860 acres of Land in Pennsylvania. (See prior years annual report for details)

The 2012 financial statements were audited by Yount, Hyde, and Barbour, P.C. and were issued an unqualified "clean" opinion. For more information or copies of the 2012 audited financials and for the complete 2012 Annual Report visit: [appalachiantrail.org/financials](http://appalachiantrail.org/financials).

# take a LOAD OFF

*In the official A.T. Community of Hot Springs, North Carolina, providing accommodations for hikers is a long-standing tradition.*

Text by Sandra Friend and John Keatley  
Photos by Sandra Friend

# T



**THE AROMA OF CHARCOAL-GRILLED BURGERS** filled the crisp mountain air as a group of hungry hikers sat around a table in Hot Springs, chowing down and swapping stories. Mike, here to help with renovations, looked carefully at the fellow across the table. “Dah Wah-He? Is that you?” The other hiker responded, “Wolfman?” Mike answered, “Yes!” The two men jumped up and exchanged a hug. They’d thru-hiked together in 2008 and hadn’t seen each other since. Two young thru-hikers, Yom from Denmark and Knif from Switzerland, studied Mike closely. “Wolfman? You’re in the German documentary about the A.T.! You’re famous,” one exclaimed. They jumped up to get a photo with their erstwhile celebrity. Meanwhile, Randy Anderson tended to the grill. Following the scent of burgers, another young man stepped off the Appalachian Trail and towards the breezeway of the Hostel at Laughing Heart Lodge. Randy called out, “We still have rooms for tonight!” Measuring up the leftovers on the grill, he added a clincher, “Dinner included!”



The view from the front porch of Laughing Heart Lodge;  
Inset: Guests enjoy dinner at Laughing Heart Hostel



Hikers call Hot Springs the “most welcoming town on the Trail,” and it’s no wonder. It’s the first town that northbound hikers walk right through, and directly past Bluff Mountain Outfitters, where ill-fitting boots, too-big pants, or a groaning backpack can be replaced. Known for its outdoor recreation opportunities — including the historic hot springs and river rafting on the French Broad River — this Appalachian Trail Community of less than 600 is hemmed in by tall mountains in every direction. An unusually high percentage of the residents are hikers. Below the restored 1929 boarding house rooms of the Iron Horse Station, where hikers are welcome to check in and relax, Sunny Riggs runs Artisun, a coffee shop and art gallery. She scoops out salted-caramel ice cream within sight of turned-wood bowls by Jack Dalton and photos by Sarah Jones, all thru-hikers, all residents. “Being here, being able to serve hikers — not just wine and ice cream — it’s fulfilling,” said Sunny. “I get to see all my hiker friends as they pass through.”

“I don’t know exactly why I’m here, but I was called here,”

Clockwise from above: Artisan coffee shop and art gallery; The Iron Horse Station (located above the Artisun) offers the comforts of home; The Laughing Heart Lodge. Inset: Hikers can walk directly from the A.T. to the entrance to the Laughing Heart Hostel

said Randy Anderson, who, with his wife LuAnn, felt a tug towards Hot Springs after years of long-distance hiking. When the couple, also known as “Chuck and Tigger,” who met at Trail Days in 2006, needed respite of their own, the Trail provided. While staying with Sunny, they got the call from Karen and Pete Nagle, the new owners of the old Jesuit property. “They were looking for someone like us, a married couple who could oversee the beginning of the hostel, who could be ‘Mom and Pop’ to the hikers coming through.”

Sitting on the front porch of Sunnybank Inn — another overnight option in Hot Springs — Elmer Hall watches for the next A.T. hiker to walk up the road, as he has for 35 years. Elmer’s tradition of taking on assistants to help run the former boarding house has forged deep roots for some. “Sunny worked



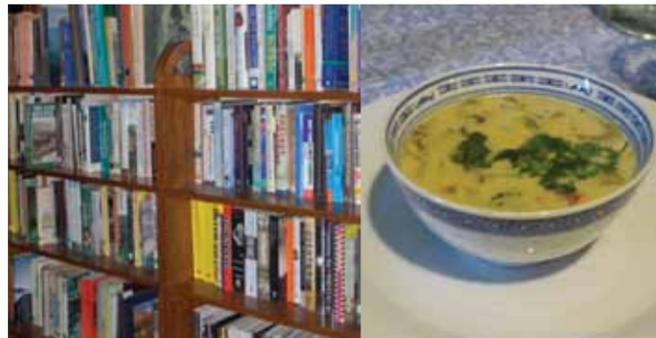
here for a season,” he said. “I remember she said ‘I want to have a coffeeshop,’ and look where she is now. One of my boys runs Bluff Mountain Outfitters — he came back here from Vermont after he finished the Trail.” All this is explained while current A.T. hikers “Rivers” and “Styx,” are sweeping the upper porch with brooms, learning hospitality at a Hot Springs pace.

When a weary foot traveler, “that lone Trail-hiker,” strode into Hot Springs in the spring of 1948, the Gentry family took him in at their boardinghouse, Sunnybank Inn. Fifty years later, that hiker, Earl Shaffer, would enjoy the Victorian surroundings of Sunnybank again under its new caretaker. “It may seem hard to believe,” said Elmer, “but there were virtually no facilities for hikers in Hot Springs until 15 or 20 years ago. This was it.” Having stayed with the Gentrys — whose matriarch, Jane, is immortalized as the balladeer of the southern Appalachians,

Clockwise from top: Thank you notes from A.T. hikers who stayed at Sunnybank; Sunnybank Inn; Sunnybank proprietor, Elmer, relaxes with a friend, JK, on the front porch.

honored with a historic plaque and a music room filled with instruments — Elmer came back after his thru-hike at their invitation to work a while. “None of their children wanted the boarding house,” he said, “and they told me ‘we like the way you do things here.’ It opened up my eyes to living in a small town,” after a life spent living in cities. “They made me an offer I couldn’t refuse.”

Settling in as caretaker in 1978, Elmer hasn’t wandered far since. The Trail brings the world to him. Amid eclectic surroundings, hikers have access to thousands of books, camaraderie, and wholesome gourmet vegetarian meals. “We



don't have a microwave here," said Elmer. Nor is there a computer, or wifi. "What we're trying to provide is a situation where hikers have a bit of privacy and the comforts of an old Victorian home," including expansive porches and clawfoot tubs. It's like a stay at a bed and breakfast, but not quite as fancy. In the off-season, guests come for retreats ranging from mushroom picking to folk music, or just to enjoy the company and the food. "The Trail represents simple living, and simplifying life," said Elmer. "We try to keep those currents going here. Magical things happen when good things come together."

We arrived last spring with "the bubble," — a stream of hikers who come through at the peak of the hiking season — dropped off by a friend who rescued us at a snow-covered Max Patch. Emerging cold, wet, and sick, barely a month into our hike, the Hostel at Laughing Heart Lodge became our place to heal. Randy Anderson — who everyone in town knows as Chuck, thanks to his Trail name, "Chuck Norris" — met us at the door. "Have you stayed at Elmer's yet?" he asked. We hadn't, yet, but with how sick we were, a private room here had our name on it. "I always encourage first-time thru-hikers to stay with Elmer at Sunnybank at least once, for the experience." From 1974 until 1999, the Jesuit Hostel, which is now the Hostel at Laughing Heart, hosted thousands of A.T. hikers. It took less than two weeks to scrub it back into shape. "The most important thing was to go in and paint," said Randy. When the doors re-opened on March 23, 2012, "hikers started coming in that night. We knew we had a hit because we were turning 12, 15, 20 hikers away a day," said Randy, who also worked on renovation of the Laughing Heart Lodge, a grand 1892 Adirondack lodge that formerly served as the Jesuit House of Prayer, during the hostel's first season.

Even before they built the hostel, the Jesuits took in Appalachian Trail thru-hikers, allowing them to sleep on the porch of the main house and offering them food. In 1970, Ed Garvey enjoyed their hospitality, sharing his story in *Appalachian Hiker: Adventure of a Lifetime*. Sifting through stacks of old books before the lodge was renovated, we uncovered a signed copy of Garvey's book, with a thank you to the Jesuits for their hospitality. With the complex now complete, Laugh-

Clockwise from right: Welcoming visitors to Laughing Heart Lodge and Hostel; Hikers have access to thousands of books, camaraderie, and wholesome gourmet vegetarian meals at Sunnybank Inn; Bluff Mountain Outfitters is owned by a former A.T. thru-hiker and the son of Sunnybank's proprietor.



ing Heart is a calm and healing place, no matter the time of year. Sitting on the porch where hikers once slept, we watched the curl of "smokes" rise from the mountain slopes and make their way towards the clouds above. A counterpoint to the simplicity of the hostel, the well-appointed rooms of the lodge offer more upscale comforts. As a sister property to the popular Mountain Magnolia Inn, commissioned as a family home by Colonel James Rumbough in 1868, Laughing Heart Lodge shares two common threads: the original owners, the Rumboughs, and the current owners, the Nagles. Pete and Karen Nagle placed a great deal of loving care into the restoration of both properties, and welcome hikers to both. The 1892 cabin that adjoins the hostel at Laughing Heart serves as a hikers' kitchen and a social space during the hiking season. A chapel hosts yoga retreats and services, as well as acting as overflow accommodations for large hiking groups.

"One of the hikers who came off the hill told us he'd had to call for a rescue three times on the way here," said Randy. "He was having problems with his heart on the way down, and he told us 'my heart began to 'laugh,' and it was okay.' I pointed to the sign. 'Dude, do you have any idea where you are?'" Looking at the Laughing Heart sign, they both laughed. 🏔️



The A.T., just above Hot Springs



Mountain Magnolia Inn

## HIKER HOSPITALITY

### THE HOSTEL AT LAUGHING HEART LODGE

(813) 763-7868, [laughingheartlodge.com](http://laughingheartlodge.com)

### LAUGHING HEART LODGE

(828) 622-0615, [laughingheartlodge.com](http://laughingheartlodge.com)

### SUNNYBANK RETREAT:

(828) 622-7206, [facebook.com/pages/Sunnybank-Inn-Retreat-Association](https://facebook.com/pages/Sunnybank-Inn-Retreat-Association)

### MOUNTAIN MAGNOLIA INN:

1-800-914-9306, [mountainmagnoliainn.com](http://mountainmagnoliainn.com)

### IRON HORSE STATION

(866) 402-9377, [theironhorsestation.com](http://theironhorsestation.com)

### OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS IN HOT SPRINGS INCLUDE:

**ALPINE COURT MOTEL:** (828) 622-3231, [hotspringsnc.org/pages/alpinecourt.html](http://hotspringsnc.org/pages/alpinecourt.html)

**CREEKSIDE COURT:** (828) 622-9400, [lodginghotspringsnc.com](http://lodginghotspringsnc.com)

**HOT SPRINGS RESORT AND SPA:** (828) 622-7676, [nchotsprings.com](http://nchotsprings.com)

For more information about the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's A.T. Community program visit: [appalachiantrail.org/atcommunity](http://appalachiantrail.org/atcommunity).



Room at Sunnybank Inn



Shared room at Laughing Heart Hostel



Creekside Court

# VICIOUS VEGETATION

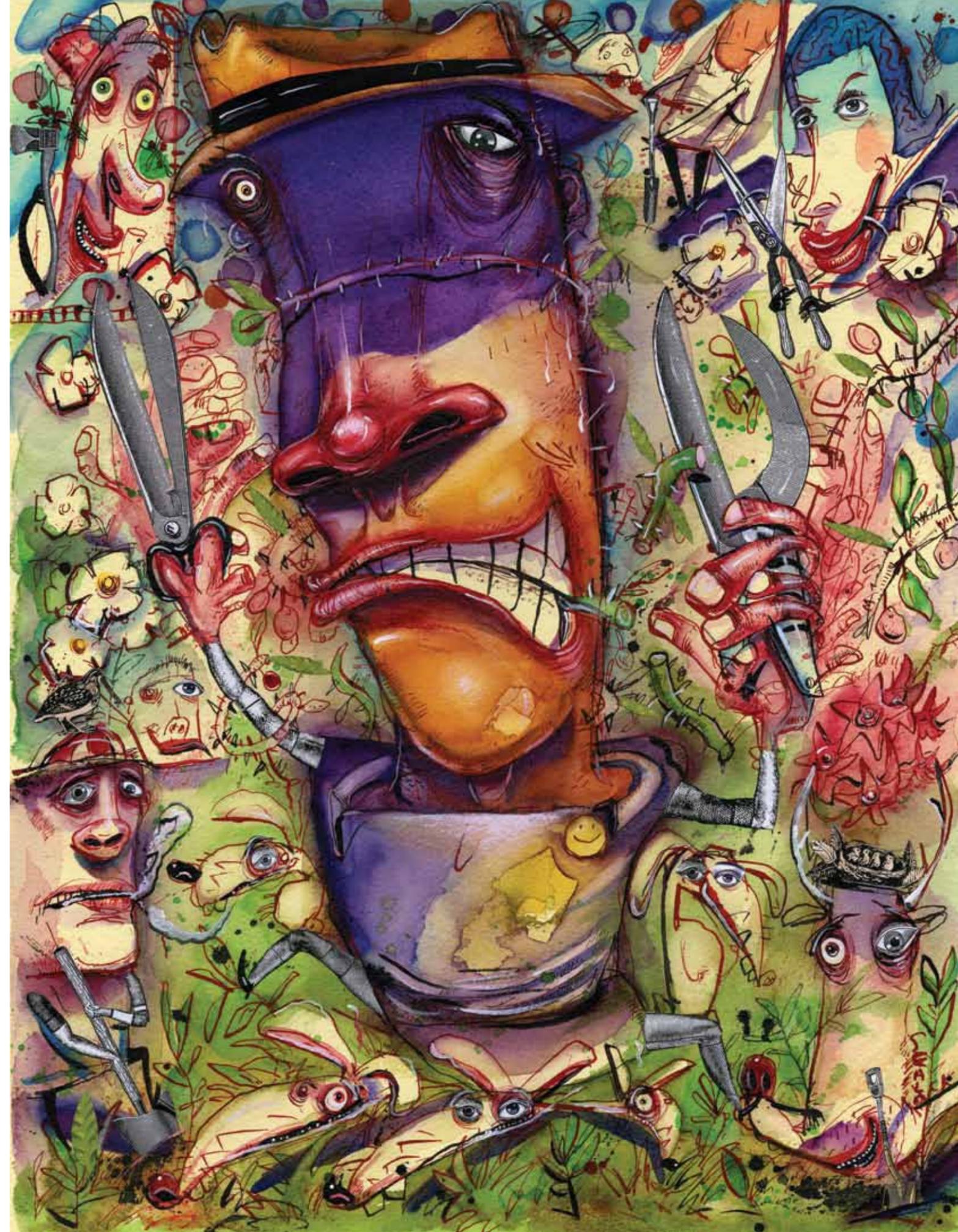
Invasive plants — the negative nuances of forceful flora & belligerent blossoms.

**IN THE PAST, OUR FORESTS FELL SOLELY BY THE AX OF THE** lumberman — a quick and clean end that had some utility. Today, the destruction is brought about by a far more insidious foe that slowly sickens and displaces once-robust and diverse native plant life with alien invaders that usurp our native variety. Invasive species, while typically unassuming individually, given time and the chance to propagate, can bring about more change to ecosystems unconsciously than we can do with even the most ambitious plan. Apart from the harm invasives cause to native habitats, hikers, and Trail maintainers, they pose an incredible nuisance by forming dense and impenetrable thickets that not only cause physical harm and annoyance, but are responsible for the destruction of equipment and the engulfment of Trail and shelter land. You don't have to be an ecologist to see the damage invasives inflict.

While many of us have heard the term “invasive” used before and have a general idea of the subject, what exactly constitutes an invasive species? An invasive plant is one that was never present in an ecosystem prior to its transport by human aid; typically has a high tolerance range to a wide variety of habitats; can thrive in adverse environmental conditions, such as hostile weather and low quality or contaminated soil; and finally, possesses an extremely high fecundity, where the plants are capable of producing vast amounts of offspring year after year. Not all non-native plants are invasives, and not all invasives are from some far away continent — even plants from North America transported to somewhere out of its normal range (perhaps only a few hundred miles) have the capability of developing invasive qualities. Native species, many of which do not have such weedy traits and have no means to resist the invaders, are generally outcompeted and displaced.

A majority of these detrimental plants were brought to this country for use as ornamentals. Many continue to be bought and planted despite the well-known invasiveness they pose if they escape cultivation. We further lend a hand whenever we degrade the land. Environmental disturbance and invasives are synonymous. Some of the major offenders along the Appalachian Trail need little introduction. Kudzu in the Southern states is one such example — due to its widespread, well-known damage. Other species that rival it in forest alteration but remain in the shadows, both literally and figuratively, should be brought to light.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MIKE ADAMOVIC  
ILLUSTRATION BY RICK SEALOCK



## MAJOR OFFENDERS



From top: Japanese barberry; Swallow-wort; Multiflora rose; Japanese stilt grass

### JAPANESE BARBERRY

Japanese barberry is one of the largest nuisances to hikers. Being a small shrub that averages about waist high, its thorny branches often lead to painful scrapes and where present in dense quantities can lead to higher rates of Lyme disease. Recent research has shown that ticks thrive in the shady and damp confines of the bushes. In addition to human impacts, the leaves can alter soil chemistry and, due to how thick the shrub grows, will often exclude native species from the understory. Its bright red berries, which are produced in the fall are a tempting treat to wildlife. Birds and deer rapidly disperse the seeds. This species is one of the most popular invasive ornamentals still planted, much to the consternation of ecologists. It is worryingly easy to buy. Visit any nursery and it is likely to be found there.

Even state officials can be ignorant. Decades ago, not long after the creation of Bear Mountain State Park in New York, barberry was planted along several trails to keep visitors from wandering off them. Today, barberry is rampant throughout the park and can be found in prodigious amounts all along the Appalachian Trail as a result. Though it is now being removed in this area, mostly through the efforts of the New York - New Jersey Trail Conference and volunteers, it is now so prevalent it will remain a permanent staple of our forests. Cutting the stems is only a seasonal solution — in the spring they will resprout. The only effective removal method is to dig up the roots, a strenuous and slow process. Prevention is the best cure.

### SWALLOW-WORT (BLACK AND PALE)

Swallow-wort is a species that is not to be underestimated. This plant favors forest gaps and other openings that allow ample light to penetrate to the forest floor. In optimal conditions, swallow-wort can become so dense that walking through a patch proves challenging, as the vines are tough enough to resist being broken or uprooted and can easily trip a person, or seriously ensnare wildlife as the nickname suggests. In early autumn its seed pods, similar in appearance to those of milkweed, open up and cotton-like seeds are dispersed by the wind as easily as those of a dandelion.

Apart from manual removal, biocontrol agents are now being researched for use. Having the ability to use another species to control an invasive is often a much

better option than by utilizing human labor. Biocontrol agents travel long distances on their own, can access sites we cannot, and are self-perpetuating, so that once released they will remain in the wild indefinitely, or until the food supply runs out. It's essentially having an army at your disposal that costs almost nothing.

Each biocontrol agent goes through a rigorous and lengthy research and review process. Before releasing a life-form into the wild, which is usually also of non-native origin, it must be made clear that the organism will only attack what we want it to. It would be incredibly counter-productive if what was released somehow itself became an invasive.

At the moment, a noctuid defoliating moth (*Abrotola clarissa*) from Eurasia is being quarantined and tested in the U.S. to see how effective and safe it will be to have it devour swallow-wort at selected locations. It will be years until it is utilized if deemed entirely host-specific to swallow-wort. Several other invasives are already being dealt with using different forms of biocontrol. Purple loosestrife and the nascent mile-a-minute vine are two species which are being successfully controlled also through the use of insects.

### MULTIFLORA ROSE

Another invasive similar to Japanese barberry is multiflora rose, although everything about it is of a larger magnitude. It can easily form clumps as long as a car and tower well above head height. Its thorns are formidable and pierce the flesh like needles. They are often referred to as "fish hooks." Its modest white blossoms hardly warrant an excuse to plant this bush with all the inconvenience that comes along with it. Each bush can produce up to a million seeds annually that have the capability of surviving buried in the soil for 20 years.

### JAPANESE STILT GRASS

Hikers are highly likely to spot Japanese stilt grass at shelter sites and along sunny reaches of the Trail. When rolling fields or glades near the shelters are filled with nothing but stilt grass — which is quite often — it appears as though the site is cast adrift on a sea of green. While marginally stunning, the detritus left behind after the plants die off will result in an increased alkalinity of the soil and alter the nutrient availability. Grazing by wildlife, a natural control method, is often by-passed by uninterested grazers and this enables it to spread unchecked. The plant's high stature and denseness is the perfect habitat for rodents, namely rats, to infest. An increase in rodents close to human habitation is always worrisome, as the risk for disease rises in step with the pest's abundance. Stilt grass is remarkably easy to pull by hand, but its prodigious populations make removing it an overwhelming and tedious task.

## FOREST FORENSICS

Quite often, being able to recognize certain combinations of invasives can lead to a past reconstruction of what an area once looked like. For example, many places in New England where the Trail now passes through were formerly farmland. It may be hard to believe, but there is more forest today than there was a hundred years ago in the eastern half of the country. This is due to a change in agricultural preferences, where farmers understandably relish the flat, rich plains west of the Mississippi, over the stony and glaciated Northeast. Today, we hike through many abandoned fields that have once more reverted to a more natural state and, apart from an occasional stone wall, leave seemingly nothing open to the imagination. In the absence of fences, walls, and crumbling foundations, we can tell an area was once a planting field or pasture due to the presence of several invasives. Finding Japanese barberry, multiflora rose, and black locust trees all present in the same general location can lead you to surmise that in the not-so-long-ago past this patch of forest probably once supported someone's family. Being able to identify invasives and understand what they mean grouped together can be very rewarding and informative.

Many invasives that we now encounter near the Trail are present in extremely large quantities due to forest succession. After a vacant plot of land is abandoned, it naturally begins reverting to forest. First, the herb layer sprouts, and is filled with native tall grasses, asters and goldenrods, and now without a doubt, invasives, possibly ranging from swallow-wort to thistle. A year or two after the field is left fallow, the shrub layer emerges. Japanese barberry and multiflora rose predominate. Next, the trees make an appearance. The first native colonizers generally consist of tulip poplar, red maple, and black birch, among others. But in addition to the natives, we also have the foreigners like black locust trees that farmers used to mark their property boundaries — these days this tree sprouts as readily as the crops the farmers once planted. The Asian tree-of-heaven and the Norway maple also have a hard time resisting the prime real estate that has just opened up.

Adding more forest to our fragmented landscape is overall beneficial, but with all positive things, something bad usually tags along. With all the invasives now released into this country, natives are at a disadvantage when it comes to repopulating vacant land, and the forests that emerge are usually of a lesser quality in terms of appearance and biodiversity. As the forests mature, the natives do generally gain slight advantages and the non-natives' presence will deteriorate — but not completely. 🌱



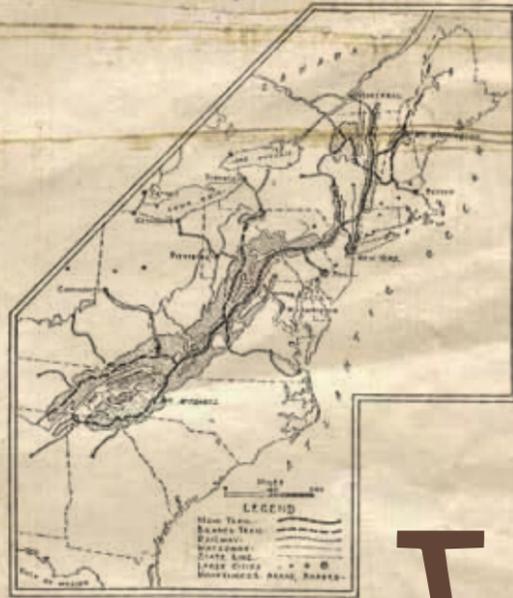
Bear Mountain State Park staff and volunteers remove Japanese stilt grass along the A.T.

### MONITOR AND FIGHT INVASIVE SPECIES ON A.T. LAND

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) relies heavily on volunteers to help monitor and control invasive exotic plants along the A.T. Each year, several workshops are held to educate people about these species and how volunteers can help address the problem. The ATC has adopted an inventory protocol modeled after the reporting guidelines on the Early Detection and Distribution Mapping Systems (EDDMapS) website. This system is volunteer friendly and allows the ATC to collect and share data with all of its partners. The ATC provides data sheets and data sheet guides to people who wish to conduct an independent inventory on the A.T. using this protocol.

For more information about the EDDMapS site and to find a volunteer opportunity near you visit: [appalachiantrail.org/invasivemonitoring](http://appalachiantrail.org/invasivemonitoring)

Michael Adamovic is an avid A.T. hiker and currently serves as the head coordinator of the Mile-a-Minute Project of the Hudson Valley, an organization that is researching ways to limit the distribution of invasive plants in southern New York State. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Manhattanville College.



# common GROUND

*The A.T. is a powerful reminder of Americans' commitment to land conservation, and of the country's ability to work through conflict to achieve major environmental goals.*



BY SARAH MITTFELDLT

When I began my doctoral work in environmental history, a field that explores changes in humans' relationships with the physical environment over time, I was surprised to discover that, to my knowledge, no one had written this kind of history about the Appalachian Trail. Sure, there were tomes of hiker narratives out there, and several scholars had written about different dimensions of the Trail on topics that ranged from the spiritual experience of hiking the A.T., to the use of the Trail for educational purposes, to changes in technology used in camping along the A.T. Yet not many had explored the cultural and political factors that helped to create America's most popular nature trail. I was eager to learn all that I could about the development of this famous footpath, and to explore the lessons that the path's past might reveal about American environmental politics. The project also provided a thinly veiled excuse to get off campus and thru-hike the A.T.

While I am certainly not the first person who came up with the idea of combining a thru-hike on the A.T. with scholarly research, I'm pretty sure I was the first to travel (often via generous rides from locals) to more than ten archives and arrange several dozen oral history interviews while walking from Georgia to Maine. What I discovered in the process revealed far more than just an interesting story about a thin footpath; it helped to explain some of the core tensions over land conservation and environmental protection in the U.S. in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

It took my research assistant, an already experienced thru-hiker and my newlywed spouse (did I mention the ten-month research trip on the A.T. was also our honeymoon?), and I a hike to New Hampshire to get to the beginning of the Appalachian Trail's story. In Hanover, we walked about 100 yards off the Trail and attempted to cram our odiferous packs into the narrow confines of the archival lockers at the Rauner Special Collections at Dartmouth College. We were eager to enjoy some air conditioning while exploring the papers of Benton MacKaye — the conceptual father of the Appalachian Trail.

We were not disappointed by what we found. MacKaye, one of the founders of both the



Wilderness Society and the Regional Planning Association of America, was a prolific writer and creator of intricate maps. When he first proposed the A.T. in 1921, he had something much greater than a recreational path in mind. The A.T. was one of the first projects of the Regional Planning Association and, as such, the path attempted to connect a series of small-scale food and farm camps that were dedicated to what we would call today "sustainable" agriculture and forestry. The recreational aspect of the project would draw urban people away from crowded cities and help them get back to nature, while the working land aspect would rejuvenate rural communities through new employment opportunities. MacKaye's visionary plans for social and economic reform were left by the wayside as a handful of dedicated volunteers began the work of actually building the footpath during the late 1920s and 1930s. Led by Myron Avery, the Appalachian Trail Conference — now the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) — worked tirelessly to build a continuous 2,000-plus-mile Trail that would stretch from Georgia to Maine.

The emerging footpath physically and politically intersected with federal land management initiatives that were being planned and developed at that time, such as Tennessee Valley Authority projects like the Fontana Dam, the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, and the Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway. Unlike these federal projects, however, the A.T. lacked the official authority of the national government. Instead, private volunteers with the ATC relied

Opposite page: Benton MacKaye's 1921 Map proposal of the A.T. — photo courtesy the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*. Inset: The author and her husband at the completion of their hike. Above: An early Potomac Appalachian Trail Club volunteer outing. Right: The emerging footpath physically and politically intersected with federal land management initiatives such as the Tennessee Valley Authority's Fontana Dam. Photos courtesy the ATC



on oral "handshake" agreements with landowners. Because Trail use was minimal and relatively local, most landowners were willing to have a few weekend adventurers cross their properties. Although many of the early A.T. advocates were



connected with the broader national conservation movement, the Trail initially relied on volunteers' status as quasi-public servants, and was ultimately established in 1937 along the path of least political resistance.

Informal agreements with landowners began to erode after World War II, when the landscapes surrounding the Trail underwent dramatic environmental, economic, and cultural changes. The growing postwar demand for new housing construction put additional pressure on the forests through which the Trail passed. In some areas, urban sprawl and new road development forced hikers from the woods onto pavement. In addition, as leisure time and disposable income increased during the postwar era, Americans began flocking to the hinterlands in droves, not only for recreation but also to build vacation homes and resort developments. As a result of these pressures, many miles of the original A.T. were obliterated or relocated onto roads.

Trail advocates realized that in order to maintain the continuity of the footpath, they would need stronger support from the federal government. Their lobbying efforts reached fruition when Congress passed the National Trails Act in 1968 as part of a broader response to the skyrocketing demand for outdoor recreation and an expansion of the national park system in the 1960s and 1970s. This expansion marked an important shift from the National Park Service's primary focus on developing park and recreation areas out of the public domain in the West, to the much more complicated task of building new types of park and recreation areas in the East — closer to where the bulk of the population lived, worked, and owned land. The growth of the National Park System in the 1960s and 1970s reflected the growing popularity of the environmental movement and Americans' desire to protect wild and scenic areas closer to home.

In 1978, Congress amended the National Trails Act to increase funding for federal land acquisition for the A.T. and



Clockwise from above: In some areas, urban sprawl and new road development forced hikers from the woods onto pavement; The ATC's Bob Proudman leads volunteers in a Trail Design workshop in the early '80s; The ATC and NPS have worked together to negotiate for the protection of Trailside land such as that near the ski resort at Saddleback Mountain in Maine. Photos courtesy the ATC

expanded the average width of the corridor from 100 feet to 1,000 feet. The amendment also required that the National Park Service complete the acquisition of all land within the A.T. corridor within a three-year timeframe. At that time, the National Park Service embarked on one of its most aggressive and unusual land acquisition campaigns in U.S. history. Instead of relying solely on bureaucratic experts and real estate specialists within the agency, the park service employed A.T. volunteers in nearly all aspects of the land acquisition process — from scouting and mapping new routes, to communicating with landowners, to negotiating complex land deals and eventually re-blazing the Trail.

At no point in our country's history did a federal land managing agency rely so heavily on an organized group of citizen volunteers. In some instances, the use of volunteers helped to mediate negative attitudes towards the project, but in other cases, it caused confusion about the authority of the quasi-public powers of these volunteer Trail blazers and added to landowner's hesitancy to support the project.

In 1981, President Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, declared an immediate moratorium on all funding for federal land acquisition. This included funding that

had been designated to finish protecting the A.T. corridor.

In public speeches, however, Watt often pointed to the A.T. as an example of the power of the private sector to promote environmental goals. He praised the citizen volunteers who had worked tirelessly to create this public resource. As financial and political support for large-scale federal land acquisition projects diminished and the property rights movement gained traction in the late 1970s and 1980s, A.T. advocates realized that they would have to take a somewhat different approach to protecting the Trail. In 1984, the National Park Service delegated the responsibility for managing newly-acquired public corridor lands to the ATC — a non-governmental, largely volunteer-based organization. Through many years of learning and cooperation between



the ATC, a number of government agencies, and the local Trail clubs, the A.T. has become one of the most successful examples of public-private partnerships in U.S. conservation history. By the end of the twentieth century, the park service's land acquisition program for the A.T. slowly neared

completion. Now, in the twenty-first century, the ATC continues to explore new opportunities for conserving the corridor and surrounding landscapes. The organization has resurrected Benton MacKaye's ideas about regional planning, and the Trail has become more integrated into the fabric of local land-use plans. Through new programs, such as the Appalachian Trail Community program, the ATC has worked with local officials and residents from towns along the A.T. to plan for sustainable economic development and to engage local citizens in environmental stewardship initiatives.

As my research assistant/new spouse and I hiked the A.T. in 2007, gathering archival and interview data and enjoying our honeymoon, we had plenty of time to think about the hidden history contained in the landscapes that surrounded us. Instead of just appreciating the physical beauty of the Trail and adjacent landscapes, we also began to appreciate the symbolic significance of the Trail. The A.T. is a powerful reminder of Americans' commitment to land conservation, and of the country's ability to work through conflict to achieve major environmental goals.

Not being a particularly nimble-footed hiker, I often found myself tripping over mile after mile of tangled roots along the Trail. Somewhere in North Carolina I realized that tangled roots were the perfect metaphor for explaining the Trail's past. Like the literal roots that I kept tripping over, the political roots of the Trail were frustrating at times and difficult to navigate, yet they were essential to sustaining the broader systems that surround the A.T. The metaphor of tangled roots also gave me a way to talk about the relationship between the horizontal, dendritic roots of grassroots social action and the strong, centralized taproot of federal power. As the Trail developed, these two forms of power evolved in dynamic interaction with one another — sometimes tipping to one side or the other — but never fully separate. By exploring the tangled roots of the Appalachian Trail, I have explored the changing relationship between civic engagement, federal power, and environmental stewardship. In doing so, I hope to provide others with a deeper understanding of the history of environmental politics in the United States, and yet another way to be inspired by the A.T. ▲



Left: ATC volunteers help to map and plan the A.T.; Above: In 1983, Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, presents the ATC's Ruth Blackburn with an award for her dedication to the Trail. Photos courtesy the ATC

Sarah ("Long Tall") Mittlefehldt is an assistant professor of environmental studies at Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vermont. She enjoys bringing her students to the A.T. to teach them about the Trail and its contributions to American environmental history. Her new book *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics* will be published by the University of Washington Press in the fall of 2013.

A.T. Allure  
2013 Biennial PHOTO Contest WINNERS





### *Congratulations to the ATC's first ever 2013 Biennial Conference Photo Contest Winners*

Photo submissions were judged by noted southeastern photographer and frequent *A.T. Journeys* contributor Jerry Greer. The winners were displayed at the recent Biennial Conference in Cullowhee, North Carolina. The ATC would like to thank all of those who entered photos to the contest for their obvious love of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

1st Place: "Mountain Frost," Mount Rogers, Virginia – by Christopher Heald

2nd Place: "Stars over Wilburn Ridge," Virginia – by Adam Collins

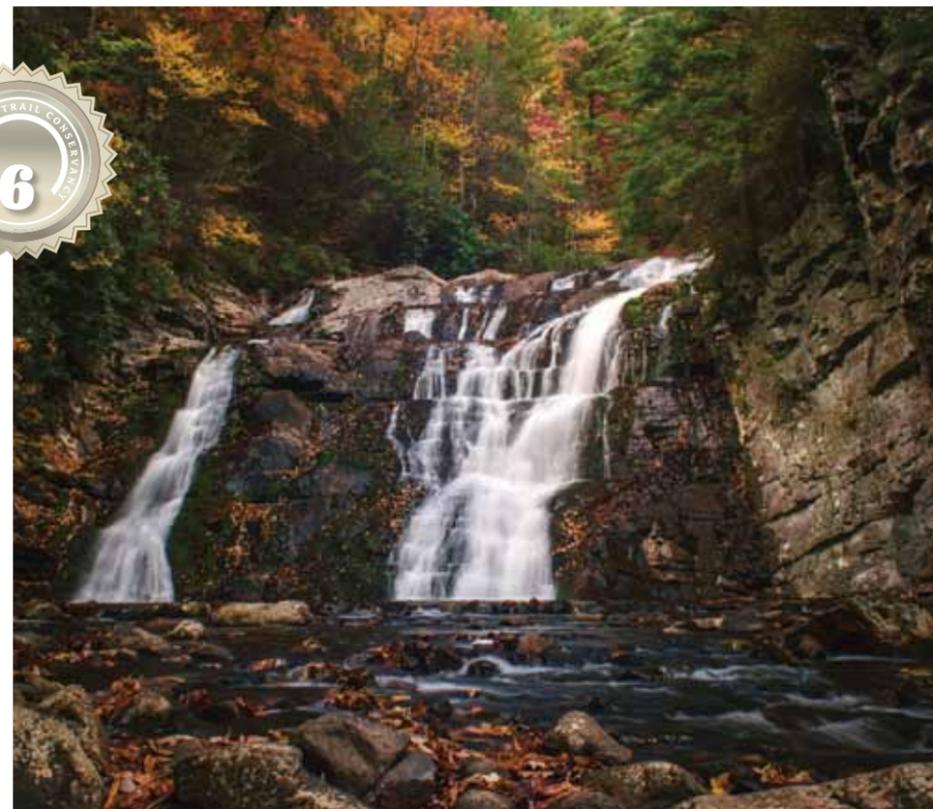
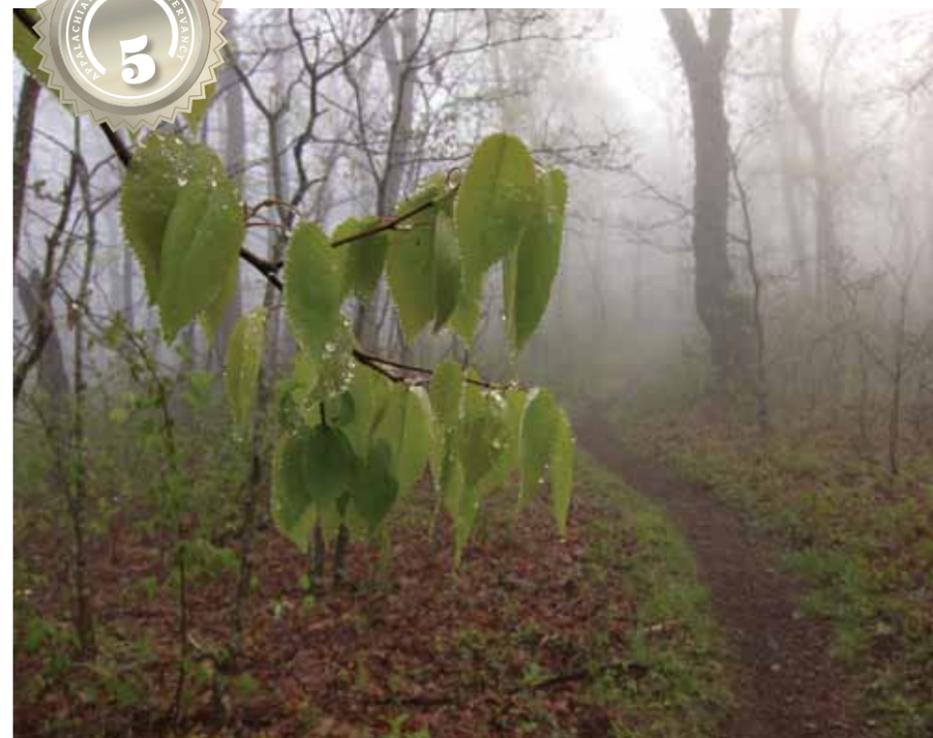
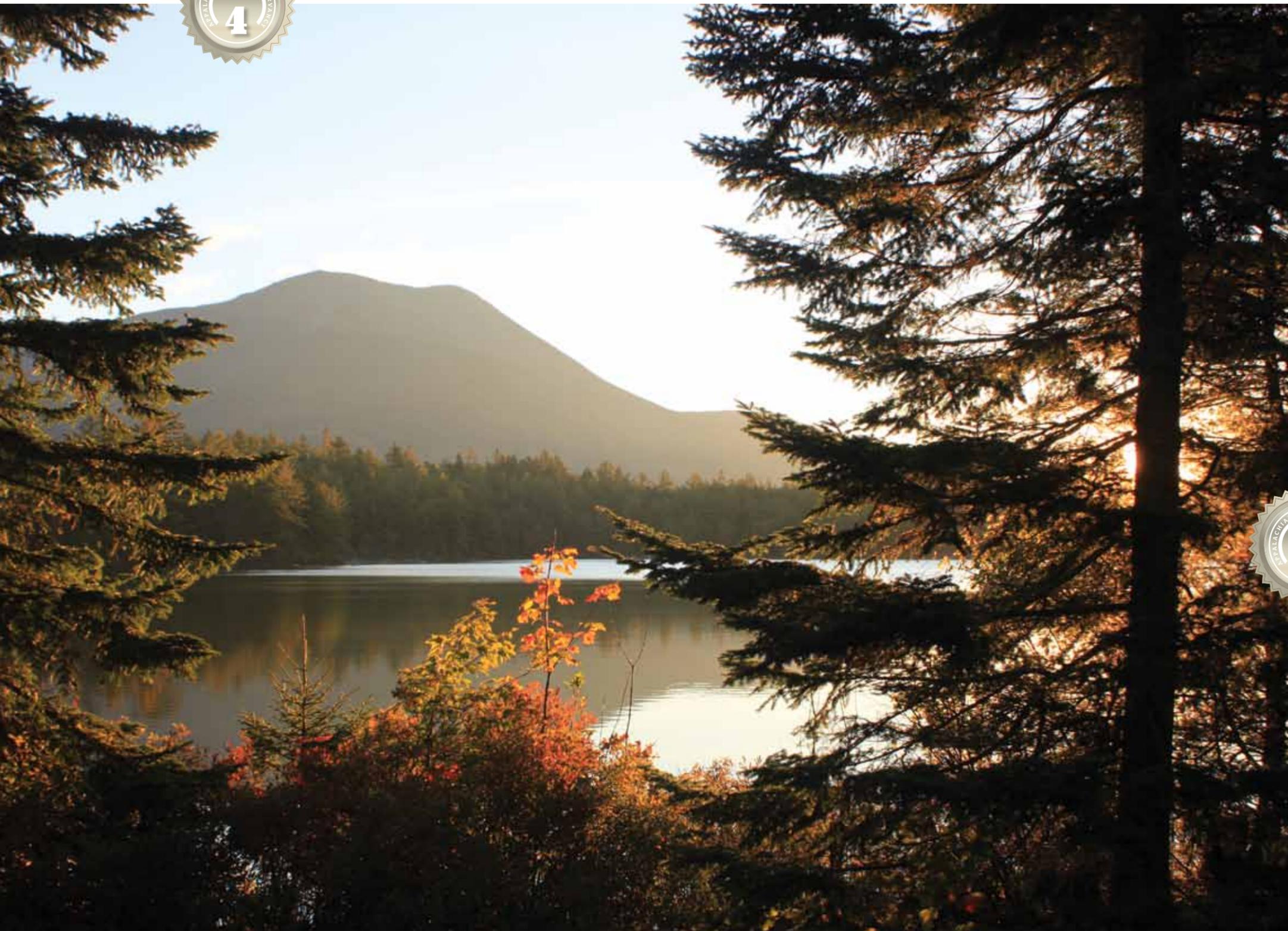
3rd Place: "100-mile Wilderness," Maine – by Steve Rincavage

#### *Honorable Mentions went to:*

4th Place: "Katahdin at Daicey Pond at Sunrise," Maine – by Wayne Gross

5th Place: "After Rain," Blue Ridge Mountains, Georgia – by Arunas Bartkus

6th Place "Laurel Fork Falls," Tennessee – by Adam Collins



# Generosity of Spirit



**AT SOME POINT IN THE LATE '90S, BOB** Williams, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) land trust coordinator at the time, proposed and had approved, the pragmatic idea of the ATC renting two connected apartment units in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, only a short walk from the ATC's Headquarters, to better attract volunteers from out of the area who wished to work there for a week or more. Hearing of this enticing "deal," I decided that at long last, I now had the perfect opportunity to "give something back to the Trail" as I continued to live a life propelled by a bounty of benefits accrued from my thruhike of 1974. Thus, it was in October of 2000 that I first came to live in the upstairs volunteer apartment and began, like many other out-of-state volunteers who took advantage of this low-cost living arrangement, an almost yearly commitment to helping out at the ATC's Headquarters.

In the fall of 2002, while once again temporarily occupying that upstairs apartment, I met John Fletcher, residing in the downstairs unit, as he had recently started his own volunteer tenure with the ATC. Owing to common interests and daily interaction at the ATC Visitor Center, we soon connected and eventually developed a warm friendship, which continued into the years that followed, with first his work as a volunteer and through and beyond his time as an ATC staff member from 2003 to 2010.

John and I were enough alike in temperament to

"synch" easily though nearly a generation apart. But no matter, it seems our difference in age only enhanced our relationship. John often provided a much-appreciated, techno-savvy, and of course younger, perspective on all things cyber or digital. I considered him to be a wizard in the areas of electronics and sound engineering, but he was also adept with computers, videography, and photography. All of these skills came in handy with his work for the ATC but especially in 2005 when we undertook an ATC/National Park Service-sponsored adventure in Maine, which I will explain in a moment. I suppose I provided some measure of balance with my stories of "life back in the day" when the A.T. was far less crowded and possessed much fewer amenities, of which he enjoyed hearing, being that he section hiked the A.T. when the opportunity presented itself.

John came with a self-effacing and quiet manner which, when we were together, one on one, could mean long lulls in conversation. But not for too long. John also possessed a twinkling eye, impish sense of humor, and loved springing one-liners and puns at the most unexpected moments. And special were the times when on a long drive he would break the silence and offer up the most splendid of stories. Despite his introverted nature, he rose to the task of greeting visitors and answering questions from the diversity of people who strode into the ATC's Visitor Center on any given day. But what I will most remember of John (and which forever endeared him to me) was his generosity of spirit, humility, and gentle demeanor. Many are the times I saw him offer an unassuming but attentive helping hand, be it for a project to remodel the "hiker room" in the ATC's Visitor Center, coming to the aid of a stranded and nearly hobbled hiker in Maine needing a ride into town, or me, with another uninformed techie question in need of an informed answer, which he always could provide. And never do I remember a harsh or demeaning word coming from John. He was capable of issuing a complaint but it always came with an understated if not humorous delivery.

In 2005, I volunteered to complete the GPS data collection of the A.T. in Maine and parts of New Hampshire, the portion left undone by "Del Doc" after he had to leave the Trail when he sustained an injury while trying to complete this grand effort in



2001. If I were to do the mile-by-mile hiking and geolocation of the Trail in those states, I needed a partner who could be relied upon to drop me off at a trail head each morning with my collection of GPS receiver, antenna, data logger, and batteries and then later pick me up at a day's convenient ending spot, all the while ready to assist me if I had a technical problem. John Fletcher, ever the conscientious and reliable helper, turned out to be the perfect person for that role. He enthusiastically asked to be included and was granted a leave of absence from his job as the ATC's information assistant to help me as a volunteer. So with Matt Robinson, then ATC's GIS/GPS expert, covering the home base and ready to intercept generated GPS data, provide advice, and answer any questions that might arise, John and I motored off to Maine in early July of 2005 to begin our task.

With only a few relatively minor setbacks encountered, our work proceeded steadily and smoothly, aided hugely by John's ability to remedy just about any technical problem and never get lost, especially in the convoluted network of logging roads found in the Maine woods. He was always there, waiting to retrieve me at the end of each day's work. And we were quite lucky with the weather. I can only remember two isolated days of steady rain that precluded taking the gear out on the Trail. On those days John and I retired to a local library to catch up on email.

An episode that epitomizes John's reliability and technical expertise came with the only day when our equipment failed us. It was a perfect hiking morning in early August when John dropped me off as close to Safford Notch as could be driven in his Chevy Blazer. I was soon on the A.T. with all components within my backpack full of GPS gear functioning normally. I made the slow and steady trek to the top of Avery Peak without incident, the GPS receiver continuing to report the A.T.'s location (every three seconds, if memory serves) to the data logger. But shortly after taking lunch just beyond Avery Peak

and trying to resume my work for the day, I discovered that the data logger would not "communicate" with the receiver. I replaced the cable that connects the two with the spare I always packed. I tried a different set of batteries. I jiggled cable connectors — all to no avail. For whatever reason, the equipment that had continued to work so well through many a Trail section now refused to record locational data. I was miffed and became more so with each mile I trod south, with nearly 30 pounds of now useless equipment on my back, and knowing full well I would have to re-do this six-mile section on another day.

I finally came to the Rt. 27 road crossing sometime after dark, encumbered with quite the foul mood. Of course, John was there, parked in his Blazer, patiently waiting for me. To his cheery inquiries of how my day had gone, I could only return cranky and short utterances, still steaming from my experience of a day mostly wasted. I just wanted to put this sorry day behind me and go to bed. Not much more was

*Many are the times I saw him offer an unassuming but attentive helping hand ... coming to the aid of a stranded and nearly hobbled hiker in Maine needing a ride into town, or helping me with another uninformed techie question in need of an informed answer, which he always could provide.*

spoken on the way back to the hostel we were staying in. But knowing John, I'm sure he forgave my curt words and couldn't wait to set upon the task of determining what was wrong with our GPS gear.

That next morning he had the answer for me. I can still see his face beaming as he came to me and announced, "I tested all the connections and found that the cable receptacle in the data logger is bad." While I was sleeping in that morning, in probably less time than it takes to ready for a day's hike, John had zeroed in on the source of my previous day's interruption (and later mental contagion). And the solution was a no-brainer: Matt had given us a second data logger as a back-up and we employed it for the rest of our work.

John, only 39, left us in March of this year. I'm sure I'm not the only one who will miss this gentle and ever helpful soul, blessed with an unpretentious and humble manner, impish humor, and an always ready willingness to volunteer a hand. ♡

## | CLUB HOPPING

TEXT COURTESY OF THE  
CAROLINA MOUNTAIN CLUB



# 90 Years and Counting

From left: CMC's 90th birthday cake – photo by Sawako Jager; An early CMC member blazes the Trail – photo courtesy of CMC archives at the University of North Carolina – Asheville's Ramsey Library

**CAROLINA MOUNTAIN CLUB (CMC) MEMBERS** like to brag that we are the oldest, largest, and most active hiking club in Western North Carolina. At 90, we know we are the oldest. With 900 members, we know we are the largest. And by maintaining 400 miles of Trail and leading 175 hikes each year, we are sure that we are the most active.

The organizers of CMC, as our club is usually called, shared Benton MacKaye's concerns about the need to conserve wild areas to provide an alternative to the growing stresses of modern life. Two of our early members, writer Horace Kephart and photog-

rapher George Masa, both of whom were avid hikers and backpackers, are credited with popularizing the need for a national park to protect the Great Smoky Mountains. Neither lived to see the park established, but in recent years, interest in these two amazing men has grown, and copies of their work documenting both the beauty of the Southern Appalachians and the destruction being inflicted by unrestricted logging are readily available.

In 1930, CMC merged with the struggling Carolina Appalachian Trail Club and took responsibility for completing sections of the A.T. in North Carolina

and Tennessee. Our responsibilities have varied over the years — we now maintain 92.7 miles of the Trail along with the North Carolina-Tennessee border, from Davenport Gap, where the A.T. exits Great Smoky Mountains National Park, to Spivey Gap. To remind CMC members that this is our section of the Trail, we have a special “90 in 90” challenge this year. Any member who hikes its full length of our A.T. section during the year will receive recognition and a patch from the club.

Most of CMC's section of the Trail is well protected by Pisgah and Cherokee National Forests, but 1.7 miles ran alongside the 10,000-acre Rocky Fork Tract, which was in private hands until last year. After decades of negotiation, Rocky Fork is now a Tennessee state park. CMC members, with the help of the Konnarock Crew, are currently relocating the A.T. off a forest road onto its optimal location in Rocky Fork. CMC members have always been proud to be part of the “three-legged stool” that is the A.T cooperative management system. In the 1980s, first Jack Davis, then his daughter Sara were members of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Board of Managers. Sara Davis, a past president of CMC, was awarded an honorary life

membership for her contributions. More recently, CMC past president, Lenny Bernstein, served on the Stewardship Council and is now on the ATC's Board of Directors. This year, CMC was one of the five southern region clubs that hosted the 2013 ATC Biennial at Western Carolina University.

As CMC has grown over the years, so have its responsibilities. Our commitment to the A.T. remains strong, but we also maintain 140 miles of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, North Carolina's State Trail, as well as trails in Pisgah National Forest and various state parks. We promote hiking in our mountains. Our website provides details on more than 800 hikes, and our four hiking challenges are designed to get hikers into some of the less well-know parts of our area. In 2014 we will finish work on a map showing 100 favorite hikes in western North Carolina and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. CMC celebrated its 90th birthday with a party on June 8 this year. But as CMC's current president, Marcia Bromberg, put it, “We're not 90 years old; we're 90 years young and looking forward to many more decades of hiking and Trail-maintaining.” ▲

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

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**IT WAS GREAT TO SEE SO MANY OF YOU AT THE BIENNIAL MEETING**

in Cullowhee, North Carolina in July. What a wonderful venue and week of great events. Thank you, 2013 Steering Committee members, Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) volunteers, and staff for all your hard work. Special thanks goes to Dianna Poling, the ATC's accounting manager, for keeping all the numbers straight, Anna Mumaw, the ATC's membership manager, for ensuring registration ran smoothly, Tim Schenken and Renee Irons from the membership staff, and Cameron Adams, development intern, for the long hours and excellent member service.

I extend the ATC's and my personal thanks to Jay Leutze, author of *Stand up that Mountain* for his service as guest speaker at both the Life Member Reception and Benton MacKaye Dinner. His readings and anecdotes from his book were very entertaining and insightful. Nearly 300 members attended the dinners and it was great to finally put faces to many who I have only spoken to on the phone. I hope to see many of you again before the next biennial and invite those who weren't able to make the dinners to plan to attend the Winchester, Virginia events in 2015.

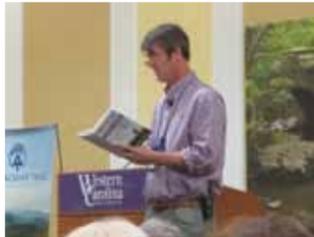
The Benton MacKaye dinner is a benefit to members who make an annual commitment to the ATC of \$500 or more. If you would like to join the great group of members whose names you see in the issues of this magazine and the ATC's annual report, please call me. There are many ways you can achieve your philanthropic goals, including monthly donations through our Trail Guardian giving society. Another option if you are age 70 ½ or more, you may want to consider redirecting all or a portion of your annual minimum distribution (maximum of \$100,000 per year) from your retirement account by gifting it to the ATC and taking a charitable deduction.

Since the biennial, many members have called to inquire about ways to include the ATC in their estate plans. There are a number of planned gift options available, such as gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, and including the ATC as a beneficiary of your life insurance or retirement account. If you have questions about how to leave a legacy

gift to the ATC, I am available to answer your questions.

Thank you all for your generous support of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Share your love of the Appalachian Trail by telling a friend, relative, or neighbor about us and encouraging them to get involved. As the saying goes, "many hands make light work." ✦

Warmest regards,  
**Royce W. Gibson** | Director of Membership & Development  
rgibson@appalachiantrail.org  
304.535.6331 x122



Author, Jay Leutze, reads from his book, *Stand up that Mountain* at a biennial reception dinner – photo by Cameron Adams; 2013 Biennial Conference attendees enjoy a guided hike to Siler Bald on the A.T. in North Carolina – photo by Laurie Potteiger

# CREATE YOUR LEGACY WITH THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

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MAY - JUNE 2013

AUTUMN IN THE HUDSON HIGHLANDS BY MIKE ADAMOVIC

## Connect with the A.T. and support the Appalachian Trail Conservancy by advertising in *A.T. Journeys*

*A.T. Journeys* is the official magazine of the A.T. and the membership magazine of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy — a national not-for-profit corporation with more than 43,000 members from all 50 U.S. states and more than 15 other countries. Our readers are adventurous, eco-friendly outdoor enthusiasts who understand the value in the protection and maintenance of the Trail and its surrounding communities.

*Advertising revenues directly support the publication and production of the magazine and help meet the ATC's objectives.*

*For more information about advertising opportunities visit:*  
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Membership dues and additional donations are tax-deductible as a charitable contribution. The ATC is a Section 501(c)(3) educational organization. To make a contribution or renew your membership, call (304) 535-6331 ext 119, or visit: [appalachiantrail.org/donate](http://appalachiantrail.org/donate)

**Hiking Partners**

Newly-retired, **60-year-old woman from Connecticut seeks hiking companion** to complete long sections of the A.T. during fall 2013 and/or spring 2014. Contact: kargentile@gmail.com.

**Lost and Found**

**Found on A.T. near Standing Indian Shelter** in early June: Two zip off pants legs, look brand new/high quality. Olive drab. For return, contact: nevins@hughes.net.

**For Sale**

Women's **Vasque low cut hiker boots**, size 8 medium. Under 15

miles on them. Asking \$75.00. Contact: ritterbrat@embarqmail.com or call: (717) 486-8456.

PUR/Katadyn **filter cartridges** for Hiker, HikerPro, BaseCamp & Voyager. 200 gallon capacity and no clog for 1 year. New, original box, factory-sealed with instructions. \$30 plus postage. Contact: DanFoto@me.com or (301) 514-859.

**For Your Information**  
**Volunteers needed to help with 2,000-miler recognition.** Hike completion reports for 2013 thru-hikers and section-hikers are starting to pour in to the ATC

headquarters. Help us send out 2,000-miler certificates and get names and hike information recorded in our database. If you can assist with data entry, packet assembly, photocopying, proofreading, or mail merges for two or more hours at a time in our Harpers Ferry, West Virginia office, please contact Laurie Potteiger at: lpotteiger@appalachiantrail.org.

**The ATC is seeking interns** for the spring 2014 term in the following positions: Public Relations; Marketing Assistant; Event Planning; Lands Records Management; Visitor Services;

Development Database; Development Events. Applications are due the second week of January 2014. For more information and to apply visit: [appalachiantrail.org/jobs](http://appalachiantrail.org/jobs). ⬆

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P.O. Box 807  
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**ULTIMATE APPALACHIAN TRAIL STORE**  
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**NEW**

**IT'S A HIT!**  
This past spring, drawing on ATC sources, National Geographic Maps created this stunning poster of the Appalachian Trail – featuring: relief, the elevation profile, every shelter, and a mileage table.

The plain paper version (item #413) is \$13.45 for ATC members; a laminated version (#413L) is available for \$22.45.

**FOR THE PAST 15 YEARS, MY DAD (“FESTUS”) and I (“Skid Mark”)** have been section-hiking the Appalachian Trail. I had just graduated high school in the summer of 1998 when we set out for our first trip. We drove 400 miles from Springfield, Ohio, to Damascus, Virginia (not knowing its significance, of course). We arrived at Mount Rogers Outfitters and met our shuttle driver — a good-natured guy who pointed us to his rusty Ford Escort. We threw our super-heavy external frame packs in the trunk and strapped them down with bungee cords and rope. Off we went as Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Heard it Through the Grapevine” played on the radio. The driver kept asking about bears and snakes and thunderstorms and all the fun stuff that would kill us. He was sincerely puzzled why anyone would want to hike in the mountains. He dropped us off at Va. Rt. 670 and we climbed out. I was 18 years old and scared and excited. We paid the driver and muscled our packs on, ready to head southbound 55 miles back to Damascus.

sopping wet sleeping bag. I tried to sleep on it, but it was gross and squishy and all wrong.

We met a few thru-hikers along the way. “Slim Fast” and “Minstrel” schooled us on pack weight and proper gear the last night of our trip. We absorbed every word. The last day, we had 10 miles into town and I was psyched to finish the trip. I was also excited for cooked meat and music and beds and things that civilized people do. But first I had to endure a teeth-gnashing bout with the blisters on the last few climbs. I even managed to slip and fall on the damp, wooden steps coming down to the road.

Still, I’ve rarely been so carefree on that final mile along the river into town. Just beaming and craving my tape of Dizzy Gillespie I had queued up in the car. When I hopped in, I cranked up the radio and drove



We hiked about a half mile from the road to the tent site. I was in sudden pain. I couldn’t believe how heavy my pack was (50-plus pounds probably), but assumed it would be fine. Festus had also carried that red Kelty pack when he hiked a few weeks in the Smoky Mountains with my uncle, Glen Poston, who thru-hiked the A.T. in 1973. We didn’t bring pillows, because Ziploc baggies packed with socks would of course be comfortable. I didn’t sleep much that night.

the Honda down the road to pick up Festus. He was barely walking at this point, but worked through the pain, same as me. We ate like kings that night. We told stories about our travails and laughed about it all. It was special because we worked so hard to get there. It was perfect. I was hooked.

First morning. Heavy rainstorm. My ancient Kelty busted down in the first half mile. A metal clasp broke. We jury-rigged it back together and walked on. Then Festus slipped in the mud and twisted his knee. We were still in the first two miles. As we made our way up the first climb, the cool June rain soaked my hair, then t-shirt, then shorts, then boots. But I had a pleasant realization: the rain was soothing and wasn’t bad as long as you kept moving. I also realized I had never hiked outdoors in the rain on purpose.

Fast forward 15 years. We’ve backpacked roughly 1,400 miles together, completing various sections from the Bigelows in Maine to the lush mountains of Georgia. Some of the best memories of my life occurred on the A.T. — swimming in a Vermont lake or zipping down the natural slide at Rattle River Shelter near Gorham. Those memories always bring a smile and a longing for the Trail. This fall, we’re headed to southern Pennsylvania to knock out another 100 miles. We’ll do another section hike next year. And the year after that. We’ve got another 800 miles to do, and we’re looking forward to every one. ⬆

The journey was strenuous and rewarding; the terrain intimidating. But at the time, it just seemed like one mishap after another. A true rookie, I had developed terrible blisters. Festus grimaced with pain due to his gimpy knee — he used duct tape to secure it. Our L.L. Bean tent weighed 12 pounds and I had the honor of lugging it. Somehow I managed to stuff my winter sleeping bag into a trash bag half-filled with water and not notice. That night, I pulled out a

*Ben Poston*  
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.

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

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# 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.**



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