

PATH WAYS

Of the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers

PATH Year 58, No. 1

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Escaping Covid on the Colorado Trail

By Sue Freeman

Rich thought his backpacking days were behind him. We had done a lot of long-distance backpacking in the three decades between our 40s and 70s. But the Covid lockdowns and limitations meant our usual vacations overseas were delayed. And I was crawling the walls in need of a forest fix.

So he agreed to do one last backpacking trip in the Colorado Rockies, a place we had never explored. I spent the 2020-21 winter Covid season shopping for new, lighter-weight gear. Much of our gear dated back to our AT thru-hike in 1996. It predated ultra-light options, and we were now much older and less able to carry heavy loads.

One of the new trends I discovered was “cold soaking,” where you forgo carrying a stove, fuel, and pots. Instead, you carry a small plastic jar with a screw top lid and adjust your menu to include only foods that can be eaten by rehydrating in cold water. Rich wasn’t too thrilled, but I tested various recipes and found some we could tolerate.

After an Amtrak train trip to Denver, and an Uber ride to the trailhead, off we went. Rather, I should say, UP we went. Slowly. We knew the early days would be short mileage. We were happy to make 8 miles. The universe let us adjust slowly too. Day one it didn’t rain, so we had a chance to remember (clumsily) how to use old gear, and an opportunity to learn to use new gear. We laughed at our rookie mistake -- trying new gear such as our water filter system, for the first time on the trail, not at home before starting on the trail. We knew better, but we did it still.



Day two tested us. Mid-day the skies opened with a torrential downpour. We had retreated to our tent, but it didn't help. Inside the tent it was raining and there was no way to keep our sleeping bags dry. So day 3 found us making an unscheduled side trip, hitchhiking into a town to find seam sealer. We lucked out with fast, easy hitches and in town found seam sealer, a laundromat, and a restaurant. Nirvana.

From then on, we got into a rhythm. We arose with the first birdsong, just as the sun was about to come up, and hiked a bit before sitting down for our cold breakfast. Each day we'd drop exhausted into a likely campsite by 1 or 2 p.m., do our camp chores and be sound asleep by 4 p.m. Sleeping 12 hours per night was no problem at all.

Our days were filled with long climbs and descents, and with me wheezing for air on every incline. Rich waited for me patiently. We traversed big groves of aspens, dense pine forests, high meadows filled with flushes of wildflowers, remnants from old avalanches, snow patches, high alpine passes, and we enjoyed views of gorgeous mountain peaks. The abundance of birds in the Colorado forests and high in the Rocky Mountains amazed us. There were robins everywhere.

It rained every day with strong lightning either in the afternoon or overnight. We didn't care; that was our sleep time and the seam sealer worked. It also meant we had plentiful water and didn't have to carry much.

The first 150 miles, the trail was very busy with hikers, bicyclists, and horseback riders. Everyone whizzed by us and camped dispersed, so other than at breaks, there wasn't much interaction with others. Then the trail split into two options: a higher elevation, remote leg, and a lower elevation, less remote leg. The youngsters took the high elevation route, and all we saw on the lower elevation option were grey-haired hikers like us, although most were section hiking.

Town stops were a challenge. They're basically tourist towns and don't cater to hikers. Hotels, motels, and even hostels were booked solid months in advance. It was a chore to locate a vacancy (thank goodness for cell phones and mountaintop cell service) and exasperating to pay \$200+ a night for a sleazy motel. Some towns were fun, such as Frisco and Buena Vista with charming little downtowns.

After three weeks our endurance hadn't improved much. Our days now ranged between 10 to 13 miles. I still wheezed up every incline. I was fine, just slow. We looked ahead and found that bailout options were virtually nonexistent for the next 200 miles. If we continued, we'd be committing to a long stretch, and due to our low daily mileage, we'd have to carry a lot of food. So, we concluded we would be happy with our 200-mile hike.

We took a bus to the east, to a city where we could rent a car, then spent 3 weeks exploring Colorado and the states between there and home by car. A good time was had by all.

Rich is pretty adamant that our backpacking days are now over. He was wonderful to go along with my wacky plan. We both came away with great memories. Oh, and we grew to appreciate the flexibility that cold soaking gave us. Still, a warm meal sure tastes good.



A Little More on Cold Soaking

Some might say “yuck,” but cold soaking has its advantages. Weight is one. You don’t have to carry a stove or fuel. If you’re traveling to a trail via air, you don’t have the problem of airline rules or the hunt for fuel before you hit the trail. And, as we discovered while cold soaking on the Colorado Trail, it gives you ease of meal prep and ultimate flexibility. Eating inside your tent during a thunderstorm is no problem at all.

The key to cold soaking is food selection. The food needs to rehydrate easily. Choices include ramen, couscous, instant mashed potatoes, oatmeal, polenta mix, dehydrated refried beans, powdered peanut butter, dried hummus, freeze dried or dehydrated fruits & vegetable, etc. What doesn’t work are pasta, purchased backpacking meals, and anything that requires cooking.

You can easily find recipes online. They’re handy for premixing meals to take or mail drop, or just to get ideas of combinations you can purchase in grocery stores along the way.

Rich wasn’t sold on the idea when we started our hike, but he grew to really appreciate it. I never quite warmed up to the idea of cold coffee in the morning, but otherwise I liked it, especially its simplicity. Our favorite recipe was a cereal mix I pre-made with oatmeal, nuts, berries, coconut milk, and ground seeds. It went down easily each day and gave us each a nice boost of energy.

-- Sue Freeman



Milestones

We are sad to report that longtime PATH stalwart **Walter Davis** died unexpectedly late Monday afternoon, Feb. 14, 2022, while walking Toby, his dog, in Burlington, N.C.



Walt and his wife Charlene were active PATH members for many years, working overtime to make our potlucks top-notch. They even hosted our annual meeting and potluck at their house for a couple of years. They also maintained a section of Trail in Groseclose, Va. While not active in recent years, they have followed our activities through the PATH-List.

Walt and Charlene were married more than 70 years, and Walt recently celebrated his 90th birthday. They have three children: Susan (Bo), Ann (PATH member and new Board member) and Chuck (Kristen).

Cards may be sent to Charlene Davis at 213 Brompton Court, Burlington, N.C. 27215. Memorials may be made to Front Street United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 2597, Burlington, N.C. 27216, AuthoraCare Hospice, 914 Chapel Hill Road, Burlington, N.C. 27215, or PATH, P.O. Box 4423, Greensboro, N.C. 27404.

2022 Calendar (so far)

Feb 26-27 **Crosscut Saw Recertification** **Sugar Grove, Va.**
Late message from Jerry Kyle which some may not get. There will be a new class sometime later in the spring. Contact jkyle@appalachiantrail.org.

March 18-20, 2022 **First PATH Work Weekend** **Sugar Grove, Va.**
PATH's first work weekend of the year will be used to survey winter damage, remove blowdowns and get the trail ready for thru-hikers. Hopefully include a potluck on Saturday.

April 15-17, 2022 **Second PATH Work Weekend** **Sugar Grove, Va.**
More of the above, again with a potluck dinner on Saturday at the work center. Main work will be cleaning up at the former Davis Path Shelter.

May 6-7, 2022 **Mount Rogers Naturalist Rally** **Konnarock, Va.**
The 48th annual rally features hikes and nature seminars, and this year the grand opening of the sponsoring Blue Ridge Discovery Center's restored building. Email info@blueridgediscoverycenter.org or call (276) 388-3155.

May 13-15, 2022 **Appalachian Trail Days** **Damascus, Va.**
The annual party and celebration. Vendors, talks, crafts, music, food, gear, an auction and the hiker parade. For more information, see www.traildays.us.

May 20-22, 2022 **Third PATH Work Weekend** **Stony Fork, Va.**
General trail work. Possibly more work on tent platforms at the location of the former Davis Path. Hope for a potluck dinner on Saturday. Also a board meeting on Saturday night.

June 16-19 2022 **PATH Summerfest (tentative)** **TBD**
Hoping to replace the railroad ties along the North Fork of the Holston River with a slightly elevated bog bridge in the same location. Possible Konnarock project. Could also happen in July.

August 5-8, 2022 **A.T. Vista** **New Paltz, N.Y.**
This is a weekend of programs and hikes planned to replace the late lamented ATC Biennials. It's at the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz. More info at www.atvista.org. They are seeking volunteers.



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. SUMMER DEADLINE MAY 20, 2022. 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

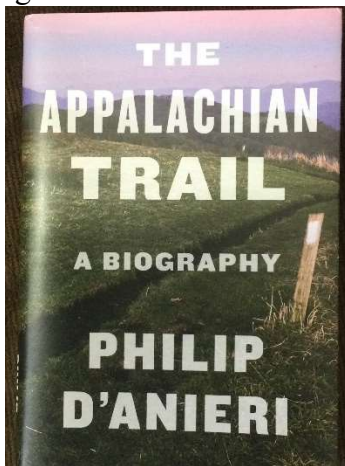
Who were the People of the Trail? A Review

“The Appalachian Trail: A Biography,” by Philip D’Anieri. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021.
\$26.00 hardback

Reviewed by Karl Kunkel

The subtitle of this history of the Appalachian trail — “a biography” — invites the reader to learn about some of the people, from the beginning to present, who helped make the trail what it is today.

The book is not a dry history, nor is it a step-by-step account of a thru-hike. Plenty of good thru-hiker books and histories are on the shelves already.



Author Philip D’Anieri, an instructor of the “built environment” at the University of Michigan, picked out 12 individuals representing the AT’s timeline from inception to its development and eventual growth to the present day. These people were his guides.

“This is a biography: an attempt to render something essential about the life of this place by looking at how it developed over time,” D’Anieri writes.

The author tells the reader upfront that he is not a hardcore backpacker. He describes himself as a day-hiker, a person who puts in five to six hours on a trail and then hops back into his car to drive home.

“In each of the chapters that follow, I have tried to capture an important piece of the trail’s history by profiling an individual (or two or three) whose own life made an important intersect with the development of the AT,” he writes.

He next offers a caveat. “I am an outsider to the AT community, a proud and increasingly diverse collection of people who, over a hundred years, have made the trail into what it is. They are trail builders, donors, citizen scientists, and organizers who volunteer the thousands of hours each year to make this project work.”

The cast of characters should be mentioned upfront, along with the category each belongs to, according to the author:

- Arnold Guyot (the Appalachians)
- Horace Kephart (Back to Nature)
- James P. Taylor (the Long Trail)
- Benton MacKaye (the Big Idea)
- Myron Avery (the Organization)
- Earl Shaffer and Emma “Grandma” Gatewood (the Thru-Hike)
- Gaylord Nelson (the Government)
- Dave Richie, Pam Underhill, and Dave Startzell (the National Park)
- Bill Bryson (the Bestseller)

One of the more high-profile names — Benton MacKaye — was a 1900 Harvard graduate. It was he who set the stage for the conservation movement in the US, hoping to grow trees rather than mine them. MacKaye coined the term “Appalachian Trail,” as he tried to link up the various Northeast hiking clubs, a blueprint for a concept of a long, national trail.

MacKaye's vision of this emerging AT was that it was the backbone of a wilderness zone that would "hold back the creeping industrial monotony of the modern world."

A conflict soon emerged between MacKaye and Myron Avery regarding the Trail versus the Highway. MacKaye, something of an idealist, wanted a wilderness, but Avery, more of a hands-on pragmatist, wanted organized trail clubs, clearly marked trails, and guidebooks.

Neither MacKaye nor Avery cared to hike the entire Appalachian Trail. But others were interested, wanting an "immersive experience."

Earl Shaffer's 1948 trek is widely accepted as the first thru-hike. For him, the AT was "a site of natural renewal for the hale and hearty." It was also a way for Shaffer to deal with his post-World War II issues. He would eventually supplement his income by conducting slideshows and publicizing the trail.

But for thru-hiker Emma Gatewood, the AT was a means of freedom and an avenue of escape from an oppressive, abusive marriage. She became known for carrying a duffel bag and wearing sneakers and staying with farming families who would invite her in. She was a favorite with the local newspaper reporters along the way who appreciated warm human-interest stories. The retail outfitter in Damascus, Va., may still have a glass-encased pair of Grandma Gatewood's well-worn sneakers.

The Appalachian Trail, the author reminds the reader, is not a park in the normal sense. It is, rather, a long, national, scenic trail — basically a mishmash of various governments, private easements, towns, AT volunteer clubs — like PATH — all interconnected to create a 2,100-mile scenic trail between Georgia and Maine.

Three contemporary individuals who helped make those interconnections happen were Dave Richie, Pam Underhill, and Dave Startzell. Underhill was the National Park Service's head of the AT. Startzell was executive Director of the Appalachian Trail Conference, as it was known then, with both of them working together, negotiating to buy properties and smooth over misunderstandings. Richie had played a key role as the AT project manager for the National Park Service for several years. Several longtime PATH members may remember meeting Dave Startzell at a club meeting in Winston-Salem in the late 1990s when he was guest of honor.

Some of the names in the book might not ring a bell, but virtually everyone is familiar with author Bill Bryson, the travel writer with an eye for humor, who wrote "A Walk in the Woods," an account of his attempt at a thru-hike. Or, they may remember actor Robert Redford, who played Bryson in the movie version. To some, Bryson's account of his light-hearted attempt at thru-hiking with an out-of-control friend garnered some positives. But negative opinions also abounded, as the serious-minded felt he was being disrespectful. Either way, the book immediately became a smash bestseller — and prompted foot traffic by aspiring thru-hikers to increase 45 percent the next season.

To capture some of the essence of the AT experience for this book, D'Anieri stuck to his forte' — day-hiking. He mapped out 11 days of day-hiking along the length of the trail, each five or six hours. Then he would drive a distance to another trailhead. Unfortunately, he skipped over PATH's 70-mile stretch. After a short hike in the Damascus, Virginia, area, he drove to scenic photo-op McAfee knob near Roanoke and then Shenandoah. His northernmost point was Saddleback Mountain, Maine.

"I tried to observe the trail and its environment for the insights it had to offer," the author wrote.

This book was highly readable and entertaining and would help anyone interested in getting a better understanding of this unique scenic landmark.

Bits and Pieces

■ PATH seems to be developing a discussion about leaf blowing on the trails in the fall and whether it's good or bad. We've been doing a lot of it, thanks to **Ed Martin** and crew, and there's no question getting the leaves off the trail produces a more comfortable walking experience, particularly when scree or roots are involved. But **Paul Haag** commented he was trained by a maintenance crew "to leave leaves on the trail because rainwater washes over the leaves and doesn't wash the dirt away." Trail boss **Jim Houck** says that's old school, "but still holds true in many cases." Jim suggests section maintainers assess their sections and report back whether to blow or not – that's what we did when we started this, with most section maintainers agreeing to blow -- and where problem areas are. Comments are welcome. Here's a mountain bike video from New Jersey that might be worth watching:

<https://www.mtbnj.com/forum/threads/leaf-blowing-on-trails-and-sustainability.43370/>

■ **Bridges:** A little bit seems to be happening regarding the several bridge problems on the northern part of our AT section. The **Lynn Camp Creek** footbridge removal – actually, conversion to a ford -- and the repair or replacement of the **Hunting Camp Creek** footbridge have been lumped together with some Mount Rogers AT stuff and won't require a NEPA study. Jim Houck said we should hear something from the Forest Service sometime this coming summer. As for the missing **Lick Creek** bridge, currently a sometimes chancy ford, it's been turned over to the Federal Highway Administration. (Yes, I know, but that's what they've done. No word on whether it will require a stoplight or a yellow line.)

■ **A new timekeeper:** Workers, remember that **Michele Nester** took over from **Paul Clayton** as PATH timekeeper at the end of last year. So all your work and commuting hours (outside of regularly reported work weekends, which we're still putting together) should be reported to her; don't just assume you can send them to the PATH List. Michele can be reached at confettiandgiggles@yahoo.com.

■ Note to those of you who have had trouble reaching the AT by means of Va. 86, a dirt road that a landowner tried to gate: A new organization called **Friends of Glade Mountain** is taking the landowner to court to get threatening signs and gates removed. Info is available from PATH member **Bill Tanger** at riverdancer1943@gmail.com or at (540) 266-0237. There are no dues or other obligations. They're just try to show that there is a lot of interest in access.

PATH Officers

President

Betsy Truscott, 5021 Stockdale Place
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27104
(335) 602-6903
btrus@infionline.net

Vice President

Chris Bracknell, 1137 Gleaves Road,
Ivanhoe, Va. 24350
(276) 621-5528
wbracknell@juno.com

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 2022, 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!

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Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers
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