



THE BLAZE

Newsletter of the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club | Spring 2021 | April, May, June

Landscaping for the Damascus Trail Center will come in the spring. There will be a "soft opening" of the Center this spring, perhaps during Trail Days, putting off a Grand Opening until fall, when COVID concerns have diminished further. Work continues on a relief map and other exhibits.



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.

MRATC RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES REPORT

This has been a quiet time for most MRATC recreational activities due to the ongoing pandemic. We have had no potlucks, and our only club business meeting has been via ZOOM. There has been some online guidance from the ATC regional office. We have had no regular group hikes, as the hike leaders in general have not felt comfortable with groups on the trail and carpooling, especially as numbers of Covid cases have again been increasing. However, one group, the Friday Hikers, were active through the fall, but as of mid-November have also discontinued advertised group hikes. Club members, however, often hike on their own or with a few well known friends. When it seems safe to resume group hikes they will be posted on our website and facebook page, and information will be sent in the Sunday club email.

For information on club hiking, contact mtrogersatc@gmail.com.

TRAILS REPORT

Coming into the 2021 maintenance season we have two pressing items: the Comers Falls bridge, which was condemned in the fall of 2019 but is still standing and in use despite an established reroute and our composting privies, which were not emptied in 2020 due to Covid.

In theory, regulation suggests the privies should not have been used for most of last year but the reality on the ground is quite different. Coming into this hiker season it is very important that they be emptied before we have a real problem on our hands. At present club members are not authorized to empty or even maintain the privies and in any case the list of volunteers willing to work on them if we could is justifiably very, very small.

Fortunately, we have coordinated with Josh Kloehn at ATC to utilize this years' Konnarock crew, albeit just a small paid crew of 4, to work on both these items. They will be in the area for two weeks in March, starting with bridge demolition and then moving on to the privies following a priority list we have provided.

In preparation we will begin to clear the trail between Dickey Gap and the Comers Falls bridge in the hope that the trail may be reopened in the near future as a low/normal water route, since there will not be a bridge for the foreseeable future. The existing reroute from Dickey Gap down toward Hurricane Camp ground will likely remain as the high water route for now.

In the meantime we await word whether the restrictions on our work groups remain in place, i.e. four person maximum, no carpooling, no sharing of tools etc... As new information is available it will be distributed in our weekly e-mails to club members.



Comers Falls Bridge - to be demolished by Konnarock crew

MRATC MEMBERSHIP REPORT

As of Feb. 25, 2021, the Mt. Roger's Appalachian Trail Club has 190 members. This is exactly the same number as one year ago. Of these, over half are life members. Life members are a mixed group, with some being active members, and some past active or never really active members. Active members are being loosely defined as those who do trail work regularly or participate in rare plant or recreational hikes held by the club, or serve on the Board of Directors or as a club Coordinator.

During the past year we have welcomed ten new members (a few of these have belonged to the club in the past):

Jennifer Watson	Drew Gallacher
Peter Lichstein	Robin Cuneo
Anne Lough	Ronnie Rafliff
Anthony Westmoreland	Luis and Ashley Isaza
Jim Parks	Arthur Simonetti

Due to the pandemic, we haven't been at community events soliciting new members. During the previous year we had 26 new members.

Renewals for annual members are due on March 1. If you receive a membership form with your Blaze, it means you need to renew.

2021: 100th ANNIVERSARY OF THE AT

2021 marks the 100th anniversary of Benton McKaye's idea of the AT as a refuge from the turmoil of daily life. His article was entitled: "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning." (Journal of the American Institute of Architects 9 (Oct. 1921): 325-330). It begins:

Something has been going on these past few strenuous years which, in the din of war and general upheaval, has been somewhat lost from the public mind. It is the slow quiet development of the recreational camp. It is something neither urban nor rural. It escapes the hecticness of the one, and the loneliness of the other.

ATC CONFERENCE

The ATC Biennial Conference was postponed for a while. It is now called ATC Vista and will be held in New York state at SUNY-New Paltz on Aug. 6-9, 2021.

IN MEMORIAM:

Haskel L. Morrell, Sr., age 90, of Bristol, Tenn., passed away on January 4, 2021. Haskel was a life member, trail maintainer and past president of the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club and a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran, serving in the Korean War.

ACTIVITY SCHEDULE – SPRING 2021
April-May-June

Trail work will be announced in the weekly email. If not on the email list, contact Trail Supervisor, Doug Levin, at mratcinfo@gmail.com,

During the spring and early summer, few recreational hikes are scheduled at this time due to the ongoing Covid pandemic. If cases continue to decrease, and as we all get immunized, hikes may be added. New hikes will be sent out in the weekly email and along with updates on recreational hikes will be posted under “Current Week’s Information” on the club’s website: www.mratc.org. and also on Facebook (Mt Rogers Appalachian Trail Club).

HIKERS, PLEASE LET THE HIKE LEADER KNOW IF YOU PLAN TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY HIKE by emailing mtrogersatc@gmail.com.

April

14 Wednesday. MRATC Quarterly Meeting via ZOOM at 7:00 PM.

May

7-9 Friday – Sunday: Mt Rogers Naturalist Rally (www.blueridgediscoverycenter.org/mrnr). There may be online or field workshops, depending on Covid restrictions at that time. Check the website for updates.

14-16 Friday – Sunday: Damascus Appalachian Trail Days. This event will be held if Covid guidelines at that time permit. If it is held, the club will have a booth. Check www.http://traildays.us/ for updates.

June

1. Deadline for Spring newsletter.

5 Saturday. National Trails Day. Check the American Hiking Society’s website <https://americanhiking.org/national-trails-day/> to locate events.

7 Monday. Meet at Massie Gap at 9 A.M. for a loop hike of about 6.5 miles, including the Twin Pinnacle and Listening Rock trails, Stampers Branch Trail from the Visitor Center to the Country Store, and returning to Massie Gap via Horse Trail East. Those wishing to come please email mtrogersatc@gmail.com by 6 P.M. the evening before so leader can notify you of any change in plans. Leader: Anne Maio.

21 Monday. Hike from Elk Garden to Whitetop Mtn and Buzzard Rock on the AT South and back, with cool green woods and stunning views. About 6-7 miles. Meet 9:00 A.M. at Elk Garden parking. If planning to come let hike leader, Sharon Trumbley, know by emailing mtrogersatc@gmail.com by 6 P.M. the evening before. Most likely numbers will be limited depending on Covid concerns at the time.

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Despite Covid-19 and the ban on group activities members of the Natural Resources Committee logged many hours individually or in small groups monitoring rare plants last season. We're looking forward to the 2021 season with more plans for independent and small group study. Sharon and Jim will continue monitoring Gray's lily on Whitetop and keep an eye out for leaf spot disease. They also track phenology of red and sugar maple, yellow buckeye, pin cherry, and white snakeroot north of Elk Garden. Anne will continue watching mock orange, beaked dodder and shrubby fivefingers in various locations, and she also monitors the flowering dogwood in the Damascus town park. Felicia is tracking the changes of the great Indian plantain in the parking lot at Elk Garden after the area was accidentally mowed, despite agreements to the contrary. There is a much healthier patch across 600 from Whitetop Road. Marcia has also agreed to help out.

Depending on Health Department recommendations, we also hope to offer group outings on Whitetop and in the Mt. Rogers area. We have previously monitored Blue Ridge St. Johnswort, longstalk holly, American umbrella leaf, Roan Mountain rattlesnake root and our locally plentiful fringed phacelia. First up in late April or early May is small mountain bittercress. I hope you'll join our celebration of mountain spring. We're looking for helpers. If you're interested in mountain flora and would like to join us, email mtrogersatc@gmail.com.

Blue Ridge St. Johnswort



Fringed Phacelia



BR St. Johnswort and Ferns



Fringed Phacelia and Umbrella Leaf



Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club
P.O. Box 789
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MRATC, P.O. Box 789, Damascus, VA 24236 www.mratc.org

General questions: mtrogersatc@gmail.com

Trails Committee: mratcinfo@gmail.com

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