

Bland County Festival of Trails - Bland County AT Community Designation Report May 2012

Bland County was officially recognized as an Appalachian Trail Community this past Saturday at Bland County's inaugural Festival of Trails. In addition to the designation ceremony, many other activities were held through the day. PATH lead two guided hikes on the Laurel Creek Loop which includes the Trail Boss/AT Loop and High Water/ AT Loop. Barry Hester led the Trail Boss Loop and I lead the High Water Loop. We had 13 hikers and one puppy. Thanks to Delores Gregory and her husband Pete and their church, Bastian Union, for providing us with a van for shuttle service!!

PATH also had a booth. Thanks to Marcia Cope, Chris Bracknell and his wife, Rhonda, for all their work in getting everything set up and to Barry, Steve Yonts and Jeff Brown for helping out as well. Julie and Ed Hasenbuhler were also there supporting PATH. We had flyers for Summerfest and for the June hike at Tilson Farmstead (Plasterbank Road to Crawfish). Lots of those were taken. Marcia enlarged a map of Bland County and had folks that stopped by mark where they lived with pushpins and then showed them where the trail was located in relation to their homes. Everyone liked that activity. Barry caused many a double take with his new hair style. Our booth was beside the ATC and USFS booths which allowed for some good socializing.

Bland County Relay for Life ABB employees held a Tour de Bland Charity Bike ride on some of Bland County's picturesque back roads in the afternoon. The rides were 14 miles and 37 miles. Fifty bikers participated including PATH's own Chris Bracknell and Jeff Brown. On behalf of ABB and our team, I want to thank Chris and Jeff for participating and helping make our first Tour de Bland such a success. So many folks have given positive feedback that we are planning on hosting a Tour de Bland Fall event. Hope you guys can come ride again and see the fall colors.

Local musicians performed throughout the afternoon and dancing was held in the pavilion to the music of The Hollybrook Band until the sun went down. There were several vendors some being PATH, ATC, USFS, Mountain Lake Conservancy, True Wheel (hike outfitter), Highland Outfitters (new to the Dismal area of Bland County) and several for health screenings, food and crafting.

Of course, the most important part of the festival was the ceremony for Bland County's AT Community designation. Speakers were Eric Workman - Bland County Administrator, Mark Wenger - Executive Director ATC, Laura Belleville - Director of Conservation ATC, Steve Yonts - PATH Vice President, Barb Walker - Eastern Divide District Ranger, Delores Gregory - TTEC Graduate Rocky Gap HS and Nick Asbury - Board of Supervisors. Delores Gregory's comments gave PATH a lot of accolades as she mentioned all the time our club has spent coming to the schools and doing programs, presenting them with maps and guide books for the library and the monthly hikes which get her kids out on the trail. Steve talked about the symbiotic relationship between Bland County and the AT. The objective is to get hikers into Bland to spend their 20 dollar bills. PATH is willing to help Bland County with this objective. He also researched and found that North bound thru-hikers reach the 25% mark right as they cross out of

Crawfish Valley onto Walker Mountain and into Bland County. Bland County wants to capitalize on this milestone by having a celebration tradition for these hikers when they get into town. What should that be??? Respond if you have a good idea!!!

All in all the day was a huge success for a first time event and next year we will be even bigger and better. Thanks to all who helped and Im looking forward to seeing you at Summerfest in June 14 - 18. We have lots of fun stuff going on: Camping along the AT, Hiking, Outdoor Activities, Trail Maintenance, Saturday night community Wiener Roast and 75th Anniversary celebration of the completion of the Appalachian Trail, Fellowship and Fun. More to come.

A scan of the Bland Messengers coverage and photos of the Festival of Trails may be found in the 2012 Gallery starting at photo 213 or at this URL http://www.path-at.org/gallery/index.php/PATH-Photos-2012/BlandMessenger_FestivalTrailsDesignation_Page1-1555052985 (If anyone is interested, I video clipped the ceremony but must apologize it is in two segments as my camera limits video size. Email me if you want the clips.)

Happy Hiking,
Diana Billips
PATH Hiking Coordinator
Bland County AT Ambassador