

The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly

A Publication of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club



Inside

Celebrating the Wilderness Act

GATC Creates a Disaster Relief Fund

12-Month Trail Report

Fall 2024



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.

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club is affiliated with The Appalachian Trail Conservancy P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, W.V. 25425 (304) 535-6331

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR John Turner

STAFF Assistant Editors

Sandi Still Stephen Wilson Lindsey Brackett William Dynan Nancy LaChance

STAFF Photographer

Van Hill

STAFF Advertising

Ben Cubitt

GATC OFFICERS & BOARD

- President Lynne Beeson
Secretary / Historian Margaret Bryant
Treasurer Lorri Branvold
Activities Director Debbie Webb
Communications Director Mike McCollum
Community Outreach Director Bo Bobinski
Conservation Director Tom Lamb
Information & Education Director Angie Lubniewski
Membership Director Ashley Luke
Trails Supervisor Rick Dicks
Director at Large Joe Boone
Director at Large John Turner

LOOK FOR US AT

GATC Website www.georgia-atclub.org

Facebook For Members

www.facebook.com/groups/gatc.members/

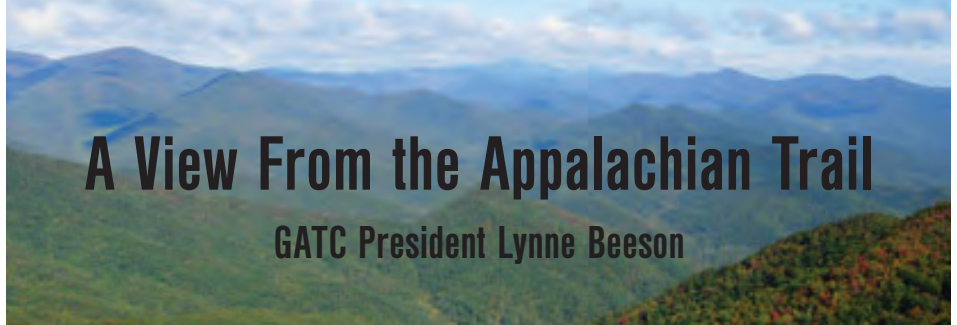
Facebook for Non-members

www.facebook.com/GaATClub

The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly Address John Turner, The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly Editor P.O. 654, Atlanta, Georgia 30301 E-mail: editor@georgia-atclub.org Voicemail (404) 494-0968

The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly is published four times a year by the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, Inc. P.O. Box 654, Atlanta, Georgia 30301. For information on subscription rates, contact editor@georgia-atclub.org

Entire contents copyright © 2024. All rights reserved. Layout and Design by Robert Tennent, Eagle-Empire Printing



A View From the Appalachian Trail

GATC President Lynne Beeson

The past 12 months will go into the record book as a year of important achievements and firsts for the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club.

At our club's annual business meeting in October, I ran down the list of impressive accomplishments for our attending members and guests and it took a while to cover everything I had made a note to mention. Looking back on the year, the work our membership has done in a number of different areas is amazing. Given all we have done in such a relatively short period of time, you would think GATC is a huge well-staffed organization. But the truth is we are relatively small in numbers, we operate on a very tight and modest budget and we are all volunteers. Talk about getting the most work out of the least amount of people - that really describes GATC. And it only happens because our members are very dedicated to our mission of maintaining and protecting the Appalachian Trail and side trails in Georgia.

My list started off with a proud first for GATC - our Women's Trail Summit held last fall at Lake Winfield Scott Park. We launched this event out of recognition that women now play a very important role in everything associated with the A.T., from maintenance to hiking to administration. Our guest speaker was Jennifer Pharr Davis, who until recently held the men's and women's record for fastest completion time of the entire Appalachian Trail. Jennifer is a fantastic speaker and we enjoyed hosting her for the weekend. (And her record was broken in late September by another woman!) Our Women's Trail Summit was such a success that we will hold the event again in November, 2025. Watch for details and sign up early to attend.

The next first for GATC was our agreement with Amicalola Falls State Park to host what used to be called the A.T. Kick Off. Re-branded A.T. Gateways, we organized this annual event, which was held the first weekend in March at the park. Again, another huge success, with big attendance by hikers, vendors and folks simply interested in learning more about the Appalachian Trail. We even included a trail maintenance activity to give visitors a brief hands-on taste of handling a Pulaski or Rogue Hoe. We will host A.T. Gateways again in 2025, from Feb. 28 to March 2. Watch for details because the event will be even better. And A.T. Gateways was just one of

nine events GATC supported during the 12-month period.

Also coming next March will be yet another first for GATC - co-hosting a Banff Film Festival in Blairsville the last weekend of the month. This will be an exciting event that should attract a big crowd. Blairsville / Union County is of course an A.T. Community, so it is a perfect site for this event. Watch for details early next year.

And speaking of firsts, how about this one - GATC is now a sister club with a trail club in Japan. The Shinetsu Trail in Japan and the club that created it was inspired by the Appalachian Trail. The Shinetsu Club folks visited Georgia several years ago to explore the A.T. and were so impressed that they returned to Japan with the dream of creating their own trail. The 74-mile Shinetsu Trail is now a reality and in October several GATC members traveled to Japan to hike the trail - the first of what I believe will be many exchange trips between our clubs for years to come.

And on the subject of trail maintenance, I could have spent most of our business

Looking back on the year .. our work has been amazing!

meeting talking about our accomplishments in that department. The two stand-out achievements in the past year are the launch of a sophisticated training program and the

start of a much-needed relocation project for the trail that connects the Byron Reece Parking area with the Appalachian Trail near Blood Mountain.

I know it sounds like bragging, but the fact is that GATC has long been known up and down the entire length of the Appalachian Trail for the high quality of our trail maintenance. Now we can add to that stature a standard-setting training curriculum that offers instruction in every facet of trail maintenance, from beginner to expert. Created by GATC Trails Supervisor Rick Dicks, along with Tom Lamb and Jason Gotch, the course begins with certification as a Trail Crew Leader, which qualifies the maintainer to organize and lead a Third Saturday trail maintenance work project or other projects. Crew Leaders can continue their training to become a maintainer trainer and finally a master trainer. These courses have attracted the admiration of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and other trail maintaining clubs, especially in the south.

I could go on and on about the great work of our trail maintainers, but check out their accomplishments elsewhere in this issue of the Quarterly.

Continued on page 8.



A Hiker's Perspective Editor John Turner

The morning was a crisp 45 degrees under a flawless blue sky, and yellow leaves from the big hardwoods had begun to speckle the Appalachian Trail beyond Jarrard Gap, which is 26 trail miles from Springer Mountain. Early fall, the first day I could get out on the section of the A.T. that I maintain, I was walking with a fellow Georgia Appalachian Trail Club member; we were carrying only a Pulaski and a hand saw for tools because our mission this morning was reconnaissance. We had no idea what we would find up on the ridge around Gaddis Mountain.

Hurricane and Tropical Storm Helene was long gone, leaving devastation and death in its huge rain-drenched wake. For the first days after the storm, no one was thinking about the Appalachian Trail – there were too many deaths, too much destruction, too much tragedy, too many lives upended, no emergency services available to rescue hikers in trouble. After a disaster of such monumental scale, a hiking trail in the woods like was not a priority.

The U. S. Forest Service had pronounced not just the A.T., but all of the national forest in North Carolina “closed.” In an administrative sense, the A.T. was considered closed from

A.T. was considered closed from Springer Mountain to Rockfish Gap . . .

pace that often identifies a thru-hiker. None of them wanted to stop and talk.

Springer Mountain to Rockfish Gap in Virginia, some 864 miles of trail. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and USFS had highly discouraged attempting to hike that part of the trail – too many bridges washed away, too many forest service roads blocked, too many trees down, too many campgrounds simply gone, too many hostels damaged and trail businesses destroyed. USFS officials were not even certain that all their employees in the western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee and southern Virginia region were alive and unharmed until almost a week after the storm blew north. Many had lost their homes. Some USFS vehicles were missing – washed far away from where they had been parked.

But the Appalachian Trail was still there. Reports began to filter in about the devastation and they were unanimously bad. Two weeks after the storm one official confided to GATC that a third of the A.T. was “wiped out.”

But as we climbed the gentle grade out of Jarrard Gap, the A.T. looked like an old friend, a little weather-beaten and frayed at the edges, but still standing proud, the big hardwoods tall and unbowed. A modest breeze kept us cool – During the summer months, no matter the hour, I had been dripping sweat by the time I had walked to a familiar bend in the trail. But this morning I was still wearing fleece, and it felt good..

A quarter mile in we were caught by two backpackers heading north. They had left Amicalola Falls State Park and climbed the Approach Trail to Springer two days before and they reported seeing no major blowdowns from there to here, only a few limbs they could easily step over. Did they know what was waiting for them up past the North Carolina line? We had unofficial reports of heavy blowdowns just over the North Carolina line, starting around Standing Indian Mountain. Yes, they said, unconvincingly.

A short distance later we met them again, their packs off beside the trail and a tangled hickory limb blocking the path.

I pulled out my razor saw and my partner and I made quick work of removing the limb. The hikers thanked us for the trail work and pushed on, their plans to hike farther north up in the air. Soon we met three more hikers with bulging backpacks heading north and then three women coming toward us, bound for Springer Mountain at the quick

Continued on page 8.

GATC Creates a Disaster Relief Fund

By GATC President Lynne Beeson

On Sept. 27 Hurricane Helene caused incomprehensible devastation across the Southeast, including the Southern Appalachians, impacting hundreds of thousands of people, including trail club members, Appalachian Trail Conservancy personnel, and U.S. Forest Service staff. Large sections of the A.T. were impacted, but more importantly, the communities surrounding the trail, including Hot Springs, Erwin, Roan Mountain, Asheville and others, suffered unimaginable damage. Many people are still suffering without basic services like water, power and internet connection.

We were fortunate that our Georgia section of the A.T. was not severely impacted, and although some areas of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest were damaged, the forest itself is not closed. Our sister clubs in North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia no doubt have work in front of them for many months and likely years ahead.

With communities still digging out from the storm, roads needing to be restored and entire National Forests closed, it is too soon to begin to understand the impact Helene will have for maintaining

clubs and hikers. Many clubs in the region cannot even begin the process of assessing the damage due to impassable roads and bridges washed out.

In October, the GATC Board of Directors approved the establishment of a Disaster Relief Fund within the Fiscal Year 2025 budget, with initial funding of \$5,000. There will be opportunities for GATC members and the public to donate to this fund in the future. The fund will be used exclusively to prepare for and to respond to disasters like Helene. It may cover travel to areas where our club resources are requested to support other clubs and land managers, or pay for training and supplies necessary to respond to a disaster. This fund will also position us to be better equipped to respond to disasters that may affect our section of the trail in the future.

With the fall season now upon us, visitation to the north Georgia mountains will increase with many hikers enjoying the 78 miles of the A.T. in Georgia. The presence of GATC trail ambassadors and maintainers on the trail throughout the fall will exemplify our club's mission of protecting and preserving the A.T. for generations to come.

Celebrating 60 Years of Wilderness Preservation

Reported by Ron Hamlin

More than half of the Appalachian Trail in Georgia is in federally designated wilderness, and anyone who hikes those 40.4 miles through hardwood forests knows why that is a big deal. What they may not know is how wilderness relates to our National Forests and how those areas of forest came to be permanently protected.

This year, 2024, marked the 60th anniversary of the federal Wilderness Act, which was a giant step in preserving the wild areas that remained in this country. But the act mainly protected areas west of the Mississippi River. It would take a second effort ten years later to bring the idea of wilderness preservation to much of the eastern portion of the United States.

Wilderness is a European concept. And the conventional understanding of American wilderness is based on a myth that this continent was a wilderness when the first explorers and colonists from Europe arrived. And to really appreciate the importance of the first Wilderness Act that was signed into law 60 years ago, and the second one ten years later, a little history of the evolution of the definition of American wilderness is necessary.

Native Americans never thought of this continent as a “wilderness” in the European sense. Indigenous communities thrived here long before Europeans began to explore and populate this continent. European traders had been in contact with Native Americans for decades before attempts to permanently settle this continent began. They traded for seafood, furs, timber, and other goods that were becoming scarce in Europe.

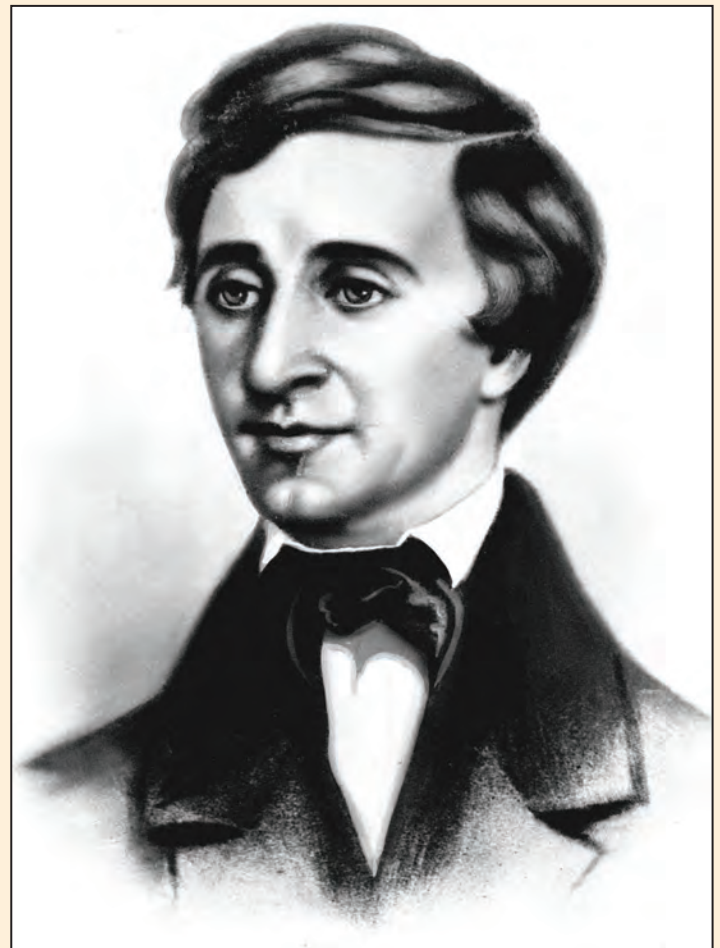
When colonists arrived, they had little understanding of the Native Americans’ unbounded way of living. Native social structures were quite different from those of the Europeans. Along the eastern seaboard of North America they had few permanent villages. They moved over the years between areas they had cleared for subsistence farming and used for hunting or fishing grounds. Native Americans rarely consumed more than they needed to survive, and the boundaries between tribes were vaguely marked, or not marked at all, whereas the colonists divided the land they occupied into distinct lots, built permanent villages, and farmed intensively, producing enough for themselves and more to sell or trade.

Native Americans changed the environment in which they lived in significant ways prior to the arrival of Europeans. Their impacts included the use of fire to clear and maintain their fields, which they changed every few years as soil nutrients were depleted. As the productivity of their fields diminished, they moved on and created new ones. Minimal as it was compared to the first settlers, their impact on the North American continent stretches back for centuries before European colonists began to arrive.

Colonists brought with them a Judeo-Christian understanding of humanity’s relationship with the earth and the products it provided. Their beliefs led them to think that the Native American male was lazy, since the men left many of the farming and household chores to the women while they went out to hunt or to fish, which colonists thought of as more recreational than productive work.

Colonists also brought with them diseases that were unknown on this continent and for which the indigenous people had no defense. As a result, the populations of many Native American villages were reduced, in many cases by 90 percent or more. Consequently, colonists and early Americans were able to take advantage of the reduction of the native population to develop their villages and eventually spread across the continent with the belief that the original people here were not using the land to the highest economic value possible. Well after the Revolution, Americans predominately thought of the forests and prairies as land that needed to be tamed and civilized.

The notion of wilderness preservation, as we think of it, has its roots in the Transcendentalist movement of the nineteenth century. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and others criticized



Henry David Thoreau

the disappearance and unchecked exploitation of natural resources, the evils of capitalism and the shift away from an agrarian economy toward industrialization.

Artists of the Hudson River Movement, led by Thomas Cole and practiced by many other artists of the time, translated the Transcendentalists’ idea that wild landscapes were beautiful and wilderness should be celebrated by paintings. Both the Transcendentalist and Hudson River School movements were the first expressions of a truly American philosophy and artistic style, and expressed a nostalgia for the wilderness they felt was being lost. That new way of thinking about wilderness slowly gained momentum in the American consciousness and began to spur calls for action, especially after the Civil War.

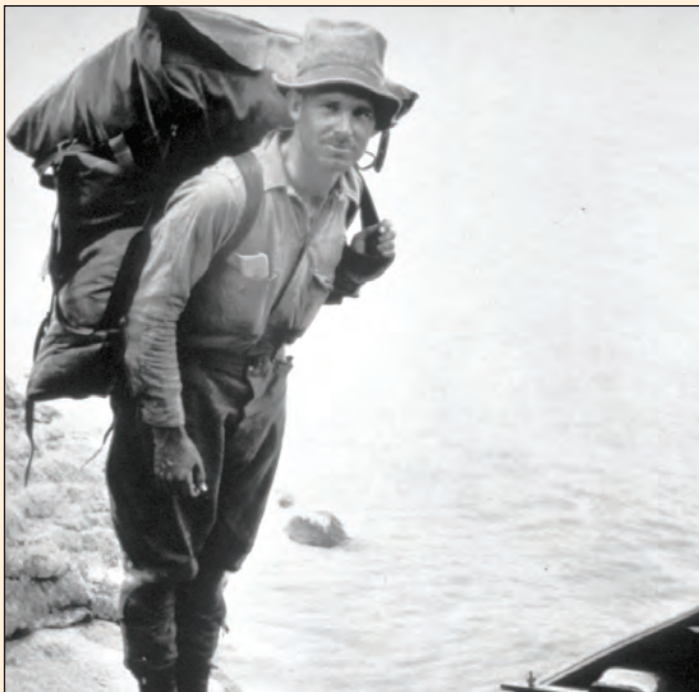
The first overt act of preservation was inspired by Arthur Carhart, a recreational planner with the U.S. Forest Service. In 1919, at the age of 27, Carhart was assigned to survey an area around a remote forest lake in Colorado for recreational development. On his return, he sent a note to his supervisor, Aldo Leopold, stating that the “...time will come when these scenic spots, where nature has been allowed to remain unmarred, will be some of the most highly prized scenic features of the country.”

His recommendation led to the area around the lake remaining undeveloped. In 1975, Trapper Lake, the lake surveyed by Carhart in 1919, received permanent protection by its inclusion in the Flat Tops Wilderness Area. Today the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center in Missoula, Montana, is where federal land managers

receive training about wilderness values and preservation.

A few years later, Aldo Leopold was working in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. He had been influenced by his former employee, Carhart, and was also concerned about the proliferation of automobiles, the associated road building that was taking place as a result and the impact cars were having in every corner of our nation. What remained of our undeveloped land was being made accessible by the advent of the automobile era. He wrote "Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?"

Leopold coined the term "wilderness preservation" and promoted the idea through his writings. He began the movement that led toward the preservation of undeveloped, areas that were rapidly disappearing by the 1920's, as wilderness. Through his efforts, the Gila Wilderness Area was set aside by the U.S. Forest Service in 1924,



Arthur Carhart

creating the first federally preserved area. The federal designation recognized the importance of preserving wild areas, protecting them from harvesting and development, and allowing them to be set aside for primitive recreation. But the designation was not permanent because the decision was made locally by the forest supervisor. Policies could change depending on the notions of any succeeding superintendent.

Leopold's advocacy for wilderness protection inspired others and helped change attitudes about undeveloped land. His legacy is carried on today; near the Carhart Center in Missoula, the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute is a multi-agency facility providing valuable information and research on wilderness areas.

Benton MacKaye, the man who first proposed an Appalachian Trail in 1921, followed in Leopold's footsteps and played a critical role in the preservation of wilderness as we know it today. After the stock market crash of 1929 and the financial depression that followed through the 1930's, President Herbert Hoover was looking for a way to respond to the crisis. His administration had access to money that had been set aside for drought relief in Virginia. Recognizing the popularity of auto touring that remains popular to this day, and in concert with the development

of the new national park in the Shenandoah Mountains, his administration used those funds to begin construction of the nation's first ridge top roadway – the Skyline Drive. While this was a successful, though limited, way to get people back to work, the roadway was built over the top of the Appalachian Trail that had been built through the Shenandoah Mountains by the volunteers of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) after it was organized in 1927.

MacKaye was distraught by this development on the Trail that he had conceived. Myron Avery, who was one of the founding members of the PATC and its first president, came to dominate the construction of the Appalachian Trail in 1931 and for many years beyond. Avery was a lawyer working for the U.S. government in Washington. He saw a benefit to this new road construction as it would provide access for his volunteers to what had been one of the most inaccessible parts of Virginia. It was an inconvenience that the Trail would need to be relocated, but now his members would have easier access. He also saw the benefit of the Skyline Drive as it would improve access for hikers to the Trail that would be rebuilt away from the roadway.

In the end, much of the relocated A.T. in Shenandoah would be built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the Roosevelt administration.

From what had originally been a somewhat socialist-leaning idea as it was described in his 1921 article, MacKaye's ideas about the Trail had evolved toward providing a wilderness experience for hikers on the eastern seaboard. He frequently wrote to and argued with Avery about the placement of the Appalachian Trail and particularly about the new highway project along the Shenandoah ridge line.

Influential members of the PATC and within the A.T. movement took sides in the argument – some with Avery, others with MacKaye. MacKaye argued for abandoning the Trail through the Shenandoah area while Avery thought that a disconnected Trail was nonsense.

The discussion came to a head at the 1935 Appalachian Trail Conference. It was hosted by the PATC that year at the Skyland Resort in what is now Shenandoah National Park. With the topic of the Skyline Drive on the agenda, Avery made sure that his side was well represented. MacKaye was unable to attend, but conference members who agreed with him were at the meeting. Avery won the argument in a vote of those in attendance.

After this, MacKaye and several others who had influenced the Trail movement severed their relationships with the Appalachian Trail. He was working at the time for the Tennessee Valley Authority in Tennessee.

In 1934, a year before the Skyline Drive issue came to a head, MacKaye attended a meeting of the American Forestry Association in Knoxville, near where he lived. He had been influenced in his thoughts on wilderness by a fellow forester, Robert Marshall. During the conference, on a field trip to a CCC camp, MacKaye, Marshall, Harvey Broome of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club and another forester, Bernard Frank and his wife, talked over the idea of creating an organization dedicated to the preservation of wilderness.

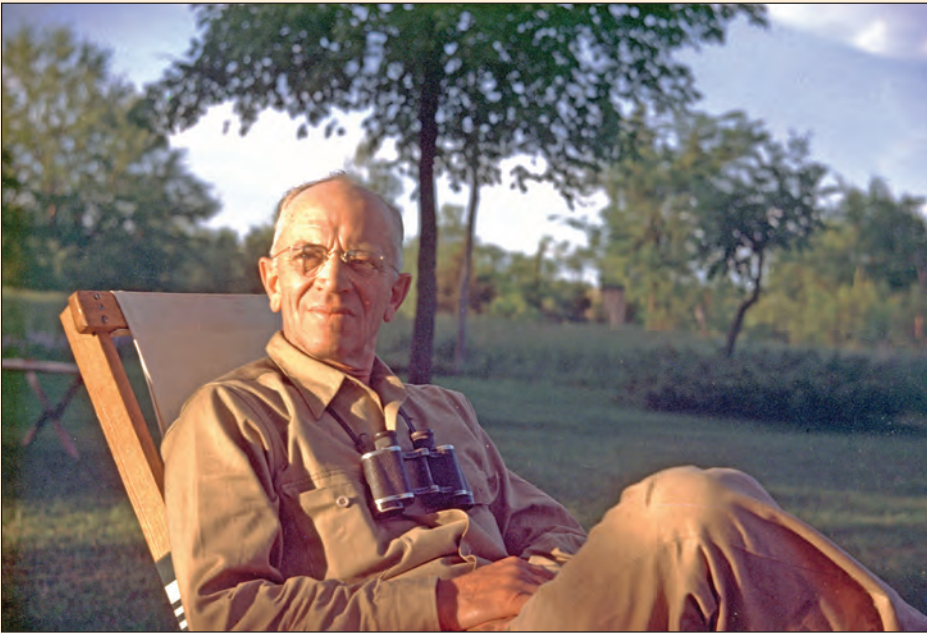
A year later, Marshall, MacKaye, Broome, and Frank, joined by Aldo Leopold, Robert Sterling Yard of the National Park Association, Harold Anderson of the PATC and Ernest Oberholtzer - who was advocating for the preservation of the Boundary Waters of northern Minnesota - agreed to create a new organization dedicated to wilderness preservation. The Wilderness Society was founded. It was incorporated two years later in 1937 and spearheaded the movement that would eventually lead to the passage of the Wilderness Act.

In the mid-1940's, serving as president of the Wilderness Society, MacKaye hired a writer and publicist named Howard Zahniser for

Continued on next page.

Celebrating 60 Years of Wilderness Preservation

Continued from page 5



Aldo Leopold

the organization. Zahniser did not have much of a previous history with outdoor activities, but he was soon assigned the task of writing proposals for the preservation of wilderness.

Olaus Murie replaced MacKaye as president in the 1950's, as the effort to create a federal law that preserved wilderness was heating up. He and his wife, Mardy, had a ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, adjacent to the Grand Tetons National Park. The Tetons became the focal point as their efforts gained momentum. Howard Zahniser made frequent trips between Jackson Hole and Washington D.C. as he wrote and rewrote proposals for a new law. He worked tirelessly, advocating for a law among Congressional offices as he worked to build a coalition of lawmakers who would carry the proposal forward. He attended 18 congressional hearings on the topic.

Finally, on September 3, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Wilderness Act, designating 54 areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service as federally protected wilderness. By the stroke of his pen, 9.1 million acres became protected. Of those, only three areas were located east of the Mississippi River: the Great Gulf in New Hampshire and Linville Gorge and Shining Rock in North Carolina.

Neither Howard Zahniser nor Olaus Murie lived to see the bill's passage, but their hard work survives and has continued to grow. It is a bit ironic that by the efforts of MacKaye, and the Wilderness Society that he helped to create, the Wilderness Act became law four years ahead of federal protection for the Appalachian Trail. MacKaye was invited to attend the signing ceremony but declined due to his age – he was 85.

At the time of passage of the Act, the U.S. Forest Service originally believed there were many more areas in the east, beyond the original three, that could be preserved as wilderness, but there was a problem. Not much of the eastern half of the country could meet the wilderness standard as defined by the law. Very little acreage remained undisturbed or unaltered in some way. Over the preceding centuries of colonial and early American development in the east, most of it had been cleared for agriculture, harvested for timber products, or otherwise impacted.

The legal definition of wilderness included such terms as "an area where the earth and its community of life have been untrammelled by man" and "affected by the forces of nature, (where) the imprint

of man's work is substantially unnoticeable."

For us in the east, and particularly along the Appalachian Trail corridor, a more momentous act would be signed into law slightly more than 10 years later - the second federal effort to preserve wilderness areas. While we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, we are also approaching the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Eastern Wilderness Act. On January 3, 1975, that Act was signed by President Gerald Ford, when Congress used its authority to place many more areas east of the 100th meridian under wilderness protection and directed that many others be declared study areas for future inclusion as wilderness.

The Eastern Wilderness Act did not change the legal definition of wilderness but allowed less pristine, roadless areas to be considered and designated for preservation.

Protection for wilderness along the Appalachian Trail would come slowly. The first areas in Georgia to be set aside as wilderness were not along the A.T. but in other areas of the state. However, in 1984, the first wilderness area established along the A.T. in Georgia was set aside and celebrates its 40th anniversary

this year. The other four areas currently preserved along the A.T. would follow over the next seven years.

Wilderness designation requires that management policies and maintenance methods be more primitive to maintain the wilderness character in concert with the features that made the areas worthy of the designation. In these areas, construction and maintenance of the Appalachian Trail requires the lowest level of technology. Power tools are not allowed, so maintainers must use hand tools such as crosscut saws to cut and clear blowdowns and sling blades for weed removal. Machinery that is used to build trails in non-wilderness areas cannot be used. Instead, hand tools, such as Pulaskis, McLeods, mattocks and such, are used to build trails. There are fewer blazes, trail markers and signs along wilderness portions of the Trail, as well. Shelters are not usually found, except the historic structures that predate wilderness designation, which requires more primitive forms of camping for backpackers.

When the roof of the Blood Mountain Shelter, a CCC-built structure in what is today a wilderness area, was replaced a few years ago, materials were hauled in on the backs of mules. Only unpowered hand tools were used on the project. In non-wilderness areas, materials may be transported by helicopter as they were when the privies were rebuilt on Springer Mountain.

Today, with the passage of the original Act, the Eastern Wilderness Act, and other legislative actions since, preserved wilderness in the United States, in the legal sense, totals nearly 112 million acres in 44 states – five percent of the total land area. In Georgia, nearly 517,000 acres are set aside as wilderness in fourteen areas, or about two percent of the total area of the state. Across the country, wilderness areas are managed by each of the nation's land management agencies: U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

A total of 150.6 miles of the A.T. travels through wilderness areas. Nearly one-third of those miles are here in Georgia. Ironically, only two of the 105 A.T. miles in Shenandoah National Park travel through designated wilderness.

Continued on next page.

Our nation was once considered a vast wilderness for our European ancestors to discover. Following an effort that began within 50 years of the American Revolution, wilderness returned as an important American element 140 years later. In the words of the author and educator Wallace Stegner, "We need wilderness preserved ... because it was the challenge against which our character as a people was formed."

Though our land has been used for centuries by Native Americans, followed by colonialists and more recent Americans, with the Wilderness Act and its successors, we can explore areas that remain similar to those once explored by William Bartram in the 1770's or Lewis and Clark in 1803. For the less adventurous, we can be assured that through the preservation of wilderness areas, the challenges of nature that our ancestors once enjoyed are preserved for future generations.



Howard Zahniser

GATC Annual Trail Report - a Productive 12 Months

Reported by Rick Dicks

Maintaining the 78 miles of the Appalachian Trail in Georgia and the blue-blazed side trails is a big job, but for 94 years the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club has been up to the task. During the past 12 months, 200 GATC members participated in trail maintenance activities, logging 10,947.5 hours of work, 1,181 hours of travel and 1,996 individual trips to the A.T.

GATC member Christine Ramsey was presented with the Trail Worker of the Year award. She participated in more than 36 work trips during the past year.

Here are just some of our accomplishments:

- Completed preliminary design for a new set of steps at Amicalola Falls State Park where the trail crosses the road. Work will begin soon.
- The long-awaited relocation of the Byron Herbert Reece Trail began, with Konnarock crews contributing two work trips. Progress of this badly needed project to completely replace the existing eroded trail for visitors to Blood Mountain has exceeded expectations.
- A longstanding seepage problem on the A.T. (District 9) was repaired by a GATC rock crew, which built a stone culvert to funnel and drain water off the trail.
- A hazard tree analysis was conducted at Blue Mountain Shelter and some trees were identified as potential problems.
- A Trail Maintenance Committee was established to help in planning work projects, skills development and coordinating with GATC partners.
- A course catalog of trail maintenance classes was published, with a dozen classes currently available and more to be developed and added.
- The GATC rock crew, The Georgia Rockers, held 34 work trips with 43 members participating for 1,883 hours.
- The Georgia Rockers conducted 16 training workshops and three demonstrations at public events.
- Two Georgia Rockers worked with the Jolly Rovers Trail Crew in New York for nine days of advanced rock work.

Marking the end of an era, GATC member Lawson Herron retired as District Leader for District 5. His wisdom and leadership was a great contribution to the maintenance of the Appalachian Trail for many years.



GATC Trails Supervisor Rick Dicks presents the Trail Worker of the Year Award to Christine Ramsey.

A Hiker's Perspective

Continued from page 2

But the fellow who emerged from a tent big enough for three people at Bird Gap did. He was maybe early thirties, red beard, neat and trim, barefooted, recently retired military and smoking what looked like it was not his first cigarette of the day. He had questions, and we must have looked like we had some answers. In addition to being a GATC trail maintainer I am a Trail Ambassador, so I listened carefully.

He had only learned about the Appalachian Trail about a week ago, he said. So he bought some gear and hopped a bus for Atlanta and made his way to Springer Mountain. He wanted to know about bears and I tried to put his mind at ease about that and then shifted the subject.

"How far are you going?" I asked.

"All the way."

"Have you heard about Helene and all the damage it caused?"

"Not really, just that there was a hurricane in Florida."

I resisted the temptation to go into full lecture mode. As a Trail Ambassador I know that lecturing isn't our role and besides it rarely works. Every late winter and spring at our Amicalola Basecamp for thru-hikers we interact with hikers who are just this side of clueless about the A.T., so this fellow's lack of planning and preparation was not really a surprise.

"A lot of the Trail is impassable," I said. "The road bridge at Erwin is gone and that's just one of many. The farther north you go, the tougher it's going to become. There's probably thousands of trees down and they aren't going to be cleared anytime soon."

He wasn't as concerned at this news as he should have been. Instead he wanted to ask about bears again. During the night an animal had sniffed around his tent and hikers camped nearby had lost their food. "What do you think that was?"

"Yeah, that was a bear," I said. "But bears are the least of your problems."

He digested that and shrugged, obviously determined to push on north. He mentioned being sober now. And how wonderful the trail was and how good he felt to be out here, hiking a trail he had only learned about a few days ago. As he spoke there was a hint in his voice of troubled times in his past. And hope for the future.

I made another attempt to explain how dire the situation was but it didn't sink in. We wished him good luck and turned around for Jarrard Gap. I didn't get the chance to tell him that where he was headed had experienced half a year's worth of rain in four days. That a cubic yard of water weighs 1,700 pounds and Helene delivered 40 inches to some places along

the Trail and so just imagine the destruction those rushing walls of flood water caused. And what they had left behind.

My partner and I finished our scouting trip with a single measly cleared limb to report. But the Appalachian Trail in the south is not the same as it was before Sept. 27. Nor are those communities the floods washed away the same. The Trail in Georgia was spared by a fluke twitch of the storm's track to the east as it roared north out of Florida. The peacefulness of the beautiful forest on Gaddis Mountain, the tall mature hardwoods and the patches of early autumn color were deceptive. Imagine encountering a blowdown on average every quarter mile of trail. That's what was waiting for anyone hiking north out of Georgia.

Hikers, especially thru-hikers, are famously stubborn and determined and the allure of the A.T. is a powerful magnet drawing them to Georgia. But the responsible thing to do now is to be patient and wait. The Trail isn't going anywhere. Eventually the clubs that maintain it will be able to clear the southern third of the path and repair the damage. No one can accurately say how long that will take. For now, and maybe for many months to come, the people who are suffering should be our first concern.

A View From the Appalachian Trail

Continued from page 2

Finally, if you have visited our website lately, at www.georgia-atclub.org, which you definitely should do, you can't help but have noticed that it looks very different. That's because we launched a new website at the end of July. I used to never get emails from anyone saying they loved our old website – but now I do and no wonder. The new website is a great improvement on the old one and should serve GATC well for years to come. Again, it was the work of a very talented and dedicated group of tech-savvy GATC volunteers spearheaded by our Webmaster, Ron Hamlin.

Does that cover everything GATC accomplished in the past 12 months? Not even close.

Contact us to find out more and how you can get involved in our exciting work.



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