

Twenty-One Stalwart DAWGS braved days of intermittent and at times heavy rain; although some were there for as long as six days, there were few complaints! Thank you to all that participated; truly you make it worthwhile!

Due to my circumstances over the past nine and a half months, I had only seen our Trail DAWG'S Base-camp on brief occasions totaling less than an hour in all of 2013 prior to my arrival there on July 24th. Several reports early in the year had advised me of branches down, some as large as small trees; Sam Tickle [Amy Roberts' cousin] had kept the road open, still when I saw it in April, I was dismayed. By the time I made it back in June for a second *even shorter visit*, the accumulation of debris was much worse and one broken tree was nearly blocking the driveway. However, with Sam Mabe mowing every few weeks, the grassy areas were quite neat.

Wednesday, June 24th: John Shaffner mowed over the yard to get the grass as short as possible while, armed with a broom and a bottle of Ortho, I knocked down cobwebs laden with actively crawling residents and their prey under the pavilion. Once the grass was as low as possible, I pulled off that job to connect a bottle of 'Bug-Free Backyard' to the garden hose and sprayed the common areas; the rain held off until all was thoroughly dry and in less than thirty minutes the no-see-ums were no longer felt! Betsy Truscott arrived shortly after I finished; she cleaned and disinfected the tables and soon the three of us were sitting around our first camp-fire. John started it using some of the accumulated debris and once it was a good hot fire we burned several broken wooden chairs and watched as they tumbled; I would never have to worry again about someone using them and getting hurt. It was nearly mid-night when Valerie Cope, Grace Shuping, Hope and Faith Elmiligy, and Alexandra Agoustides arrived! I think I said 'hello' and 'good-night' in the same breath.

Thursday, June 25th: So... there were eight DAWGS on the mountain at dawn and a Baker's Dozen by night fall with much cleaning under the pavilion by moi and an even greater push by John and Betsy as they tackled the downed trees and branches, wrangling with those that were in the worst of places; and this using a bow saw and loppers after discovering that the chain on the saw was dull. Katie Floyd, Jarred Faircloth, Jim Houck, and Greg Weaver arrived during the afternoon and Kelly Chambers came down from next door when she wasn't working. Valerie, Betsy, and John plus all the kids went on an excursion to Wolf Creek Indian Village and by late afternoon I was almost satisfied with the Pavilion having completed almost two week-ends of cleaning in two days; that could not have happened without all the aid I received from Valerie and Betsy plus Valerie also did most of that day's cooking. We had a clear night, our nightly camp-fire, and great conversations until almost mid-night even as the fire burned into only glowing embers. For me this is the most meaningful part of Trail DAWG Days... the sharing of our thoughts, feelings, experiences, and ideas; it cements the bonds that bind us to each other and brings us back yearly!

Friday, June 26th: Greg, John, Betsy and others continued with cleaning up debris and also trimmed the trees along-side the entrance road, stacking up wood for our camp-fires as they worked; Valerie and Grace focused on meals and Pavilion clean-up; and Jim and I took off to shop for supplies and groceries in Wytheville plus fill up water containers at Stony Fork Camp-ground. Kelly joined us again in the afternoon and Trudy Whitney, Sam Mabe, Paul Clayton, Norma Johnston, and SuZanna Flinchum all arrived between and/or during rain squalls. We got plenty of exercise just putting our yard chairs under the Pavilion, setting them out again, and then repeating the cycle. Later we enjoyed our traditional Hot Dog Meal for Trail DAWGS and our third camp-fire in a somewhat damp fire-ring.

Saturday, June 27th: For the first time *EVER* Trail DAWGS milled about camp watching the rain from under the Pavilion while happily visiting with one another; by afternoon it cleared enough for Paul to lead a short excursion on the Appalachian Trail. Diana Billips came by and picked up Grace and Alexandra for an afternoon at her farm near the AT up in the northern end of Bland County. That night we had our 'Open Grill' meal with whatever participants brought for the grill plus a wide assortment of other dishes including vegetables, fruits, and desserts... and including the always popular 'dirt-cake' that Betsy and the kids put together. Becky Chambers and Kelly joined us; Barry Hester arrived; we feasted rather well and believe it or not had another camp-fire in the now rain-drenched fire-ring! As usual, I stayed up too late but again was intrigued by and thoroughly enjoying the conversations!

Sunday, June 28th: Paul and Betsy produced a second fantastic breakfast, everyone pitched in with general camp clean-up, and all too soon folks were packing up and moving out... already making plans for our **Seventeenth Annual Trail DAWG Days Event next summer... July 25, 26, and 27th, 2014.** Very special thanks to those who carried away trash or recycle and to those who spent most of the day helping clean up the Pavilion before starting home... I truly couldn't do it without you. In the late afternoon Barry lead a hike in the near-by woods, after which we ate left-overs; later sitting around the camp-fire we enjoyed the remainder of Valerie's Fourth-of-July Firework that Barry and John set off between the camp-fire and the bunk-house.

Monday, June 29th: Part of our final clean-up day was spent going through the accumulated toys, tents, and other paraphernalia... deciding what we were going to keep and what we were going to pitch; I spent a couple of hours spraying all around the Pavilion into every crack and crevice I found in hopes that not too many spiders would arrive before our AGATE weekend, August 16-18th. Mid-afternoon Valerie and John took the kids over to Big Walker Mountain Look-out and I was ALONE for several hours; unashamedly I sat nearly the whole time savouring the solitude. It was just after ten PM when Valerie and girls pulled out of the drive-way with John Shaffner and I behind them; we were a tired bunch but with great memories of the weekend!

Submitted by Marcia Cope

PS: Please send corrections if I have mistakes; I am so very far from perfect.