

PATH WAYS

Of the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers

PATH Year 56, No. 4

Holiday 2020

Our Club's History with Moldering Privies

Stories by Herb MacDonald

The history of privies on the PATH Appalachian Trail section is one of planning, hard work, many volunteer work hours and PATH partners' assistance. Bill Medlin and Andrew Mitchell, PATH members, took on the job of replacing three PATH pit privies around 2002. Bill passed in September 2002 during a PATH work trip near Knot Maul Shelter. Andrew then continued with the project in memory of Bill. Virginia ATC reps reviewed the plans, and Andrew wrote a Moldering Privy Grant in 2003; funding was approved for the materials.



Archive photo

Remains of the Davis Path Shelter, privy at left.

Moldering privies for Davis Path, Knot Maul and Chestnut Knob were pre-built, then disassembled for transport to site. Other shelters on the PATH section with pit privies were not suitable for moldering privies. The Forest Service gave us a section in one of their equipment bays to store the prefabbed sections until we got them installed. At least three winter weekends were spent with PATH members, 25 to 40 people each weekend, working at the Sugar Grove USFS workshop.

They pre-built moldering privies in segments they felt could be hand carried into PATH shelter locations. Damascus Trail Days Volunteers helped with transporting the materials to the sites and completed the assemblies on the sites in 2003. Chatfield Shelter's grounds were also refurbished in 2002, with the pit privy rebuilt at that time. After a year of planning and preparation work for Summerfest 2003, we had 54 workers over the week to complete that week's plan. We did not do Partnership, as it has a Forest Service pit privy. We did not do Jenkins, as the Jenkins section belonged to the Outing Club of Virginia Tech at the time.



The Jenkins Shelter Privy with two holding bins and recently installed enclosure. Note the wood shavings barrel and grocery sacks full of shavings carried in by hikers. Photo by Herb MacDonald.

Why Use Moldering Privies Instead of Pits?

Moldering, or “worm,” privies were all the rage in the years 2000 through 2003. That was back before red-wigglers, or “night crawlers,” became exotic and a potentially invasive species. The number of pit privies depended upon the depth of pits and of course, how much they were used. Normally they were rotated on a one-and-one-half to two-year cycle, no better than a moldering privy, and in some cases, worse than our moldering privies. The moldering privy requires less labor, exposes maintainers to less risk of infection than bin composting systems, and is much less polluting than pit toilets. It also eliminates the need to dig new pits, and it can serve more users than pit toilets. The maximum use capacity of the moldering privy varies, but under the right conditions it may approach or equal the capacity of commercial composting toilets and batch-bin composting systems. Molder means “to slowly decay, generally at temperatures below that of the human body” (between 40 and 99 degrees F.).

Urine in anaerobic systems (high heat) like pit toilets substantially increases offensive odors. Urine is mostly water (90%). Separation of urine from the compost mass is unnecessary in a moldering privy, which actually benefits from the liquid provided by urine. Water seeping down in the crib encourages oxygen penetration/composting, and excess drains into the soil, not a deterrent to moldering.

PATH'S privies were built with two cribs under the seat structure. When the used crib is full, the seat structure is shifted to the other emptied bin, ideally after a minimum of three years. Then the finished compost in the moldered crib can be removed and applied to the forest floor. It looks like potting soil and is void of smell with dead pathogens.

PATH's moldering privies have through the years had "red" worms added, which help composting. Recently, we have been adding Port, a commercial solution (not wine), which aids in composting and eliminating odors in the cribs. Maintainers occasionally in a year need to tip back the seat structure and mix the contents and level the cone. The emptying of the full composted crib and shifting of the seat structure is less frequent.

Thanks to Andrew Mitchell, Jim Houck and Ron Hudnell for their help and information

2021 Calendar

Here is what we know of our calendar for the start of 2021. Keep your fingers crossed!

March 19-21, 2021 First PATH Work Trip Sugar Grove, Va.

After a year with no work weekends, only ad hoc do-it-yourselfers, our first work weekend should take place out of the Forest Service work camp at Sugar Grove, Va., with a pot luck meal on Saturday night. Keep your fingers crossed this comes off as planned. More info in March.

May 1, 2021 AT Hall of Fame Banquet Carlisle, Pa.

The 10th AT Hall of Fame Banquet is set for 7 p.m. at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center. Visit www.2020athalloffamebanquet.eventbrite.com. Or write AT Museum, 1120 Pine Grove Road, Gardners, Pa. 17324. Or call (717) 649-5505. Tickets \$50, \$40 museum members.

This was scheduled for November 2020, but was postponed because of the coronavirus.

Aug. 6-9, 2021 AT Vista New Paltz, N.Y.

This is a four-day weekend event commemorating Benton MacKaye's 1921 article laying out the idea of an Appalachian Trail. It seems to be an effort to resume the discontinued Biennial ATC Conferences in a new form. More info is at www.atvista2020.weebly.com.

October 2021 39th ALDHA Gathering Abingdon, Va.

The annual gathering of the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association. It was planned to be in October 2020, but was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic. They're still negotiating an exact date. Email Blaze@aldha.org

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. SPRING DEADLINE FEB. 20, 2021. Web site: www.path-at.org. Or for info: PiedmontATHikers@gmail.com. Or see our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/PiedmontATHikers/

Tom Dillon, editor (tdillon27127@earthlink.net) or (336) 725-2760

Reactions and Letters

Here are some reactions to Paul Clayton's story about the 1994 revitalization of the Chestnut Knob Shelter in the Fall issue of Pathways.

■ Very much loved the photos of Chestnut Knob and the well-done article. Helps keep me going. I recognize a few names in the article and hope to keep the oral history tradition going. I make an extra effort each and every time I visit the Chestnut Knob Shelter to clear the "1994 PATH" in the cement outside the door.

Steven Fishback, Durham

■ That excellent article on Chestnut Knob makes me wonder what other "chestnuts" I've been missing.

Kathryn Herndon-Powell, ATC-Roanoke

■ I thought that I would add some more information about the renovation of the old warden's cabin into a real AT shelter, since the statute of limitations has undoubtedly passed. In 1983 shortly after the opening of the major Burkes Garden Relocation from Walker Mountain, I called a meeting with Wythe District Ranger Lou Brossey, Ken Rose, Gordon Burgess and couple of other PATH members, as well as two leaders at the Virginia Tech Outdoor Club to discuss restoring access to shelters after the relocation. At the meeting we decided on several locations for shelters pending field work. These included Knot Maul, Chestnut High Knob, Davis Farm Campsite (never a shelter), Jenkins shelter on Little Wolf Creek, and Helvey's



Mill. The Helvey's Mill site was, I believe, replaced in mitigation for powerline construction. The access to that site was on a back farm road through private land, and this was also where the farmer dumped old livestock carcasses from the farm. For many years as the site was prepared and the shelter built, the Outdoor Club referred to this as Dead Sheep Shelter, a name that the club continued to use for many years in spite of the USFS rejection of the name for the public. Go figure!

After that 1983 meeting, I worked with both clubs and the district to do the fieldwork and complete the environmental review, and now all we needed was money to build shelters. Lou called me with a plan: In the USFS budget there was no money for new construction, but there was a lot for facility renovation. That is how we settled on moving the three shelters abandoned on Walker Mountain to the new relocation to become the Knot Maul, Jenkins and Helvey's Mill shelters. After moving what materials could be salvaged (all labelled for reuse on the inside of the shelter), we mostly had a frame and some siding, so the shelter was "renovated" with new

foundation piers, new materials to replace those that were damaged (mostly through removal), and a brand new roof!

This led to a bizarre scene. I got a call one day from a man who was clearly very nervous. It seemed that he had been hiking the old Walker Mountain route for many decades and with the new route open and shelters in place, he decided to hike the new route. He went on and on about the improved quality of the hike and how much he loved it. Then he got down to the creepy part. He admitted that he had always carved his initials in every AT shelter that he stayed in when he was younger. It was always in the same place on the big center beam that stood upright in the shelter. He said that he was very sure that he had never been anywhere near the Knot Maul shelter area before this hike, and yet when he looked up from his sleeping bag at night there in that same place there were his initials, exactly as he had always carved them in this new shelter! After spending quite some time castigating him about defacing our volunteer's work, I gave it up that this was one of the old shelters on the Walker Mountain route and we had a good laugh. That person showed up on several PATH work trips over the next few years to do his restitution, but I'll never reveal his name!

Back to the Chestnut High Knob renovation: The original shelter/cabin was very dark and dank, and the roof was really too low to accommodate the bunk beds that were needed to increase its capacity. The floor was dirt mixed with decades of fireplace ash. I visited the site with Cheryl Mills, a USFS Landscape Architect working out of their Blacksburg office. I wanted to raise the roof and provide light without compromising the integrity of the original stone walls, and she came up with the design you see today. The Konnarock Crew leader was Jim Bartos. Konnarock crews often traveled long distances to get to and return from projects, and the crew members often became restless. As an antidote, Jim bought dozens of dime store toys and figurines and kept them on the dash of the van. When folks got bored, he would scoop up a handful of toys and toss them over his shoulder to the restless crew and keep driving. Thus the Mickey Mouse figurine embedded in the concrete. Jim has been a CPA in the Portland, Ore., area for decades, I believe still married to a woman that he met on crew that summer. Also on that Konnarock crew was Dean Sims on what might have been his first introduction working with PATH.

Mike Dawson, Vashon Island, Wash.

ATC Regional Representative for Southwest and Central Virginia 1980-2001

Bits and Pieces

■ On Aug. 17, the **Appalachian Trail Conservancy**, the **Conservation Fund** and the **Mountain Valley Pipeline** announced a voluntary agreement that “will advance the Conservancy’s mission to manage, protect and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail,” according to a joint news release. As part of the agreement, the pipeline company committed up to \$19.5 million for use by the ATC to conserve land along the Trail corridor and support outdoor recreation-based economies in southeastern West Virginia and southwestern Virginia. Some of that money may be available in the PATH section.

We haven’t had much in this newsletter about the pipeline, but it’s been an ongoing problem for the Roanoke and Virginia Tech Appalachian Trail clubs. It’s being fought by counties all over southwest Virginia. And since its planned crossing is in Giles County, just north of our Bland County section, we really ought to know more about it.

ATC said that through the agreement, it and its partners “will be able to enhance the A.T. hiking experience, protect thousands of acres of high-priority land, and provide support to local recreation-based economies in the region.” For more info from them, contact Jordan Bowman, ATC’s Director of Communications, at jbowman@appalachiantrail.org.

But here are some other links to pipeline info mostly out of the **RATC newsletter**. If you’re getting an online version of this newsletter, please click and read some of this. For print readers, we’ll try to keep up with the issue better in later newsletters. Brief summation: Yes, the AT crosses a number of pipelines, particularly in Pennsylvania. But the fewer, the better.

Proposed crossing of AT could hardly be less appropriate <https://www.ratc.org/earthquakes-and-pipelines-recipe-for-disaster/>

MVP and FS security drove ATVs on the trail for 19 days before we busted them and FS apologized <https://www.ratc.org/mountain-valley-pipeline-drove-atvs-on-the-appalachian-trail-for-19-days/>

■ Returning members of the new **Appalachian Trail Conservancy** board, elected at the Sept. 12 meeting online, are **Colin Beasley** of New London, N.H., **Rob Hutchinson** of Sandy Springs, Ga., **Daniel Howe** of Raleigh, N.C., **Colleen Peterson** of Frostburg, Md., and **Nathan Rogers** of Windham, N.H. New directors are **Eboni Preston** of Atlanta, Ga., and **Rajinder (Raj) Singh** of Raleigh.

■ Despite all the coronavirus problems this year, we’ve worked. President **Jim Houck** reported in October that **45 PATH volunteers contributed 689 hours** on the Eastern Divide Ranger District from October, 2019, through September this year. On the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, **45 volunteers contributed 690 hours** in that same time frame. Yes, those were most likely a lot of the same people. The dividing line between these districts is Va. 42. Thanks to timekeeper Paul Clayton for keeping track of this. You can report hours to him at paul@neuseriversailors.com

■ At long last, the new **PATH Web site** is up and operating. There are still kinks to work out, but please visit it and feel free to express your opinions and point out any problems. It’s the same address, www.path-at.org. This has been a long time coming, and in the long run we hope it will draw more attention to the club.

■ We hope the new Web site will soon have the ability to post pictures of our work trips. In the meantime, trail workers, **please send pictures** from your workdays to the newsletter. Many thanks to **Ed Martin** and crew for the pictures in this newsletter of the Rye Valley View clearing. The video of that falling tree was great. Someone said it looked like slow motion; Ed and **Lloyd Walker**, the sawyers, said that definitely was not the case. We’ll have a report on October Chestnut Ridge work in the next newsletter.

■ **Gun deer season** ends Nov. 28 in our part of Virginia, but some other seasons – bear, muzzleloader deer, archery deer, grouse and some other small game, will go on well into the New Year. There’s also a spring wild turkey season in April and May. When in the woods during those seasons, remember to wear blaze orange. It’s the best protection you can have.

■ 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 pages. 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.**



Working on the Rye Valley view

After the AT ridgerunner reported that the Rye Valley View overlook was getting overgrown, a crew led by Ed Martin and Lloyd Walker took it on Sept. 19. They felled several trees and opened the view, even installing what look like sitting logs for tired hikers.

The full crew was Ed, Lloyd, Wes Martin and Glenn Miller. The reopened view is above at right. More pictures of the work, including a video of a falling tree, can be found at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/2DfSWP8HbtXZ3g6W9>. Thanks to Glenn and Ed for the pictures.

PATH Officers

President

Jim Houck, 206 Hillcrest Avenue,
Titusville, Fla. 32796
(321) 615-2115
houckjw@bellsouth.net

Vice President

Betsy Truscott, 5021 Stockdale Place,
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27104
(336) 602-6903
btrus@infionline.net

Secretary

Hunt McKinnon, 2201 Sir Walter Court,
Greenville, N.C. 27858 (252) 916-3220
Mckinnonw@ecu.edu

Treasurer

David Faucette, 1105 Hunting Ridge Road,
Raleigh, N.C. 27615 (919) 848-3811
dfaucette1948@gmail.com

Want to Join?



We will be working on the Trail in 2021, despite coronavirus. If you'd like to join us, here's how: 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!

Name (s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

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

accepted. Donation total _____

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

Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers
P.O. Box 4423
Greensboro, N.C. 27404
Address correction requested



Merry Christmas