

PATH WAYS

Of the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers

PATH Year 56, No. 1

Spring 2020

The Wreck on Pine Mountain

Many railroads once crisscrossed Southwest Virginia and the Mount Rogers region where we work. They helped create Fairwood, the now-vanished lumber mill town not far from our Appalachian Trail section. It's amazing to visit the site, now a meadow and woodland, and realize that once, scores of people worked here processing the timber from the Mount Rogers highlands. *(If you want to go, the Mount Rogers Naturalist Rally, in May, often runs field trips to the site. See the calendar.)*

It's also amazing to note that the open crest zone of Mount Rogers was once a spruce-fir forest so dark that it was said to require a lantern in the middle of the day. The railroads made that logging possible, created the vanished town and made the hamlet of Troutdale a boomtown.

Here's one more story, this one a tragic one, about logging in what became the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. This excerpt is from "Hiking Virginia," by Bill and Mary Burnham, but the story is also told in "The Switchback Scenic Route," by Gary Price. That book is out of print, but PATH has a copy, and it's also available from the library in Marion, Va.

This sad event happened in 1912. Here's the story:

"It was for Spruce Lumber Co. that engineer Kent Steffey worked on the September day he took a Shay locomotive, No. 9, up Pine Mountain. After uncoupling a boxcar and reversing the engine, he started downhill. The train gathered speed, and Steffey blew two sharp whistles, signaling for brakes. Nothing happened. The train careened on. Steffey's repeated whistle blows pealed across the mountain. The conductor and fireman jumped, but Steffey stayed aboard. Workers later found his body under the smoking wreckage of the 65-ton Shay. All that's left is his tombstone in Rural Retreat, Va., and a ballad, 'The Wreck of Ole Number Nine.' It goes:

"Kent Steffey was an engineer, the best one on the line.
Each morning he left Fairwood with his Engine Number Nine.
To the mountains he would go and make his run on time,
Not knowing that his fate relied on his lucky Number Nine.

"Fields Anderson was conductor on the train that awful day.
The autumn sun was shining on the world of color gay.
Beneath the sky so bright and blue it seemed no danger lay,
His engine brakes refused to work, Poor Kent's train ran away.

"On brakes, On brakes, he whistled, but his brakemen were all gone,
And his fireman, Nute Bakeman, thinking of his home,
Leaped from the cab, his life to save, as Nine dashed madly on.



Photo courtesy of Tom Blevins

“Still on the rails the bell began its pondering clang
And out upon the mountain air the mourning whistle rang.
‘Farewell, farewell,’ it seemed to say and the wheels like death did sing.
It struck the curve with an awful shock, and from the rails she sprang.

“Beneath the wreck now cold and dead, the engineer was found,
His body crushed and mangled and buried beneath the ground.
And now poor Kent is sleeping beneath the mountain sod.
His body lies cold and buried, but his soul has gone to God.”

The Burnhams conclude the story with this comment on the picture above:

“They stare at you, men in dirty overalls and brimmed hats sitting atop Steffey’s wrecked Shay No. 9. Say what you will about habitats destroyed, species lost, trees gone forever. But don’t forget their faces.”

This is a newsletter for the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers, a trail work club that maintains approximately 70 miles of the Appalachian Trail in Southwest Virginia. This newsletter comes out four times a year, as long as we have enough material and contributions. It is sent by email to the PATH List and others, or by U.S. Mail to members who don’t have email. Feel free to print and post in your local outdoor store. SUMMER DEADLINE JUNE 1, 2020. Web site: www.path-at.org. Or for info: PiedmontATHikers@gmail.com. Or see our Facebook page.

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2020 Calendar

Here is our calendar for 2020, along with some other events that may interest members. PATH work weekends are the third weekend of each month from March through October. Contact us if you have questions.

March 14-15 **Southern Partnership Meeting** **Marion, Va.**
Planning meeting for clubs and oversight agencies in the South. It's at Hungry Mother State Park Conference Center. Visit www.appalachiantrail.org and click on Community and Events. Or contact us.

March 20-22 **March Volunteer Weekend** **Sugar Grove, Va.**
The first of our work weekends for 2020. As in the past, it will be based out of the U.S. Forest Service volunteer work camp at Sugar Grove and will probably focus on surveys of winter damage. Pot luck on Saturday night.



Karen, Betsy and Marian at Stony Fork Campsite during last year's Summerfest. This year's will take place in June. See information on Page 4. Thanks to Jim Houck for the photo.

April 2-3 **Crosscut Saw Certifying**
Sugar Grove, Va.
This is certification and recertification (first day only) for crosscut sawyers. Course takes place at the Sugar Grove work center. Space is limited. Contact the club or Josh Kloehn (jkloehn@appalachiantrail.org).

April 17-19 **Wilderness First Aid**
Sugar Grove, Va.
Two-day wilderness first aid course will renew your first aid certificate for the next two years, including CPR. PATH will pay the \$50 cost for this course. Visit www.landmarklearning.org.

April 17-19 **April Volunteer Weekend**
Sugar Grove, Va.
Base Camp at Sugar Grove with a pot-luck meal Saturday evening. Some work will probably take place this weekend on Garden Mountain near the Jenkins Shelter.

April 25-26 **Chain Saw Certification**
Sugar Grove, Va.
This is certification and recertification (first day only) for chain saw sawyers working in the national forests. Course takes place at the Sugar Grove work center. Space is limited. Contact Josh Kloehn

May 8-10 **Mount Rogers Naturalist Rally** **Konnarock, Va.**
The 46th annual edition of the area's premier Naturalist Rally, including seminars, field trips, a butterfly count, an all-day hike to the summit of Mount Rogers and more. Visit www.blueridgediscoverycenter.org for information.

May 14-17 **Appalachian Trail Days** **Damascus, Va.**
The annual Appalachian Trail Celebration, with a parade, talent show, auction, music, workshops, work trips and assorted foolishness. Go to www.visitdamascus.org or call 276-475-3831.

May 15-17 **May Volunteer Weekend** **Stony Fork, Va.**
Base Camp at Stony Fork Campground off U.S. 52 north of Wytheville, Va., with a pot-luck meal Saturday evening. To reach the campground, take I-77 north to Krenning Road, at the entrance to the Big Walker Tunnel. Take the road west five miles to the campground. Or take U.S. 52 from Wytheville.

June 17-21 **2020 Summerfest** **Stony Fork, Va.**
PATH'S annual extended work weekend. Base Camp at Stony Fork Campground off U.S. 52 north of Wytheville, Va., with a pot-luck meal Saturday evening.

July 17-19 **July Volunteer Weekend** **Stony Fork, Va.**
Base Camp at Stony Fork Campground off U.S. 52 north of Wytheville, Va., with a pot-luck meal Saturday evening.

August 14-16 **August Volunteer Weekend** **Stony Fork, Va.**
Base Camp at Stony Fork Campground off U.S. 52 north of Wytheville, Va., with a pot-luck meal Saturday evening.

September 18-20 **September Volunteer Weekend** **TBA**
Base Camp probably at Stony Fork Campground off U.S. 52 north of Wytheville, Va., with a pot-luck meal Saturday evening.

October 9-12 **39th ALDHA Gathering** **Abingdon, Va.**
The annual gathering of the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association. It will take place at the SW Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon. Email Blaze@aldha.org.

October 16-18 **October Volunteer Weekend** **TBA**
Base Camp probably at Stony Fork Campground off U.S. 52 north of Wytheville, Va., with a pot-luck meal Saturday evening.

November 21 **Annual Meeting** **TBA.**
Our annual meeting, scheduled somewhere in the PATH region in North Carolina or Virginia. Review of 2020 work. (Note: There has been some talk of rescheduling this meeting to take place during the work year. Stay tuned.)

Bits and Pieces

■ That business about using a leaf blower on trail work? Board member **Ed Martin** mentioned it at the annual meeting in November, and he's since had a chance to try it out. Here are a couple of pictures from his work. Yes, to answer a couple of comments, it is noisier than using a rake. But Herb MacDonald walked with Ed and Lloyd Walker right before Christmas and says it works. "Ed's blower actually was capable of blowing wet soaked leaves off the foot bed and all water structures along this section," Herb reported. "It was obvious that this treatment will result in the foot bed moving up the side hill." Ed says fuel consumption is about 1 liter per mile or 2 liters per hour. "Carrying 3 liters of extra fuel gives one person about 5 miles before he needs a resupply. The blower must have a clear back for the muffler or you burn your pack. Found out the hard way."



Photos courtesy of Ed Martin

The pictures show Ed Martin with the leaf blower and a completed trail after blowing. PATH has so far not taken any position on the procedure.

■ If you're staying at Sugar Grove, remember there is no cell phone service there. Some people have been able to get out at the Mount Rogers NRA headquarters at the top of the mountain. The **EMERGENCY number for Sugar Grove is (276) 677-4055**. This number is for emergencies only and not friendly chatter. Limit calls to less than 10 minutes and do not take phone to your pod. The Trail Maintenance Coordinator may also receive calls notifying him of

cancellations or changes in individual plans. The USFS and ATC have been gracious enough to provide this phone and also internet access 365 days of the year.

■ For kids and grandkids: Registrations for the **Blue Ridge Discovery Center 2020 Summer Camps** are open. Offerings include six day camps for ages six to 10 and six sleepaway camps for ages 11 to 17. The camps operate out of the former Lutheran Girls School in Konnarock, Va., once the home of the Konnarock AT Cew and now the home of the Natural Center. Camps are in June, July and August. Visit www.blueridgediscoverycenter.org. Explore, discover and share the wonders of the Blue Ridge and expert guides and new friends.

■ The Blue Ridge Discovery Center is also now offering some programs for adults. A **Women's Fly Fishing Weekend** will take place March 21-22 at the center in Konnarock, Va., for women who want an introduction to fly fishing or to advance their skills. Cost is \$160, or \$150 for members. Visit the Web site at www.blueridgediscoverycenter.org for information.

■ If you want to contribute to a good cause, consider donating to the ATC/Roanoke club's attempt to improve the currently **chaotic parking situation at McAfee Knob**, one of the iconic Appalachian Trail sites in Virginia. Some 45,000 people visit the site each year, often overflowing the small parking area along Va. 311. The Roanoke AT Club, ATC, the National Park Service and Virginia DOT are trying to raise \$200,000 to expand parking, add rest rooms and build a bridge. You can donate at www.appalachiantrail.org/mcafee. Or send a letter to ATC stipulating the donation is for the McAfee Knob project.

■ To send information to all members via the PATH List, send your email messages to path-list@path-at.org. To subscribe to the PATH List, see the directions on the Web page at Inside PATH, which will require an ID and password to enter. Subscribing to the list will increase the amount of email you receive, but it's a quick way to get informed and involved about PATH work. **It will pay you to sign up for the PATH List.**

■ **Correction:** An introduction to Horace Kephart's book, "Camping and Woodcraft," featured in the Holiday newsletter, was written by a Bryson City naturalist named George Ellison. We misspelled his last name in our story. We're happy that our story got to a Kephart descendant, who liked it. Thanks to author Ron Hudnell and Vice President Betsy Truscott for making that happen.

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Want to Join?



We will have lots of trail work scheduled on the Appalachian Trail in 2020, and now is the time to get enrolled. You may join PATH (or renew) at our Web site, www.path-at.org, with PayPal, or print and mail this form with check or money order. You can also attend work weekends/meetings and join or renew there. Please don't mail cash!

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Annual membership dues are \$20 for an individual _____, \$25 for a family _____ or \$15 for a student_____. Donations are also

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Send payment to PATH Treasurer, P.O. Box 4423, Greensboro, North Carolina 27404. Total amount enclosed _____

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