



# THE BLAZE

Newsletter of the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club | Summer 2020 | July, August, September



On March 10, just before COVID-19 curtailed trail work, students from the University of TN at Chattanooga carried lumber and installed a new trail bridge across a gully and small waterfall and stream between Straight Branch and Taylor Valley. Thanks to MRATC life member, Harold Croxton, for his generous donation of funds for the bridge!

The MOUNT ROGERS APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB, a member of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy was organized February 29, 1960. The club has maintenance responsibilities for 59.4 miles of the APPALACHIAN TRAIL in the Jefferson National Forest, Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Grayson Highlands State Park and additional trails in the area.

## **THE AT AND CORONAVIRUS**

In March, the ATC recalled from the Trail the thru-hikers and section hikers who could be reached because of their registration with the ATC, in an effort to stop the coronavirus from spreading among hikers and in trail communities. Trail maintenance clubs suspended work on the trail, since much of this involves working in groups. Trail club members, day hikers and backpackers were urged not to hike on the AT, particularly in groups. Many popular trailhead parking facilities were closed by the Forest Service or other land managing agency.

As of the end of May, many areas are reopening and hikers are getting back out on the Trail, with attention to social distancing, but with a sense of relief in enjoying the outdoors once again. Shelters and privies are still either closed or their use discouraged. AT maintenance clubs are working with their land managing agencies on job hazard analysis and guidance to gradually resume trail work.

## **MRATC RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES REPORT**

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, there have been no official club group hikes or potlucks during Spring 2020. Many club members continue to hike, either alone or with a few people and keeping social distancing in mind. Mostly, we have not been hiking on the AT due to ATC recommendations. Especially risky is carpooling to hikes, so mostly, club members have been driving solo or with family/trusted friends only and meeting to hike. So, many of us have explored areas we haven't spent as much time in in the past. Some incredibly beautiful Spring flowers have been seen, and some pictures are in this Blaze. Hopefully, by the time of the fall Blaze, some hiking and group events will resume, but perhaps in a new fashion, with limits on numbers hiking together and carpooling and some social distancing continuing.

## **TRAILS REPORT**

Due to Covid-19 concerns and closures there was no trail work in either April or May but there is hope going forward.

Club representatives joined those from ATC, PATH and the Forest Service in a discussion initiated by MRNRA for the purpose of establishing coronavirus safety guidelines and a new Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) document. Once approved this will allow monitors and maintainers to begin doing some work individually or in very small groups if they are comfortable doing so. We also hope to concurrently roll out a check in/check out procedure for monitors.

More specific information and a copy of the MRNRA JHA and coronavirus safety guidelines will be sent out to club members as plans progress.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES REPORT**

The Natural Resources Committee has nothing much to report, due to all volunteer activities being suspended by the Forest Service and the ATC due to Covid-19. Our activities normally include monitoring rare plants and phenology, controlling invasives, and managing open areas, among others. The good news is that we may be able to resume activities after June 9, and many of our mountain plants are late bloomers. Hopefully, there will be plenty of time for a full season of activities. If you have interest in helping please email [mtrogersatc@gmail.com](mailto:mtrogersatc@gmail.com)



## MRATC MEMBERSHIP REPORT

We now have 180 club members, counting Public Relations members. Members who have not paid their 2020 dues were recently purged from the list after 3 reminders. This isn't a time when we are actively recruiting new members, as there have been no outreach activities during the Covid-19 pandemic. We hope this will change in the near future, and that the club membership will once again be active with trail work, recreational, and rare plant/wildflower/phenology activities.

Students from University of TN at  
Chattanooga working on the new bridge  
shown on Page 1



## MRATC ACTIVITY SCHEDULE – SUMMER 2020

### July – August – September

**MRATC Trail work and Recreational Hikes:** Group hikes, including trail work, for Summer 2020 will not be scheduled at this time due to uncertainties about Covid – 19, and when hiking in groups and carpooling will be considered safe. As Summer arrives, if the pandemic seems to be waning, we may send out hikes in the weekly email to club members and friends and post them on our website: [www.mratc.org/CurrentWeek'sInformation](http://www.mratc.org/CurrentWeek'sInformation).

#### July

8 Wednesday. MRATC club meeting 7 p.m. either online or at the Glade Spring library. All Welcome.

#### August

14 – 16 ? Summer Naturalist Rally. [www.blueridgediscoverycenter.org/mrnrr](http://www.blueridgediscoverycenter.org/mrnrr).

#### September

1 Deadline for items for Fall Newsletter.

26 Saturday. ? Public Lands Day and/or Possible date for ATC Family Hike Day.

### ATC SURVEY

The ATC is launching a survey seeking input from A.T. volunteers.

The goal is to inform priorities and focus to better serve clubs:

- The form and content of trainings available to A.T volunteers, at all levels
- The value of A.T. Saw Safety Training, including frequency of the application of those skills, and the capacity of skills to meet the needs of the Trail.
- Any gaps between perceived confidence in skills and availability of training.
- As a thank you, each volunteer is entered in a raffle to win one of several daypacks, perfect for a day on the Trail.
- Copy/paste this link to take the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AllVolsAT>



Yellow Ladyslippers - Found Near  
Grayson Highlands State Park



Little Brown Jugs



Awash in fringed phacelia



Big Jack



Lady Slippers



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

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MRATC information is now available via Twitter ([www.twitter.com/@Mt\\_rogersATC](https://www.twitter.com/@Mt_rogersATC)) and Instagram: ([www.instagram.com/mountrogersATCclub](https://www.instagram.com/mountrogersATCclub)). Look for us under Mt. Rogers Appalachian Trail Club