JOURNEYS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / WINTER 2019

THE WILD EAST:

The importance of the Appalachian Trail in the eastern United States

The Trail as Skyway and Home for Birds

A Wonder in Winter: Bundle Up and Enjoy a Cool Hike

ON THE COVER
Morning Light from Mount Cammerer — Great Smoky Mountains, North Carolina/ Tennessee. By Steven Yocom

24 WILD SKYWAY

The A.T. provides an essential home and thoroughfare for birds

Canada geese. By Roy Sujata / Courtesy Cornell Lab of Ornithology

A JOURNEYS

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A.T. Journeys is published four times per year. Advertising revenues directly support the publication and production of the magazine, and help meet Appalachian Trail Conservancy objectives. For more information and advertising rates, visit: appalachiantrail.org/atjadvertising

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A.T. Journeys is published on Somerset matte paper manufactured by Sappi North America mills and distributors that follow responsible forestry practices. It is printed with Soy Seal certified ink in the U.S.A. by Sheridan NH in Hanover, New Hampshire.

A.T. Journeys (ISSN 1556-2751) is published quarterly for $15 a year by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, 799 Washington Street, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, (304) 535-6331. Bulk-rate postage paid at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and other offices. Postmaster: Send change-of-address Form 3575 to *A.T. Journeys*, P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425.

> WE ARE DRIVEN TO CONSERVE WHAT WE VALUE, AND WE VALUE WHAT WE KNOW …
> *Tyler Nordgren*

IN MY 11 YEARS AS EDITOR, I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE to work with countless, talented contributors — not to mention our graphic designer Traci Anfuso-Young, without whom I would only be one half of a dynamic duo. These writers, photographers, and artists pour their passion for the A.T. into their work. So, I am thrilled that we are taking some big strides with a fresh new design, starting with this issue, to bring you the voices and images that tell the extraordinary story of the Trail as a part of the "Wild East" — from the birds that soar above to the mountains and forests on the ground.

Wendy K. Probst / Editor in Chief

Kim O'Connell

Kim O'Connell writes about science, history, conservation, and sustainability for a range of national publications. She has served as a writer-in-residence at Acadia and Shenandoah national parks and teaches in the Johns Hopkins University Master's in Science Writing program. "As a writer, I love how metaphorical the Appalachian Trail is — how it offers important life lessons about taking things one step at a time, being brave enough to venture into new territory, and trusting a long and winding path," she says. "I'm always excited to get back on the Trail and learn those lessons all over again."

Tyler Nordgren

In this issue, we present the eye-catching artwork of Dr. Tyler Nordgren, an unusually gifted artist, astronomer, and author. Tyler is well-known for his contemporary series of "Milky Way" posters for dozens of national parks and his series on the 2017 eclipse, which are now part of the Smithsonian collection. His commissioned artwork of the Appalachian Trail presents some of the Trail's attributes in a fresh new way, reminiscent of vintage "See America" posters. "We are driven to conserve what we value, and we value what we know," says Tyler. "For me, this project helps share the wild beauty of the eastern U.S. and the need to protect and conserve it just as we would the canyons, arches, and mountains out west."

Marina Richie

As a child, Marina Richie watched raptors at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Kittatinny, Pennsylvania with her father Dave Richie — a former National Park Service official who played an important role in protecting the Trail. Later, Marina backpacked the Monson to Katahdin section of the Trail with him in Maine. "Every bird of the A.T. is magnificent — from the cerulean warbler winging from the Appalachians to the Andes, to the pileated woodpecker drumming on a tree," she says. "My father had this knack for finding rejuvenation in bird song no matter how arduous his A.T. hike. Writing this piece connected me even more deeply to him, and to the grassroots legacy of the A.T. that gives me hope for the future of our imperiled birds."

Amanda Wheelock

The A.T. wove its way into Amanda Wheelock's life when she moved from Georgia to New Hampshire to attend Dartmouth College. There, she worked on a Trail crew, taught backpacking, and hiked from Hanover to Moosilauke because it was "tradition." She quickly discovered that her love of long-distance trails was more than just a college fling. Amanda now works for the Continental Divide Trail Coalition and stays connected to her first love by volunteering on the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Next Generation Advisory Council. "Writing about winter hiking toward the end of a year jam-packed with change gave me a welcome opportunity to look back at a wonderful weekend spent on the A.T."

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL: THE HEART OF THE WILD EAST

CHEERS TO A NEW YEAR, fresh thinking, and finding your wild place.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is off to a great start this year in thinking creatively, with an eye on the future. We're launching "Wild East," a powerful public outreach initiative intended to increase support for the Trail and the lands that surround it. You, and hopefully millions of other people, are going to hear us talk about how the Appalachian Trail is the heart of an important corridor of open space in the eastern United States — open space that astonishingly remains intact, stretching nearly 2,200 miles, open space that needs attention and your support.

Just as the West has its allure of scenic vistas, starry skies, and towns of character, so does the Trail and its adjoining lands. The ATC is going to be talking about how the Wild East is every bit as important as the iconic, well-known national parks in the West. And how we now, urgently, need to make certain the future of the Trail is expansive, not limited.

We're picking up on what Benton MacKaye noted in the 1920s as he saw flourishing interest in establishing national parks and witnessed the wealthy boarding trains for national parks in the West. MacKaye pointedly envisioned something bigger and more accessible noting: "However useful may be the National Parks and Forests of the West for those affording the Pullman fare to reach them, what is needed by the bulk of the American population is something nearer home." MacKaye's desire was for the Trail to not be an isolated footpath, but something that connects—*and unites*—people to a treasured landscape valued for its pristine natural and scenic resources.

Today, the Appalachian Trail is the cord, connecting six national parks, seven national forests, several national wildlife refuges, national heritage areas, national recreation areas, and some national wilderness areas. The Trail links state parks, historic farmlands, and forests as it unites us in our appreciation for natural beauty and appeals to our "wild side."

The word *wild*, we know, is defined in many ways. A natural state. A sense of awaiting adventure. Freedom from the daily grind. For some, it is finding your way to designated wilderness. For others, it is a day hike in a serene forest, escaping the confines of concrete and noise. Or gazing at a dark night sky. Whatever *wild* means to you, it is nearby, along the A.T. That's the point of talking about the Wild East, about reminding people of the original vision for the Trail and calling out the attributes of preserving open space traversing the eastern United States.

In this column, I use the word wild as an exclamation point. In my first year leading the ATC, I have been *wildly* impressed by supporters and by those who commit to maintaining the Trail. And I have been *wildly* grateful for the invitations to get on the Trail with those who love it; to visit Trail town communities and discuss geotourism strategies; and to engage in thoughtful big-vision dialogue.

Wild East refreshes the ATC's advocacy for landscape conservation in a way that captures attention and invites increasing support for the preservation of the Trail and open space. However you define it, whatever your most-valued feature of the Trail, the ATC encourages you to ramp up your engagement in protecting what could be lost.

Over the next two years, leading to the 100th anniversary of MacKaye's big vision for the Trail, we have the opportunity to reexamine and revive, to showcase all the reasons the Trail corridor is vital to the eastern United States, and to remind everyone around the world of the Appalachian Trail and the Wild East.

I hope you will support the ATC and unite with us in saving the last remaining contiguous open space in the eastern United States.

See you on the Trail!

Suzanne

THOROUGHLY ENJOYED READING Niki DiGaetano's "Pivotal Path" (Trail Stories, Fall 2018). My wife and I are in our mid-seventies and are in the process of hiking on the A.T. in all of the 14 states it passes through. Just last August we hiked in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. Our main hike in Massachusetts was up Mount Greylock from the trailhead on Notch Road, southbound to the summit and back. We can certainly appreciate the effort and accomplishment of hiking that last 19-plus miles from Mount Greylock to the Vermont border. The portion we were on is a steep, rocky trek and I can imagine that the rest of the Trail is no easier. We frequently hike sections of the A.T. here in the Georgia and North Carolina area and thought the New England sections would be easy in comparison. We were wrong. The sections we hiked there were every bit as tough, if not tougher, as any we've been on in any state. As A.T. day hikers we frequently meet thru-hikers as well as section hikers along the way and are unfailingly impressed by the camaraderie, stamina, courtesy, and genuine pleasure all seem to exhibit as a result of being on the Trail. "Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt." ~ John Muir

Lee Sneed
Central, South Carolina

I WAS TOLD BY THE WONDERFUL owners of Shaw's Hiker Hostel in Monson, Maine about a poem explaining how one should enjoy the moments on the Trail, as they are something special and something you will be able to keep for a lifetime. As I entered the 100 Mile Wilderness, I thought about the words he spoke to me, and how true they rang. As I looked back on the 2,190 miles of Trail from the very top of Katahdin, I thought about all the people I've met and grown to love, the miles of silence and tranquility provided by the vast wilderness. After all the pain and struggle, I felt nothing but a sense of joy. As I was told on my first night on the A.T. by two ladies known as the "Caboose Sisters," "No pain, no rain, no Maine!" And they couldn't have been more correct.

Andrew "Fedex" Harman
Holland, Pennsylvania

THE ARTICLE "ADVENTURE BLOOMS" (A.T. Communities, Fall 2018) states: "At 6,285 feet, Roan is the highest point in Tennessee outside of Clingman's Dome..." This statement is inaccurate. Yes, Clingman's Dome, at 6,643 feet is the highest, but there are five peaks that exceed Roan's 6,285 feet. Mount Guyot (6,621 feet), Mount LeConte (6,593 feet), Mount Buckley (6,580 feet), Mount Love (6,420 feet), and Mount Chapman (6,417 feet) are all higher than Roan. Otherwise, the article was well-written and informative. Roan Mountain is truly a special place. Thank you for the opportunity to set the record straight.

Bryan A. Jackson
Athens, Tennessee

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

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@dajagu
Starting off the new year with new parts of the Trail! Here's to the first of hopefully many more miles on the Trail this year!

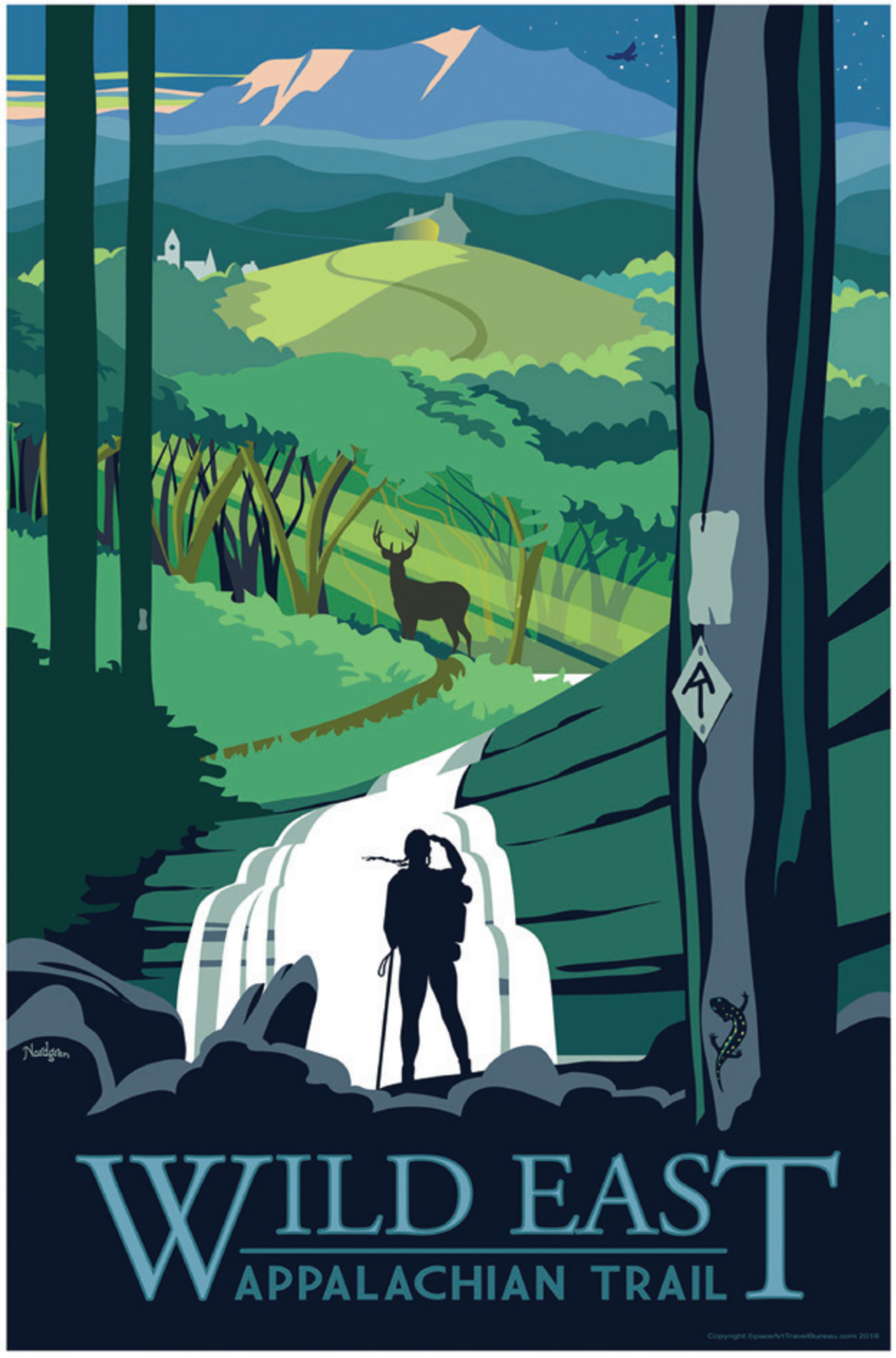
@Karen_Lockhart8
Thoroughly enjoyed my weekend winter hiking in the Green Mountains of Vermont! I spent some much-needed time recharging before the new year.

@fritschya
The MD A.T. was my backyard when I lived in DC. I loved hiking MD and it was a great testing ground for my gear and myself. Before I eventually did the whole Trail.

@DSAArchaeology
Sometimes you've just have to leave the land of WiFi behind for a foggy trip up #McAfeesKnob!

@coddiwomplehike
Thru-hiked with my 14 year old. Watching him grow into a young man. Best thing in life.

@sball357
Took my kids on the A.T. for the first time this year. We hiked from Woody Gap to Preachers Rock. They loved it!



The Appalachian Trail is the centerpiece of the "Wild East" — its backbone and its heart. Its wildness is tangible and close. The Trail is the largest natural corridor that remains east of the Mississippi River, within a day's drive from 55 percent of the U.S. population. Offering scenic and bucolic open space near many major population centers, the A.T. is surprisingly accessible to both thru-hikers and day hikers, to solo travelers and to families and groups. For the three million people who set foot on the Trail each year, it is a place for connection and community, yet a haven for solitude and silence, too. Guided by the Trail's famous white blazes, A.T. hikers tend to discover something essential and profound — the exhilaration of freedom, an appreciation for beauty, and a sense of their own power.

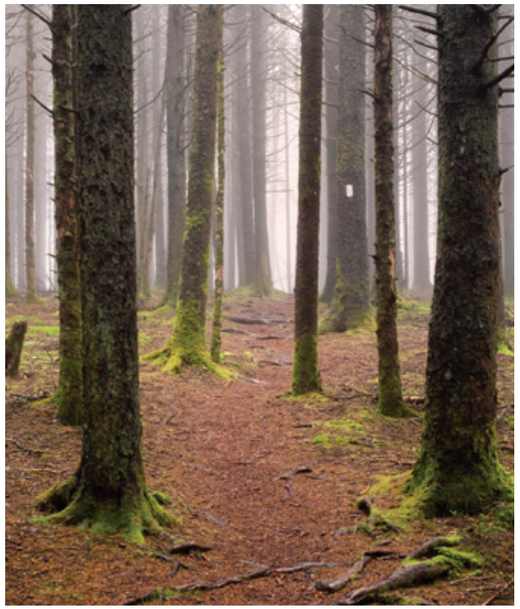
BY KIM O'CONNELL

ILLUSTRATION BY TYLER NORDGREN

THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS were once a natural threshold between the Eastern Seaboard and the frontier wilderness that lay beyond, with its beckoning farmlands, forests, and endless possibilities. Yet visionary Benton MacKaye saw that the Appalachians provided those same qualities with scenery that rivaled the rugged landscapes of the Wild West. "Our job is to open up a realm," he once said. "This realm is something more than a geographical location — it is an environment…not of road and hotel, but of trail and camp. It is human access to the sources of life."

> "The Appalachian Mountains were once a natural threshold between the Eastern Seaboard and the frontier wilderness that lay beyond."

The Appalachian Trail can be experienced on two scales — one remarkably vast, the other exquisite and small. On the Trail, you are walking on the crest of an ancient mountain range, one that has stood for 480-million years. The path before you stretches nearly 2,200 miles in total and traverses 14 states.



A.T. – red spruce forest – Unaka Mountain, North Carolina / Tennessee. By Jeffrey Stoner

Rather than making you feel insignificant, it feels right and good to be part of something much bigger than yourself, to bear witness to the epic forces of tectonics and gravity and erosion, as well as trailblazing and conservation, that have allowed you to be on this trail in the first place.

And yet, on the A.T., the scale shrinks, too. Your eyes focus. You notice small things, things that might escape your attention in everyday life. Bouquets of lavender-colored asters, pushing up between rocks. Bear scat, packed with berries. A green horned caterpillar resting on a leaf. The wind whistling through stands of spruce and fir. The trickle of a stream or the mad rush of a waterfall. The constant, companionable rhythm of your breath and heart.

The lure of the wild has always drawn people outside, towards the mountains. But, in our rapidly developing world, wildness is disappearing. In the last decade, the United States has lost about 175,000 acres of tree cover to pavement each year. Worldwide, wildlife population sizes have dropped by an average of 60 percent in our own lifetimes. Children in urban areas are increasingly disconnected from places where they can roam and let their imaginations soar. With every passing year, conserving wild areas like the Appalachian Trail becomes more necessary for people and animals alike. Preserving the Trail and the open space that surrounds it maintains its recreational opportunities, provides economic benefits to local communities, ensures essential habitat for many species, and provides necessary resiliency against the effects of climate change.

The Appalachians have long been an important route for migratory birds, for example. Thousands of broad-winged hawks and other raptors depend on Appalachian mountain updrafts to make their way to and from their nesting grounds in South America each year. Other birds, such as the cerulean warbler, are ever more dependent on the Trail for habitat as their numbers dwindle throughout their historic range. Once found in abundance along the Eastern Seaboard, the cerulean warbler population has declined by more than 70 percent over the past 50 years. Yet they still fly — and find refuge — along the A.T.

If this is a trail about mountains, it's also about trees. Traversing one of the largest uninterrupted forest corridors on the East Coast, the A.T. lessens the effects of carbon dioxide emissions and climate change. Trees act as carbon sinks, capturing as much as 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per tree per year, according to some estimates, while sequestering carbon for the duration of the tree's lifespan. Trees also give the A.T. its "green tunnel" effect, beckoning us into the woods.

A.T. night sky – Franconia Ridge – White Mountains, New Hampshire. By Erin Donovan

The Wild East of the Appalachian Trail also includes the wild sky. Because of artificial lighting, the Earth is becoming brighter at a rate of about two percent each year. Light pollution disrupts internal circadian rhythms and disturbs the normal activities of nocturnal wildlife. It also prevents our engagement with the sky our ancestors knew, one where the glittering light from thousands of stars was enough to fill us with awe, make us feel safe, and quite literally guide us. Camping at one of the A.T.'s famous shelters (or in a tent) under an inky dome speckled with stars, or stopping at a mountain overlook after sunset, hikers can still find places to experience the wonder and thrill of true natural darkness.

In these wild and welcoming mountains and valleys, places, towns, people, and opportunities abound. There is one Trail, but there are many stories. The Appalachian Trail encompasses all of them.

TRAILHEAD

ATC DIRT / HIGHLIGHTS / EVENTS / UPDATES

Housatonic River in Kent, Connecticut — Bull's Bridge Scenic Area. Photo by Julian Diamond

Deb at the ATC Visitor Center during her flip-flop thru-hike

ATC PROFILES

DEB "MONA LISA" COLEMAN

It's not only the particulars of pursuing Leave No Trace training and education, promoting flip flop thru-hikes, and attempting outside-the-box approaches that help conserve the Trail and sustain communities that make Deb Coleman such an exemplary Appalachian Trail Conservancy volunteer. It's her willingness and eagerness to try new things, from doing Trail maintenance, to joining a local wilderness first responder rescue group, to trying corridor boundary maintenance. "If just one in 100 hikers did half of what Deb does," says the ATC's information services manager Laurie Potteiger, "we'd be on our way to cultivating our next generation of leaders." ¶ "I started my flip flop in Harpers Ferry, on a relatively 'easy' part of the Trail," Deb says. "As I hiked, the Trail grew more difficult and gave me experience with rocks, boulders, increasingly large elevation changes, roots, and wet feet. By the time I reached New Hampshire, I was ready for it — the Trail had trained me — and I was physically at my strongest." She says she got into Leave No Trace training because "it's exponential in nature. It's not just training those who take the classes, but training those people to spread the word — and because everyone can make a difference. You don't need to have formal training to make a difference."

Find out more about Deb, her flip flop thru-hike, and what is behind her energy and enthusiasm to volunteer in so many diverse and dynamic ways in our Q&A with her at: **appalachiantrail.org/ATCProfiles**

PROTECTING WATERWAYS

The north-south corridor of the Tail, traversing the highest and lowest elevations of the ancient Appalachian Mountains, anchors the headwaters of critical watersheds that sustain more than 10 percent of the population of the United States.

Information courtesy the National Park Service

The A.T. Tribute Garden is Complete

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) announces that the A.T. Tribute Garden — located at ATC's headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia — is complete. ¶ Thanks to the generosity of more than 600 donors who purchased engraved bricks, boulders, benches, and other items, the ATC created a lovely and peaceful place that celebrates and remembers those who have walked the Appalachian Trail, helped protect it, and have been inspired by the longest, continuous footpath in the world.

Learn more, view photos of the garden, share your own A.T. tribute story, and read others at **appalachiantrail.org/tributegarden**

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE LIBRARY

A LIFETIME OF TRAIL BUILDING

BY HAWK METHENY

The Appalachian Trail Community lost a long-time supporter and trusted friend last October. Known to many of us from Georgia to Maine and beyond, Bob Proudman passed away while with his family on October 18 after a brief and courageous struggle with cancer. ¶ Bob began his Trail career in 1965 as a member of the Appalachian Mountain Clubs's (AMC) trail crew in the White Mountains. And so began a lifelong career path highlighted by a bounty of accomplishments ranging from innovative high-end trail reconstruction techniques to volunteer engagement to the creation of important long-term Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) polices, guiding our current and future Trail management direction. Bob also authored several definitive guides to Trail Construction including AMC's *Trail Building and Maintenance* and the ATC's *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*. ¶ Bob worked at AMC until 1978, where he was known as "Bobe." He came to work at ATC in Harpers Ferry in 1981 and worked there until his retirement in 2015 after a full 50 years in professional trail management. Most recently, Bob was elected president of AMC's Trail Crew Alumni Association, bringing his involvement with trails full circle back to his roots. ¶ During his time with the ATC, he founded and inspired Trail crews, caretakers, and ridgerunners. He also formalized the Trail's exterior boundary survey program and is widely recognized as the architect and tireless champion of the nationally recognized Cooperative Management System that the ATC relies on every day for the successful management of the A.T. with land managers and local Trail clubs. ¶ Bob served as a mentor to many of the ATC's staff and Trail club volunteers, and was often the go-to source for his unmatched knowledge, experience, and remarkable memory and record keeping. All the while, Bob maintained a consistently humble and approachable demeanor, a generous spirit, witty sense of humor, and wide smile. All of these admirable attributes combined to further complement his remarkable accomplishments and influence in a way unique to the one-of-kind Bobe.

Hawk Metheny is the ATC's New England regional director

Bob at the Great Wall in China (during a visit to explain Trail design)

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE

Find out what's happening on Capitol Hill — and how it will affect the Trail.

For more information visit:
appalachiantrail.org/takeaction

VIRGINIA

Sinking Creek Relocation

A three-year relocation of the Trail in central Virginia was just completed at the end of 2018, replacing a steep and slippery scramble with a gently-graded switchback. The final half-mile of the northbound ascent of Sinking Creek Mountain was identified as a problem over a decade ago, since steep alignment made the Trail hazardous in wet conditions. But finding a new route was complicated by a relatively narrow corridor of national forest land and an abundance of rock fields. The new switchback fits just within the corridor, and features over 200 rock steps and many large stone crib walls built to last for generations. An observant hiker can enjoy a challenging but more enjoyable climb, as well as the beauty of the durable, technical stone structures. ¶ More than 100 volunteers from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) Konnarock Trail Crew and the Roanoke A.T. Club contributed almost 4,000 hours to complete the relocation. Volunteers from the nearby Natural Bridge A.T. Club and the Outdoor Club at Virginia Tech pitched in too, especially for the final "Special Forces" push to open the new section in December. Relocations like this are integral to the ever-evolving A.T.

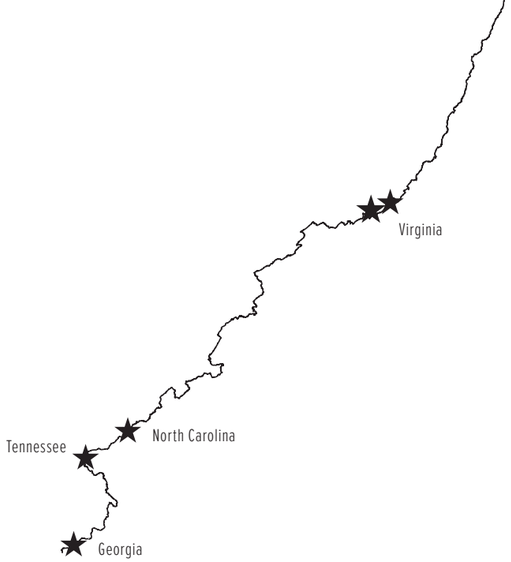


PHOTO BY MATT GENTRY

Sinking Creek was one of Five Konnarock Trail Crew relocation projects completed in 2018, including:

Highcock Knob
Relocation, in Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club's section south of the James River in central Virginia

The Jerry Cabin to Big Butt
Relocation, on Carolina Mountain Club's section south of Erwin, Tennessee

Brown Fork Gap
Relocation, in the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club's section north of Stecoah Gap North Carolina

Justus Mountain
Relocation, in the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club's section near Dahlonega

Wild Skyway

THE TRAIL IS AN ESSENTIAL MIGRATORY ROUTE AND A SAFE REFUGE FOR NUMEROUS SPECIES OF NORTH AMERICA'S BIRDS

By Marina Richie

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE LIBRARY

THE FLUTING NOTES OF A WOOD THRUSH SERENADE YOUR one-pot dinner. A barred owl hoots "who cooks for you" in the night. A loon's wail coils around your heart on a Maine lake. Wherever you are on the Appalachian Trail, birds offer sweet companionship. Yet, as hiker numbers soar, bird populations tumble.

More than half of North America species are experiencing major declines. We have a few billion less birds than 40 years ago. In one drastic example, the golden-winged warbler nests in multiple places along the A.T., including the Roan Highlands, where its numbers have plummeted by a staggering 98 percent. Within this sobering news, the A.T. shines with the promise of protection and ecological restoration. For instance, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC) habitat work on behalf of the golden-winged warbler is leading to an uptick in nesting birds, while serving hikers with more expansive views. The ATC also partners with other groups to conserve the warbler's critical winter home in Columbia and Venezuela. This work across international boundaries will help to ensure the survival of this species.

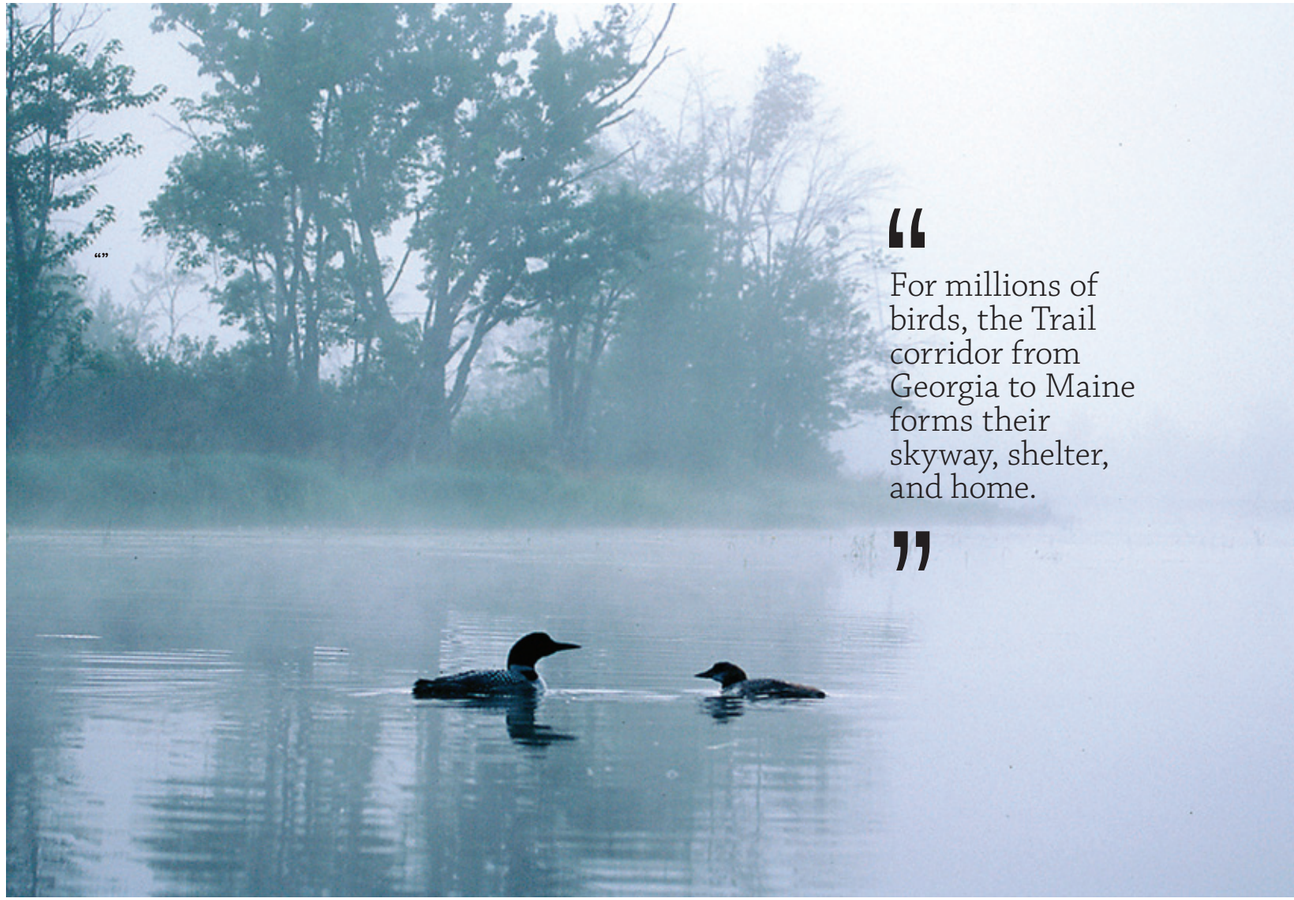
Above: Golden-winged warbler on Max Patch – North Carolina. By Andrew Riley; Right: Loons on Lake Umbagog – New Hampshire. By John Slonina

Peter Marra is the director of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, devoted to the study, conservation, and championing of one of the great wonders of our planet — the migration of birds. He's also an A.T. hiker who has trekked segments in all 14 states."The Appalachian Trail and associated habitats provide a wonderful natural thoroughfare north to south that's like an I-95 for birds," he says. For millions of our beleaguered birds, the Trail corridor from Georgia to Maine forms their skyway, shelter, and home. The heart-pounding rise and fall of Trail elevations results in a sweep of habitats and birds adapted to them. Those homes include intact forests that are essential for the future of nesting birds in trouble, including the wood thrush, cerulean warbler, and eastern whip-poor-will.

Can the A.T. Save Birds in Peril?

In today's unraveling natural world, the A.T.'s significance is paramount. Strategic land acquisitions to the East's wild conservation backbone add to a protected landscape. Size, quality, and diversity of bird habitat matter — the bigger and wilder the better, especially in a time of crisis. "We are witnessing the collapse of the North America avifauna," Marra says. "We are not looking at an individual single cause — like DDT —of the past that we could get rid of to save species. We are now seeing multiple and interacting effects that are driving declines." The depletion of birds is personal to Marra, who recalls a favorite phenomenon where he grew up in Connecticut in the 1970s. "I used to see long ribbons of nighthawks migrating in the fall over the mountains, but not anymore." Common nighthawks chase the day's end, giving a definitive high *peeeeent* call as they zoom after their insect prey, making the slender-winged birds vulnerable to pesticides. Their numbers have fallen by 61 percent. Still, they remain valiant ultramarathoners, flying from as far away as northern Canada to Argentina.

For nighthawks and many other migratory birds, the A.T. serves as the perfect flyway. Like most thru-hikers, birds head north with the spring. Unlike all but the most intrepid thru-hikers, they turn around to head back the other way after the summer nesting season. Repeating this cycle year after year, they ride the skyway, aided by the winds that drive up the mountains. For night-flying songbirds, the building-free corridor and its dark



> "For millions of birds, the Trail corridor from Georgia to Maine forms their skyway, shelter, and home."

HOW TO HELP BIRDS ON AND OFF THE TRAIL

- Be a citizen scientist. Join E-Bird and start a list: **www.ebird.org**
- Volunteer with Trail Clubs, the ATC, and conservation groups.
- Spread the joy of birds to other hikers. Teach a child how to identify birds.
- Plant native trees, bushes, and flowers that host native caterpillars which, in turn, feed songbirds.
- Buy bird-friendly coffee to conserve birds in winter ranges. Avoid palm oil — plantations destroy tropical habitat.
- Keep cats indoors. Domestic cats kill approximately 2.4 billion birds annually, and are the number one cause of direct mortality.

skies keep them safer from collisions that take a terrible toll elsewhere. Up to a billion birds die annually in collisions with glass windows alone. Every stretch of the Trail is significant to the future of migratory and resident birds, including these key geographic regions: Maine's 100 Mile Wilderness, Pennsylvania's Kittatinny Ridge, and North Carolina and Tennessee's Roan Highlands.

Maine — Katahdin's Best Kept Secret

From Monson, Maine to Katahdin — the famed northern terminus of the A.T. — hikers of the 100-Mile Wilderness immerse in denizens of the far north, from loons to spruce grouse, gray jays, and ravens. On the high slopes of Katahdin itself nests one of the rarest birds of the A.T. The Bicknell's thrush is an extreme specialist, living on the brink of extinction. This operatic songster nests in stunted balsam firs and bushes near the tops of peaks only in New England and Canada, then flies to the Dominican Republic for winter. Baxter State Park, a 209,644-acre wilderness haven that includes Katahdin, is a stronghold. Protecting mountaintops from new ski areas, towers, and turbines is critical to saving the Bicknell's thrush. Scientists estimate a breeding population of only 110,000 in its limited range. All wildlife that lives at the highest elevations face grave troubles from a rapidly warming climate. When their habitat becomes unlivable, they have nowhere to go.

Above: A rare Bicknell's thrush. By Ian Davies / Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Right: Black-throated blue warblers nest and migrate directly along the A.T. corridor. Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife

"Bicknell's thrushes are very hard to identify and find, so you have to be at the top of a mountain at dawn and hear their song," says Nick Lund of Maine Audubon, who once climbed Saddleback Mountain (well south of Monson) in the pitch dark, shivering, and then was rewarded with its lovely chords at first light. Lund takes pride in his work for Maine Audubon, which has been protecting birds and habitat since 1843. He says Mainers delight in the access the Trail provides to birds impossible to see from roadsides. He believes everyone who ventures on the Trail will never be lonely when they dip into avian life. "On the Trail, you have time to think deeply about things and it's a perfect time to become a birder," he says. "You are in nature all day long where you can become familiar with the birds around you."

Conserving Pennsylvania's Kittatinny Ridge — Top to Bottom

Whether a birder or not yet, the fall hawk and eagle migrations of the A.T. are stunning, especially along the 125 miles from Delaware Water Gap into Cumberland County that follow Kittatinny Ridge — the premier migration range of the eastern U.S. "We record between 18- 20,000 raptors just at Hawk Mountain and between 60- 70,000 other birds, from ravens to warblers each year," says Laurie Goodrich, director of long-term monitoring at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Pennsylvania's world-renowned public viewpoint that's linked to the A.T. by its Skyline Trail. The best hawk watching is in the fall, when birds soar south on updrafts created by air currents

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE LIBRARY

rising up the ridge. Returning north in spring, most hawks disperse across a wider landscape to ride ascending columns of warm air, called thermals. However, when the wind is steady from the south, they will funnel above Kittatinny Ridge.

Rosalie the Hawk

Among those long-distance flyers are several bearing telemetry backpacks. Rosalie is one of 12 tagged female broad-winged hawks. Her nesting territory encompasses both the A.T. and Hawk Mountain lands. In mid-September of 2018, this bird champion of the A.T. flew south from Pennsylvania to arrive 82 days later in the forested Bahuaja-Sonene National Park of southern Peru. On the way, she took rest stops in the Appalachians, flying downslope where forests meet wetlands or meadows and where the hunting for rodents, lizards, and snakes is best.

"We need to maintain the ecological integrity of the ridges by protecting the bases too," says Goodrich. Favorable winds alone are not enough. All birds must find shelter and high-calorie foods along the way. Reaching Veracruz, Mexico, Rosalie converged with a river of the small, compact hawks with distinctive banded tails — more than a million broad-wings in a season. It was here that Goodrich witnessed an unforgettable scene. "In

From top: Rosalie at Hawk Mountain after being fitted with a transmitter. By Zach Bordner; Red-shouldered hawk. By Bill Moses

2016, we had four females tagged. I was watching when the broad wings were coming through and it was really exciting knowing this bird we tagged up in the Poconos was right over our heads." Caught in 2016 at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary itself, Rosalie's transmitter will soon wear out. This spring, Goodrich hopes to capture a hawk in Maine, potentially a new champion to follow its journey along the entire length of the A.T., shedding light on more key places to protect.

Cerulean Warbler Haven

Kittatinny Ridge is also critical for a much smaller bird, the cerulean warbler. This dashing blue slip of a songster nests high in the forest canopy, then migrates to the Andes Mountains — facing deforestation threats in both places. Fortunately, people are stepping up internationally to reverse the downward spiral of a 70 percent decline in 40 years. The Kittatinny Ridge Coalition, led by the ATC and Audubon, works to protect big woodlands for the cerulean warbler and a host of other interior nesting birds, including broad-winged hawks.

Roan Highlands — Rewilding for Birds

To save birds, protection of habitat is paramount, and so is ecological restoration. The ATC's resource management coordinator for ATC's southern region, Matt Drury, based in Asheville, North Carolina, looks to nature for guidance. One focus is the open vistas of the Roan Highland balds, relicts from the ice age with rare wildflowers and birds like the

Wood thrush. Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife

golden-winged warbler. The balds were once kept open by wild grazing animals, but their local extinction from the area along with a warming climate have contributed to the shrinking of the balds on the Roan. Today, Drury, conservation partners, and volunteers carefully use mowers, weed whackers, and other equipment to help preserve these balds and the species that depend on them. "In the pursuit of preserving the iconic vistas these balds provide, I try to make every area as ecologically functional as possible," Drury says. While preserving views, this work also leaves a soft, feathered, and diverse forest edge. With help from partners, he closed an old steep trail by planting native brambles that deter hikers and invite golden-winged warblers to nest — and they did. The ATC strives for a mosaic of habitats that will serve other birds, including the eastern whip-poor-will, olive-sided flycatcher, loggerhead shrike, hermit thrush, American redstart, and ruffed grouse.

Drury also turns his restoration eye to the even-age, dense forests that have come back since the "great cut"— massive clearcutting in the 1920s. He seeks to replicate the mix of ages and natural openings of the old growth spruce forests of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Spruce forests shelter northern saw-whet owls, red crossbills, and brown creepers — to name a few. "To protect biodiversity, sometimes we can't just draw a line around things," says Drury.

A Tapestry of Birds and People

There may be no better place than out hiking with birds to consider their value to us. Stand on a rocky outcrop. Feel the winds that buoy the gliding eagle overhead. Drink in bird song. Know that our lives and those of birds are intimately connected. "Birds are part of the tapestry of life that surrounds the earth," says the Smithsonian's Peter Marra. "They are the threads that make up the tapestry. Humans are just another thread. As we lose the threads, the tapestry disintegrates. We have an obligation to maintain the integrity of the tapestry on the earth not just for our own sake, but for our children." If the Appalachian Trail is a long, intricately-woven tapestry, then the thousands of people who volunteer to maintain, protect, and conserve it are the re-weavers — repairing the frays, the tatters, and guarding all that is whole. "I want our children and their children to walk along the Appalachian Trail and also hear a wood thrush when surrounded by forest," Marra continues, "or look up in a tree to see a broad-winged hawk perched there on its way to its wintering grounds in South America."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My father Dave Richie noted birds and wildflowers in his A.T. hiking journals in the 1980s and '90s, and yes, he did listen to wood thrushes serenading his one-pot dinners. Here's one entry of many that inspired my writing of this article: "Was awakened by a whip-poor-will right in front of the shelter at 5:30 am while it was still dark. Could just barely see his red eyes gleaming luminous when he flew." (6/1/86—about 10 miles south of Damascus, Virginia)

For more information about birds and the A.T. visit:
appalachiantrail.org/birds
For more information about hawk migration visit:
kittatinnyridge.org

A.T. BIRD MIGRATION FEATS

Tennessee Warbler Ultra-flyer

2,800 miles in 52 days

One plucky bird flew from Lesser Slave Lake in Northern Alberta (where it was banded) to the Big Bald Banding station on the A.T. in North Carolina in just 52 days, a distance of 2,800 miles, and an average flight of 50 miles per day — except the flights are at night.

Cherokee the Golden Eagle

3,400 mile round trip

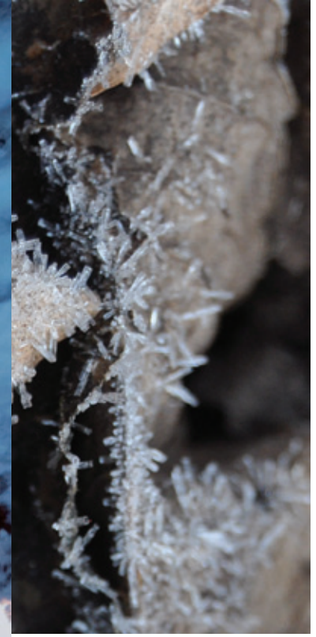
Fitted with a radio collar at Unaka Mountain (on the Tennessee and North Carolina border) in 2015, this colossal eagle (13.6 pounds) winters there and then wings north up the A.T. and into Quebec to northern Labrador and Newfoundland to nest — a 1,700-mile one-way trip. She returns in the fall, joining many golden eagles that winter in the southern Appalachians.

Endangered Kirtland's Warbler

1,700 miles in 16 days

Riding prevailing winds, this endangered bird flies from the Jack pine forests of northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ontario to the Bahamas — crossing over the southern Appalachian Mountains. When a young, unbanded Kirtland's Warbler showed up in a mist net at Big Bald Banding Station in fall of 2017, researchers were thrilled at this remarkable first for the station.

To join volunteer banders at Big Bald Banding Station visit: **bigbaldbanding.org**
PHOTOS COURTESY BIG BALD BANDING STATION



a wonder in winter

WIDE-OPEN VIEWS, CRISP AIR, AND SOLITUDE MAKE FOR A COOL HIKE

BY AMANDA WHEELOCK

MY FRIEND CHLOË SEEMED SURPRISED WHEN I quickly agreed to go backpacking with her one winter Saturday. "Really? Are you sure?" I doubled down. "A night on the A.T.? That's exactly what I need."

"Awesome!" she replied. "And here I thought January camping would be a tough sell."

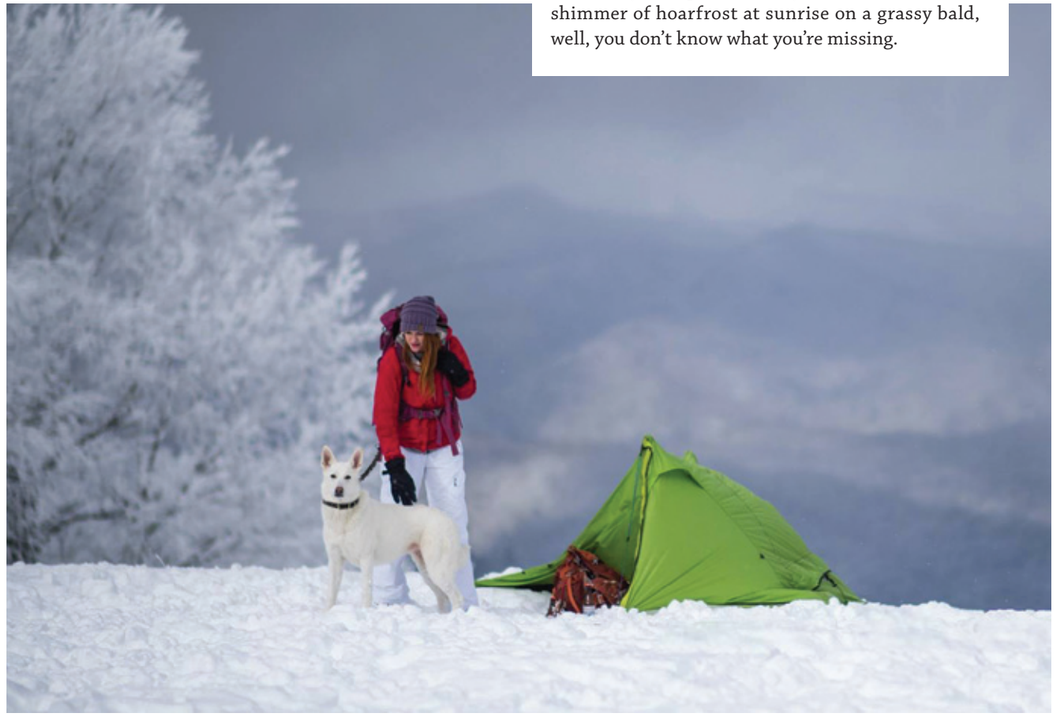
Chloë works for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and needed to hit the Trail to scout a route for a "How to Hike the A.T." backpacking course she'd be leading that spring, but I had my own motivations for joining her. I had just found out that I would be moving to Colorado in three weeks. While I was excited for all the skiing I would soon be doing, I knew that my hiking boots would get tucked away in a corner of my closet for the next few months. The mountains of western North Carolina had been my home for almost four years, and I couldn't think of a better way to say goodbye for now than to spend a weekend exploring a new section of that familiar white-blazed Trail. So what if it was January?

Hoarfrost on Round Bald – North Carolina / Tennessee. By Jerry Greer

Selfie of Chloë and Amanda during their January Hike; Winter hiker on Round Bald at Carvers Gap. By Steven Yocom

We packed our sleeping bag liners and our puffy jackets and headed out of Asheville toward Wayah Gap, where we intended to start our hike. The same parking area that is full to the brim during every summer weekend was practically empty when we arrived. Snow lingered on the ground from a storm the week before, but the Trail itself was clear, and that classic southern Appalachian steep terrain had us shedding layers in no time. Eventually, we arrived at Siler Bald, where we set up camp, watched a gorgeous sunset, cooked dinner, and snuggled into our tent. In other words, it was a wonderful, completely uneventful night on the A.T.

Once the leaves have fallen, many people seem to think that they must shutter themselves away for a long season of hibernation. It's too cold outside, the road is closed for winter, the Trail is covered in snow — the excuses are many. To be sure, winter hiking requires a bit more planning than your average summer stroll, but with the right gear and proper preparation, winter hikes can become some of your favorite days on the Trail. Cooler temperatures keep the crowds away, providing more of a sense of solitude. Bare branches make much better windows than leafy canopies. And if you've never seen the shimmer of hoarfrost at sunrise on a grassy bald, well, you don't know what you're missing.



BEFORE YOU ADVENTURE ON THE A.T. IN WINTER

Be flexible. Remember that snow on the ground that I mentioned? If Chloë and I had tried to hike to Siler Bald a week prior, we would have encountered howling winds, temperatures in the teens, and almost a foot of snow to trudge through — not exactly the ingredients for a "wonderful, completely uneventful night" on Trail. It's not uncommon to see February days in the 60s and April days below freezing along the A.T., so be flexible with your dates and go when the weather is kind.

Do your research. During winter, many facilities on public lands are closed, meaning that spigot you were depending on to fill up your water bottles before your hike may not be so dependable. Visit the website of the local land manager and contact them if necessary, to find out what's open and what's not, including things like roads, bathrooms, and campgrounds.

Be an underachiever. You may crush 20-mile days in the summer, but the winter is a different ballgame. There could be snow or mud that slows your progress, but moreover, it'll be dark by five-o'clock. Always bring a headlamp, even on a short day hike, and plan fewer miles than you normally would — better to watch the sunset from your living room than to be shivering your way down a dark Trail.

Get the right gear. Layering is crucial in the winter, as you want to stay warm without getting too sweaty, since moisture will chill you quickly as soon as you stop moving. Your base layer should fit snugly, as moisture-wicking material has to be in direct contact with skin to work well; and don't wear any cotton, because it holds moisture. As far as footwear goes, traction support is necessary if the Trail is covered in snow or ice — wear snowshoes for snow, and MICROspikes, which you strap on to your normal hiking shoes, or even crampons for ice. Bring an emergency shelter and a headlamp, even on a short day hike, because the days themselves are short and this is one case where a few ounces can save your life. And remember to have a plan for human waste — a trowel is a good start, but consider bringing a "wag bag" if the ground may be frozen and/or covered in snow.

Stay low. Elevation makes big differences in temperature and weather. An area just 1,000 - to 2,000-feet higher than your neighborhood may have significantly more snow on the ground, particularly if it's an area with little sun. If possible, check weather forecasts for an area with similar elevation close by to where you're headed, instead of just the nearest town. Weather data for individual peaks can sometimes be found online.

Don't be afraid to quit. Sometimes, conditions are worse than you expected, or you realize a mile in that you left your headlamp in the car. Hypothermia and frostbite are completely preventable in an era with heated cars and homes, and being out in the woods in winter is not the time to be stubborn. Know the signs of cold injuries (numb, waxy skin) and the beginning stages of hypothermia (shivering, clumsiness), and don't ignore them. It's always an option to turn around.

GEARING UP

WARM HAT

SUNGLASSES

SCARF OR BUFF – Many people forget about insulating their necks, but you can lose a lot of heat here

BASE LAYERS – Non-cotton and breathable — synthetic fabrics and merino wool work best

MID-LAYERS – Some combination of a fleece, down "puffy" jacket, or other non-cotton insulating layers go here, depending on the temperature

OUTER "SHELL" (torso and legs) – Water-and wind-proofing are key to combatting cold; usually a rain jacket will suffice if you've got warm mid-layers

GLOVES OR MITTENS – Mittens are generally warmer than gloves. Make sure they're waterproof if you'll be playing in the snow

SOCKS – Quality over quantity is important. A pair of good wool socks will keep your toes warm, while squeezing multiple pairs of socks into your shoes can actually reduce blood flow to your feet and make them colder

SHOES – Waterproof hiking boots are best if you think you'll find any snow on the Trail (you can even waterproof your own boots pretty easily)

TRACTION – Snowshoes are necessary for snow deeper than a couple of inches, even if it's packed; traction devices like MICROspikes, can keep you from slipping on ice built up in the middle of the Trail

ILLUSTRATION BY COREY SEBRING

CHOOSE YOUR HIKE

Ready to set out for your winter adventures, but not sure where to head? Here are some of our favorites — and why they're good choices.

★ RICH MOUNTAIN FIRE TOWER
Hot Springs, North Carolina

The trailhead for this five-mile, out-and-back hike is easily accessible in all weather due to its location right next to a well-trafficked highway. You'll get great views from the recently renovated fire tower, and there are no creek crossings on the way, so no need to worry about potentially swollen streams or getting your feet wet.

★ UPPER GOOSE POND
Lee, Massachusetts

This five-mile out-and-back takes you to beautiful Upper Goose Pond. The cabin at the north end of the pond is closed for the winter, but still offers a nice porch where you can enjoy lunch. The terrain here is gentle and relatively flat, making it less likely that slippery ice or steep snow climbs will impede your progress; and keeps hikers protected from the wind with its lack of exposure and tree-lined path.

★ HAY ROCK
Roanoke, Virginia

This eight-mile hike offers great views, plus a fun scramble up Hay Rock at the end if it isn't icy. The trailhead is easily accessible from just off I-81, and the consistent climb to the ridge will warm you up. What makes this hike perfect for winter is its out-and-back nature and rewarding views along your way, so it still feels like a great hike if you need to turn around before reaching Hay Rock due to cold or fading light.

FOOTAGE

The Long Start to the Journey

An award-winning film that describes a journey into the Smoky Mountains during a week-long snow storm — and the struggles, rewards, and determination to endure.

CHRIS GALLAWAY / *Horizonline Pictures*

CHRIS GALLAWAY — WRITER, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND FILMMAKER — chronicles his winter hike in a full-length documentary about the Appalachian Trail, *The Long Start to the Journey*. A heartwarming clip from Chris' winter film can be found at: **appalachiantrail.org/thelongstart**.

Chris has also produced a beautiful and calming short video for the ATC featuring winter hiking and spring thaw. Visit: **appalachiantrail.org/winterontheat**, and immerse yourself in the virtual experience of winter on the Trail.

Chris and his wife, "Sunshine," live in Black Mountain, North Carolina with their young son and infant daughter. Chris' award-winning production company, Horizonline Pictures, produced ATC's exceptional *myATstory* video series which can be viewed at: **myATstory.org**.

WINTER SUNRISE FROM MOUNT CAMMERER FIRE TOWER

PHOTOGRAPHER ***Steven Yocum***

"EVERY YEAR, WHEN WE GET A GOOD SNOW, I head out into the thick of it. Winter imagery can be fleeting in the southern Appalachians, so it's important to get out and stay out before all the fresh snow blows off the trees. For this particular storm, the eastern edge of the Smokies was going to get a good bit of snow from the west. We set our sights on Mount Cammerer. I'd been eyeing that little fire tower for many years while driving I-40 home each week at my old job. We chose Davenport Gap as our starting point due to its easy access and close proximity to my cabin. As we started up, there was just a bit of snow, but by the time we crested the ridge the drifts were knee deep, the wind was howling, and we kept getting quick glimpses of stars above us as the storm made its way out. With the wind, it was easily zero degrees — we prayed that the tower would be unlocked so we could escape the cold and make a cup of coffee while awaiting the sunrise. Luck was on our side — fresh grounds in the AeroPress, a bagel with peanut butter and honey, and then it was time to get to work. The clouds cleared and the sun rose over fresh snow on the pines and distant mountains. It was a photographer's dream. Sometimes I get shut out, stuck in a cloud, or the light is no good. But mornings like this I hold dear; they keep me going in hopes for the next one." ~ *Steven Yocum*

INSPIRING TRAIL MEMOIRS

WINTER IS A GREAT TIME TO SNUGGLE IN WITH A GOOD book until the weather warms. Tod Jones, an avid A.T. section hiker and reader, recommends four Trail memoirs that are certain to inspire. Jones taught English composition and literature for 20 years at the University of Maryland College Park. He turned to reading Trail memoirs four years ago when he and his wife, Karen, started hiking the A.T. Since then, they have logged 930 miles. Jones says reading memoirs has been inspiring and informative. He underscores the point that hiking the A.T is, without question, a very personal experience that is uniquely shared in each book.

Walking with Spring; the First Thru-Hike of the Appalachian Trail

By Earl V. Shaffer

Earl Shaffer details his thru-hike in 1948 after World War II and the death of his hiking partner who had been killed in Iwo Jima. Shaffer wrote his book years later from notes he had taken on the Trail. If you are looking for an account that traces the author's emotional or psychological journey, this memoir is not for you. What is rather unique in the book is that the author liberally intersperses his narrative with naturalistic and historical information.

AWOL on the Appalachian Trail

By David Miller

In 2003, David Miller was determined to hike the A.T. When his request to take a leave of absence from his computer programming job was turned down, Miller went absent without leave: AWOL. His account of his six-month thru-hike does more than tell a story, although that he does. Miller takes his readers along his journey, introducing them to life on the Trail. The resulting book is both descriptive and informative. It is an introduction to the lifestyle, including the hardships and rewards, as well as the social experience of an A.T. thru-hiker.

As Far as the Eye Can See: Reflections of an Appalachian Trail Hiker

By David Brill

David Brill recounts his five-month northbound thru-hike in 1979 and does a masterful job of chronological reporting — *and* manages to arrange his narrative into thematic chapters. In his first chapter titled "Fear," the author narrates the terrifying mountain storm that Brill experienced on his first night in the Georgia wilderness, the fears and anxieties that emerged in the process of preparing for his A.T. journey, and the self-doubt that troubled him during the first leg of his immense undertaking. There is an unmistakable nostalgia in these pages. Brill looks back upon his A.T. hike as not only a formative experience, but as a period of self-reliance, of magical camaraderie, and unique freedom from the constraints of societal expectations and material possessions.

Becoming Odyssa: Adventures on the Appalachian Trail

By Jennifer Pharr Davis

Jennifer Pharr Davis, who achieved a 2008 (unofficial) women's speed record for hiking the A.T. in 57 days, recounts her first thru-hike three years earlier — an experience she says defined her more than achieving her speed record. This book is predominantly about Davis' unique and sometimes unusual experiences, and her interactions with, and reactions to people, places, and things. A couple of characters in her book are especially memorable — namely Moot and Mooch. Her accounts are often humorous and, ultimately, likeable.

Tod Jones has reviewed more than two dozen Appalachian Trail memoirs on his blog "Weekend Jots": **weekendjots.com/birchs-review**

Purchase one of these great reads at: **atctrailstore.org/exploring/journeys-books**

INDIGENOUS

ECOSYSTEMS / CONSERVATION / ENDANGERED

Red spruce grow slow, and live 250 to 450+ years.

The Southern Appalachian spruce/fir forests are considered a critically endangered ecosystem.

Life Zone: high elevation forests, above 4,500 feet threatened by pollution, non-native insects and climate change.

Challenged propagation by faster growing hardwoods, inhibits natural revitalization, choking out seedlings.

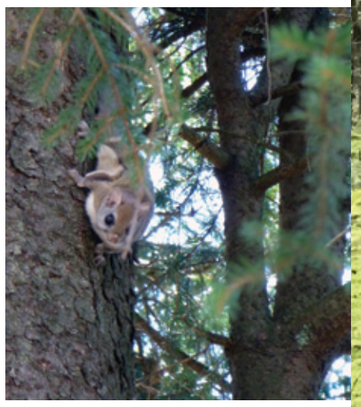
RED SPRUCE (*Picea rubens*) once thrived in the southern Appalachian's iconic areas of Clingmans Dome, Mount Rogers, and Roan Mountain. These forests are now considered a critically endangered ecosystem.

Red spruce were heavily logged between 1905 and 1930, followed by wildfires, further drying the soils making conditions poor for germination. Hardwood species had the advantage (birch, cherry, maple) choking out spruce seedlings.

SPRUCE RESTORATION

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is proposing approximately 60 acres of forestry treatments at 4 sites in the southern Appalachians. These actions will promote multiple age and size classes of spruce, providing higher wildlife value, higher capacity for carbon sequestration, and more ecosystem resilience. These activities will also prepare these sites for the heavy red spruce seed production expected in 2019, and future underplanting. Slash from these forest thinnings will be left onsite, adding coarse woody debris for salamanders, small mammals, and soil invertebrates. The ATC plans to complete this work in mid-late 2019.

Spruce-fir provides critical habitat for a host of plant and animal species, including the federally endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel, who eats truffles, the fruiting bodies of mycorrhizal fungi associated with the roots of red spruce trees. The red crossbill, a stocky red or greenish finch, eats spruce seed and has a specialized bill that pries open cones to extract seed. Also, the federally endangered spruce-fir moss spider, one of the smallest members of the primitive suborder of spiders popularly referred to as "tarantulas." This spiders' range is limited to a handful of mountains in western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and southwest Virginia. And rare Weller's salamanders are associated with high elevation spruce-fir forests.



Inset: Red spruce are a critical component to Carolina northern flying squirrel habitat. By C. Kelly; Right: The A.T. passes through spruce forest on Unaka Mountain, North Carolina / Tennessee. By Leanna Joyner

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE LIBRARY

RED SPRUCE

PICEA RUBENS

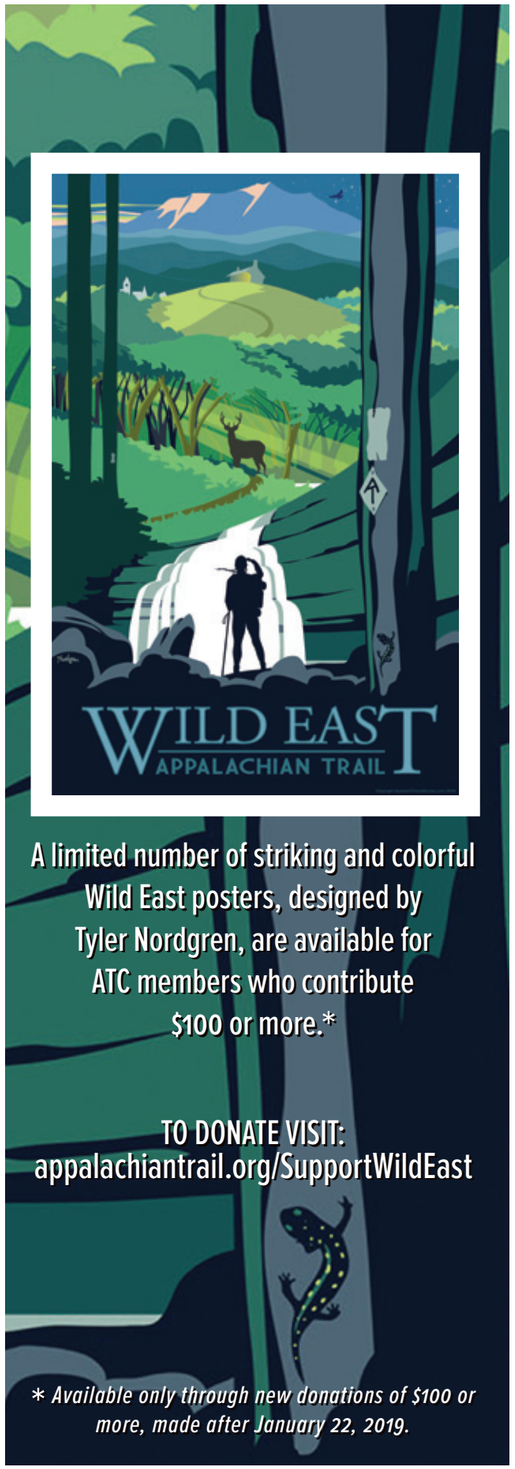
by Matt Drury

Reflections on A Winged Journey

CONTEMPLATING THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION THROUGH MIGRATION IN LIFE AND NATURE.

by Cyndi Garcia

RECENTLY, I READ A NOVEL THAT centers around migratory issues of the monarch butterfly. It reminded me of when I first became aware of the monarch's migration. At the time, I lived on a narrow barrier island, and I recall being surprised to see a monarch butterfly so close to the Atlantic Ocean. It was miraculous to see such a fragile winged thing of beauty gain any distance in the steady ocean breeze. The fact that we were literally located on the eastern side of the United States and these dainty butterflies were planning a flight route southwest over 2,000 miles astounded me. Come to think of it, it was late autumn, and I remember being concerned that the monarchs would never reach Mexico by the first frost. It seemed an impossible task and



> I was searching out sources of nourishment for my travels both inward and outward. I needed to shed my skin just like the caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland who asked Alice: "Who are You?" Indeed, who was I as I emerged from my chrysalis and spread my wings?

I wondered why they had flown so far from home.

As if I wouldn't fly so far from home. Thirty years ago, the day after my college graduation, I packed my belongings into my trusty old white pick-up truck and headed south into Appalachia where yellow swallowtail butterflies were in abundance and reminded me once again of the monarch's graceful movements. I was 21, and on my own. I was searching out sources of nourishment for my travels both inward and outward. I needed to shed my skin just like the caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland who asked Alice: "Who are You?" Indeed, who was I as I emerged from my chrysalis and spread my wings? I was in a different stage of my life, perhaps my first real adult stage.

I had been hired as camp coordinator by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (then conference); and this was no ordinary camp. My duties spanned from everything imaginable in overseeing a dormitory full of volunteers and staff who were willing to labor for just about nothing to do trail work on the Appalachian Trail. The employee manual was 29 pages long, and the introduction began with the following: "despite the discomforts of aching muscles, blisters, wet clothes, insect bites, poison ivy and lack of privacy, you will be rewarded by the excitement of working in some of the most beautiful areas of the Appalachian Mountains, the camaraderie of fellow volunteers and the satisfaction of doing high quality work on the Appalachian Trail." We were a crew that summer, the "Konnarock Crew" so named after our home base in the town of Konnarock, Virginia.

For five days a week, we camped in close proximity to the A.T. where we built sections of Trail and performed Trail maintenance. All of our personal gear, food, and tools had to be loaded each week into the one of the three large passenger vans. At one site, we carried in the all the lumber that was necessary to build a new shelter.

At the end of the work week, the crews would return to the building we called home. It was an old Lutheran girl's boarding school sided entirely in chestnut bark shingles. There we huddled together on the wide covered front porch resembling butterflies roosting on a tree. The house had 16 bedrooms on the second floor, a kitchen, tool room, and a huge gathering room that served as a dining room and living room on the first floor. There was no TV and barely a radio signal where we were situated at the foot of Mount Rogers. The only means of communication was a pay phone located in the entrance hallway.

In addition to managing the finances, setting up schedules, and picking up volunteers who flew into the local airport over an hour's drive away, I had the weekly task of grocery shopping for the ravenous bunch. Unlike the larvae of the monarch butterflies that feed exclusively on readily accessible milkweed, I journeyed 23 miles to the nearest grocery store. On average, I would fill three large shopping carts full of provisions and made numerous trips back and forth to the van to load all those bags of groceries.

Over 40 people came and went that summer, including three crew leaders and myself. Some weeks we flocked together at the same work site, other weeks, depending on the number of volunteers, we dispersed to separate areas like the intermingling of butterflies. Virginia has the longest section of the Appalachian Trail, so our work was mostly focused along its 550 miles. It was a shared experience that I will never forget. Although I don't recall the total number of miles of Trail we built and maintained, at the end of the season I received a thank you letter from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's regional director for the area saying more people were involved that summer and more work was accomplished than ever before. Our productivity and competitiveness was infectious.

At summer's close, the tools were sharpened and put away. The house was swept, and the refrigerator emptied of its contents. The base camp would lie dormant until next year's crew arrived, like the butterflies that return annually to their winter dwelling place to begin the cycle again, when the succeeding volunteers will devote their time and energy in ensuring that the Trail, which traverses through 14 states, remains clear and blazed for the next season of hikers.

★ ROUND HILL / *Virginia* ★

NOT FAR FROM THE BUSTLE AND BUZZ OF WASHINGTON, D.C., THE PASTORAL TOWN OF ROUND HILL, VIRGINIA IS A REFRESHING DESTINATION, OFFERING AN ESCAPE FROM THE DAILY GRIND.

From left: Sunset from Bears Den Rocks. By Dean Clark; An elaborate carving greets visitors at Bears Den; Blackburn Trail Center is well-known for its hospitality to hikers. Photos by Laurie Potteiger

LOCATED IN WESTERN LOUDOUN COUNTY — IN THE northwest tip of Virginia, and not to be confused with other towns in Virginia of the same name — Round Hill recently joined an impressive list of nearly 50 other cities and towns to become an official A.T. Community, recognizing the Trail as a community asset and pledging to support ongoing stewardship.

The historic town of fewer than a thousand residents is nestled in picturesque countryside and farmlands near Sleeter Lake, seven miles from the Shenandoah River, under an hour's drive from Shenandoah National Park, and within close proximity to the Appalachian Trail. The town sits between two well-known and photogenic Trail centers — Bears Den to the south and the Blackburn to the north. Round Hill provides access to what is often called the "Roller Coaster," a rocky 13-mile stretch of the Trail with many ups and downs.

TIP: Grab your camera or smartphone for remarkable and shareable photos of the sunset from Bears Den Rocks. Linger in the fading light. And make certain you have a headlamp or headlight to find your way back.

WELCOMING ACCESS TO THE A.T.
ROUND HILL

Bears Den

One of the A.T.'s most popular Trail centers, Bears Den offers easy access to the Trail, a family-friendly nature trail, and spectacular sunrises and sunsets overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Make your way down a narrow gravel road off Blue Ridge Mountain Road (Va. 601). A historic stone wall and wooden carving greet your arrival and invite exploration. Beyond the wall, you find a historic stone mansion. Built in the 1930s to resemble a castle, complete with a pitched roof and turrets, the mansion was once home to an opera singer. It is now owned by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, managed by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, and available for group rentals. Beyond, the A.T. beckons.

Blackburn Trail Center

With a history as interesting as Bears Den, the Blackburn Trail Center invites a look-see from hikers on the nearby Appalachian Trail and welcomes groups up to 22 people to stay overnight, for an exceptionally reasonable charge of $6 per person, per night.

Built in 1913 by a prominent Washington, D.C. physician and eventually purchased and managed by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, Blackburn is distinct for its beautiful mountain forest setting and a wrap-around porch that nearly surrounds the entire massive cottage — with scenic views to the southeast towards Washington, D.C., and a westward view into West Virginia from the A.T. in between side trails.

Grab a tasty treat at Mom's Apple Pie; Visit a local vineyard; Fish on Sleeter Lake

WHAT TO SEE AND DO IN AND AROUND ROUND HILL

Round Hill's Historic District

Check out historic churches, former boarding houses, and other historic structures. Settled in the late 1800s, and officially made a town in 1900, the National Register of Historic Places and state of Virginia list nearly 200 buildings in the area.

Sleeter Lake

Throw a line in from the shores of Sleeter Lake. Largemouth and smallmouth bass are plentiful on this peaceful, motor-restricted lake. Insider tip: the fishing is best under a new moon.

Equestrian Arts

Experience the gentility of horse country and equestrian arts. Several stables in the area offer riding lessons and preset hunter-jumper shows.

Mom's Apple Pie Hill High

Pick up fresh-from-the-oven breads, yummy preservative-free pie, and other baked goods at Mom's Apple Pie Hill High, which offers traditional apple pies along with a mouth-watering selection of unusual pies including: almond amaretto, bourbon walnut, and butter pecan.

Loudoun County's Wines

Take a tasting tour of Loudon County's wines. With approximately three-dozen vineyards and several breweries, visitors have a wide range of options including guided tasting, farm-to-table food pairings, live music, and patios among tended gardens.

Hill High Marketplace

Stop by the Hill High Marketplace, a former orchard with a covered wagon out front, for organic produce, baked goods, and original artwork, produced by the marketplace's studio tenants.

TAKE A DAY HIKE NEAR ROUND HILL

Cool Spring Waterfall Park and Hike

3 miles, out and back /Hike level: Easy

This out-and-back hike takes you on a paved path through the old golf course along the Shenandoah River, then off-road on a flat footpath that winds through a grove of paw-paw trees, across a stream over stepping stones, and then a few more steps until you reach a beautiful waterfall.

The land surrounding your hike was the site of the Battle of Cool Spring in 1864 and recently, Shenandoah University reclaimed the property and maintains it as an outdoor classroom for both its community and the general public. Beyond the waterfall is the River Ridge Trail, which connects into a network of trails, including the Appalachian Trail (just north of Raven Rocks).

Raven Rocks Hollow Run

4 miles, out and back /Hike level: Moderate

This out-and-back hike takes you up and away from Rte. 7 for about 1.5 miles before a half-mile steep descent to Raven Rocks Hollow Run, the turnaround spot. You'll find a nice shady place to hang out and enjoy a snack before returning south to your car. If you're thirsty, there's a spring about 100 yards down a blue blaze trail where you can collect water (filtration recommended).

Keyes Gap to David Lesser Shelter

6 miles, out and back /Hike level: Moderate

This is a simple walk in the woods along the A.T. starting from the Keyes Gap parking lot with the turn-around point at the David Lesser shelter — an excellent example of an Appalachian Trail shelter used by thru-hikers walking from Georgia to Maine. It's the perfect midway point to relax and eat your lunch, complete with a picnic table and swing. Just downhill from the shelter is a stream where you can collect water (filtration recommended). And it is a historical hike. Keyes Gap was of strategic importance during the Civil War, as it provided an alternate "back route" from Virginia to the key point of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Find out more about Round Hill, where to hike and play, and its entire outdoor-loving philosophy at: **roundhill.at**

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*Hiking info courtesy Sean Lloyd: **roundhill.at/hikes**

AS 2019 BEGINS, I AM CONTEMPLATING HOW LAST year flew by so fast that I did not get a chance to get out and enjoy the Trail as much as I had hoped. But the Trail beckons my husband and I to repaint fresh, new white blazes along the three-mile section we maintain. These simple footpath duties will be our reminder that the A.T. is there waiting for us to care for it and coax us to trek past our section and enjoy more. I am reminded how multi-faceted managing the entire Trail is — as an ever-changing and shifting, living organism with so many passionate people involved. We put our heads together and determinedly face big challenges that keep us on our toes (so that so many others can slip some boots over their toes and enjoy it).

We are not alone in our challenges. Protecting our precious natural resources requires dogged determination and an ability to think spherically, find solutions, and not lose sight of the fact that everyone has a stake. While some supporters are more "on the ground" oriented in their work, others walk a fine line to maintain strong and complex connections with constituents and supporters. And we need and appreciate every aspect of support equally. We do all of this so that the Trail remains protected, relevant, and resilient for both the short- and long-term future.

With all this, I am more positive than ever that the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and our partners and supporters are up to the task. And I keep in mind that what we do — promote, protect, and maintain the Appalachian Trail — has never been easy. From Benton MacKaye pushing to have his vision realized to the years of hard work led by Myron Avery to get the footpath established, our hike has been a challenging one. When people are as passionate as ATC people are, we may not always agree. But it is exactly because of that passion that, in the end, we come together and move the organization, and our own hearts and minds, forward to ensure the absolute best for the Appalachian Trail.

Sandra Marra / Chair

A.T. – Roan Highlands near Stan Murray and Overmountain shelters. By Travis Bordley

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A.T.– ROAN HIGHLANDS – BY STEVEN YOCOM