

# *The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly*

*A Publication of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club*

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Photo courtesy of Leon M. Rubin, taken on National Trails Day: "Armed with their implements of choice from the GATC tool trailer, the volunteers joined forces to improve a popular section of the Appalachian Trail between Tesnatee Gap and Cowrock Mountain in Union County."

Summer 2025





### 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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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, W.V. 25425  
(304) 535-6331

### EDITORIAL STAFF

**EDITOR** John Turner

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

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# A View From the Appalachian Trail

GATC President Lynne Beeson

When I say “reach out” what comes to mind? Do you think about extending services or information or assistance to specific groups and organizations? How about creating partnerships and sharing knowledge? If any of these are your answer, then you’re right! And the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club created a program to do exactly that. We call it community outreach.

There is a lot more to the GATC’s community outreach program than those broad points of providing assistance and information, sharing knowledge and fostering partnerships. Let’s take a deeper look at the GATC’s community outreach program and find the connections within the Georgia Appalachian Trail corridor that tie us all together.

The community outreach program within GATC has grown and expanded over the past decade to become a concrete example of volunteerism at its best. GATC outreach is about connecting those who may not have access to outdoor recreation opportunities to our natural environment through various activities, mostly in our north Georgia mountains. And nowhere is this more visible than with the many partners who engage with GATC for Hike Inn trips. Not familiar with the Len Foote Hike Inn? Then learn more about this wonderful

award-winning backcountry inn by visiting their website (<https://hike-inn.com>).

Most of our hike trips are funded through a Georgia Tag Grant that supports these efforts. Tag grant funds come from the purchase of those beautiful blue A.T. license plates you see on vehicles. Speaking of tag grants, the application period for 2026 tag grants is now open through August 29. Want to know more about the tag grant program in Georgia, like who can apply and what the grants are used for? Visit the following [georgia-atclub.org/get-involved/gatc-license-plate/](http://georgia-atclub.org/get-involved/gatc-license-plate/)

Our partners this past year for Hike Inn trips have included not only school groups, such as Mount Yonah Elementary, but the Global Village Project, the Refuge Women’s Network, and the VetSpace organization. Each of these groups and organizations was able to experience the knowledge and expertise of our club’s outstanding outreach hike leaders, get exposed to LNT principles (that’s Leave No Trace for those

of you who don’t know), challenge themselves on the hikes to and from the Hike Inn, and most importantly, become a part of the natural environment and become more aware of their place in it. Not only all of that, but these Hike Inn trips are seriously fun! As a bonus, sometimes the experience recruits a new GATC member.

Hike Inn trips are one major aspect of our GATC outreach efforts, but there’s a lot more. How many of you are aware that the Georgia AT Communities program also falls under what our club considers outreach? Coordination with our six AT Communities (Elijay, Dahlonega, Helen/White County, Blairsville, Hiawassee, and Clayton) expands everyone’s knowledge about the role GATC has with the A.T. in Georgia and creates more opportunities for furthering the GATC mission. In many ways, our AT Communities are the conduit to the Georgia Appalachian Trail.

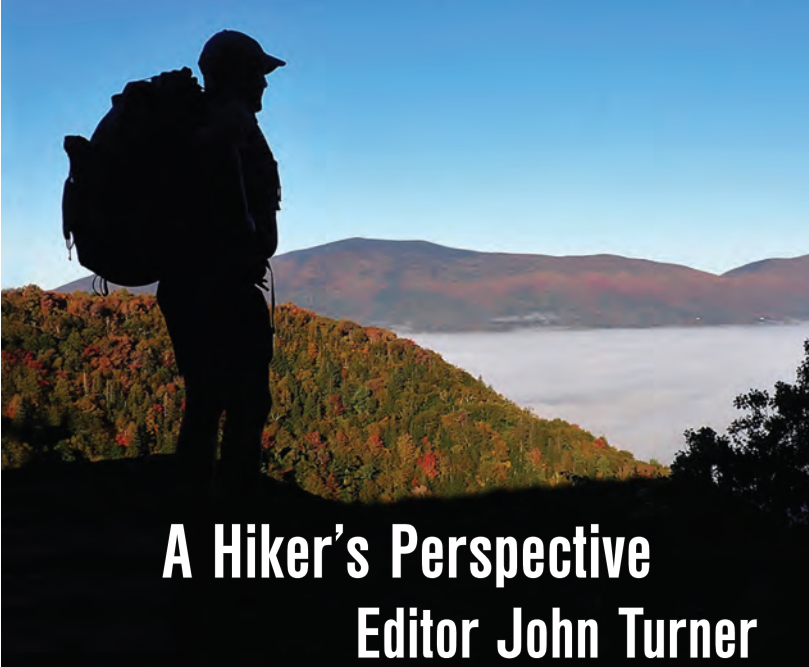
Have you ever met one of our Trail Ambassadors on the trail, or perhaps at a trailhead? Trail Ambassadors are another avenue for outreach as these individuals not only share knowledge

about the trail and hiking conditions but also model Leave No Trace principles with their hiker interactions.

As you can see, GATC’s outreach program is expansive. And it is hot! Not temperature hot, but hot

as in, it’s on fire for sharing our passion about the Appalachian Trail and the natural environment. As we find ourselves in the “heat dome” of Summer, just remember that the work of our outreach program and the GATC’s core mission of maintaining the Appalachian Trail in Georgia is ongoing, year round.

We will soon (not fast enough!) leave the sweltering days of Summer and find ourselves enjoying the cooler days of Fall. In fact, many of the larger box stores have already made the move to Fall décor! Looking ahead to Fall, which seems appropriate, save the dates for Trail Skills Workshop Nov 1-2 at Vogel State Park and the Women’s Trail Summit Nov 21-23 at Amicalola Falls State Park. Information on both of these, as well as our other events and work trips open to the public can be found on our website at [georgia-atclub.org](http://georgia-atclub.org). Come join us!



## A Hiker's Perspective

### Editor John Turner

**These Summer months** in the north Georgia Mountains have been hazy skies, afternoon thunderstorms, muggy air and a general languid atmosphere that advises taking the days slow and easy. The excitement of late Winter and Spring - when dozens of thru-hikers bustled into our Georgia Appalachian Trail Club Basecamp at Amicalola Falls State Park each day, eager to begin their great trek north toward Katahdin - seems a distant memory. Our GATC Trail Ambassadors who staffed the basecamp tend to move on to other concerns when the hot weather arrives.

But many of those eager-beaver thru-hikers who sat for our "Leo the Bear" video and our quick orientation about food storage safety, fire danger and the woes of norovirus are still out on the Appalachian Trail tromping north through the heat and thunderstorms. Our Trail Ambassadors got to know them for ten or twenty minutes at Basecamp or maybe during an evening at a Georgia shelter or in a chance meeting on the trail. We usually have no way of knowing how far north they can go. (And predicting their success or lack thereof is something we never do.) We tend to hear a lot about the casualties who don't make it out of Georgia but not much about the survivors of Georgia's 78 miles of the A.T. who are still out there.

So, when I attended Trail Days in Damascus this year I was curious. Would I meet any hikers who earned their green 2025 ATC backpack hangtag at Basecamp on a day when I was giving the orientations? I was thrilled to meet five thru-hikers who did just that. Thumper was the first one. He came into the small room of the Damascus library where I was signing books with other authors - a stout, jolly man with a full beard and a restless energy. He looked over the various book displays, and when he spotted me behind my table his face burst into a surprised grin.

"I remember you!" he said.

I had to admit I didn't recognize him at first. Then it came back to me - was it late March or early April? The fellow sitting in the first row of chairs tapping his foot with anticipation and a little bewilderment that he was finally on the doorstep of the Appalachian Trail.

"How has your hike been so far?" I asked.

"Incredible! Amazing! And pretty hard... harder than I thought. But I'm loving it."

The miles our GATC Basecamp hikers had walked from Springer Mountain was just the opening act of a long saga.

Four more thru-hikers came along while I was in Damascus and recognized me. Hearing their stories and learning how they were coping with the trail's challenges was both inspiring and gratifying. I asked each of them if our GATC orientation at the Basecamp had been helpful and the answers were a unanimous yes. They of course remembered Leo the Bear and agreed the video was a cool and effective way to get across a basic Leave No Trace lesson without lecturing.

Of the five, only one was planning to leave the trail. Maybe when he got to Harpers Ferry, maybe sooner, because of unstated reasons, maybe something back home or money or commitments and responsibilities. The other four had that determined look about them - Katahdin was their goal. The miles they had walked from Springer Mountain were just the prelude, the opening act of a long saga.

Then in June I had the opportunity to backpack some miles of the Appalachian Trail myself in Shenandoah National Park. With a friend's car parked at Lewis Cabins about midway through the park, we left my car at Rockfish Gap, crossed the bridge over the interstate and headed into the woods going north. The morning was cool, the sky clear and the air fresh. I was delighted to be back on the A.T. for the first time since I finished the trail in 2022.

After I had spent no more than five minutes walking, a young couple also hiking northbound passed me. They stopped to say hello. Their accent was familiar and they were looking at me in the same puzzled way I was looking at them.

"Did you start at Amicalola?" I asked.

They had, and the mutual recollection clicked into place.

It was March 27. The young man and woman had just arrived from Leiden in The Netherlands. I had welcomed them to the United States and Georgia and they had listened intently to the video and my brief orientation. Now they had trail names - Sleepy for the young fellow and Cookie for the young lady. And they were having the time of their lives on the Appalachian Trail. Eight hundred and sixty five miles in 64 days, a healthy average pace, not too fast because they took their time in Georgia, but now they were knocking out 20 to 25 miles per day with no problem.

And it got better. After three days on the trail, I had to admit I was too out-of-shape (and old) to hike all the way to the north end of Shenandoah in the allotted time, so I skipped ahead to Compton Gap to hike the easy miles down to the park's northern boundary. And as I was standing by the boundary sign chatting with two other fellows, who should come bounding down the trail toward me? Sleepy and Cookie - 103 miles in five days and they were still grinning. We had another wonderful reunion, and then off they went toward Front Royal seeking a bed and breakfast where they could get showers and beds and hot meals. Then on to the Roller Coaster and Harpers Ferry and Maryland and... well, more miles, more hot Summer days, more thunderstorms. More mountains.

I'm willing to bet money they are still out there - Sleepy and Cookie, Thumper, Treeman and Gemini and Crazy Wolf and Highliner, and the dad and his teenage daughter from Indiana, and all the other hikers I was privileged to meet and come to know just a little.

The miles ahead will be hard and success is never guaranteed on the Appalachian Trail. But I'm pulling for them. I have a hunch they are all going to see Katahdin's summit.



# National Trail Days Teaches Volunteers Tools of the Trade

Reported by Nora DePalma and Leon M. Rubin

When a group of trail maintainers from the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) gathered at the Tesnatee Gap Trailhead on the morning of National Trail Days, June 7, the first timers among the volunteers were introduced to an array of tools with some unfamiliar names: Fire rakes. Rogue hoes. Pick mattocks. Pulaskis (a combination axe and mattock). McLeod fire tools. Rock bars.

Armed with their implements of choice from the GATC tool trailer, the volunteers joined forces to improve a popular section of the Appalachian Trail between Tesnatee Gap and Cowrock Mountain in Union County. Armed with ropes and straps, shovels, and grit, the crew moved numerous large rocks and redefined the trail's critical edge, ensuring a safer, more sustainable pathway for hikers.

Stepping aside on occasion to let backpackers and day hikers pass by, the group spent about three hours working on the trail. Newcomers marveled at the size of the rocks that were dragged and rolled into place for later positioning as "gargoyles" – designed to prevent erosion and damage to the surrounding vegetation and soil by keeping hikers on the designated path.

Volunteers are the backbone of the Appalachian Trail experience, improving trail safety, preserving natural resources, and fostering the welcoming spirit that draws hikers and tourists to the A.T. Communities of North Georgia. The GATC maintains the first 78.1 miles of the Trail as it passes through Georgia, plus nearly 50 miles of side trails.

"GATC volunteers give back, mile by mile, so that both residents and visitors can continue to enjoy North Georgia's natural beauty," said Christine Ramsey, Assistant Rock Crew Chair and a Maintainer Trainer, who organized the National Trails Day volunteer effort.

After cleaning their tools and returning them to the trailer, the group enjoyed a Jim's Smokin' Que lunch organized by GATC Activities Committee members Joyce Baker and Nora DePalma.

In addition to Christine Ramsey, the participants included club members Ali Ansari and Kelly Motter (Crew Leaders), Chris Fulford, Art Hagar, Emilio Posada, Patrick Schumacher, John Skinner, Silu Tu, Leon Rubin, and GATC Trails Supervisor Tom Lamb along with guests Cindy Ciaccio and Joy Nash. Jesse Lumsden from the U.S. Forest Service and two of his interns played key roles, as well. Special thanks go out to Emilio for bringing the tool trailer, Joyce and Nora



Armed with ropes and straps, shovels, and grit, the crew moved numerous large rocks and redefined the trail's critical edge, ensuring a safer, more sustainable pathway for hikers.

for picking up the lunches, and Emilio and Joyce for the desserts. National Trails Day is a nationwide celebration of trails and outdoor stewardship sponsored by the American Hiking Society. Volunteers from the Benton MacKaye Trail Association also planned to perform trail work on June 7.

To learn about upcoming trail maintenance opportunities, please visit the GATC website at <https://georgia-atclub.org>.



# A.T. Section Maintainers Give Back to the Trail They Love

Reported by Whitney Crawford

Whitney and David Crawford became members of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) in October 2024, shortly after David retired from 20 years of service in the U.S. Navy. Finally able to settle in Sautee Nacoochee, GA—a place close to their hearts—they saw an opportunity to give back to a trail that had long been part of their lives.

Having hiked various sections of the Appalachian Trail over the years, the Crawfords were eager to contribute to its preservation and stewardship. The GATC felt like the perfect fit. Whitney, who holds a degree in environmental science, has always had a deep love for nature and hiking. Volunteering on the trail was a natural extension of her passion and a calling she felt strongly compelled to answer.

Since joining, the Crawfords have participated in two trail maintenance classes and several work trips. They now maintain Section 8.10 – Chattahoochee Gap to Spaniard's Knob, a challenging and remote stretch. Reaching their section requires hiking 2.5 miles via the Jack's Knob Trail, gaining roughly 1,300 feet in elevation. As the area is within designated wilderness, they carry all tools—Pulaski, Rogue Hoe, and full packs—by hand. The maintained section itself is 1.1 miles long, making each round-trip a 7.2-mile effort.

On a recent trip, the Crawfords focused on debarming—removing the berm that had formed over time due to poor water drainage. They added a new water diversion to help prevent future erosion and improve trail sustainability. This section also had numerous root-related trip hazards, which they began to remove to create a safer, more comfortable hiking experience. By the end of the day, they had debarmed approximately 50 feet of trail and cleared trip hazards along 200 feet. They also took time to check and clean up three campsites located along the route.

The Crawfords are grateful for the guidance and mentorship they've received from seasoned volunteers. Jordan Shenefield, who previously maintained their section, has been generous with his advice and encouragement. Phillip Hodges has also walked the trail with them several times, helping them learn to “read” the trail and identify priority work areas.

Whitney and David deeply value the friendships they've made through the GATC and are excited to continue serving and maintaining their section of the trail for many years to come.

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Whitney and David Crawford maintain Section 8.10 – Chattahoochee Gap to Spaniard's Knob, a challenging and remote stretch.





# GATC Outreach and The Vet Space: Empowering Women Veterans Through Nature

Reported by Lynne Beeson

**GATC's Outreach Program is committed to reaching out to diverse groups and organizations**, from school age to adults, enabling them to experience a unique adventure to Georgia's only backcountry inn, the Len Foote Hike Inn. One such recent trip clearly illustrates our Outreach mission of creating opportunities for individuals to connect with nature and experience the outdoor environment in a safe setting.

It was hot, humid, and not exactly what one could call nice hiking weather (although it was very sunny!), when Ashley Luke (Membership Director) and Lynne Beeson (President) had the honor and privilege of leading and sharing the Hike Inn experience with 19 women veterans through an event sponsored by The Vet Space, an organization created exclusively for women veterans, with the mission of "empowering women veterans through nature." The founder and executive director is GATC member, Vedia Barnett. GATC is honored to have Vedia on our membership roll! Vedia had handled every detail of the event, advertising, getting participants, providing needed information, and making it fun! One can learn more about The Vet Space at <https://www.thevetspace.org/>.

Ashley and I were the only non-Veteran women in this special group! However, as my father was a USAF WWII veteran, my brother a USAF Black Hawk pilot and my son a Marine, I had connections! Our "troop" was comprised of women veterans representing the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force, and the U.S. Marine Corps, with a variety of ages, military experiences and stories. We had a mother (Army) and her daughter (Air Force) and two highly competitive sisters, both Marines. We had some who were new to hiking, others with more experience, and a couple who are world travelers, including just having completed the Camino Frances.

Due to the heat and humidity, it was a slow and steady "march" to the Hike Inn, keeping everyone well hydrated and encouraged, and thankful for the fact that the Hike Inn trail is very shaded and crosses several creeks for cooling rest stops. Of course, being women veterans, there was the occasional military cadence, with various chants to maintain morale, and a lot of laughter to go along with every step.

Once at the Hike Inn in mid-afternoon, the nature connection settled in, and they were able to enjoy the "chill out" effect from everyday life-- kick back, complete a puzzle, engage in story telling, have a wonderful dinner of pulled pork and wild rice, enjoy an entertaining "show and tell" program about animals and plants by Issac, admire an evening sunset and, for some, even experience a bear sighting! Not to be outdone, others were treated to a nice sized black rat snake hanging out and doing his snake thing on the banister in front of rooms 14 and 15, until it was relocated by Hike Inn staff person, Sarah, back to the forest floor.

The next morning, before the always awesome breakfast and lots of coffee, many enjoyed a Hike Inn sunrise, which is always a highlight at daylight!

For the hike back out, given that the group had a variety of hiking experience levels, we divided the group into two: one aptly named the "Rabbits," faster and off to the races, with the other, the "Turtles," slowly sauntering down the trail (note the use of the word saunter, as John Muir despised the word "hike"). Ashley was the sweep for the "Rabbits" and I brought up the rear for the "Turtles," since sauntering is my specialty! Everyone made it safely back to the Hike Inn Trailhead parking lot; however, it was noted that the "Rabbits" had a sub-squad, the "bunnies" and the "Turtles" had a sub-squad, the "snails." Ooh-rah!



Ashley Luke (Membership Director) and Lynne Beeson (President) had the honor and privilege of leading and sharing the Hike Inn experience with 19 women veterans through an event sponsored by The Vet Space, an organization created exclusively for women veterans, with the mission of "empowering women veterans through nature."

Overheard during the hike was the comment, "I never knew there was so much to learn outdoors," as they learned about everything from wild azaleas and blooming rhododendrons, to trail maintenance, erosion and "trail eyes," how to use trekking poles, water management while hiking, and endless more observations, questions asked and answered, and awareness increased about our natural resources.

It was a meaningful experience for all, fast or slow, experienced or not, and in the end it achieved the mission of The Vet Space organization, which is to empower women veterans through nature, and fulfilled GATC's mission of promoting appreciation of natural outdoor places through education and recreational activities. It was a true win-win for all involved. Many thanks to Vedia and all the awesome women veterans who participated and provided Ashley and I the opportunity to join them in their Hike Inn adventure.



# Wilcox County Middle Schoolers Experience the Backcountry

Reported by Robert (Bo) Bobinski

Last year, Necole Blackwell, the Wilcox County Elementary School Gifted Students teacher, traveled almost five hours from South Georgia with a group of her students to Amicalola Falls State Park for a trip to the Hike Inn. Mrs. Blackwell earned the trip through the Forest for Every Classroom program. The trip was a big hit for Necole and her students, many of whom were visiting the North Georgia mountains for the first time. Knowing she was moving up to teach the Middle School Gifted students starting with the 2024-2025 school year, Necole requested another trip to the Hike Inn for a new group of students.

Thanks to a GATC Outreach Tag Grant, Wilcox County students once again had the opportunity to enjoy North Georgia. One of the things I like about Mrs. Blackwell's program is her requirement for students to write an essay about "Why" they should get to attend this trip. A couple of students told me it was their best essay, and with complete honesty, some told me they're not sure they would want to go on a hike like this again, but they felt it was a great experience.

Originally scheduled for February, Winter weather forced the trip to be rescheduled to June. As fate would have it, the same thing happened with last year's trip! Unlike last Summer when the hike was warmer than our South Georgia guests had anticipated (they were hoping for some cool mountain air), this year the weather was not quite as hot and humid, and there was no rain!

The group boarded a county school bus in the wee hours of the morning on June 3 and traveled up I-75 through Atlanta, arriving at Amicalola Falls State Park shortly after 10am. The kids were ready to stretch their legs on the trail after a long bus ride. At the trailhead, John Oudin and I briefed the kids about what they could expect during the 5.1 mile hike out. As usual, we started our initial Leave No Trace education with Principle #3 – Dispose of Waste Properly. Teaching new hikers how to pee and poop in the woods is an essential skill because when you gotta go, you gotta go. As is always the case with kids, discussing a normal bodily function is about the last thing they want to do! To keep things lively, two students were bestowed the honor of carrying the privy kit – one carried the Ziplock bag with toilet paper and hand sanitizer and the other carried the "golden spoon," a.k.a. the trowel. As always, the students were mortified at the idea of using the woods as their toilet, but deep down inside, everyone likes to talk about poop, right? Throughout the journey to the Hike Inn and back, the privy kit and golden spoon were rotated among the students.

On our way to the Hike Inn, we had our first snake encounter (a sign of things to come). I was leading the column of hikers, walking and talking as usual, when one of the students said, "Hey, Mr. Bo, look what you walked by." I had completely missed a Copperhead coiled up a couple of feet off the trail from where I had just passed. It blended perfectly into the foliage. I don't share the same affinity for snakes that our South Georgia guests do. As one boy exclaimed, "We see snakes all the time where I live." Their enthusiasm for wildlife and the desire to see more would come to fruition as the day continued.

During the hike, John and I talked with the students about the Hike Inn's history and its focus on sustainable operations, conservation, and minimizing food waste. We also discussed the composting room, and not too many students seemed interested in that part of the facility (old food, paper, worms, etc.). Once we arrived at the Hike Inn and the students got settled in their rooms, Sarah gave the group a tour of the property. Surprisingly, the kids became very interested in composting. The next thing I knew, several of those previously uninterested had their hands in the compost bin and were displaying the worms in their hands as they moved the composting material around. Go figure.



A Copperhead coils up a couple of feet off the trail, blending perfectly into the foliage.

Before dinner, the students spent time roaming the grounds and found a den of, you guessed it, snakes. Thankfully, it was a den with two curious rat snakes. After a great dinner prepared by Matt and his staff, Sarah gave the students a presentation on bats. As the sun started to set, the students went for another jaunt around the grounds in search of more critters! Two students talked about staying outside all night in hopes of seeing a bear. John and I kept saying that was neither a good idea nor was it going to happen! Around 9:15pm, as the sun fully set, a student came up to me very enthusiastically and proudly displayed a picture of a rather large Copperhead that was looking for a meal under the dining facility. Three snake encounters in one day pegged my fun meter. At 9:45pm, Mrs. Blackwell and I determined it was time to end the "Hide and Seek" game between the rambunctious students and the local wildlife. All John and I could think about was the old saying "It's all fun and games, until..."

Everyone was up early as planned and remarkably full of energy, considering what a long day they'd had less than 12 hours prior. One thing I've learned about the kids from Wilcox County is they're early risers. Back home during the school year, many are up by 5am to catch the 6am school bus. Matt fed everyone a hearty breakfast, and we were on the trail just after 9am for the hike back to Amicalola. The group made the journey in just under three hours. Once John and I bid the group adieu, they made their way down to the Visitor Center for a snack and some souvenirs before the long journey back to South Georgia.

Another great group of kids from down South Georgia! We're already planning next year's trip!



The students spent time roaming the grounds and found a den with two curious rat snakes.





Women Veterans from The Vet Space enjoyed a Hike Inn sunrise, which is always a highlight at daylight!

