

A JOURNEYS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / FALL 2022

— NURTURE EDITION —



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A tiny, northern metalmark butterfly pollinates a native milkweed plant near the A.T. in Connecticut. Photo by Fern Crossway

ON THE COVER

A view of fall foliage on Mount Madison from Dome Rock – White Mountain National Forest, New Hampshire. The entire protected A.T. landscape nurtures the most important region of biodiversity and climate resiliency in eastern North America. Photo by Jerry Monkman



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CONTRIBUTORS

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“THERE IS A WAY THAT NATURE SPEAKS, THAT LAND SPEAKS.
MOST OF THE TIME WE ARE SIMPLY NOT PATIENT ENOUGH,
QUIET ENOUGH, TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE STORY.”

~ Linda Hogan, Chickasaw Poet and Environmentalist



*The West branch of the Pleasant River along the A.T. corridor – 100-Mile Wilderness, Maine.
Photo by A.T. boundary volunteer Jim Williams*

NATURE’S STORY

FALL BRINGS WITH IT A NEW CADENCE to life. The light and vitality of the summer recedes into darker, shorter days. But the clean, fresh air of autumn always invigorates and seems laden with promises of both endings and new beginnings. Amid this, our forests show us one more profound expression of color as the leaves change from green to a vast array of autumnal tones.

Perhaps from the beginning of our existence, humans have been fascinated by fall leaves. We drive to Shenandoah, the Blue Ridge Parkway, the White Mountains of New Hampshire. We travel the globe in search of fleeting colors, paper-like formations, with unique veiny patterns falling from the sky and blanketing the ground with their layers of softness. Stepping upon these fallen leaves, the gentle percussive sounds of fall remind us that what grows from the ground eventually returns there.

But for a few fleeting moments, leaves float from the sky with a kind of cadence and slowness we rarely experience in our daily lives — the world in slow motion. Nature’s confetti. There is something deeply beautiful about watching an individual leaf drift through our shared atmosphere and down to our feet.

As life begins to slow down with the coming of the fall and winter seasons, it’s a great time to pause and reflect upon what connects us — the shared experience of seasons, the holidays that reunite friends and families, and time to plan for the new places we may go to in the future.

As President and CEO of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, I too am spending a lot of time lately reflecting upon the beauty of the Trail and about all who work for it, play upon it, and support it. I wonder about the nature of beauty itself and the purpose it serves. Perhaps natural beauty in all its brilliant

seasonal colors is here to capture our attention, to tell us it needs us, to inspire us to care. Perhaps these fall colors are our forest’s form of communication, reminding us that the world needs our nurturing and that the beauty around us is unifying and universal.

As is so often the case, the Appalachian Trail infuses our lives with depth, richness, and wisdom. As 2022 comes to a close, thank you for all of the ways you have cared for the A.T. I continue to be humbled by your generosity and the kindness you extend to one another. May you continue to enjoy the beauty of this season and all seasons. I shall leave you with a question that I ask myself this fall: What can I learn from nature’s story?

Sandra Marra / President & CEO

CONTRIBUTORS



Marina Richie

Marina Richie wrote about the imperiled metalmark butterfly of the A.T. while gazing upon her pollinator garden humming with insects and singing with songbirds fattened on caterpillars that, in turn, thrive on native host plants. "I kept wandering outside, more curious than ever about the lives of each butterfly, native bee, wasp, or ant."

As the author of the 2022 book, *Halcyon Journey: In Search of the Belted Kingfisher*, Marina found an intriguing comparison. "Both butterflies and kingfishers are charismatic megafauna that guide us to wondrous communities of life we might not have noticed otherwise." Threading natural history, memoir, and mythology, Marina's book is the first to feature the belted kingfisher, a bird found throughout North America, including the waterways of the Appalachian Trail.

A regular contributor to *A.T. Journeys*, her stories and essays often reflect a theme of kinship with nature leading to advocacy for protecting wildlife and wildlands. She writes from Bend, Oregon, and values her returns to the A.T. with her late father, Dave Richie's Trail journals in hand.



Chris Gallaway

Chris Gallaway is a filmmaker and photographer specializing in stories of wilderness and conservation. Since his 2013 thru-hike, Chris has returned to the Trail many times to work on a variety of filming and photography projects for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). His travels in 2022 led from the ridges of New England tracking finger-nail-sized butterflies to the shady climes of the red spruce forests in the Mount Rogers High Country of Virginia. "It's a privilege and a pleasure to see these places and the good work that the ATC is doing to protect them," he says. Chris enjoys taking home these stories to share with his wife, Sunshine (who thru-hiked the A.T. in '04 and '05), and his two young children back in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Chris and Sunshine co-created the documentary film: *The Long Start to the Journey*, which takes viewers along for the adventure, highs, and lows of his A.T. thru-hike. His film can be found at thelongstarttothejourney.vhx.tv.



Jerry Monkman

Jerry Monkman is a conservation photographer, filmmaker, and writer based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He has written ten books and directed two feature-length documentary films about recreation and conservation in New England. His books include two National Outdoor Book Award winners: 2012's *The AMC Guide to Outdoor Digital Photography*, and 2017's *Outdoor Adventures: Acadia National Park*. His work has appeared in publications worldwide including *National Geographic Adventure*, *Audubon*, *Men's Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *Outdoor Photographer*.

Jerry's first-ever published photo was on the cover of the July 1993 issue of *Appalachian Trailway News* and has continued to be featured in *A.T. Journeys* over the years. "I've been hiking on the A.T. for more than thirty years," he says. "As a conservation photographer, I've been involved in projects along or adjacent to the A.T. in the New England area, which have strengthened my belief that conserved open space is important, not only for wildlife and biodiversity, but for strengthening individuals and communities."



Audrey Peterman

Since she saw her first national park in August 1995, Audrey Peterman has retained the excitement of a child at Christmas time, gleefully exploring more than 185 units, from the Virgin Islands National Park to Denali National Park in Alaska, with her husband, Frank. Besides the beauty of the public lands system, Audrey has strived to publicize the history in places where Black and Brown Americans made the critical difference to our country's evolution.

She is the author of three books: *Legacy on the Land: A Black Couple Discovers Our National Inheritance and Tells Why Every American Should Care*; *Our True Nature: Finding a Zest for Life in the National Park System*; and *From My Jamaican Gully to the World*. "My mission is to demystify the environmental sector through sharing my life experience and inspire others to live joyfully while making a positive difference in our world," she says.

Audrey's daily social media posts and twice-weekly blog, *The Joy Train*, extol the benefits of nature in efforts to create "a pandemic of joy." She co-founded the Diverse Environmental Leaders Speakers Bureau in 2014. Last April, the National Parks Conservation Association presented her with the 2022 Centennial Leadership Award, saluting her twenty-five years of dedicated effort.



MOOSEHEAD LAKE, NEAR THE A.T. CORRIDOR IN MAINE — PHOTO BY A.T. BOUNDARY VOLUNTEER BOB HUFF

Planned Giving is an easy and flexible way
to meet your philanthropic goals while protecting the Trail you love.
Whatever your stage in life, your financial circumstances and your charitable goals, let us show you how to make a gift that benefits you and your loved ones as well as the Appalachian Trail.

If you've already made a planned gift, please let us know so that we can partner in honoring your legacy.





★ TRAILHEAD

HIGHLIGHTS / EVENTS

ATC WELCOMES NEW AND RETURNING BOARD MEMBERS

AT ITS ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING on October 1, 2022, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) welcomed three new and two returning board directors. The meeting also provided an opportunity for staff and volunteer leadership to share highlights of recent accomplishments and financial statements. If you missed the livestream, you can watch a recording of the meeting at appalachiantrail.org/2022meeting.

New Directors

Rita Hennessy began hiking the A.T. as a teenager in Connecticut and later served as an A.T. ridgerunner. She held a thirty-year career with the National Park Service, where she served as recreation specialist and then assistant superintendent of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail Park Office for eighteen years. She completed her career as the National Park Service Program lead of the National Trails System and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Yong Lee's decades-long career in management has spanned both non-profit and for-profit sectors. She served as the chief of staff to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. She previously served as the chief of staff to the President of Morehouse College, a historically Black college for men in Atlanta, Georgia. Yong has hiked portions of the A.T. in Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and Maine. She is an avid backpacker, mountaineer, and rock climber.

Katherine Ross is the retired President of Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Health Care Systems. She has more than thirty-five years of operating experience and has led supply chains (and lived) in Asia, Europe, and the United States. Her most recent role was leading J&J's global logistics and customer service operations, managing a \$2 billion spend across seventy countries. Katherine has hiked portions of the A.T. throughout her life and in 2022 embarked on a southbound section hike from Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Re-Elected Directors

John Knapp grew up hiking and paddling in the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Valley in Virginia and has been section hiking the A.T. since earning his Boy Scout Fifty-Miler patch many years ago. He retired from a career at Verizon in 2012 and then worked as state director for U.S. Senator Tim Kaine during his first term. He also served twenty-four years in the Army National Guard, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. (See John's "Parting Thought" on page 56).

Patricia Shannon is currently the chief financial and operational officer for the AARP Foundation, based in Washington, DC. She enjoys exploring the great outdoors and has most recently been hiking the trails of Shenandoah National Park and southwest Virginia. She has extensive for-profit and nonprofit management experience. Patricia is a CPA and a Chartered Global Management Accountant.

Katahdin from Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. Photo by Jerry Monkman
Baxter State Park officially closed all Katahdin trails for the season. This includes the Hunt Trail, which the A.T. follows to its northern terminus on Baxter Peak. The trails on Katahdin typically reopen in mid-to-late May each year.

Trail Safety



Photo Courtesy of BearVault

KEEPING PEOPLE AND NATURE IN HARMONY

IN RESPONSE TO A MULTI-YEAR increase in human-bear encounters at Appalachian Trail campsites, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) has adopted a new policy related to bear-resistant food storage practices. Issued in July 2022, this new policy recommends that all overnight visitors carry a bear-resistant food storage container as part of their backpacking gear.

“Black bears along multiple sections of the Appalachian Trail have become increasingly adept at defeating traditional food hangs, where a hiker stores their food over a tree branch using a rope and storage bag,” says Hawk Metheny, ATC vice president of Regional and Trail Operations. “This is even when food hangs are done completely right, and sometimes that just isn’t possible depending on where you are camping.”

By using bear-resistant containers, hikers can help prevent more bears from becoming habituated to humans as a source of food, as well as minimize their chances of a negative bear encounter. The ATC promotes the use of food storage containers approved by the Interagency

Grizzly Bear Committee, which have a high success rate in preventing all species of bears from easily accessing hiker food supplies.

To help educate Trail visitors about the benefits of bear-resistant containers, the ATC is encouraging the development of container rental or loaner programs in addition to those already in place in Georgia and Vermont. “Loaner programs like these will help introduce a new generation of A.T. hikers to the benefits of bear canisters, not the least of which is overall increased convenience and ease of use,” says Metheny.

The new ATC food storage policy was developed in coordination with multiple A.T. land management agencies, including the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service.

For more information visit appalachiantrail.org/foodstoragepolicy.

To view the list of approved food storage containers, visit igbconline.org/programs/bear-resistant-products

HALL OF FAME INDUCTION DAY HONORS TRAIL LEGENDS

IN EARLY OCTOBER, A LARGE crowd gathered at Pine Grove Furnace State Park near Gardners, Pennsylvania, to honor the 2022 inductees to the Appalachian Trail Hall of Fame. The induction ceremony and banquet was hosted by the Appalachian Trail Museum and emceed by Hawk Metheny, vice president of regional and Trail operations for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC).

The Honorees were the late Jim and Molly Denton of Front Royal, Virginia; JoAnn and Paul Dolan of New York, New York; Laurie Potteiger of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; and Tom Speaks of Cleveland, Tennessee.

The Dentons were primarily responsible for the longest contiguous reroute in the history of the Trail, which moved the A.T. from a rapidly urbanizing area in southern Virginia to a more protected area within the Jefferson National Forest along the Virginia-West Virginia border.

The Dolans spearheaded the effort to save a forested area north of New York City, through which the A.T. passes, from development and form the 22,000-acre Sterling Forest State Park.

After her 1987 A.T. thru-hike, Laurie Potteiger began her 33-year career with the ATC. Over the decades, Laurie assisted and inspired thousands of visitors, including countless thru-hikers, at the ATC Headquarters and Visitor Center in Harpers Ferry. She also helped found the annual Flip-Flop Festival, which encourages long-distance hikers to begin their journeys at various places along the Trail rather than adding to the annual influx of hikers in Georgia, reducing the negative impact on Trail resources.

Tom Speaks played an important leadership role for the U.S. Forest Service in achieving critical land acquisitions in the South. He led a Forest Service team responsible for A.T. acquisitions from Georgia to central Virginia., including Rocky Fork, Spy Rock, Max Patch and the Roan Highlands.

Each Hall of Fame honoree or representative received a hiking stick, custom carved by John “Bodacious” Beaudet. The ceremony also featured a talk by Trail legend and 2020 Hall of Fame inductee Warren Doyle (a multiple-A.T. thru-hiker and creator and director of the Appalachian Trail Institute), the grand opening of the A.T. Museum’s interactive Trail display, an interview with new inductee Laurie Potteiger and guided tours of the Museum and the Ironmasters Mansion.

For more information about the inductees and the A.T. Museum visit atmuseum.org.



From left: Inductees Laurie Potteiger; Ron Rosen, representing JoAnn and Paul Dolan; Michael Denton, representing Jim and Molly Denton; Ron Tipton, representing Tom Speaks; and Shirley Denton, representing Jim and Molly Denton. Photo by Dan Innamorato

APPALACHIAN FOCUS

ESSENTIAL SOURCE

ZEALAND FALLS IN WHITE MOUNTAIN National Forest, New Hampshire — here with a view of Mount Tom in the distance — is one of myriad essential Appalachian Mountain water sources. The falls are adjacent to the A.T. and the Appalachian Mountain Club's Zealand Falls Hut. "It's a favorite spot of mine for photography and it's the first place my wife, Marcy and I ever hiked to when we moved to New England 30-plus years ago," says conservation photographer Jerry Monkman. The protected Appalachian Trail landscape serves as a supplier of water resources to 119 million people.

Photo by Jerry Monkman
ecophotography.com





Larry Mulder, crouching at left, with members of the youth group from his church in Hope, Michigan. In passing on his love of the A.T. to the next generation, Larry is upholding a time-honored tradition.

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

A COMMITMENT TO INTRODUCING KIDS TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS BECOMES A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

THE JOURNEY TYPICALLY TRANSPIRED SOMETHING LIKE this: Two minivans packed with seven middle-schoolers, three or four adults, and their gear depart Holland, Michigan. They drive some 700 miles to a pre-selected section of the Appalachian Trail. Upon nearing the destination, the vans diverge and travel to two trailheads roughly forty miles apart. Then, two groups begin a four-day trek along the Trail, walking towards each other until they meet somewhere in the middle. They spend a night together at the same campsite, sharing stories of their adventures and vying for the chance to talk. The next morning, the adults swap car keys and each group proceeds to the other group's minivan. Eventually they all meet up at a motel on the drive back to Michigan — where pizza and pool time are prerequisites.

It might seem simple on the surface, but the impetus, planning, and preparation for the annual journey would not have happened without Larry Mulder. For more than twenty-five years, Larry led small groups of eleven- to thirteen-year-olds from his church's youth group on a weeklong hiking trip on the A.T. His commitment to introducing kids to the great outdoors at a formative time in their lives resulted in some 150 young people having a memorable — and often transformative — experience.

"They thought the four-day hike was as rustic a thing as you could ever do in life," recalls Larry about the students who participated. "At the end, many of them said they would never do it again — but the vast majority of kids who went once came back for a second or third trip."

A PERSONAL CONNECTION

The choice of the A.T. was personal. Larry spent most of the 1980s section-hiking the A.T. with his son Michael, completing two or three sections a year. By the time Michael graduated from high school, the duo had completed the southern half of the Trail. When Michael went away to college, Larry began casting around for others to bring along on his hikes. That was when he realized that other young people might be interested in an A.T. hiking adventure.

The A.T. is in and of itself a multigenerational project. It simply would not exist without care, protec-

tion, and love for it passing from one generation to another, for 100 years. So in wanting to share his excitement about the Trail with a younger generation — first his children and then youngsters in his church community — Larry is upholding a time-honored tradition.

Rachel Medina née Smith was in the first group of middle-schoolers from Hope Church in Holland, Michigan, to hike on the A.T. with Larry. And she was one of the kids to go back — again in middle school, then for a few years in college, and then in 2000 when she completed a thru-hike. “Hiking with Larry

directly inspired me to thru-hike the A.T. when I did, and that choice has changed the trajectory of my entire life,” says Rachel.

Now a middle-school English teacher in Colorado, Rachel regularly takes her students on hikes and teaches a nature appreciation class. She also led a group of students on a trip to Tanzania, where they summited Kilimanjaro and then volunteered at a nearby orphanage. “There is no way I would have had the confidence and leadership skills necessary to take eleven young people to a developing nation if it hadn’t been for Larry,” Rachel says.

MEMORABLE INTRODUCTIONS

For Larry, the opportunity to introduce young people to the A.T. each year provided the chance to see it with fresh eyes. “After years of hiking, I had become a little blasé about the wonders of the A.T. I had forgotten the awe of standing on a mountain peak and looking at clouds in the valleys below me. I no longer wondered at a spring of pure water coming from under a rock,” Larry admits. But the sights and experiences that had become mundane for Larry provided once-in-a-lifetime memories for the kids.

“I remember the time we were hiking and we saw a rattlesnake draped across the Trail. Everybody started freaking out except Larry, who walked up to the snake, picked it up with his hiking stick, flicked it off the Trail, and kept on walking as if nothing had happened,” recalls Aaron. Others learned valuable lessons. “Hiking the A.T. with Larry taught me many things. Most importantly, it taught me how to be a leader, and that the best leaders don’t rush ahead and leave others behind. True leaders make sure everyone is okay,” says Jake.

“My A.T. experiences taught me I can do difficult things and be better off because of them, and that sometimes a test of strength actually makes life even more beautiful. That’s a lesson I’ll continue drawing from for the rest of my life,” says Bethany.

CLOSING THE LOOP

At the top of Larry’s most fond memories along the Trail was completing his section-hike with his son Michael. “We had hiked the first 1,000 miles together on the southern half of the Trail, but then for ten or twelve years we didn’t hike together at all,” says Larry. They reunited on the Trail at the southern end of the Hundred Mile Wilderness and summited Katahdin

together. “To finish up with Michael was very special.”

And there were many more unforgettable moments. Like being snowed in at Clingmans Dome with Michael and not making it up to the observation deck. Or spraining his ankle eight miles from a trailhead and having to send thirteen-year-old Michael ahead on his own to tell the shuttle driver to wait. Or hiking on two separate occasions with youth group members through Rhododendron Gap when the woody plants were in full bloom.

But most of all, it’s observing the impact of the outdoor experience on the young people that Larry considers essential. “The first time they have to cross a bunch of rocks on a boulder field or in a stream, it’s scary for them. When they do it, and get to the other side, it’s really wonderful to see how they feel about it,” says Larry.

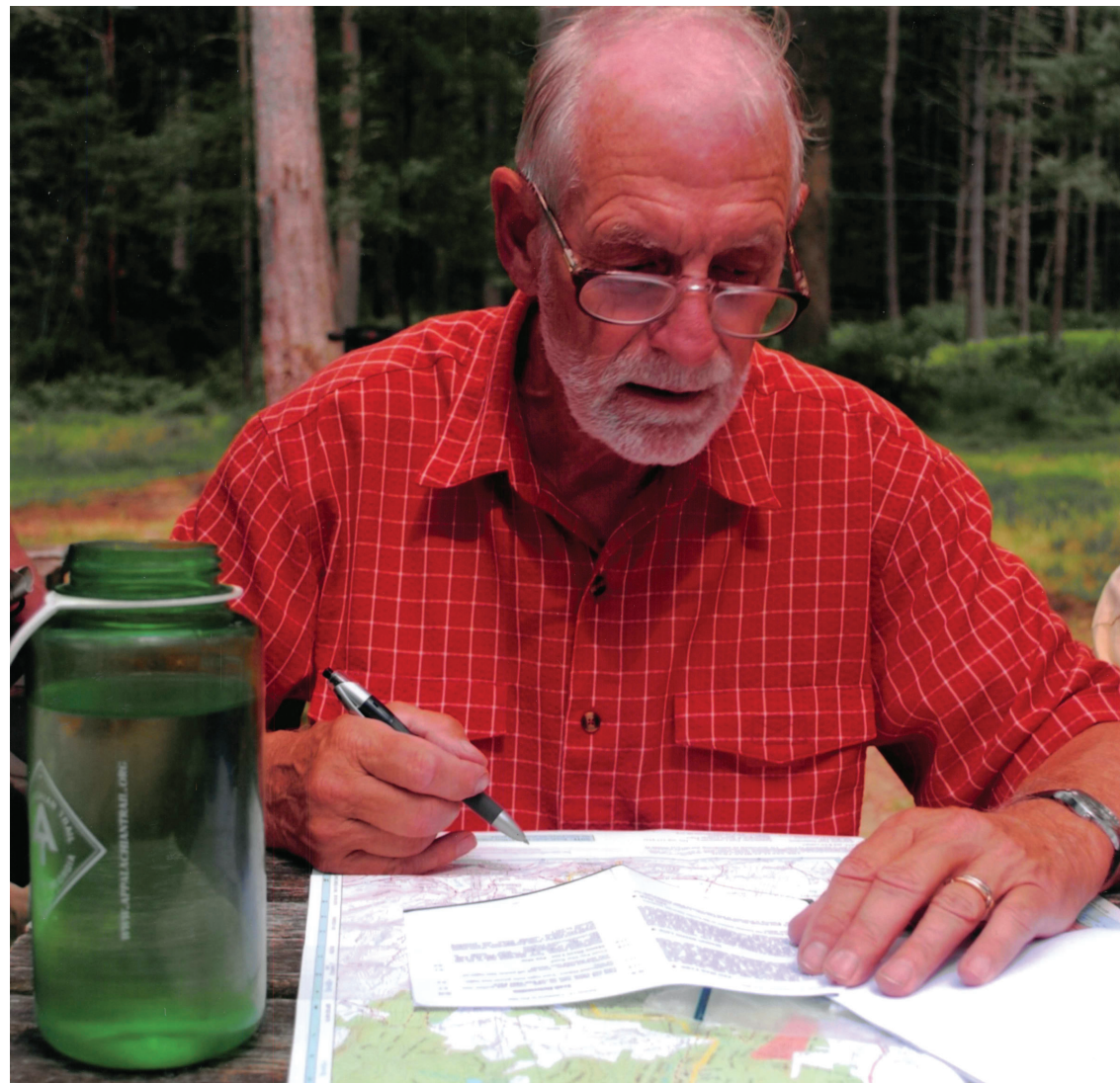
“I believe the experience they had when they were in their pre-teens has had a positive impact on their lives. And I’m thankful I was able to be part of that.”

SUPPORTING THE DAMASCUS TRAIL CENTER



As part of their commitment to introducing new generations to the Appalachian Trail, Larry Mulder and his wife, Karen made a generous donation to the new Damascus Trail Center. Included in the center’s exhibitions is a storyboard, named for Larry (whose Trail name is “Dutch Plodder”), where Trail visitors of all ages can share memorable moments from their outdoor adventures.

For more information about the Damascus Trail Center see “A New Model for Visitor Centers” on page 32.



Above: Larry reviews A.T. maps in preparation for an upcoming youth hike. Right: Larry and Karen Mulder unveil the name of an interactive display at the Damascus Trail Center that encourages visitors to share stories of their outdoor experiences.



HIDDEN IN THE DETAILS

AN EFFORT TO REVIVE THE RARE
NORTHERN METALMARK BUTTERFLY WILL
BENEFIT A WIDE RANGE OF OTHER NATIVE
SPECIES ALONG THE A.T.

BY MARINA RICHIE

BUTTERFLIES ARE THE CHARISMATIC
AMBASSADORS FOR THE MULTITUDES OF
INSECTS THAT FAMED BIOLOGIST
E.O. WILSON TERMED:
“THE LITTLE THINGS THAT RUN
THE WORLD.”

WHEN NEWS OF THE MONARCH'S GLOBALLY endangered status fluttered across headlines in July 2022, another imperiled butterfly story unfurled on a patch of the Appalachian Trail corridor in western Connecticut. There, a multi-year effort to revive the northern metalmark butterfly reveals one potential flight path for recovery.

That path? The butterfly leads and biologists follow. The resulting habitat restoration is finely tuned over time. Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) staff and partners have pulled invasive barberry and bittersweet, planted nectar wildflowers, and felled single trees to create sunny glades within the hardwood forest canopy. Each tweak to remove a threat or enhance metalmark habitat results from what the butterflies teach the scientists.

At first glance, a northern metalmark appears the opposite of a monarch reigning over wildflowers in a royal cloak of orange wings etched in black. Where the monarch is a long-distance migratory champion, the demure metalmark is a stay-at-home specialist few people will ever see. Monarchs face dangers from Canada to Mexico; a whole colony of metalmarks can be eliminated in one fell blow (as happened in Connecticut at a rock quarry). However, the two butterflies share striking qualities as pollinators reliant on one kind of caterpillar host plant. For the monarch, it's milkweed. For the northern metalmark,

the host is roundleaf ragwort. Both butterflies are at high risk of vanishing forever unless people care enough to take meaningful actions based on science — not just once, but over the long run.

While the northern metalmark's future is far from secure, ATC seasonal biologists Fern Crossway and Leo Wahl recorded an uptick in numbers in a population along the A.T. last summer. So elusive are the butterflies that the biologists equipped with elongated nets had to pay keen attention among forest glens and meadows. “It's like finding a gemstone,” says Crossway. “They are hidden in tiny pockets.”

ELEMENTAL DISGUISE

Resting on a wild raspberry bush with wings open in a moth-like pose, a metalmark might be mistaken for an inch-long brown leaf upon the greenery. On closer inspection, the colors are velvety cinnamon and nutmeg with a hint of blue, patterned in faint black scallops and inscribed with the namesake metallic filagree. The undersides reveal bright tangerine hues. “We're often drawn to showy species, but if you take a little time to observe, you will likely find beauty hidden in the details,” says Marian Orlousky, the ATC's director of science and stewardship. “They have these fine silvery marks that glimmer.”

After Orlousky rounded up partners and funding



Previous page: A METALMARK FEEDS ON THE NECTAR OF A BLACK-EYED SUSAN;
Above: THE METALMARK'S UNDERSIDES REVEAL BRIGHT TANGERINE HUES.
Photos by Chris Gallaway/Horizonline Pictures



THE ART OF GENTLE CAPTURE REQUIRES CERTAIN WAYS OF SWINGING THE TRANSLUCENT NET WHILE WALKING IN ONE DIRECTION ON A PATH TO PREVENT SCOOPING UP A BUTTERFLY TWICE IN A DAY. WAHL AND CROSSWAY ALTERNATED WALKING AND PAUSING TO SCAN FOR BUTTERFLIES IN THE AIR. *Photo by Chris Gallaway/Horizonline Pictures*

for a six-week-long monitoring season, Crossway and Wahl began tracking and gathering new information for the northernmost population found near the A.T. They recorded specific locations with GPS, determined two favorite wildflowers for nectar (black-eyed Susan and butterfly milkweed), and noted clustering behaviors within an area of ten square meters, the size of a typical bedroom. From mid-June to mid-July, they tracked and marked 155 adults — up from 117 in 2019 and 89 in 2018.

Central to the project is University of Connecticut's Dr. David Wagner, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology and author of a 2021 report titled "Insect Decline in the Anthropocene: Death by a Thousand Cuts." The report highlights the colliding forces causing the insect apocalypse, from global warming and related extreme weather to deforestation, industrial agriculture, insecticides, urbanization, and introduced species. Wagner initiated monitoring at this site in 2007. Crossway and Wahl conducted summer research

under Wagner in 2022 and recently received their undergraduate degrees from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

SAVE EVERY SPECIES

Why put such intensive labor into saving one isolated population of a rare butterfly within the A.T. corridor? I decided to ask Dr. Douglas Tallamy, the entomologist and biologist who is fostering the rewilding of yards and lawns with his advocacy and best-selling books *Nature's Best Hope* and *Bringing Nature Home*. "Saving biodiversity is not optional," Tallamy says. "We have to save it for our own good."

Every species plays a critical role in the stability and productivity of our ecosystems that are essential for all life, Tallamy explained. Both endangered and common insects are showing alarming declines in populations. We must act swiftly. That sometimes means stepping in to help nature contend with our



“WE’RE OFTEN DRAWN TO SHOWY SPECIES, BUT IF YOU TAKE A LITTLE TIME TO OBSERVE, YOU WILL LIKELY FIND BEAUTY HIDDEN IN THE DETAILS. THEY HAVE THESE FINE SILVERY MARKS THAT GLIMMER.”

MARKING EACH BUTTERFLY IS A DELICATE MATTER. WHILE TEMPORARILY ASLEEP, DOTS ARE APPLIED TO THE UNDERSIDE OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S WINGS, FOLLOWING A SYSTEMATIC NUMBERING SCHEME. THEN, THE AWAKENING METALMARK IS CONVEYED TO A FLOWER AND WATCHED OVER UNTIL FULLY AWAKE. *Photo by Chris Gallaway/Horizonline Pictures*



Left: THE DARK GREEN LEAVES OF THE ROUNDEAF RAGWORT (*PACKERA OBOVATA*) SERVE AS THE SOLE FOOD SOURCE FOR YOUNG METALMARK CATERPILLARS; Inset: TINY, TURBAN-SHAPED EGGS ARE LAID ON THE UNDERSIDE OF A ROUNDEAF RAGWORT. *Photos by Fern Crossway*; Above: MARIAN ORLOUSKY, THE ATC'S DIRECTOR OF SCIENCE AND STEWARDSHIP, STUDIES A FRESHLY MARKED BUTTERFLY AS IT AWAKENS. *Photo by Chris Gallaway/Horizonline Pictures*

human-caused meddling, like introduced plants overwhelming and even eliminating the native wildflowers butterflies rely on. Tallamy calls the protected A.T. “a lifeline and connection to the natural world from Georgia to Maine.”

Within the 2,194-mile-long corridor, the ATC’s science and stewardship team is vigilant in identifying threats, monitoring declining species, and taking action to keep the “Wild East” corridor strong and functioning for all plants and animals, including more than 1,800 vulnerable species. The work done to protect the imperiled metalmark butterfly will further benefit a wide suite of other native species that rely on the same high-quality habitat.

FINICKY FLYERS

While historically common, the northern metalmark butterfly is now critically imperiled and found in small, isolated pockets throughout its range, extending from western Connecticut south through west-central Pennsylvania, the central Appalachians, and the Ohio River Valley (with isolated pockets in southwest Missouri and eastern Oklahoma).

Connecticut lists the species as officially endangered.

To be a northern metalmark is to live on the edge — literally. Where two habitats meet, they sip nectar from radiant flowers within sun-dappled glades on forest slopes, and only where red cedar grows in calcareous soils formed by limestone. These sunny openings are often no bigger than a double door and are typically near rivers with limestone outcroppings. Generations of northern metalmark must find all their habitat needs at every point in their life cycle within a small range often an acre or less in size.

After a flurry of aerial courtship and mating, a female chooses a host plant to her liking. Once satisfied, she lays a teensy turban-shaped egg on the underside of a low-growing new leaf of a roundleaf ragwort. The host plants form rosette mats of shiny emerald leaves so close to the ground that it’s impossible to avoid stepping on them if off the trail. They grow only on slippery, erodible slopes on the same calcareous soils and often in shade. Their yellow aster-like flowers bloom before metalmark adults take flight. The butterfly life is brief, lasting for two weeks from the end of June to mid-July.

In August, the hairy little caterpillars hatch to feed

ASSURING THE RIGHT WILDFLOWERS ARE
BLOOMING AT THE RIGHT TIME IN THE RIGHT PLACES
IS ONE OF THE RESTORATION CHALLENGES.
WHILE IT'S TEMPTING TO CALL NORTHERN
METALMARKS FINICKY, THEIR BEHAVIORS REFLECT
AN EXQUISITE EVOLUTION.

on ragwort leaves. Their meals are so tiny it's difficult to notice the munching. By fall, they burrow into the soil and sleep until spring. Then, the half-grown caterpillars eat and grow until mid-June, when they form their chrysalises on the soil around ragworts. By month's end, the crowning moment of metamorphosis arrives — voila! The winged adults emerge to fly and find their special nectar plants. Assuring the right wildflowers are blooming at the right time in the right places is one of the restoration challenges. While it's tempting to call northern metalmarks finicky, their behaviors reflect an exquisite evolution. Consider this: The oldest butterfly fossils date to 200 million years ago and over time diversified into the kaleidoscopic array of some 17,500 species in the world with 750 in the U.S. — each with a remarkable life history.

CATCH AND RELEASE

Fresh from a spring project tracking a butterfly called a frosted elfin, Crossway and Wahl soon found they'd met their match. "These butterflies are small, quick, and good at getting out of the net," says Wahl. The art of gentle capture requires certain ways of swinging the translucent net while walking in one direction on a path to prevent scooping up a butterfly twice in a day. One technique is to drop the net on top of a flower or bush as a butterfly rises to escape. But the metalmark flies down and disappears. So, Wahl and Crossway alternated walking and pausing



to scan for butterflies in the air. If not seeing one, they would swish their nets over the flowers to entice them into flight, and then would come the practiced swoop. Caught!

Next came the act of coaxing a butterfly into a jar to be put into a brief sleep for recording details, including noting the sex. A female differs from a male with a slight curvature of her wing and a larger abdomen. To mark an individual took applying dots in a recognizable pattern on wing undersides. Then, the awakening metalmark would grasp Crossway or Wahl's fingertip to be conveyed to a leaf and watched over until fully recovered. Often they'd recatch butterflies the following day, and over the season marked an estimated eighty percent of the population.



From left: A NEWLY CAUGHT BUTTERFLY IS TRANSFERRED FROM NET TO JAR SO IT CAN BE ASSIGNED AND MARKED WITH A UNIQUE IDENTIFICATION NUMBER; CROSSWAY AND WAHL PATIENTLY WAIT AS A BUTTERFLY FALLS ASLEEP BEFORE THEY CAN STUDY AND MARK IT. Photos by Chris Galloway/Horizonline Pictures

FOR ALL WHO HIKE AND PROTECT THE
APPALACHIAN TRAIL, THE REWARDS OF ENDURANCE,
RETURNING, AND GIVING BACK COME IN MANY
FORMS, INCLUDING A DEEPENING RELATIONSHIP
WITH WILDLANDS AND WILDLIFE.

In addition to their quarry, the biologists recorded all butterflies and moths observed or netted, including Delaware skippers, great spangled fritillaries, satyrs, wood nymphs, and once a state-listed rarity called a juniper hairstreak. While monarchs were not on their list, they believe the site could attract them by planting more milkweed species. Crossway also photographed a sampling of stunning insect diversity integral to the metalmark's world. Each species plays a pivotal part in the ecosystem, from American carrion beetles feeding on decaying plants and recycling nutrients to wide-footed treehoppers. Blending in like thorns, the treehoppers extract sap from goldenrod and aster without harm to the pollinator plant. Ants milk them for their honeydew and guard them from predators, although many treehoppers become tasty meals for songbirds.

POLLINATORS AND POWERLINES

Biodiversity matters, and sometimes species-rich habitats come in surprising forms. Not all lands are pristine and, when damaged, the challenge is to make the best use of them for conservation. For powerlines, that translates to restoring native wildflowers and shrubs and not spraying herbicides or ripping out vegetation to be replaced with rocks. As awareness grows of the importance of powerline cuts for the future of pollinators, more utility companies are changing their practices and joining partnerships like saving the vulnerable metalmark butterflies in Connecticut.

A powerline cut composes one of the habitats for a certain flock (called a flutter) of the metalmarks Crossway and Wahl followed. However, the butterflies led them to only one edge near the river as a favored locale for preferred wildflowers, shrubs, and nearby host plants. Regular communication with the utility company is critical to avoid inadvertent damage from clearing trees and brush to keep the strip open below the electrical lines. "Minor shifts in policies can make a big difference," the ATC's Orlousky says. "When you commit to the long vision, there can be positive change."

REWARDS OF RECIPROCITY

For all who hike and protect the Appalachian Trail, the rewards of endurance, returning, and giving back come in many forms, including a deepening relationship with wildlands and wildlife. Add in the story of this quest to save the northern metalmark butterfly, and I'm hoping more than a few hearts are fluttering with pride to be part of the A.T. legacy. Tallamy has a message for A.T. hikers as well. Take the love for the Trail back home and add your voice to all who are calling for saving biodiversity. Take personal actions wherever possible, like gardening for wildlife with native plants. "Even if you live in an apartment in a city or don't own any property, you can help the A.T.," he says. "The only way we are going to make conservation a grassroots effort is to convince everybody."



Above: A SUMMER AZURE (*CELASTRINA NEGLECTA*) RESTS ON AN OAK LEAF IN METALMARK HABITAT. THE TWO SPECIES DEPEND ON MANY OF THE SAME NATIVE FLOWERS FOR THEIR SURVIVAL; Below: PROTECTED WATERWAYS AND NATIVE FLORA ARE A VITAL PART OF A HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM THAT SPANS THE A.T. CORRIDOR. *Photos by Fern Crossway*



An aerial photograph of a small town nestled in a valley. The town is surrounded by dense, green forested mountains. The town itself features a mix of residential houses and commercial buildings, with a central area that appears to be a downtown or business district. A river or stream flows through the town, and there are several parking lots and roads visible. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, highlighting the town's location in a natural setting.

A NEW MODEL FOR VISITOR CENTERS

A PURPOSE-BUILT FACILITY IN
DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA, DEMONSTRATES
THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH
A.T. COMMUNITIES

HOW FAR IS THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL from here and how long is it? How long does it take people to hike the A.T. and when do you see the most thru-hikers? What is your recommendation for the best day hikes and sightseeing in the area? Where is a good place to eat in town?

These are just a few of the most common questions asked by people who come through the doors of the newest Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) visitor center — located in the heart of Damascus, Virginia. Visitors hail from as close by as across the nearby Tennessee state line and from as far away as Alaska, Brazil, Germany, and Sweden. In total, more than 1,700 people visited the center in its first six weeks after opening on August 27, 2022.

Upon entering the 2,100-square-foot facility with its soaring floor-to-ceiling windows, visitors not only get their questions answered by knowledgeable ATC staff members and volunteers — they also have an opportunity to explore exhibits about the history of Damascus and the three national trails that converge there: the A.T., the Virginia Creeper Recreational Trail, and the Overmountain Victory Historic Trail.

The Damascus Trail Center serves as the quintessential starting point for a variety of excursions in the region. The spectrum of opportunities available from the centrally-located center also served as the conceptual starting point for a multi-year design process that engaged a multitude of regional partners. The success of those efforts is apparent in the range of questions that visitors ask. At the center, visitors can pick up information about recreation and volunteer opportunities in the region and a map or two before heading out to the outfitters, restaurants, and shops farther down Main Street.

REVITALIZATION PLANS

Damascus has not been immune from the challenges facing other small towns in the Southern Appalachians, which include declining populations and higher unemployment rates than national averages. In years past, the impact of the waning timber and coal-based economies was particularly noticeable in the town's business district, where storefronts sat empty and some buildings fell into disrepair. But Damascus also had some distinct advantages, not the least of which are the natural assets surrounding it — the mountains, valleys, and rivers — and the recreational opportunities they provide for hikers,

cyclists, kayakers, and fly-fishermen, among others.

“We saw an opportunity to connect our natural resources with the cash registers at the businesses in town,” says Idalina Walker, director of outreach and partnership at the Friends of Southwest Virginia (SWVA). In 2016, SWVA worked with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) to submit a proposal for POWER Initiative funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission. This initiative, whose acronym stands for Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization, provides grants to Appalachian communities seeking to create more vibrant, diverse, and sustainable economies.

The POWER proposal included a master plan for revitalizing downtown Damascus — of which a purpose-built trail center was the centerpiece. “We wanted to capitalize on our growing reputation for being outdoor recreation-oriented and the friendliest town along the Appalachian Trail,” said Gavin Blevins, who is currently the Damascus town manager and the planning director for the MRPDC. “We sought to create new assets that built on what we know to be innately Damascus.”

The master plan also included a waterfront development project to build a riverwalk and green space adjacent to Laurel Creek, which runs through town, as well as enhancements to wayfinding and connection points with the various trails. The Trail Center provided a much-needed anchor for downtown. “It creates a campus feel and a place for the community to congregate in town, rather than being dispersed across the county,” says Blevins.

A conference room doubling as a classroom off the main exhibition hall in the Trail Center provides a welcoming space for meetings, educational programs, and other community gatherings. A garage on the property is being converted into a workshop where the ATC's storied Konnarock Trail Crew and the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club store tools and supplies for trail maintenance projects as well as conduct training sessions for volunteers.

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Recognizing the importance of the A.T. in driving visitation to Damascus, the town's leadership approached the ATC in 2017 to partner on the design of the new Visitor Center. They also asked the Conservancy to operate the center once it opened to the public. “The A.T. builds community in an important way. It brings people to Damascus who are



MORE THAN 1,700 PEOPLE VISITED THE CENTER IN ITS FIRST SIX WEEKS AFTER OPENING.



Previous Page: DAMASCUS IS A PLACE OF STUNNING NATURAL BEAUTY, NESTLED IN THE HILLS AND PEAKS OF THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS. *Photo by Tyler Irving / We Ran There Photo & Video*; From top: THE A.T. IS ONE OF THREE NATIONALLY KNOWN TRAILS THAT INTERSECT WITHIN THE TOWN'S BORDERS; THE DAMASCUS VISITOR CENTER IS LOCATED IN THE HEART OF DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA. *Photos by Kristi McFarland*



Clockwise from top: DAMASCUS WELCOMES SOME 20,000 VISITORS ANNUALLY FOR ITS TRAIL DAYS FESTIVAL; THE 2,100-SQUARE-FOOT FACILITY WITH ITS SOARING FLOOR-TO-CEILING WINDOWS GIVES VISITORS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE EXHIBITS ABOUT THE HISTORY OF DAMASCUS AND THE THREE NATIONAL TRAILS THAT CONVERGE THERE. *Photo by Jesse Kokotek*; A CARVED WOODEN MAP OF THE MOUNT ROGERS HIGH COUNTRY MOUNTED ON A PLAQUE RECOGNIZES THE GENEROUS DONORS WHO MADE THE DAMASCUS TRAIL CENTER POSSIBLE. *Photo by Jesse Kokotek*

“THE VISITOR CENTER SUPPORTS OUR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS BY PROVIDING A FACILITY FOR TRAINING AND PARTNERSHIP EVENTS . . . AND IT GIVES US AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH VISITORS TO THE A.T., TO TELL THEM WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO, AND OUR HISTORY THAT PREDATES THE TRAIL ITSELF.”

committed to exploring and preserving our natural assets, and it connects Damascus to a bigger region and a broader network of people along the entire Trail,” says Walker.

The ATC was no stranger to Damascus, given the popularity of the town’s annual Trail Days festival. For more than thirty years, Damascus has welcomed some 20,000 hikers and outdoor enthusiasts annually, including current and former thru-hikers, for a weekend of Trail-related camaraderie, education, and celebration. Damascus has also been a designated A.T. Community™ since 2011. Before signing onto the partnership, the ATC Board of Directors completed an economic analysis to clarify the financial impact of operating the center and then helped draft the terms of a lease. Groundbreaking took place in winter 2020, and the center officially opened to the public in August 2022.

“The Visitor Center supports our volunteer engagement efforts by providing a facility for training and partnership events,” notes Andrew Downs, ATC’s senior regional director – South. “It’s also an important communications vehicle for the Conservancy, because it gives us an opportunity to speak directly with visitors to the A.T., to tell them who we are, what we do, and our history that predates the Trail itself.”

ATC staff were responsible for designing the exhibition space, which includes a four- by ten-foot topographical relief map of the Mount Rogers High Country, marked with roadways, parking areas, trails, shelters, and campgrounds. Wall-mounted informational panels, photographs, and historic timelines surround the relief map. An important goal in selecting what to display was conveying that

outdoor spaces are welcoming to visitors of all ability levels and degrees of experience.

To underscore the “Trail is for all” message, visitors are encouraged to share their experiences in the outdoors by posting hand-written notes on a storyboard named for a lead donor to the center, Larry “Dutch Plodder” Mulder (see “Spotlight,” page 16).

A BLUEPRINT FOR OTHERS

The A.T. runs through some 88 counties and 164 townships and municipalities as it winds its way up the spine of the East Coast. Each of those communities is unique and has its own set of assets and needs. Yet, the Damascus Visitor Center offers some lessons that could prove useful to all of them.

“The planning process that we followed is one many other communities could adopt,” notes Blevins. Walker adds, “The programmatic aspect is the replicable piece. A beautiful building is a great step, but without programming and community involvement, it would be left out in the water.”

As the ATC approaches its 100th anniversary in 2025, its leadership is thinking strategically about the role of visitor centers up and down the Trail, including its headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Programming needs, partnership opportunities, hiker engagement, and community involvement will all be critical components of the solution envisioned for the next century — a vision that connects everyone to the A.T.

For more information and to take a visual tour of the area and Trail Center visit appalachiantrail.org/dtc

A group of hikers is walking along a dirt trail in a lush, green forest. The hikers are dressed in various outdoor gear, including backpacks, hats, and trekking poles. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the hikers as they move through the dense canopy of trees. The lighting is soft and natural, filtering through the leaves. The overall mood is peaceful and adventurous.

A SHARED EXPERIENCE

BY JENNIFER KOONS

“WE CAN’T ALL BE GREAT EXPLORERS... NOR GREAT
NATURALISTS... BUT ANYONE WHO PRIZES THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS
OF NATURE IN ACTION, WHETHER ROBINS AT THE WINDOW OR
MUSKRAT IN THE STREAM, OR BOG BORN OF AGES, SUCH A ONE IS,
WITHIN HIS MEASURE, AN EXPLORER AND NATURALIST.”

~ BENTON MACKAYE, *Expedition Nine: A Return to a Region*, 1969

AMONG THE POSSIBILITIES

that Benton MacKaye imagined for his “project in regional planning” was satisfying the recreational needs of the general public — those he referred to as “the industrial workers, the farmers and the housewives.” What they had in common was living in the densely populated eastern half of the United States, not far from the Appalachian Mountains. It was this group — not the experienced outdoorsman or the “great” naturalist or explorer — for whom MacKaye wanted to provide opportunities for “a little fun” and “to catch a breath.”

MacKaye did not envision a trail serving the desires of a privileged few, but rather the needs of the average person. From its inception, therefore, the Appalachian Trail was intended to be a welcoming place for all — regardless of ability, experience, or various other factors.

Fulfilling this vision of inclusiveness in the early decades of the 21st century remains a challenge. And yet, there are countless stories of people who experience on the Trail something akin to what MacKaye intended: a sense of peace, rejuvenation, and communion with nature and one another. One such story took place last summer in northwest Georgia.

Previous page: ON A LATE JUNE MORNING, NEAR THE VISITOR CENTER OF AMICALOLA FALLS STATE PARK, TWENTY WOMEN GATHERED TO EMBARK ON A HIKE THAT WOULD COME TO MEAN SOMETHING UNIQUE TO EACH. *Photo by Bonnie Bandurski*;
This page: SUNRISE OVER THE NORTHERN GEORGIA APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS FROM THE LEN FOOTE HIKE INN. *Photo by Marianne Skeen*



From top: OLIVIA MCKELLAR OF RWN TALKS TO THE GROUP IN AN ORIENTATION BEFORE STARTING THE HIKE; THE ENTRANCE TO THE A.T. APPROACH TRAIL AND HIKE INN. *Photos by Bonnie Bandurski*



DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

New and experienced hikers, athletes and first-time trekkers, the women who gathered at Amicalola had a range of ability and familiarity with outdoor adventure. They represented various nationalities, having been born in the United States, Nigeria, Iran, India, Eritrea, and elsewhere. With respect to hiking the A.T., each of them brought a unique perspective. For Nahid, traversing the foothills of northern Georgia evoked some of her fondest memories of hiking throughout the Alborz mountain range back in Tehran. This month’s journey to the Len Foote Hike Inn presented less of a physical obstacle to overcome than many of the peaks she had reached in Iran and beyond — and yet the wonder was familiar and welcome.

She particularly relished the opportunity the hike provided to get rare one-on-one time with her daughter, Leila — something they haven’t had since before her grandchildren arrived. It’s a precious experience for Nahid in part because the two will share in the challenge the hike represented and then get to celebrate their victory. “There are always moments where it feels hard. I have been on hikes before where suddenly we reach an altitude and I’m not able to breathe. Still, I think: ‘I want to make it to the top,’” Nahid says. The distance and difficulty matter far less than the high that comes from meeting the moment.

For Mobina, nothing about snaking through a series of switchbacks in the wilderness felt intuitive, and yet she found herself invigorated by the adrenaline high. For Selina, the excursion represented another welcome first. After embarking on an inaugural cross-country road trip and a subsequent camping excursion, she was eager to tackle her first two-day climb.

A COMMUNAL HIGH POINT

There are many ways in which the shared movement and connection with nature — and one another — nurtures an experience removed, even temporarily, from outside stressors. Beneath tunnels of blooming mountain laurel, buffeted overhead by oaks, hickories, and pines, a shared experience feels more singular and even sacred.

The Hike Inn greeted the group at the end of the trail. The sustainably designed ecotourism facility

EVERYONE BELONGS HERE

On a late June morning near the visitor center of Amicalola Falls State Park, twenty women gathered to embark on an adventure that would come to mean something unique to each. They were brought together by the Refugee Women’s Network (RWN), a nonprofit in Decatur, Georgia, that serves refugees and families from outside the U.S. who have resettled in the state — whether three months ago or thirty years ago. In 2021, RWN started an extensive hiking program with various partner organizations. This past summer, they collaborated with the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) to co-coordinate, support, and lead a hike on a blue-blazed trail near the A.T.’s southern terminus.

GATC’s director of community outreach, Lynne Beeson, established the partnership with RWN in 2021 and worked with them to schedule the June 2022 hike. The destination, the Len Foote Inn, was also a result of the club’s efforts. It is a frequent GATC partner for community outreach and education programs year-round. “We were fortunate to be able to engage with them later that year and set up something in 2022,” says Beeson. “We are excited to continue this partnership going forward.”

“Most other outreach hikes to the Hike Inn that I’ve led are with youth groups,” says GATC’s Marianne Skeen, former ATC vice chair who helped lead the RWN hike with her fellow club member Shelley Rose. “The kids are fun, but this trip provided an opportunity for fascinating conversations with strong women from around the world with a wide range of life experiences. It was moving to see how much being in the beautiful woods of north Georgia meant to them.”

THERE ARE MANY WAYS IN WHICH THE
SHARED MOVEMENT AND CONNECTION WITH
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FROM OUTSIDE STRESSORS.

was in many ways the leading draw for those who set out on this particular loop. It provided a welcome setting to swap stories, share photos, play games, and even exchange language lessons.

“It was such a meaningful experience,” says co-hike leader Shelley Rose. “The women were willing and eager to challenge themselves and they showed a lot of curiosity about the native plants and all the sustainability features of the Hike Inn (solar panels, composting toilets, red worm composting). A lot of laughter all along the trail continued into evening.”

It was a welcome reminder for Selina that, in the midst of a western hiking experience, she was surrounded by women who had enjoyed the pastime before they came to the United States and simply continued hiking with their own families and communities here. That had not been Selina’s experience in her Eritrean community. “I love learning about different cultures and history and picking up a few words in Farsi or realizing the derivative of Arabic that I speak allowed some of the women to understand bits and pieces of what I said was so cool,” she says.

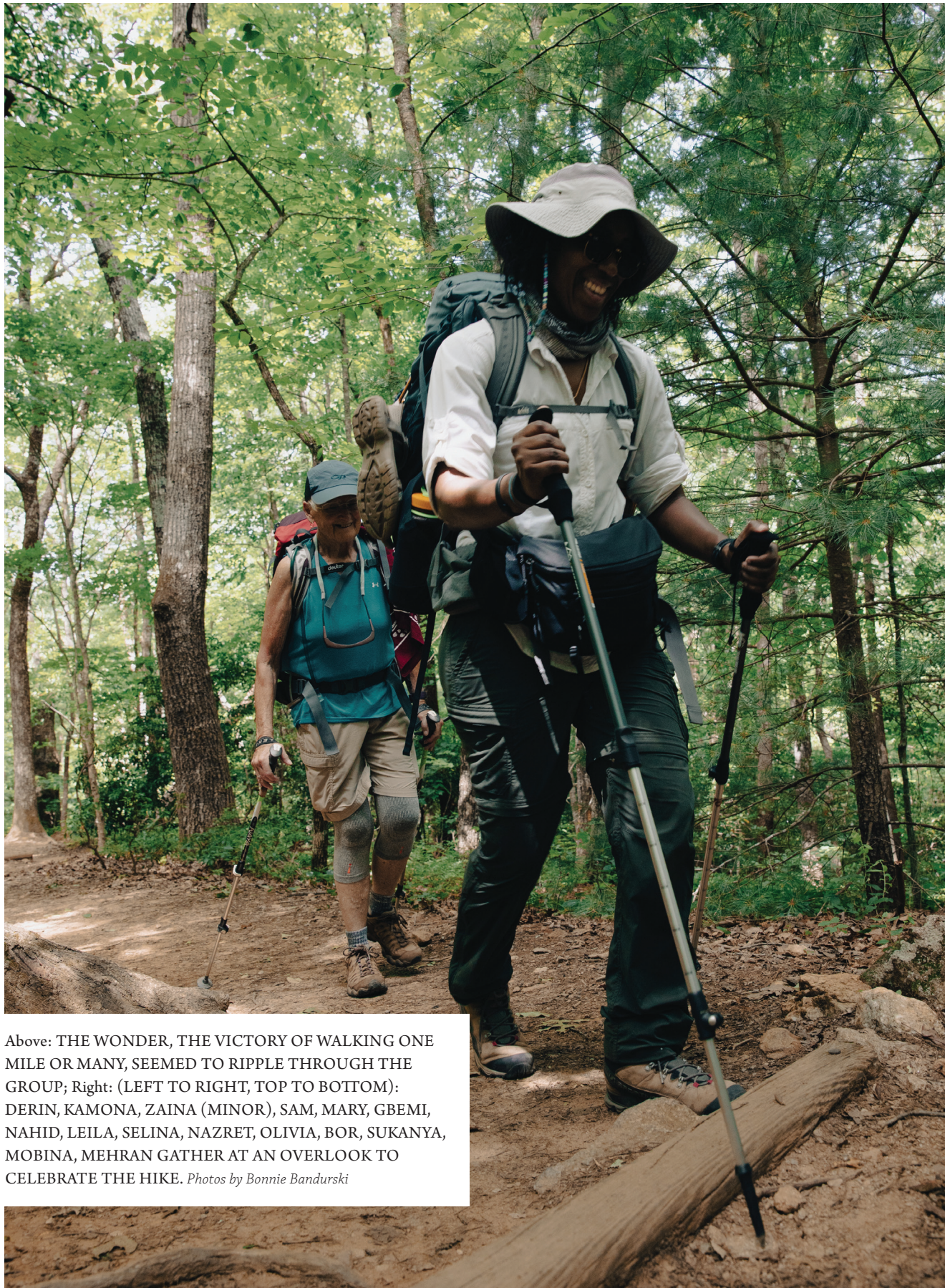
CLOSING THE LOOP

In the morning, the women gathered to close the loop. Two groups formed of their own volition — a pack



THE WOMEN HAD A RANGE OF ABILITY AND FAMILIARITY WITH OUTDOOR ADVENTURE. THEY REPRESENTED VARIOUS NATIONALITIES, HAVING BEEN BORN IN THE UNITED STATES, NIGERIA, IRAN, INDIA, ERITREA, AND ELSEWHERE. WITH RESPECT TO HIKING THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL, EACH OF THEM BROUGHT A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE.

Photos by Bonnie Bandurski



Above: THE WONDER, THE VICTORY OF WALKING ONE MILE OR MANY, SEEMED TO RIPPLE THROUGH THE GROUP; Right: (LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM): DERIN, KAMONA, ZAINA (MINOR), SAM, MARY, GBEMI, NAHID, LEILA, SELINA, NAZRET, OLIVIA, BOR, SUKANYA, MOBINA, MEHRAN GATHER AT AN OVERLOOK TO CELEBRATE THE HIKE. *Photos by Bonnie Bandurski*



REFRESHED. INSPIRED. ALIVE. PEACE. THEY ARE THE SAME WORDS THAT GENERATIONS OF HIKERS HAVE USED TO DESCRIBE WHY THEY ARE DRAWN AGAIN AND AGAIN TO TIME ON THE TRAIL.

itching for a brisk pace back to Amicalola and another wishing for a leisurely finish. The first group has time for a detour to the cascading waterfall at the base camp. The second stopped along the way as a particular overlook or wildflower caught someone's eye. The wonder, the victory that Nahid had spoken of whether walking one mile or many, seemed to ripple through the group as they gathered in a closing circle.

Refreshed. Inspired. New beginning. Alive. Peace. Prompted by their guides, each woman shared a word or several that summed up what they would take from the experience. They are the same words that generations of hikers have used to describe why they are drawn again and again to time on the Trail. They are the same feelings that all of us experience, regardless of our level of ability, our familiarity with the A.T., the country we were born in, or the language we speak. The Trail truly does unite us all.

The Georgia A.T. Club is one of thirty Trail maintaining clubs that are responsible for most of the day-to-day work of keeping the footpath open. In addition to Trail maintenance, club volunteers build and repair shelters and other structures, monitor and protect the Trail corridor, monitor and manage rare plants and invasive species, develop management plans for their sections, and much more.

For more information visit:
appalachiantrail.org/clubs

For more information about the Refugee Women's Network visit:
refugeewomensnetworkinc.org

NATURALLY INSPIRED

THE GREAT OUTDOORS EXPERIENCE IS FOR EVERYONE

■ BY AUDREY PETERMAN

WHAT INSPIRED HUMAN RIGHTS AND environmental justice advocate Audri Scott-Williams to walk across every continent except Antarctica to promote peace?

The Appalachian Trail.

What excited health, wellness, and aging coach Carolyn Hartfield so much that after her first-ever hike at fifty-six years old, she formed a hiking group and has led thousands of people on hikes across the U.S. and multiple other countries?

The Appalachian Trail.

What empowered long-distance hiker and outdoor diversity champion Daniel “the Blackalachian” White to decide to live off the grid and devote his life to educating the public about how to live more sustainably?

The Appalachian Trail.

What made local, state, and national park advocates/supporters Tanya and Larry Pender decide to form “Pathways to Parks” and attract Black and Brown Americans to the A.T. and other trails?

The Appalachian Trail. This was also because they were inspired by the vision and mission my

husband, Frank and I shared at a 2018 Earth Day event at the University of North Carolina, Asheville, co-sponsored by Everybody’s Environment, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. That mission: to demystify the environmental sector through sharing our life experience, and inspiring others to live joyfully while making a positive difference in our world.

As I’m deeply involved in the movement to engage more Americans of color with the enjoyment and protection of the great outdoors, it was natural for me to be connected with these varied adventures. I’ve written before about the wondrous experience of setting foot on the A.T. for the first time outside Atlanta, as part of the group Keeping It Wild (KIW). As southeastern regional director of the Wilderness Society (of which forester Benton MacKaye was a founding member), my husband Frank had helped initiate KIW, reasoning that connecting urban-based people to the beauty of the forests and the source of their water supply would be a sure way to inspire them to care.



Audrey near the A.T. at Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee/North Carolina

THESE TRANSFORMATIVE
EXPERIENCES ON THE A.T.
REINFORCE MY BELIEF IN THE
METAPHYSICAL TEACHINGS
THAT WE ARE “SPIRIT HAVING A
HUMAN EXPERIENCE,” WITH THE
GOAL OF FEELING LIKE ONE WITH
SPIRIT. THE A.T. FACILITATES THAT
TRANSCENDENT FEELING OF
“ONENESS” WITH ALL CREATION. I
KNOW THIS BECAUSE I’VE FELT IT
MYSELF MANY TIMES.

A CATALYST FOR PEACE

When Audri Scott-Williams shared her A.T. experience with me and Frank to publish in our environmental/travel newsletter *Pickup & GO!*, it was already six years since she and the Trail of Dreams Team had hiked the Trail. Leaving from Fayetteville, Pennsylvania, the party of six — including one wheelchair bound person — walked for sixty-four days to Dillard, Georgia. They conceptualized the hike as a pilgrimage in honor of enslaved forbearers who pursued freedom via the Underground Railroad.

They reasoned that they had little to fear, and when the going got tough, they would stay motivated by contemplating the trials the ancestors had met and overcome. So it was a deep shock, when Audri found

herself handcuffed and detained in the dark of night by a local police officer who had entered their camp earlier shining bright lights and inquiring what they were doing on the Trail. Yet, that experience was countered by the “Trail angels” they met soon after, who convinced them that the ancestors were looking out for them. It strengthened their resolve and led them to undertake a “Walk for Peace” that took them across six continents.

NEW BEGINNINGS

On her birthday this September, my friend Carolyn Hartfield in Atlanta reminded me that it was exactly eighteen years ago, at the age of fifty-six that she decided to join a hike on the A.T. It was part of her plan to celebrate every birthday with a new experience. The hike ended up being the single most transformative thing she had ever done — hiking the Blood Mountain Trail made her want to be out in nature forever. Today, she wants to share that experience with other people from urban areas who, like her, may have never set foot on a trail before. Since then, Hartfield’s Hikers has led thousands of people on hikes, with a monthly hike every first Saturday rain or shine.

Similarly, the experiences that Daniel White, Trail name “the Blackalachian,” had thru-hiking the A.T. led a young man who had never previously thought about hiking until then, to become an international backpacker. He completed the Scottish Outdoors Challenge, hiking coast to coast across Scotland. He then hiked the Camino del Norte Trail in Spain, completing the route trod by pilgrims since the Ninth Century. Today the Blackalachian is contentedly homesteading in Maine, in a house and amenities he built with his own hands, while sustaining himself with food he grows in his own backyard.

When the group Everybody’s Environment, along with the ATC, invited me and Frank to speak at an Earth Day event in 2018, I could see the excitement shining in Tanya Marie’s face as she listened carefully to what we had to say. A few months later, she and her fiancé (now husband) Larry Pender formed “Pathways to Parks,” providing opportunities for ethnically diverse Americans to explore where they had never gone before: to resource-rich wonderlands including the A.T. Today, Tanya serves on the boards of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation; Conserving Carolina and Mountain True, while Larry serves on the board of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy.



Audrey basks in the atmosphere at the Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona; Audrey with her husband, Frank at Rocky Mountain National Park in Aspen, Colorado

A SOURCE OF HEALING

When author Cindy Ross sent me a draft of her 2021 book *Walking Toward Peace: Veterans Healing on America’s Trails*, I learned the stories of wounded warriors who hiked the A.T. and found their lives transformed. The book is a poignant example of the nurturing capabilities of the A.T. The experiences that the former servicemen and women shared are a testament to the healing power of nature. Oh, if only Benton MacKaye, who conceptualized the A.T. in 1921 and helped create it as “a moral equivalent to war,” could know what he has wrought.

These transformative experiences on the A.T. reinforce my belief in the metaphysical teachings that

we are “spirit having a human experience” with the goal of feeling like one with spirit. The A.T. facilitates that transcendent feeling of “oneness” with all creation. I know this because I’ve felt it myself many times.

My greatest chagrin comes from knowing that there are millions of people, particularly Americans of color, who know nothing of these opportunities or may fear that they would not be welcome. I’m grateful that even today there are people striving, much like Benton MacKaye did, to blaze new trails and protect new acreage for posterity. And I’m grateful for organizations like the Appalachian Trail Conservancy that are working to conserve and expand the benefits of our great outdoors to everyone.

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SERVICE IN ALL ITS FORMS

~ BY JOHN KNAPP

“THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE” IS A sentiment that I hear — and say — often. Lately, I have been thinking a lot about service. This issue of *A.T. Journeys* comes to you around Veterans Day, a holiday that is especially meaningful to me. I am writing this, however, in mid-September when two events are dominating the news. This first is the anniversary of 9/11, which annually causes me to reflect on the service and sacrifice of so many people on that awful day. The second is the death of Queen Elizabeth II. She was no doubt a woman of privilege, but one who devoted her whole life to serving the British people. Each of these converging events remind me that there are many ways to serve.

The Appalachian Trail has a long history of being a place of solace, refuge, and healing for veterans. Earl Shaffer leads a long list of veterans who have used the Appalachian Trail to “walk off the war.” While some may proudly show their colors as they hike, there are many others out there just quietly using the Trail. As is so often the case, you may never even know they are veterans. I think there may be no higher purpose for these public lands than to be a resource for those who have served us all.

The A.T. couldn’t exist for veterans — or even exist at all — without a wide range of individuals performing their own public service. The Trail would disappear without thousands of volunteers maintaining the footpath, water crossings, shelters, and signage. But Trail maintenance isn’t the only way to serve. The A.T. is a complex system that needs many hands to make it work. It requires leadership and coordination from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), Trail clubs, and government partners. Many of the heroes of the A.T. are unsung — like the members, donors, shuttle drivers, Trail angels, hostel owners, and other good Samaritans who hikers rely on every day.



John on the A.T. in Shenandoah National Park

The point I want to leave you with is that you don’t have to be a queen, first responder, veteran, or member of the ATC Board of Directors to be of essential service on the A.T. or anywhere else. Service comes in many forms, and I think that quiet, selfless service is in many ways the most admirable. So, on this Veterans Day, let me say to all of you out there quietly contributing to and serving the Appalachian Trail — Thank you for your service!

—
John Knapp is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and member of the ATC Board of Directors.
—



PHOTO BY CHRIS GALLAWAY/HORIZONLINE PICTURES

Every year, 6,000 volunteers dedicate more than 200,000 hours of sweat and hard work to preserve one of the greatest public lands projects in American history.

Our volunteers are the glue that holds the Appalachian Trail together. But volunteerism is not cost free, and every year brings new challenges to overcome. Our volunteers depend on your donations for: gear and equipment, training and skills development, and volunteer management and recruitment.



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Whitewater Falls along the A.T. corridor – Nantahala National Forest, North Carolina

Photo by Jerry Greer