

2008 - Trail DAWGS began their Second Decade

Of Service by Side-hilling

Report by Marcia Cope

Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hiker's (PATH's) Annual Sidehilling Event was held earlier than usual this year as the Trail DAWGS gathered the last weekend in July 2008 at their Base-Camp in Bland County, Virginia, ready to begin a second decade of Service by Side-hilling on the Appalachian Trail. This year's event was dedicated to the memory of Vaughan Thomas (1941-2008). We honored Vaughn for the gentle, gracious, multi-talented woman and a dear friend that she was plus her many contributions to Dawg Days, PATH, the ATC, and the trail she dearly loved. 'Doc' shared stories that touched my heart and I'm sure the hearts of others.

Katie Floyd and Marcia Cope (*C'est moi!*) went up a week before the event to deliver the still boxed picnic tables, sweep cobwebs out of the Pavilion and the lawn chairs, and mow at least the Orchard/Tenting area. but actually managed to mow all but the center of the narrow road. Unfortunately, there wasn't time to take water and ice into Crawfish Valley for the PATH/Konnarock Crew working there, but they were thought of as we mowed and cleaned and later traveled back to North Carolina.

The next several days were spent grocery/supply shopping and packing up the van with the stuff we didn't forget! Around mid-afternoon on Wednesday, July 23rd, Katie and I picked up the newly designed Tee-Shirts and headed northwest into a darkly foreboding storm that promptly delivered torrential rain from south of Pilot Mountain to well west of Mount Airy. The rest of the trip was uneventful and we soon reached Base-Camp where we unloaded only perishable food supplies and spent the remainder of the fading daylight enjoying our peaceful surroundings. [Two Dawgs on the mountain.]

Jim Houck arrived early enough to join me for Thursday morning coffee which doesn't necessarily mean *early* before starting out to complete his list of errands. Katie cleaned the bunk house for her family that would

arrive early Saturday morning; I tackled a myriad of mostly small jobs; and Trail Dawgs arrived sporadically throughout the day. their tents creating a collage of colour in the Orchard.

Later Doc Branham and Jim assembled three new picnic tables; I vacuumed The Porch and readied it for the Spaghetti Supper that's traditionally my treat to the Thursday volunteers; and Sharon Morgenstern, Alex Burton, and Chris Carpender ventured into Bluefield, WV.. expanding their horizons to include a bowling alley which the teen-agers immensely enjoyed.

As dusk began to gradually claim the day, we shared a simple meal of Salad, Spaghetti with a robust Vegetarian Sauce, and the choice of Parmesan or Mozzarella cheese to enhance either dish. Marcia forgot to serve the bread which wasn't even missed until the next day! Following the meal, Paul Clayton and Doc helped the boys locate plenty of downed wood for our campfires.

Before the stars were out our Pack o Dawgs increased again when Valerie Cope, Grace Shuping, and twins, Hope and Faith Elmiligy arrived, giving us the largest group of pre-event volunteers ever to arrive by Thursday night! As the tired Baby-dawgs wailed in displeasure. *why are we in this strange place?* ..the majority of us ended the day around a comfortable, crackling fire that warmed the chilly evening. [Twelve Dawgs on the Mountain]

Friday is always a busy day as we sanitize all Kitchen Surfaces in the Pavilion, sweep-out the Privy, and track down the necessities that were overlooked or forgotten. By late afternoon Clean-up/Set-up was completed; Jim, Doc and Paul had returned from the PATH Tool Shed in Bland and had also stopped for more supplies; Betsy Truscott and her nephew, Harrison Truscott, had arrived; and we began to turn our thoughts to the first Group Meal (volunteers contributing) .our Traditional Hot Doggies and Baked Beans Supper that dates back to our very first Trail DAWGS Days Event in 1998.

We were delighted to again have Kenny Houck, Jims son who lives in nearby Pearisburg, VA, accompanied by his friend, Denise, join us for the evening. As father and son worked over the grill, the enticing odors of cooking foods flavoured the night air and soon everyone was eating *and* talking. Denises tiny four-legged friend, Penelope, kept Katies larger Rat

Terrier, Daisy, on her toes. It was the only time at this event that Daisy had a playmate .or, I suppose, a doggie-mate!

Comfortably full, we relaxed around another warming fire munching on Sharons Famous Brownies while more vehicles rolled in bringing Paul Haag, his friend Leon Snuggs, and Leons son, Witt, plus a little later, David Faucette. and more tents added to the rich panoply of colour in the Orchard as our Dawg-count grew to Twenty.

The Saturday AM aroma of Pauls (H.) awesome Sausage and Potatoe Dish plus Scrambled Eggs breakfast teased me awake. PATH definitely has two Chef Pauls, and of course, our King of the Grill, Chef Jim.

Despite the laid-back character of Dawg Days, Saturday morning is still a bustling time with breakfast, trail food preparation, and the rounding up water bottles and back packs, plus towels for the traditional after trail-work swim that the young and young-at-heart anticipate. And there is also the sorting out of who drives and who rides with whom and the loading of tools. In the midst of all this, Jim managed to organize a group picture shoot before leading the caravan first to OLystery and later to the Tilson Mill area.

Doc was our designated Base-camp Sitter/Gofer for Saturday and helped immensely with the one-walking, one-crawling infant-Dawgs. His presence and infinite patience made it possible for them to be in the Great Out-Doors for the greater part of the day. The vehicles had barely departed when the Flinchums: Zanna, Paul, and Lindsey arrived bringing our Dawg-total to twenty-three for the weekend. Zanna immediately plunged into the post-breakfast clean-up; Valerie re-supplied the Arts n Crafts corner of The Porch for the younger children; Paul (F.) entertained his eight-year-old daughter, Lindsay, and later in the day many others, with a microscope they used to examine the flora and fauna discovered on a brief foray of the surrounding area; meanwhile I completely cleared the yard from the cabin to the pavilion and lightly sprayed to discourage the yellow-jackets that *thankfully* did not return that afternoon! Lindsey had a fun day, but frequently mentioned how much she wished *she* was on "The Trail."

As I started mincing veggies in the mid-afternoon for Saturday Night's

Pasta Salad, Valerie and Zanna put out quite a spread of fruit, crackers, nuts, meats and cheeses for the returning Trail crews. I was almost too satisfied after that to remember supper! However, Jim did remember also and fondly remembered Bill Medlin as he manned the grill for another yield of succulent meat and veggie entrees; Paul (C.) up-loaded pictures to his laptop for all to enjoy; Zanna made her legendary Mac n Cheese, and Betsy concocted the Dirt Cake using the Original Recipe she and her daughter, Worrill, used at our Inaugural Trail Dawg Days Event. Add to this Davids fresh fruit and assorted dressings for the many-itemed salad bar plus Valeries Pintos and her Green Beans n Corn and the table was laden.. No Dawg went hungry!

Paul (H.), Leon, and Witt departed after the evening meal; Paul (C.) and the teenagers played Badminton... or was that game called BAD-minton?; Paul (F.) and Zanna helped the younger kids enjoy sparklers; and Valerie and I stored the food and stacked soiled kitchen items. no dish washing as we all relaxed and chatted by our third and last Campfire.

On Sunday morning I waved my magic wand and the leftover Sausage n Potatoes turned into a Breakfast Casserole that was accompanied by Paul (C.) pancakes; Zanna got the Breakfast Clean-up started before she packed up her family; Betsy and Jim returned tools to the PATH Shed; and slowly our Pack o Dawgs disbanded, each taking their own treasured memories. Lindsey vehemently announced that SHE was going to be coming next year. and sooner, so she could go out on the trail!

Betsy and Valerie remained and helped with cleaning while we continued to visit.... we don't see each other that often during the remainder of the year and Paul (C.), Alex, and Chris packed up the outdoor toys and mowed the grass. Later, when they too had departed, I took Grace and the twins out to the Pavilion where I soaped and rinsed every surface to discourage wild animals from investigating the Kitchen Area. although they still will do that. just to a lesser degree. Soon all the chairs were folded or stacked and the small tables secured from the capricious antics of the frequently strong winds that sweep over the narrow Ridgeline Campsite. Valerie used her time alone indoors wisely to organize and pack for her departure and soon she and her girls pulled out enroute for Lewisville.

Alone, I sat long into the night by the cold Fire-ring, warmed by cherished memories of the past several days. silently giving thanks for our beautiful natural world, our privileged opportunity to lovingly and responsibly care for it; and lastly for my own richly blessed chance to share this wonderful little scrap of ridgeline that I was chosen to be the caretaker of in this lifetime.

A thousand thanks are due to everyone who participated; for all the food and supplies that were brought; for all the tales that were told and/or retold; and all the joys and hugs that were shared. This is the breath, the very energy of DAWG Days. Without your devotion to the future of the AT, your work, your caring and your sharing. this event could not happen. Thank you, again.

PATHs Twelfth Trail DAWG Days Sidehilling Event will be held July 24-25-26, 2009.

Pathmates, Friends, and Families, from near and far, you are cordially invited to attend and may contact any of the following for more information: copemh@attglobal.net; claytonpm@bellsouth.net; btrus@infionline.net or the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers Web Page: <http://www.path-at.org>.