A Publication of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club

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Summer 2024

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The GATC Mission

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club manages, maintains and protects the Appalachian National Scenic Trail in Georgia with volunteers from its membership and the interested public. The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club promotes the appreciation of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and natural outdoor places through education and recreational activities, with an emphasis on conservation ethics and protection of the forests, their natural resources and wilderness areas.

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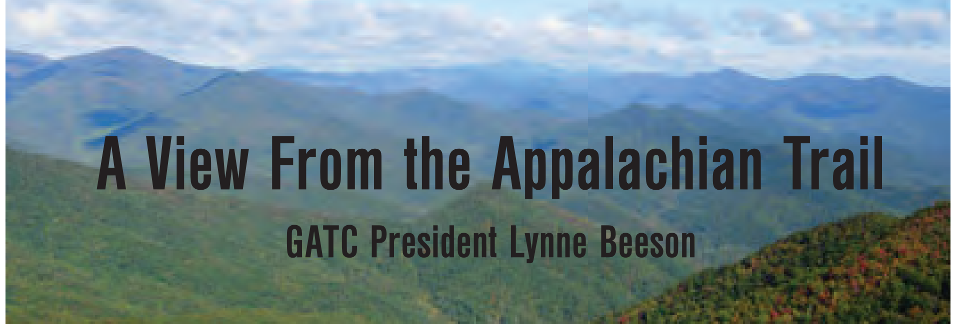


A View From the Appalachian Trail

GATC President Lynne Beeson

I'm ready for fall, with cooler weather and the Crayola crayon colors that blanket our mountain landscapes. However, first there is the remainder of summer, with the always hot days of August as kids head back to school. Not only has it been hot, but there has been a lot of "hot" news in the trail world this summer. First, there is exciting trail protection news for our beloved Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail Centennial Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate recently. The landmark legislation marks the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's upcoming 100th anniversary in 2025 and recognizes that National Trails need strong partnership agreements with the federal government to enable them to forever protect the places we all love. The bill has been the focus of intense and diligent work by the ATC for the past three years.

As stated in the ATC's Trailway News, "The legislation will also bolster land protection, gather data and information on the visitation and economic impact of trails, and help ensure the A.T. and all of our National Trails are maintained and conserved for the next generation."

"For nearly 100 years, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy has been the standard bearer for trail management," said Sandra Marra, President and CEO of the ATC. "The Appalachian Trail Centennial Act recognizes what the ATC has learned over the decades — no single entity can manage a National Trail on its own. Instead, organizations need strong partnership agreements with the federal government that will enable them to forever protect the places we love."

"The ATC thanks Senators Kaine and Tillis and Representatives Lawler and Beyer for their leadership on this legislation," Marra said, "and we are grateful to our agency partners at the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service for their support for trail management and protection."

Franklin Tate, ATC Associate Regional Director, Southeast, provided the following information: "In addition, the ATCA will statutorily establish a class of NGO partners for each National Trail, modeled after the work currently being done by ATC—which has set the standard for partnering with the federal government to help protect the A.T. since its founding—and recognize the ATC as the first Designated Management Partner."

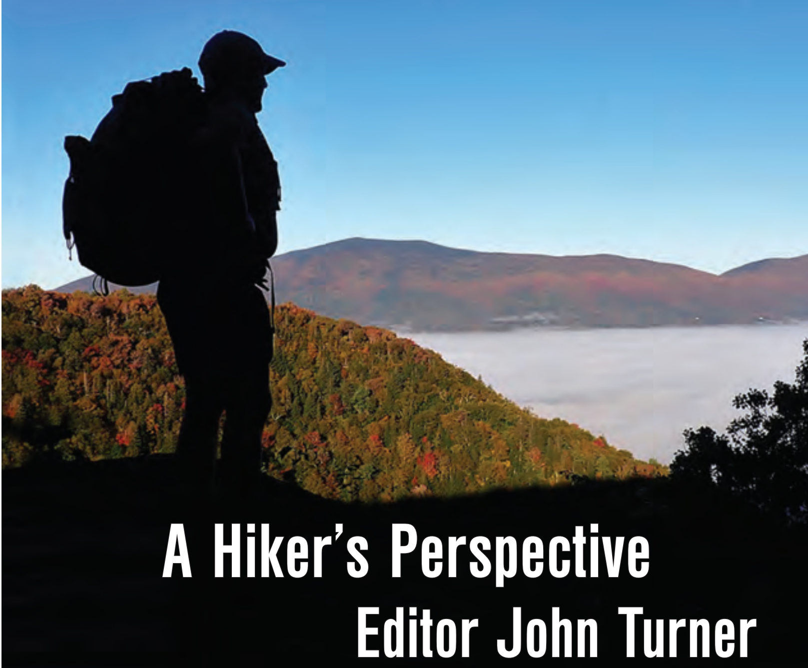
"The legislation will give the ATC and the management partner of each National Trail more flexibility in providing for the public good, implementing our responsibilities, and expanding the potential for philanthropic support for our work," Franklin said. "Once enacted, this legislation will also formalize what we have always known about the A.T., that without our partnerships and collaboration, no part of this world-renowned recreational resource would be successful."

If you're asking yourself, what does that mean for the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, or the other 29 trail maintaining clubs that are the "boots on the ground" for trail maintenance and stewardship - it means no change in our Club's mission and operation but it will strengthen our voices as ambassadors and advocates for the A.T.

The A.T. is not the only newsmaker this summer, as the bipartisan Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study Act of 2024 was introduced in the Senate. This was a key step towards designating the Benton MacKaye Trail, our sister trail in the region, as a National Scenic Trail (NST) within the National Trails System. The Benton MacKaye Trail is a nearly 300-mile-long route that begins at Springer Mountain, Georgia, and spans more than 80 miles in the state and an additional 200 miles in Tennessee and North Carolina. The trail has been protected and maintained by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association volunteer organization since 1980. The legislation would authorize a mandatory study of the trail as a first step towards receiving an NST designation. A companion bill was also introduced in the House. Upon successful completion of the feasibility study, Congress could designate the Benton MacKaye Trail as the 12th National Scenic Trail since the NST program was established in 1968. For hikers, this could mean significant improvements in trail management and recreational opportunities along the BMT, further promoting access to the outdoors for all Americans, connecting trail communities through conservation efforts, and strengthening working relationships among partners.

What's on the horizon for the fall for the GATC?

Lots going on, isn't there? What's on the horizon for the fall for the GATC? There's the upcoming annual Trails Skills Workshop, Sept 14-15, at Lake Winfield Scott Recreation Area (more information can be found on our new website georgia-atclub.com.) Our trail skills workshops, trail maintenance, rock crew trips and more are ongoing. We're in the preliminary planning stage for A.T. Gateways on the first weekend of March, 2025 and the Blairsville Banff Film Festival, March 29, 2025. We're busy! Come join us!



A Hiker's Perspective

Editor John Turner

As a hiker I have worked diligently to not get lost. And I've been pretty successful over the years, especially as I gained experience hiking farther north on the Appalachian Trail. Those white blazes are always reassuring when you see one up ahead painted on a tree trunk or a rock cairn beside the trail. For a long time now footpaths have been my friends.

But there is another way of looking at walking in the woods. What if the whole purpose of being out there was to get lost? And what if getting lost led to useful lessons about the forest and nature?

That's the way conservation biologist Noah Charney sees a forest in his charming book *These Trees Tell A Story: The Art of Reading Landscapes*. "Following the trail is the easiest way to be lost," he writes. "While we're on the trail, we lose track of what's around us and where we are in space - we are lost."

I had never thought of trails like that until I opened Charney's book and delved into his world of examining a landscape through every clue nature provides, from the minute to the huge. Charney says if we put our trust in a trail, we cede our responsibility, give up our awareness, mute our senses and our minds. We focus on just two numbers - the length of how far we have to go and the distance we have already come.

"Step off that path and suddenly we have to look up. Look at the shape of the land and decide how steeply we want to climb," he says. When Charney does this, and from each of the chapters in his book he does this almost every time he goes into the woods, he looks in every direction, not just straight ahead. He studies the vegetation and the patterns of light, the species of trees and how they change as he moves, the dryness of a slope, the wetness of a low spot. White tops of sycamores in the distance tell him he is not far from a creek; chestnut oaks mean he is near the high ground. He pays attention to faint wildlife trails and the sounds or lack of sound, and he uses the angle of the sun for a compass. He builds a map of the landscape as he goes and learns in detail about that little patch of the world and his place in it.

When I was a boy, I thought nothing of wandering in the woods, rarely staying on a path. But I didn't have a guide like Charney telling me to pay close attention. Charney is an assistant professor of biology at the University of Maine and his classrooms are mostly out in the woods or deep in a marsh or alongside a river. Over years of travel and curiosity and getting lost in the woods, he has learned how to read the stories that nature can tell us. Some of these are sad, like the loss of species and how in each instance that happened, a falling dominoes chain of events followed. But like so many scientists, Charney takes a long view of nature and our place in the dynamic natural world.

Within that long view Charney poses another challenging idea. I have long thought that all invasive species were destructive to our forests. Plants, bugs and animals that are not supposed to be in our forests unquestionably cause damage and the list of casualties is longer. Our native hemlocks and white ash trees are relatively recent examples and the mighty chestnuts that once dominated our forests are perhaps the most well known victims of invasive diseases.

But Charney suggests we think about this a bit differently. Exactly what is a native species? Have all the species of life in a particular landscape always been there? And is it always such a bad thing that a new species of plant or animal appears and takes root? He says not necessarily in every instance. What we are seeing is a snapshot in time, he says, when the reality is a very long movie. And nature has a way of taking care of itself if given enough time.

Though I see his point, I can't completely agree with Charney about invasive species and the loss of native species. I would have loved to have walked in a forest of huge chestnut trees, and I think our forests are the poorer for the loss of them to an introduced blight. And to be fair, Charney does too.

I was thinking about this recently as I went up to the section of the Appalachian Trail that I maintain and discovered that the forest floor on either side of the footpath for the full length of my section and beyond had been plowed and gouged by feral hogs. This is a common problem in our southern forests. The hogs don't belong up there in the mountains. And they have torn up an amazing amount of ground along the Appalachian Trail rooting around for food. I can only imagine the fragile wild plants they have destroyed in their foraging.

But as Charney noted, most invasive species are here to stay. We can't get rid of all of them. And as I walked along the A.T. pathway in the beautiful hardwood forest north of Jarrard Gap, growing more irritated at the hogs with every step, it suddenly occurred to me that if those oaks and maples and hickories I was passing were sentient beings who could communicate, they just might have a common thought - the ultimate invasive species is those destructive humans who brought the blights and bugs and hogs to their forest in the first place. And as Charney observed, we aren't going anywhere anytime soon. So maybe we ought to be pretty humble about the problem. It's not the blights and the bugs and the hogs – it's us. And our beloved trail, which the trees and plants and forest animals would no doubt consider just as invasive as we are.

> **While we're on the trail, we lose track of what's around us . . .**

I don't wander through the woods anymore like I did when I was a boy. I stay on the trails -- after all, that is the first principle of Leave No Trace. And I try and mostly succeed to not get lost, though when it does occasionally happen on a trail I've never hiked before, I just laugh at myself and find my way back. But I agree with Charney that it is our responsibility to metaphorically step off the trail, occasionally, to stop thinking in terms of miles hiked or maintained and look around us and learn more about our little patch of forest here in north Georgia.

Our forest has survived heavy damage from us in the past and it will adapt in its own way to future conditions like climate change and invasive species. We are not in control of our forests as much as we sometimes like to think we are. But it is our responsibility to do the best we can to at least make the situation better for both the short term and the long haul. We must step off the trail, occasionally, to stop thinking in terms of miles hiked or maintained and look around us and learn more about our little patch of forest here in north Georgia. We owe it to the trees and the plants and the wildlife. Maybe even to the hogs.

Appalachian Trail History Series
The Clarke-McNary Act Made the A.T. Possible

Reported by Ron Hamlin

The Weeks Act, signed into law in 1911, began the era of eastern national forest protection, but June 7 marked the centennial of the Clarke-McNary Act and those of us who love and enjoy our forests should have celebrated the date. Why? Because Clarke-McNary did something momentous.

At the stroke of President Calvin Coolidge's pen on that date in 1924, Clarke-McNary opened the door for the expansion of the national forests we enjoy today. It is not a stretch to say that the Appalachian Trail as we know it would not have been possible without this obscure piece of legislation.

Clarke-McNary was initiated by Senator Charles McNary of Oregon and was drafted primarily to improve fighting wildfires on federal and non-federal land in the west. The act provided more funding for, and allowed greater cooperation between, federal, state, and local fire fighting forces, but buried deep in the legislation, in sections six and seven, additional provisions fundamentally changed the definition of the lands the federal government could purchase for eastern national forests, modifying the Weeks Act of 1911 that had originally authorized the federal purchase of lands and the establishment of eastern national forests.

The Weeks Act had allowed for federal purchase of the headwaters of navigable rivers to protect interstate shipping. Section six of the Clarke-McNary Act amended the Weeks Act to authorize the purchase of eastern lands that "may be necessary to the regulation of the flow of navigable streams or for the production of timber." This simple language greatly broadened the ability of the U.S. Forest Service to purchase not only headwater lands, but also watershed lands and other properties for the purpose of timber production. Section seven of the Clarke-McNary act authorized the donation of lands to the federal government by states and private landowners, allowing for further expansion of national forest land. Efforts to preserve eastern national forests began with citizen reaction to environmental disasters during the second half of the nineteenth century. If you consider how our nation developed after European settlement, you may recognize that there were very few places in the east that were under any federal jurisdiction or management after the Revolutionary War. Much of the east was settled privately, having been deeded to the first colonial settlers by European sovereigns. After the Revolution, the new federal government obtained vast tracts of land in the west through the Louisiana Purchase, war with Mexico, and treaties with the British and Canadian governments. Our Revolution was in large part a reaction against the European practice of sovereigns holding vast amounts of land and unfairly taxing the indentured people who worked on estates owned or controlled by aristocrats. Members of our Congress and our elected presidents were loath to recreate a similar land-holding caste system here, so efforts were made to dispose of the federal land through homesteading acts, timber and mining leases, land deals with railroads as they expanded across the continent and other methods. But with the millions of square miles of federal land in the west, the government could not so easily dispose of the land beyond the Mississippi River. This led to vast areas of land being held in reserve by the government.

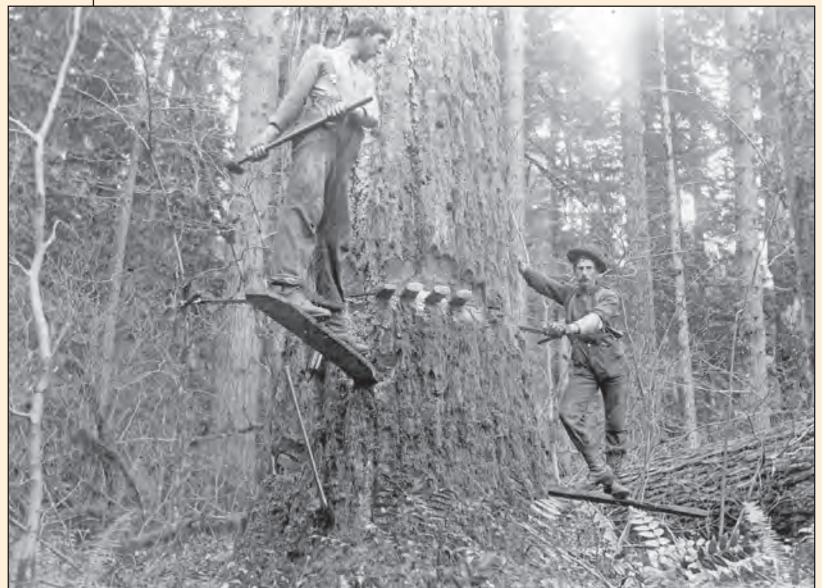
Throughout the 19th century, and particularly after the Civil War, as our nation's population grew and our domestic and international trade increased, owners of timber lands in the east harvested hundreds of thousands of acres of forest to provide lumber to meet the needs of the growing nation. Logging operations took place with little regard for the environmental damage that was occurring downhill or downstream from their lands.

This often led to deteriorated conditions on streams and rivers, clogged riverways that interfered with the transport of goods, and damage to mills that relied on the flow of clean water to power them. The businesses that were dependent on the waterways, as well as concerned citizens, began to push for protection of their commercial interests through the federal purchase of the remaining eastern forests. Their efforts eventually led to the passage of the Weeks Act in 1911.

The first tracts of lands that would become the Chattahoochee National Forest were purchased in 1911, soon after the Weeks Act was signed. In those early days, the administration of newly acquired tracts often crossed state lines as property was slowly assembled into national forests. This happened here in Georgia. Lands that protected the headwaters of the Chattahoochee River were added to the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee while lands in northeast Georgia and northwest South Carolina that protected the headwaters of the Chattooga and Savannah River system became part of the Nantahala National Forest based in North Carolina.

The lands that would become national forest were often abandoned farms or areas that had been subjected to abuse by mining; other areas were damaged by "cut and run" timber harvesting practices, or by wildfires and over-grazing. They were often tracts of land that no one had any further use for.

At the time that the federal forest was being established, wildlife populations in north Georgia had been virtually eliminated. With the U.S. Forest Service's purchase of the lands, local governments were able to share in the profit resulting from the harvest of timber. Sustainable forest practices were instituted by the Forest Service. Through protection at state and federal levels, populations of deer,



Two loggers with springboards pounding wedges into tree.

turkey and black bear began to rebound to the healthy and sustainable levels we see today.

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club values its partnership with the Chattahoochee National Forest. Our relationship is often referred to as a "three-legged stool" that begins with our partnership with the government agencies and personnel of the Georgia state parks and the Chattahoochee National Forest, from the development of policies and procedures for maintaining the A.T. and its associated trails and preparing for future trail relocations and facility replacement or repair to providing facilities to prepare hikers for thru-hikes, club events and trail celebrations.

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club plaque above the rock wall was first located at Neel Gap. The bronze plaque and the boulder were later moved to their present location when the Civilian Conservation Corps built the Wa-la-se-yi center at Neel Gap in the 1930s.

The second leg is our partnership with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy which provides much of the overall guidance in volunteer training, trail construction standards, legislative lobbying efforts on trail issues, funding and more. Then there is the third leg: local enthusiasm and boots on the ground provided by the members of the GATC as well as our partner A.T.-maintaining clubs from North Carolina to Maine. Without any one of the three legs, the Appalachian Trail and the recreational and economic opportunities it provides our region would certainly cease to exist.

So, with the first centennial of the Clarke-McNary Act behind us, think of what may have happened if our ancestors had not been so forward thinking in restoring our eastern forests. The Clarke-McNary Act and the Weeks Act have allowed for the creation of many recreational opportunities and have provided for the economic enrichment of many regions in the eastern portion of the United States. And a bonus was the protected forests that were used to route the Appalachian Trail that stretches nearly 2,200 miles over the length of the Appalachian Mountains from Georgia to Maine. May our generation be as forward thinking!

Early logging operations in eastern forests.

Arthur Woody (left) and Roy Ozmer in the early days of the Chattahoochee National Forest. Ozmer was responsible for routing much of the Appalachian Trail in the south.

An Interview with GATC Trails Supervisor Rick Dicks Explaining the Relocation of the Byron Reece Trail

Rick Dicks, GATC Trails Supervisor

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club is constantly working to improve the trails our club is responsible for maintaining, and that involves more than just the 78 miles of the Appalachian Trail in Georgia. GATC is also responsible for maintaining the blue-blazed connecting trails to the A.T. and one of the most popular and heavily-used of those trails is the Byron Herbert Reece Trail. This trail connects the parking lot off U.S. 129 with the A.T. and is used by the majority of hikers who climb to the summit of Blood Mountain.

Recently GATC volunteers began a major project to relocate the connecting trail. In this question and answer, Rick Dicks, GATC's Trails Supervisor, explains what is going on.

Q ~ There is an existing trail from the Byron Reece Parking Lot up to the Appalachian Trail. Is something wrong with it? Why does it have to be replaced?

Rick ~ The existing trail is badly eroded, due to issues related to how it was constructed. It is too steep and has too many places where we can't get water off the trail so it runs down the middle of the trail, causing further erosion. Despite many hundreds of hours of maintenance, it will never get better for long. It has also become a wide hiking "superhighway," which detracts from the wilderness characteristic it is intended to have.

The new trail will have a less steep grade and is designed from the beginning to shed water. So it will be far easier to maintain and keep it sustainable. It is designed to provide a more isolated feel, to enhance the feeling of wilderness.

Q ~ This sounds like a big project. What is involved in relocating a trail?

Rick ~ It is a VERY big deal. It takes years of study and exploration to find a suitable path, then check it for any "showstoppers" - endangered plants or animals, historical artifacts, watershed impact, and other things. If it passes those checks, and because this is a wilderness area, it then has to pass additional approval levels to ensure we are making the least amount of impact we can to the wilderness. We anticipate this effort will take two-plus years. Then we still have to eliminate the old trail and restore it to natural conditions. Building a wilderness trail is a major commitment and often takes 10 years or more from concept to finish.

Q ~ Since the trail is within the U.S. Forest Service, why can't they do the work? Couldn't they use heavy machinery and wouldn't that be a lot easier?

Rick ~ The USFS doesn't have nearly enough staff to do this job. In the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest alone, there are 867,000 acres of land to manage, 500 miles of existing trail, and over 1,300 miles of trout streams, all of which USFS must manage, in addition to being prepared to respond to wildfires nationwide. Like almost all trails, the A.T. and connecting trails such as the Byron Reece, are maintained by volunteers. They do provide guidance, expertise, and what staff they can spare, but only the involvement of hundreds of volunteers makes our trails possible.

As for heavy machinery, neither USFS nor volunteers can use heavy machinery in wilderness areas. The Wilderness Act of 1964, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Johnson, established wilderness areas where "earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man." To help retain its wild nature, the law also forbids the use of basically anything that wouldn't have been in use when America was still unsettled by Europeans. So digging a trail in a wilderness area means using picks, shovels, and other hand tools to build. We can't even use chainsaws. If we need to cut logs, as is usually the case when building a trail, only hand-operated crosscut saws can be used.

Q ~ While the work is being done, will the old trail be closed? Can people still use it to hike to Blood Mountain?

Rick ~ The existing trail will be kept intact and open until the new trail is fully ready. Access to Blood Mountain will not be interrupted. Once the new trail is open, we will eliminate the old trail.

Q ~ If the government can't do it, who will do the actual work?

Rick ~ For the most part, volunteers will do the work. This includes dozens of members of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, but also includes several weeks of help from the Konnarock Crew. This crew, sponsored by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, is composed of two paid crew leaders and volunteers from across America who give up one or two weeks of their time to come and help build this trail, and other trails along the A.T. corridor. Without their help, at least another year would be added onto the build schedule. Many of the volunteers are hikers who want to give back to the trails they so enjoyed hiking, so they come help us out for a day and many stay for a lifetime. Now that is trail magic!

Q ~ Who decides where the new trail will go? How is that done?

Rick ~ That is a joint effort between partners. GATC, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, all have input to the trail route. Typically GATC will propose a draft route, using a device called a clinometer to lay out a trail with the desired grade, and incorporating positive control points such as outstanding views or unusual features. The USFS and ATC then review it for proper grade, traffic flow, negative control points (roads, water sources, endangered plants, etc.), and the layout iterates until everyone is satisfied. A complicated layout like Byron Reece might go through five or more potential routes before consensus is reached.

New trail built by GATC volunteers.

GATC Volunteers working on the new trail.

Q ~ Is building a completely new trail a set of skills that all trail clubs have? How did GATC develop the knowledge and skills to know how to build a brand new trail as opposed to maintaining an old one?

Rick ~ I can't answer for every club. Certainly many clubs have this skill, but probably some of them have to rely on outside expertise. It's not one of the more common skills, largely because to teach it well, you have to build a new trail, which doesn't happen frequently. GATC is fortunate to have a very experienced and knowledgeable trail designer named Marion McLean, who has spent much of the last 40-plus years bushwhacking the mountainsides looking for good pathways. He used the development of the Byron Reece trail to teach another GATC member and an ATC staff member. There was also a class on trail layout and design taught earlier this year, which I was able to attend, given by the Wilderness Skills Institute and taught by a USFS trail expert and an ATC trail design expert.

Q ~ How long will the project take and when will it be finished?

Rick ~ We anticipate it will take up to three years to get the new trail opened and to close the old trail. Since it is being built entirely by hand and by volunteers, it is a lengthy process. Of course, more volunteers will help move it along faster.

Q ~ Speaking of volunteers, can only GATC members volunteer for this work?

Rick ~ No, we are happy to have anyone who wants to volunteer contribute to this project or any of our other trail maintenance work days. We post our trail work opportunities on our website, georgia-atclub.org, and people can sign up in advance to attend. We provide personal protection equipment (gloves, hard hat, etc.) and tools, and we place new volunteers in small groups and provide them with an experienced trail maintainer to show them proper and safe techniques of trail work. It's fun and very rewarding to see a trail improved or, in the case of the Byron Reece, get built "from the ground up."

The story of a hiker's journey on the Appalachian Trail

"a thoughtful book that quickly grows on you..." Rick Van Noy

"A joy to read... points to a spirituality of being present with others while we walk..." Dr. Kip Redding

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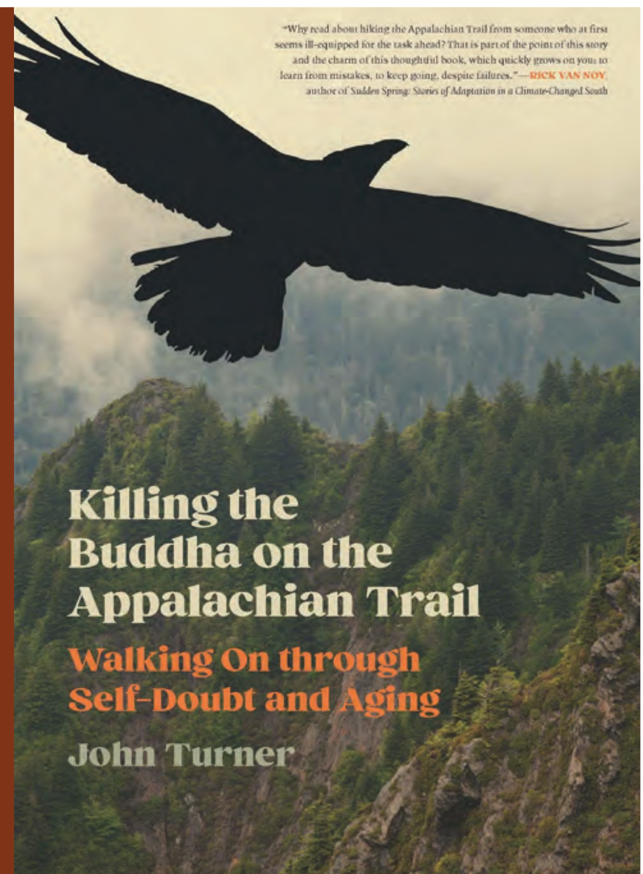

The Refugee Women's Network Returns to the Hike Inn

Reported by Kathy Hancock, Shelley Rose, and Marianne Skeen

For a fourth year, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Cub partnered with the Refugee Women's Network (RWN) and led a group of women for an overnight stay at the Len Foote Hike Inn. Eighteen women, originally from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, participated, including two mother-daughter pairs. Some of the women were returnees and others first-timers

Perhaps the most joyful person was the last to arrive at the Hike Inn. After catching her breath, she expressed her feelings of accomplishment and pride.

One of the hikers, Elisabeth, reflected upon her experience of hiking. "It's good. I love it. You need to step away from your stuft. When you step away, your mind thinks right. When you go home, the way you see stuff is different

Her daughter, Malembe, added "At the end of the day, we are all just enjoying each other's company, enjoying the hike, challenging ourselves, and taking our steps of gratitude along the way.'

This trip was made possible by the GATC Outreach Committee, the Len Foote Hike inn and the Georgia License Tag Program.

HIKE INN
hike-inn.com
Everyone who makes the five-mile trek to the Hike Inn does so for a different reason. But no matter the reason, the result is the same: *Everyone leaves with a sense of belonging.*
Photo by: Wade Chandler