

# PATH WAYS

Of the Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers

PATH Year 59, No. 2

Summer 2023

## A Road Trip to Alaska

A PATH member shares both wonder and travel advice

Story and photos  
By Bryan Thompson

I'd been dreaming of a road trip to Alaska for decades. I'd read books, watched documentaries and studied maps for years, and I was convinced that a leisurely road trip was the way to satisfy my curiosity and desire to get close to this still remote and wild country. It all came to be last summer when I took off in a truck camper for 75 days of wandering through western Canada and Alaska.



[Crossing the Brooks Range on the Dalton Highway.](#)

When I first started thinking about this adventure decades ago, road hazards were notorious. Travelers were urged to carry multiple spare tires and extra fuel. I found the roads are relatively good compared to those older accounts. I saw few tire issues along the way, and signage regarding fuel services helps avoid any surprises. However, these roads are almost all unpaved and prone to annual adjustments of the underlying permafrost and impacts from heavy ice action. The potholes are shockingly deep, and the frost heaves can launch your vehicle if not respected. In general, driving requires full concentration to avoid issues, and top speeds of 35-40 mph are typical on the more remote roads.

The enormity of landscapes in Alaska, Yukon, and British Columbia is both comforting and overwhelming. The comfort comes from knowing these wild spaces still exist. That in itself is very important to me, and I can report there's still opportunity to grab a pack and hit the trail or waterway



[A trail running alongside Exit Glacier, near Seward, looks out onto the Harding Icefield.](#)

in vast pristine natural surroundings. The overwhelming aspect was trying to decide where to go and how to capture my experience in photos and stories to share. Every photo I took seemed inadequate in capturing distance, awe, and spirit of the place.

I chose to travel July through September. This time frame allowed me to avoid most other lower 48 visitors and the huge bug hatches that occur after spring thaw. On the flip side, August can be quite wet and cool in the Alaska bush. By the time I exited Alaska back into Yukon in mid-September, it was much cooler, and Fall was in full swing. I camped in the truck every night, mostly in governmental campgrounds, and found it to be both cost effective and satisfying. Most Alaska state campgrounds or Canadian provincial campgrounds only cost \$15-20 per night. Yukon even provides free firewood. Many of these campgrounds are close to trails where day hikes easily transport you to mountain ridges and summits, or along epic waterways like the Yukon and Copper rivers. There are typically trails alongside glaciers, which was a favorite for me.

One sign that human encroachment is affecting the Alaska wilderness was less frequent wildlife encounters than I was anticipating. I did see or have close encounters with all the major iconic wildlife: moose, caribou, sheep, bear, eagle and other bird species. However, it was far less frequent and in fewer numbers than I was expecting based on my years of studying the region. This was disappointing, although I cherished every encounter I did have. I was able to see small herds of caribou grazing, eagle fledglings leaving the nest, grizzly bear mothers teaching their cubs how to catch salmon, and Dahl sheep climbing sheer cliffs. Curious ravens were talking to me everywhere.





[A view of Denali, alias Mount McKinley, something few Alaska travelers get to see.](#)

The other sign that humans are impacting this wilderness was the status of ice fields, glaciers, and the rivers they feed. I was blown away by how much water there was everywhere, then felt sad after I realized it was due mainly to rapidly melting ice. I hiked up alongside the Exit glacier near Seward, Alaska, and there the National Park Service (Kenai Fjords NP) had constructed a series of waypoints to illustrate the retreat of Exit over the last century. That really had a profound impact on me as I sat at elevation and stared at the glacier and its source, the Harding Icefield.

I could write my own travel guide based on this adventure and the hundreds of photos I captured. How to summarize and condense the experience into a newsletter article seemed impossible at first, but after thinking on it for a few weeks I've come up with some conclusions and encouragement for anyone interested in experiencing that part of the world. Everything connected with the natural world is vast beyond comprehension, period. Everything connected with humans is shockingly tiny – place names on a road map often relate to a community of one or two structures and no services. Solitude is the norm.

Wherever in Alaska you go, plan to give yourself ample time to sit with nature and observe. For example, it was only due to my decision to take a full 10 days to drive along the Alaska Range and Denali NP that I was rewarded by a brief view of Denali itself. The park staff claims that only 30 percent of visitors get to see the mountain due to clouds produced by the massive peak. You need time to get a glimpse, and it is certainly worth the wait.

Just go do it!

# Bits and Pieces



Here's part of the March 18 crew in the day room. Others were already out working.

■ **WHITEWASH, GREEN BRIARS AND FISH STEW:** There isn't enough room in this newsletter to report on every work weekend, but comment should be made on the opening weekend of our work year March 17-19. Though it was cold (17 degrees Sunday morning in the pods at Sugar Grove), we had nine teams with a total of 32 workers who, among other things, whitewashed the interior walls of the Chestnut Knob Shelter, repaired a fence at O'Lystery parking lot, repaired steps just north of O'Lystery, cut numerous blowdowns and trimmed thousands (well, maybe hundreds) of green briars. Fair warning: It's a good year for green briars.



Our team included a number of people who'd seen the announcement, including a couple of U.S. Army soldiers from Fort Meade (in Maryland) and a couple of people from Switzerland currently working in the U.S. Several new members showed up.

Back at Sugar Grove after the Saturday workday, a crew under the direction of new member **Tina Hogue** prepared a fish stew, salad, corn bread and pies that brought raves from the assembled masses. It's called courtbouillon (the "t" is silent), and it was so good that Tina agreed to provide the recipe. Here it is:



## Courtbouillon

4 lbs. any firm fish (catfish, crappie, tilapia, redfish)  
¼ cup flour  
½ lb. butter  
2 T green onions, chopped (including the green part)  
2 large onions, finely chopped  
½ cup celery, chopped  
1 large green pepper, chopped  
1 ½ quarts water

1 T parsley, minced  
1 large can stewed tomatoes (or stew your own)  
salt to taste  
red pepper  
2 bay leaves  
¼ cup dry sherry  
1 t rosemary  
lemon slices

Melt butter and blend in flour. Saute onions slowly until light brown, stirring constantly. Add all ingredients except fish, sherry and lemon. Cook about 20 minutes. Filet and skin fish and cut into two-and-one-half-inch squares. Add fish to mixture and cook slowly, stirring gently so as not to break fish, about 20 more minutes. Just before serving add sherry and garnish with lemon slices. Serve with rice. Serves 6.

■ **APRIL WORK WEEKEND:** Not to be outdone, April's organizers reported nine work teams with a total of 35 workers April 14-15. They created a bypass around a hazardous cattle grate, rerouted a branch, repaired a stile and added steps, side-hilled near Davis Farm Campsite, weed-wacked the North Fork of the Holston bog area, removed blowdowns on the Golden-winged Warbler Trail and near Walker Gap, and went to Flat Ridge to hear the Flat Ridge Boys and Jake the Dog. There are reported to be pictures of PATHers doing the Indian Dance, whatever that is. That picture at right, supplied by **Ron Hudnell**, shows **Bryan Thompson** working on the branch rerouting, which was done in conjunction with the cattle grate work.



■ **NEW MEMBERS** from spring work trips include **Chris and Adrienne Green** of Holland, Mich.; **Alan Lawrence** of High Point, N.C.; **Darlene Wayman** of Raleigh, N.C.; and **Justin Curtis** of Lancaster, Ohio. If there are others, please let us know.

■ We're still on hold in that controversy about **ACCESS TO GLADE MOUNTAIN** via Va. 86, which an adjacent landowner has been trying to close. There was a court hearing last fall, but PATH member **Bill Tanger** says his **Friends of Glade Mountain** group has been unsuccessful getting a transcript of it. Apparently, the court reporter fell ill and her company dropped the ball. Once a transcript is in hand and the landowner has an attorney, a trial can take place. In the meantime, the PATH board is considering a \$250 grant to Friends of Glade Mountain to help with legal expenses.

■ This is the last call here for PATH's **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>

■ There's been a lot of talk about how to **RESERVE THE CABIN AT STONY FORK CAMPGROUND** for PATH work weekends during the summer and fall. Here's how to do it: Go the Web site at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) and enter "Stony Fork Cabin" in the search line. Click availability, and you'll be able to put in your preferred dates. Costs are \$65 per night or \$410 weekly. You can also call (800) 628-7202.

■ **FROM PAUL CLAYTON**, PATH historian, in answer to a hiker's question in February: Partnership Shelter was named in memory of **Thomas Baldwin**, an avid hiker who died young. His family provided much of the funding for the shelter and participated in building it. Members of six clubs worked on the shelter during the Multi-Club meeting of 1997. (Those used to take place over Labor Day.) So this was a true partnership effort, with PATH, the Forest Service, ATC, other clubs and the Baldwin family all working together to build a real gem of a shelter. The shelter was dedicated in June 1998, on National Trails Day.

## 2023 Calendar

**May 19-21, 2023**

**May Work Weekend**

**Stony Fork Camp, Va.**

General maintenance, hopefully with a potluck or meal out Saturday night. See the notice elsewhere for renting the Forest Service cabin at Stony Fork Camp. It makes a good headquarters for a work weekend.

**May 19-21, 2023**

**AT Trail Days**

**Damascus, Va.**

This annual event in Damascus celebrates the Appalachian Trail and is a sure gathering place for this year's crop of through-hikers. Music, seminars, hikers' parade, many other events. It will most likely operate out of the new Damascus Trail Center.

**May 22-26, 30-June 2**

**Wilderness Skills Institute**

**Cradle of Forestry, N.C.**

These are two weeks of courses ranging from introductory trail work to Wilderness First Aid to rock work to crosscut saw techniques. For info, visit [www.wildernessskillsinstitute.org/sawsj](http://www.wildernessskillsinstitute.org/sawsj). Applications are now open.

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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. AUTUMN DEADLINE August 20, 2023. Web site:

[www.path-at.org](http://www.path-at.org). Or for info: [PiedmontATHikers@gmail.com](mailto:PiedmontATHikers@gmail.com). Or see our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/PiedmontATHikers/](http://www.facebook.com/PiedmontATHikers/)

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**June 3, 2023**

**National Trails Day**

**Nationwide**

PATH does not have anything special scheduled for National Trails Day this year, but the North Carolina Trails Days festival will be taking place in Elkin, N.C., over this weekend. This includes hikes, a festival, a quilt show and a trails work day. Visit [www.nctraildays.com](http://www.nctraildays.com).

**June 15-18, 2023**

**June Work Weekend**

**Settlers' Museum, Va.**

General maintenance, hopefully with a potluck or meal out Saturday night. This is our 2023 Summerfest, and we'll be working on projects around the Settlers' Museum. Location is scheduled for the Settlers' Museum, which is on the AT.

**July 14-16, 2023**

**July Work Weekend**

**Stony Fork Camp, Va.**

General trail maintenance, hopefully with a potluck or meal out Saturday night.

**July 16, 2023**

**CMC Centennial**

**Asheville, N.C.**

Our neighboring Carolina Mountain Club, headquartered in Asheville, will celebrate its centennial with a free, family-friendly party and celebration from 1-5 p.m. at the North Carolina Arboretum. The arboretum is off N.C. 191 (Brevard Road) south of the city of Asheville, where the Blue Ridge Parkway crosses the French Broad River. Visit [www.cmcl00th.org](http://www.cmcl00th.org).

**August 4-7, 2023**

**AT Vista 2023**

**Johnson City, Tenn.**

AT Vista 2023, Aug. 4-7 in Johnson City, Tenn., is a long weekend of hikes, workshops, excursions and entertainment planned to replace the late lamented ATC Biennials. More info and reports, as well newsletter and registration links, are at [www.atvista.org](http://www.atvista.org).



**August 18-20 2023**

**August Work Weekend**

**Stony Fork Camp, Va.**

General maintenance, hopefully with a potluck or meal out Saturday night. There will be a lot of late-season undergrowth to clear or weedat on the trail.

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# Want to Join?



We are working on the Trail in 2023, despite coronavirus, monkey pox or whatever illness you want to name. If you'd like to join us, here's how: You may join PATH (or renew) at our Web site, [www.path-at.org](http://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 \_\_\_\_\_

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Address correction requested

