

PATH WAYS

Of the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers

PATH Year 57, No. 3

Autumn 2021

A Hiking Trip to Denali

PATH members don't hike just on the AT, and sometimes not even on trails. This is the story of a 2013 trip to Denali National Park by David Faucette and David John.

Story and photos by David Faucette and David John

After our first western backpacking trip to Glacier National Park in 2011, we embarked on a trip to Denali National Park in 2013. Both parks provided opportunities for backcountry backpacking, but very different. Both parks had an abundance of mosquitos and water. Denali provides large tracks of wilderness to explore without any trails or established backcountry campgrounds. A good map and compass are required.

On July 13, we left Raleigh/Durham airport with our backpacks and flew to Fairbanks, Alaska, with a stop in Minneapolis. Our Delta flight left Minneapolis in the dark. As it continued northwest, the sun reappeared. In Fairbanks at 12:30 a.m., sunlight was abundant. We did not realize two weeks would pass before we would experience dark again. Flying over Canada and Alaska, we saw much water below, and forest fires were common.

From the airport, we checked into a hotel with thick blackout curtains. Later that morning, we took a taxi to the train station and boarded the Alaska Railroad for our trip south. The train followed the banks and canyons of the Nenana and Tanana rivers, arriving in Denali National Park in midafternoon. We spent that afternoon in the Denali Park Back Country Office, taking a bear safety course and reserving two backcountry parcels (100 square miles each) for our first week. Reservations on the camper bus



Along the Teklanika River valley in Denali NP.

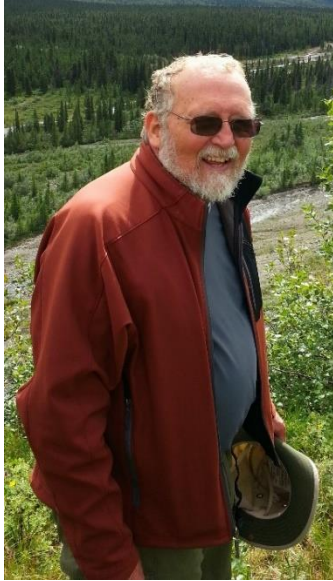


for transportation into the backcountry and at Riley Campground for that first night were available in the Denali Park Office. Our Golden Age passes significantly reduced the fees.

Our first week of backpacking started with the camper bus taking us down Park Road. After dropping off a food cache at Igloo Campground, we rode to the Tattler Creek area. We hiked up the creek bed, eventually found a place to camp with a tremendous view and set up a base camp. For the next couple of days, we hiked all around treeless Sable Mountains. Due to rain, we did not make it to the top of the mountain. We basically followed the creek high into the mountain, the bluffs and the moraines.

We became well acquainted with a squirrel that lived in the ground next to our tents. It was very interested in our food and gear. We were told that the ground squirrels were an important food source for golden eagles, foxes, and grizzly bears. After hiking back down to the road, we caught the camper bus and went to Igloo campground. We picked up our cached food and spent one night in the primitive campground. The next morning, we hiked across the tundra from Igloo Campground to the upper Teklanika river bar. The tundra is a wet sponge with ice underneath. In some places, the sun melts more of the ice resulting in much more water on the surface. This was slow and deliberate hiking.

Along the way we encountered a large moose – which eventually moved on. We finally came to the Teklanika headland. We searched for and found a cut in the land that took us down to the rocky river bar. Continuing upstream along the river, we came to a good camping site where we set up a base camp. It rained a good deal while we were there, which made us especially hesitant to cross the river. (The Teklanika whispered to us, “Step in and drown.”) The glacier-fed river water was fast, deep, heavily silted and extremely cold. We did hike



David John

upstream by climbing back up the riverbank and cutting across the tundra. We found good views much further up the river. At the end of our first week, we hiked along the Teklanika to Park Road. The camper shuttle returned us to Riley Campground (showers, laundry).

While back in the area of the park entrance, we enjoyed local eateries both in the park and the town. The town primarily serves people arriving from Anchorage on cruise line travel packages. No matter what we ordered, it cost \$35.

At this point, given the large size of Denali Park (6.1 million acres, or 9,446 square miles), we decided during the second week we would focus on



David Faucette

campgrounds and day hikes. We returned to the Denali Park Offices to secure all our permits and travel reservations. First, we went out to Wonder (or Mosquito!) Lake, a 90-mile and 6-hour camper bus ride. (See map.) Wonder Lake has the best views of Denali, the mountain. For us, there was absolutely no view of the mountain due to clouds; however, the hungry mosquitos were delighted with our presence. We hiked all around the area, including a trail out to the McKinley river bar.

After two nights at Wonder Lake, we took the camper bus for 45 miles back to our next destination, near the Eielson Visitor Center, the glacier area along Sunrise and Sunset creeks. Unfortunately, the rain poured, visibility was greatly reduced, and grizzly bears were active. We caught a camper bus and returned the 45 miles back to Riley Campground for one night. We resumed our trip by going out to Sanctuary River campground. There we hiked up Mount Wright and around the Sanctuary River. (The Sanctuary River valley would be a great multiday backpacking trip).

Returning to Riley Campground, we started preparations for our return trip. As well, we hiked the trail to Healy Mountain Overlook. This hike provided an excellent view of the entrance to the park. Healy Mountain is one of the very few maintained trails in the park, and it was interesting to see how they are built and maintained. All trails in the tundra are constructed by digging trenching on either side of the treadway, with all removed materials thrown up on the treadway. As the ice underneath the treadway melts, maintainers must regularly clean out the trenches and build up the treadway. We were told that roads are built similarly.

It was a great trip. The weather was warm, and it rained a fair amount, but we also had some clear days; we did see the mountain on the way out. All the grizzly bears we observed, we saw from the camper bus. (The driver would not open the bus door when we were near the bears.) While we were in the backcountry, the grizzly bears knew about us, kept away from us, and gorged on berries. Mosquitos were abundant. Our mosquito hat nets and repellants were most valuable.

On August 1, we boarded the Alaska Railway to the airport and flew back to RDU. We were shocked at the darkness when we deplaned. ■

2021 Calendar

August 28, 2021 **ATC annual meeting** **Online**
The annual ATC membership meeting will be from 10:30 a.m. to noon, online only

Sept. 17-19, 2021 **September Work Weekend** **Stony Fork, Va.**
Working out of Stony Fork Campground (off U.S.52), with a potluck Saturday evening.

October 8-11, 2021 **39th ALDHA Gathering** **Abingdon, Va.**
The annual gathering of the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association. Email Blaze@aldha.org for more information. They have been looking for vendors and volunteers.

October 15-17, 2021 **October Work Weekend** **Stony Fork, Va.**
Working out of Stony Fork Campground, with a potluck Saturday evening.

November 20, 2021 **PATH annual meeting?** **TBA**
The PATH annual meeting usually takes place this weekend somewhere in North Carolina or Virginia. But there's talk about postponing until March. Stay tuned to your phone and email.

November 20, 2021 **AT Hall of Fame Banquet** **Carlisle, Pa.**
The AT Museum's annual banquet will be at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, 950 Soldiers Drive. Tickets \$40 for members, \$50 for non-members. Go to www.atmuseum.org.

August 5-8, 2022 **A.T. Vista** **New Paltz, N.Y.**
This is a weekend of programs and hikes that is planned to replace the late lamented Biennial ATC weekends. It's at SUNY/New Paltz. More info at www.atvista.org.



Milestones

■ We are sad to report that PATH member **Daniel M. Tito**, 60, of Charlotte, died on March 6, 2021. He is survived by his mother Mary C.; his son Daniel (Morgan Pink); his siblings, Diane Callahan (Michael) and Michael Tito (Lynne); and girlfriend Jodi Aimone. He was also cherished by several nieces and nephews. Donations in his memory can be made to the Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina, 500 Spratt St., B., Charlotte, N. C. 28206. A tree is also to be planted in his memory at Belk Scout Camp, where he was camp master for several years and volunteered much of his time. Prayer cards are available from Jodi Aimone at trekkiechick42@outlook.com. Funeral arrangements were entrusted to the Charles G. Schmitt Funeral Home, Seaford, N.Y., at www.schmittfuneralhome.com.

■ We are also sorry to report the unexpected July 5 passing of **Mark McGinnis**, 45, who had put together the new PATH Website and was rapidly becoming the go-to person for all PATH things digital. While he was not a PATH member, he was valuable to us. He leaves a wife and two young children. Donations may be made to the family's GoFundMe page at (<https://gofund.me/f773c3d1>) or to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, 8201 Corporate Drive, Suite 1000, Hyattsville, Md. 20785.

Bits and Pieces

■ **Don Smyth** wrote a great story about an app called “Guthook” in the summer PATH newsletter. But we didn’t get to say much about his 2018 thru-hike. Here’s his brief – and impressive – summary. Sounds like he could do a good program on how to pack light for backpacking:

“I thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2018. My trail name was Sawdust. I started at Springer Mountain on March 6th in the rain and summited Mt. Katahdin on July 4th on a beautiful clear day. My base weight was 15 pounds and between 22- 25 pounds with food and water. My favorite states were NC, VA, and NH. The trail was hard, and sometimes very hard. It was an amazing journey, and I'm glad I did it.”

■ **HUNTING SEASONS:** Virginia fall deer firearms season is Nov. 14-28 in our neck of the woods. Archery season runs Oct. 3-Nov. 13 and Nov. 29-Jan. 2, 2022. Muzzleloader season is Oct. 31-Nov. 13 and Dec. 12-Jan. 2, 2022. Bear seasons run Oct. 3-Nov. 13 for archery, Nov. 7-13 for muzzleloaders and Nov. 23-Jan. 2, 2022 for firearms. Some small game seasons are also open during the fall. Remember that hunting is allowed on national forest lands like those crossed by the PATH section of the AT. Always wear blaze orange clothing in the woods during hunting seasons.

■ **Duke Energy TRAILS** at Rockingham Community College, Wentworth, N.C., has developed a sustainable trail skills training sequence of classes for varying skill levels, interests, and needs. Several courses are offered in two formats to meet student needs and time availability.

- Single day classes provide basic information specific to the course title.
- Multiple day classes provide the same information as the single day classes listed under them and often include additional topics and fieldwork.
- Lecture, discussion, and experiential activities/fieldwork combine to help students completely comprehend the course content. For more information, visit www.rockinghamcc.edu/node/trails.

■ Note to those interested in the **Wednesday breakfast AT meetings in Winston-Salem:** We’re moving! Cloverdale Kitchen, our longtime early morning meeting place, closed in late June, and we have spent several weeks looking for a new hangout and deciding what to do. No decisions yet. Why is this important? Because it’s probably the longest running informal AT breakfast meeting in the country. **Paul Clayton**, a founder (if that’s the word), says it dates from sometime in the 1980s or early ’90s.

■ The **Blue Ridge Discovery Center** (at Konnarock, Va.) says its refurbished building, once the home of the AT’s Konnarock Crew, will be complete in the spring of 2022. It is planning a Grand Opening event during the 48th annual Spring Mount Rogers Naturalist Rally on Mothers’ Day weekend. The center has a volunteer weekend set Aug. 20-22 covering trail building, bridge building, boardwalk construction, painting and other jobs, for those interested, with a group dinner Saturday night. Email info@blueridgediscoverycenter.org or call (276) 388-3155.

■ PATH member **Karen Worthington** reports that she and partner, **Wayne**, have safely completed their move to Seattle, Wash., and are looking for a trail club there. They’re in the Green Lake neighborhood of Seattle, for those familiar with the geography. Karen did exchange some brief comms with club members during Summerfest in July.



■ We have had a number of **new members** on recent third-weekend work trips, including Summerfest, on our Appalachian Trail Section this summer.

Welcome aboard to **Michele Nester, Marcia Pencola, Jerry Adams, Forrest Atwood, Peter Whiteis**, and probably several others I've overlooked.

Apologies! (And let us know if we really did omit someone new.)

That's Michele's photo, at left, of a PATH crew sidehilling on the Desert Dog relo during Summerfest in July.

■ An ongoing Perils-of-Pauline story: The **Mountain Valley gas pipeline**, which is planned to cross the AT on Peters Mountain in Giles County, has delayed its planned start of operation until summer of 2022. The cost has also gone up again, to \$6.2 billion. (It was originally expected to be \$3.5 billion.) **Diana Christopoulos**, who is keeping up with this for the Roanoke AT Club, provided this short summary: "Mountain Valley

Pipeline is still on hold in Jefferson National Forest and at hundreds of water crossings because it lacks water permits from the US Army Corps of Engineers and from the environmental quality agencies in Virginia and West Virginia. MVP lost its Corps of Engineers permits due to a ruling in the federal Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2018. Now it has applied for new permits and proposes to bore under many water bodies and do individual analysis of crossings. This means it could not receive new permits until sometime in 2022. MVP continues to lay pipe right up to the edges of hundreds of water bodies."

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

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This shows the crew and about one-quarter of the of the Dry Run turnpike built during July's Summerfest. The photo is by ridgerunner and PATH member James Baum.

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Want to Join?

We are 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 _____

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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 _____

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