

PATH WAYS

Of the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers

PATH Year 58, No. 3

Autumn 2022

Wanted: A New Appalachian Trail Boss



Betsy Truscott

Workers encourage a hiker on the Bog Bridge.

locust log sills, to driving the nails that attached the decking, it was an adventure.

“PATH Trail Supervisor Jim Houck and Konnarock crew leader Austin Grosklags used their surveying expertise to keep the alignment true, using gentle curves to give an aesthetically pleasing look.

“Assistant Konnarock crew leader Ruth Mosholder hovered over us like a mother hen, keeping us focused and on track.

Jim Houck is bowing out after ‘best ever’ Summerfest

After 10 years and who knows how many hundred gallons of gas traveling from his home in Florida to southwest Virginia, Jim Houck has finally done it: He handed in his resignation as trail boss on June 30, at the end of the fiscal year.

That followed closely a highly successful Summerfest, in which we worked with the Konnarock Crew to install a new bog bridge along the North Fork of the Holston River north of Walker Mountain. Jim reported that Konnarock Crew leader Jerry Kyle, who has attended several Summerfests, called it the best ever.

Here is Jim’s Summerfest report:

“Jerry pulled things together after a shaky start, due to supply issues for the materials to build the Bog Bridge.

“The camaraderie and teamwork building the Bog Bridge was exponential. From cutting and stripping the bark off the



Jim Houck

How to debark logs: Unpeeling, left; with a pulaski, center; and with a sledgehammer, right.

“Meanwhile back at base camp, meals were prepared and shared, feeding as many as 35 people on Saturday evening. PATH members Joe Levsen, Rich Freeman, David Atkinson and Bryan “Acorn” Thompson kept the coffee and food hot off the grill coming, to keep up with the hungry volunteers.

“Many others helped with food preparation, organizing the serving line and with the all-important cleanup.

“A Friday afternoon storm blew thru, causing damage to both tarps with wind & rain. Konnarock’s tent blew down but was re-erected using splints. PATH’s tarp has a few rips.

“Saturday evening Betsy held a raffle style drawing where prizes were awarded. The laughter and jocularly could be heard up and down Rich Valley. Big Winner was Dwight Levi with his solar powered, night light pineapple. Paul Haag almost ended up with the can of Vienna sausage.

“David Atkinson won the “guess the Karl Kunkel arrival time” (details supplied upon request). David awaits his prize from Karl: A can or bottle of Yoo-hoo drink.

“James Baum, PATH member and ATC ridgerunner, made a couple of appearances to lend his expertise and help out. Ed Martin, while doing trail assessment and cleanup on Walker Mountain, directed thru hiker Katie Suminski, aka “num num,” to join us at base camp. She stayed for 2 days, helping with the bog bridge project. Burke’s Garden hostel owner Rebecca James (aka “Cantaloupe”) dropped in Saturday evening for conversation and fun.

“Set up and take down of the camp was made easy, thanks to the volunteers. As was the transporting of all the equipment to and from Sugar Grove. We had 29 PATH members & 10 Konnarock members in attendance. It was great to see everyone during this action-packed Summerfest.”



Jim Houck

Rich Freeman hammers in the last decking on the Bog Bridge. It's all held down by rebar.

Duties of the Trail Supervisor

It's way too early now to speculate much about a new trail boss, replacing the legendary Jim Houck (though we almost surely will), but here is Jim's duty list for whoever takes over the job. It's sure to be a topic for the annual meeting later this year.

- 1) Plan and announce the monthly work trips, to include base camp location and work projects.
- 2) Arrange for transporting tools to & from base camp.
- 3) Conduct pre-work safety meeting, JHA review & PPE requirements.
- 4) Report all hours (work & travel) to Michele Nester.
- 5) Submit work trip report to the PATH-List.
- 6) Continually remind individual workers to submit their hours (non-work weekends) to Michele.
- 7) Keep in contact with PATH section maintainers as to work needed.
- 8) Remain in close contact with ATC Roanoke & Forest Service partners (MRNRA & EDRD).
- 9) Grants. Apply for & follow up.
- 10) Oversee maintenance of PATH tools.

Manchin Dealing May Help Gas Pipeline

By Hiroko Tabuchi
New York Times, 8/7

Editor's note: This pipeline would cross under the AT in Giles County, just north of the PATH section of the Appalachian Trail. See past issues for much more information.

BLACKSBURG, Va. — After years of spirited opposition from environmental activists, the Mountain Valley Pipeline — a 304-mile gas pipeline cutting through the Appalachian Mountains — was behind schedule, over budget and beset with lawsuits. As recently as February, one of its developers, NextEra Energy, warned that the many legal and regulatory obstacles meant there was “a very low probability of pipeline completion.”

Then came Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia and his hold on the Democrats’ climate agenda.

Mr. Manchin’s recent surprise agreement to back the Biden administration’s historic climate legislation came about in part because the senator was promised something in return: not only [support](#) for the pipeline in his home state, but also expedited approval for pipelines and other infrastructure nationwide, as part of a wider set of [concessions to fossil fuels](#).

It was a big win for a pipeline industry that, in recent years, has quietly become one of Mr. Manchin’s biggest financial supporters.



Natural gas pipeline companies have dramatically increased their contributions to Mr. Manchin, from just \$20,000 in 2020 to more than \$331,000 so far this election cycle, according to [campaign finance disclosures](#) filed with the Federal Election Commission and tallied by the Center for Responsive Politics. Mr. Manchin has been by far Congress’s largest recipient of money from natural gas pipeline companies this cycle, raising three times as much from the industry than any other lawmaker.

NextEra Energy, a utility giant and stakeholder in the Mountain Valley Pipeline, is a top donor [to both Mr. Manchin](#) and [Senator Chuck Schumer](#), Democrat of New York, who negotiated the pipeline side deal with Mr. Manchin. Mr. Schumer has [received more than \\$281,000](#) from NextEra this election cycle, the data shows. Equitrans Midstream, which owns the largest stake in the pipeline, [has given more than \\$10,000](#) to Mr. Manchin. The pipeline and its owners have also [spent heavily](#) to [lobby Congress](#).

A spokesman for Mr. Manchin said the Mountain Valley Pipeline “will help bring down energy costs, shore up American energy security and create jobs in West Virginia.” An official in Mr. Schumer’s office said the pipeline deal “was only included at the insistence of Sen. Manchin as part of any agreement related to this reconciliation bill.”

Natalie Cox, a spokeswoman for Equitrans, said the company maintained a “high standard of integrity” while engaging with policymakers. She declined to say whether Equitrans had pressed either senator on the pipeline. NextEra Energy, which also develops renewable projects across the country and stands to benefit widely from the bill, did not respond to requests for comment.

Bits and Pieces

■ We've gotten a lot done so far this year, but still more is needed. Here were some needed jobs as of mid-July, according to retiring trail supervisor **Jim Houck**:

1) Completion of the \$3,900 ATC Grant.

So far, we have purchased one chainsaw and three large silky saws totaling about \$2,000. The plan was to purchase two new weed eaters. (More of this money has since been spent.)

2) Tilson south & Golden Winged Warbler Trail needs attention. Blazing and mowing ASAP.

3) 12 blowdowns from June 18 storm. 3 on **Dwight Levi's** section & 9 somewhere north of 617 to Va-610. (A good bit of this has been accomplished.)

4) Footbridges:

A) 2-log bridge, 1 mile south of Settlers Museum should have decking added.

B) **Philippi Branch** has deteriorating stringers, and Forest Service advises a replacement bridge will not happen. As a 40-foot bridge would need professional design & installation, this stream crossing will be made into a ford, probably downstream.

C) Bridge over **Dry Run** needs hardware cloth attached at the south end. It's slippery when wet.

D) **Lynn Camp Creek** bridge, remove and replace with a ford. Waiting for Forest Service approval. Check with Josh at ATC.

E) **Lick Creek** bridge. This project has been turned over to the Federal Highway Administration for design and installation. Forest Service is supposed to keep us informed. Meanwhile PATH is responsible for maintaining an occasionally dangerous water crossing at that location.

F) **Hunting Camp Creek** footbridge needs repairs to decking and handrail.

PATH could do repairs, but if extensive work is needed Forest Service would have to be involved.

■ We missed getting this picture in last time. Here is a rear view of PATH's wonderful **new yellow t-shirt**. You can both see and order it, short or long sleeve or hoodie, at this link. Thanks to **Rich Freeman, Ron Hudnell** and **Ed Martin** for putting this project together. Here's the link:

<https://mommascustomtees-llc.square.site/product/PATHVolunteer/262>

■ Not many PATHers go back 50 years, but it's worth remembering that June 29, 2022, marked the 50th anniversary of the opening of the **Big Walker Mountain Tunnel** on I-77, a vital route for both East Coast to Midwest traffic and for many people working on the Appalachian Trail. The project cost \$50 million at the time (equivalent to \$239 million in 2020) and was the single most costly item on Virginia's interstate system. The anniversary was noted with a brief event and tour for invited guests. That didn't include us, although the AT passed right over the top of the tunnel in 1972 – several hundred feet higher up, of course. Thanks to **Craig Brock** for the reminder.



■ Due to lower-than-expected registration for the first **AT Vista**, which was scheduled earlier this month at the State University in New Paltz, N.Y., the program was canceled. ATC said full refunds are being made to all registrants. Plans for **AT Vista 2023, Aug. 4-7 in Johnson City, Tenn.**, are under way, and it's hoped this will draw more people. AT Vista events are long weekends of hikes, workshops, excursions and entertainment planned to replace the late lamented ATC Biennials. More info and reports, as well as a link to sign up for a newsletter, are at www.atvista.org.



■ In his status report, **Jim Houck** mentioned the three large Silky “Katanaboy” folding saws that PATH has purchased with an Appalachian Trail Conservancy grant, and early experience with them shows that they may come in very handy. Forestry Suppliers advertises them as “a great alternative to chain saws,” and we used one of them to take down a threatening snag on the Tilson South section of the AT during Summerfest. Better still, they don't require the same certification as crosscut saws – at least, not yet. Here are **Rich Freeman** and **Dwight Levi** comparing the two saws: Rich with Katanaboy, left, and Dwight with a one-person or two-person crosscut saw.

■ A topic for future discussion is the future of the **Chatfield (nee Glade Mountain) Shelter**. The old privy was full, and the Forest Service says there's no proper location for a new privy; all sites are too close to the stream. So the July work trip involved taking the old privy apart and toting all the materials to a waiting truck. It was all

successful, but of course there's no privy at Chatfield now. What are we going to do? Your ideas are welcome. (Note: The summer newsletter had a story about the old Killinger Creek shelter, which predated Chatfield/Glade Mountain. It might be worth reading.)

■ Most people get this newsletter by email, but it's come to our attention recently that some, for one reason or another, are missing the newsletter. If you're not on the Path List, or you'd like to have the newsletter sent by regular **U.S. Mail**, please let us know. PATH member Ron Hudnell (use address below) keeps up with the snail mail mailing addresses. Or contact the newsletter editor.

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, 2022. 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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■ Don't forget that we have **fall hunting seasons** coming up; and remember to wear **blaze orange** during them. For deer: Early archery season is Oct. 1-Nov. 18 statewide. Late archery season is Dec. 4-Jan. 7 in our area. Muzzleloader season is Nov. 5-18 and Dec. 17-Jan. 7 in our area, and firearms deer season is Nov. 19-Dec. 3 in our area. For bear: The seasons are Oct. 1-Nov. 18 for archers, Nov. 12-18 for muzzleloaders and Nov. 28-Jan. 7 for firearms. Hunting seasons also exist for turkey and many small game animals.

2022 Calendar

September 16-18, 2022 **September Work Weekend** **Sugar Grove, Va.**
General trail maintenance, hopefully with a potluck Saturday night. We're looking for leaders for this and other late season work weekends.

October 14-16, 2022 **October Work Weekend** **Sugar Grove, Va.**
General trail maintenance, hopefully with a potluck Saturday night at the Sugar Grove work center. We're looking for leaders for this and other late season work weekends.

October 17-21, 2022 **Crosscut Saw Certification** **Sugar Grove, Va.**
Offered by the Forest Service, ATC and the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards. To learn more and apply, visit the link <https://wildernessskillsinstitute.org/crosscut2022/> Application closed August 15, but email anyway if you're interested. Contact Eric Giebelstein at ericgiebelstein@wildernessstewards.org for info.

November 19, 2022 **PATH Annual Meeting** **TBA**
The PATH Annual Meeting is usually held on the third Saturday of November somewhere in the club's Virginia and North Carolina membership area. Stay tuned. This was conducted by Zoom last year.

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Want to Join?

We are 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!

Name (s) _____

Address _____

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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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