



May 2020

A.T. Maintenance and COVID-19

As you know, all A.T. maintenance activities are currently on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The GSMNP is closed (indefinitely), the Nantahala National Forest is closed, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy has submitted a letter to the Department of the Interior requesting formal closure of the the A.T. At this time, the President and CEO of the ATC, Sandra Marra, has requested all A.T. Clubs suspend Trail- related activities, and of course A.T. hikers (day and thru) have been asked to stay off the Trail. In addition, Ridgerunners are off the Trail, Konnorock in the NNF has been cancelled this year, and Rocky Top/ S.W.E.A.T. crews are on indefinite hold for the GSMNP.

It is unclear at this time what a transition-back-to-activity for us will look like. There may be phases of transition, there may be guidelines on work group size or types of work, etc. We will be in communication as that unfolds.

I know we are all anxious to get back to regular monthly work trips, maintaining our sections, taking care of blowdowns, shelters, and privies (well..... maybe the privies are a stretch!). We will keep you informed of all updates as they occur via the ATMC newsletter, or group e-mails. This is an unprecedented time for everyone. Know that when we are allowed to return to work, we will need LOTS of help, to get the Trail back to the excellent shape it is usually in, thanks to all of the work you do! In the meantime, please stay safe and healthy! If you have specific questions, please feel free to communicate with me at petrillad@gmail.com or 931-224-5149.

Diane Petrilla M.D.

National Trails Day in the Smokies 2020

On April 10, 2020, a conference call was held by members of the NTD Steering Committee, several ATMC members, Stephen Eren of the ATC, and Christine Hoyer of the GSMNP. The trajectory of COVID-19 pandemic cases is likely to go into May, it is unclear when the GSMNP will re-open and when the ATC recommends volunteer work can resume on the A.T. In addition, it is likely that return-to-activity plans will not include large group activities for awhile. A consensus opinion was reached by this conference call group. As part of the process, the conclusion must be presented to the National Park, including the Superintendent, since NTD occurs in partnership with the Park and with support by Friends of the Smokies, and is part of yearly event planning. After this step, we will notify you by separate e-mail of the final status of NTD. I apologize for the delay.

ATMC Meeting Scheduled for April 29 Cancelled

As you have probably already guessed, the ATMC meeting tentatively scheduled for April 29 has been cancelled. As we receive information about how we can return to work as A.T. volunteers in the Park and NNF, we will schedule a meeting to re-plan a work schedule for the many projects that were pending before COVID-19. Whether the meeting will be in person or via tele/video conference is TBD. Thank you all for your patience.

Please send any items of interest, **photos**, and event notifications for the ATMC Newsletter to Diane Petrilla at petrillad@gmail.com. Thank you for **ALL** of the work (and now pausing!) you do!



ATC Requests Your Input!

If you haven't done so already, please consider completing the ATC survey described below. I have completed it, and it allows us to give good feedback to the ATC about what training and services might be helpful for us.

The goal [of the survey] is to inform the priorities and focus for an emerging task force to better serve [maintaining] Clubs by better understanding:

- The form and content of trainings available to A.T volunteers, at all levels
- The value of A.T. Saw Safety Training, including frequency of the application of those skills, and the capacity of skills to meet the needs of the Trail.
- Any gaps between perceived confidence in skills and availability of training.

Based on the number of volunteers our club reported for the last federal fiscal year (**302** volunteers), we anticipate that for this survey to be statistically significant and provide effective meaning, that there would need to be **182** unique responses. Here's the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AllVolsAT>
It takes about 30 minutes to complete.

Each survey participant will also be entered in a raffle to win one of several daypacks, perfect for a day on the Trail. Clubs with the highest percentage of survey participants (based on tiers of small, medium and large clubs) will then have their members entered into the raffle twice, doubling chances of winning!

A. T. Work Trip From 2/21/2020 to 4/10/2020 (all performed before Park/ NNF closures in place)

2/21 - Scott McClure, Bert Emmerson, Dwight Norris - Cosby Knob Shelter - Cleaned Shelter fire pit removed ashes, swept out bunks. When we got to the shelter the tarp was down and was folded up and in the shelter. We put it back up as best we could. The bin lock was frozen and we weren't able to thaw it out to get tools. The privy is in dire need of maintenance; the cone is very high. We knocked it down as best we could but it definitely needs further attention. We cleaned out some of the water breaks on the access trail and did a basic cleanup around the shelter.

2/28 - Phyllis Henry - AT Mgt, Mtgs & Admin - Shopped for supplies and delivered to Ridgerunners.

3/7 - Keith Mertz, Judy Wade, Melanie Harmon, Jonny Bruce, Terry Martin, Dean Dennison, Taylor Weatherbee

- Yellow Creek Gap to Brown Fork Gap - Removed blowdowns with chain saw from access trail leading from the USFS road to Cody Gap, then around 0.5 mile south on A.T. to clear 3 blowdowns there. Then hiked north on A.T. to Cable Gap clearing a few blowdowns. Then hiked a short distance north from Cable Gap shelter to clear 2 small blowdowns. Also trimmed branches encroaching on Trail.

3/7 - Franklin LaFond, Bill Pyle, Randy Mitchell, Russell Redden, "Hopeful" Powell, Amanda Beal, Mark Buckles

- Stekoah Gap to Wright Gap - 2 sawyer teams started from Nolton Ridge, hiked up the Bartram trail to the AT. Team 1 cleared 5 blowdowns between Cheoah Bald and Locust Cove Gap. Team 2 cleared 32 blowdowns between Cheoah Bald and Wright Gap. Serviced the privy and removed a small bag-full of trash from Sassafras Gap Shelter. Both teams pruned a significant amount of woody vegetation.



Franklin, Russ and Bill with one big blowdown! (photo courtesy of Franklin LaFond)

3/8 - Barbara Allen, Barbara Allen's Friends Group - Davenport Gap to Chestnut Br Trail - Cleaned water drainages. Cleaned trash from shelter. Spent time educating participants about trail maintenance.

3/11 - Taylor Weatherbee - Newfound Gap to Mt Love - Hiked up the road from NFG to Collins Gap, then got on the AT to hike from Collins Gap to Mt Love, planning to evaluate this section prior to a planned introductory trip with Charlie McDonald who is inheriting this section

from Wayne Williams, to be done in April. I did cut a small blowdown measuring around 8 in. with a hand saw. I think we might be able to use some 8 and 4 foot locust logs on the Collins Gap to Mt Love section. I then hiked back to Collins Gap, and continued on the A.T. on our section to the Fork Ridge access point. I chopped a 14 in. tree lying parallel to the trail just south of Mt Collins summit, then removed a second rotten broken up log nearby. I also spent some time looking for acceptable sites to store locust logs for our 2 access locations, Charlie's section, Scotty McClure's section, and Patti Grady and Diane Petrilla's section. I also did a better estimate of the number of 4 and 8 foot locust logs that we could use at each end of the Mt Collins section.

3/13 - Mike Harrington, Glenn Gardner - Sassafras Gap (PK) to Lewellyn Branch - Removed wet leaves from waterbar drainage channels. Removed a few minor blowdowns.

3/13 - Taylor Weatherbee - AT Mgt, Mtgs & Admin - Attended Southern Region Partnership meeting by videoconference.

3/14 - Leonard T Gaddis, Paul Glascock, Jimmy Glascock - Swim Bald to Wright Gap - Picked up trash in fire pits, cleared water bars, removed 2 medium sized blow downs. Trail is in good condition up to the large rock fall where we had to stop, with exception of an old large blowdown just west of Grassy Gap.

3/14 - Scott McClure, Bert Emmerson - Mount Collins Shelter - Packed into Mt. Collins Shelter Friday morning. Started at the shelter by cleaning ashes out of fire place and picked up all garbage. Built the floor of the shelter up with some dry dirt and shovel packing it in. The floor had eroded with foot traffic and was no longer draining out to the kitchen area. Water was ponding all around the shelter and the trail to the shelter. I dug some trenches at the shelter to direct the water away. Once I got the shelter water handled, I started working up the Trail to the A.T. cleaning water breaks. Removed a few small blowdowns between A.T. and Shelter. The water bars were in bad shape, clogged and not draining. We worked north on the AT approximately 1/4 mile from Mt Collins trail intersection cleaning out the water breaks and creating ditches. Rained or misted all day. Stopped work at 4:30 and hiked back to shelter. We had 4 Thru Hikers in the shelter Friday night. Got up Saturday, 14th @ Mt Collins Shelter and hiked back to where I ended Friday evening. Continued working north cleaning water bars and creating ditches to drain the water off the trail. We made it to 1/2 mile south of Spruce Fir parking area @3:30. We were able to make a big difference in the Trail conditions with the drainage work. I returned to the

shelter to put tools back in the box, filled mulch buckets I took the garbage that was left in the box from Ridge runner and hauled it out to Newfound Gap. There were very limited tools at the shelter. It would be great if we could add a few new fire rakes and a pulaski or two to the box. Fire rake at the privy has a broken handle and needs replaced ASAP.

3/14 - Taylor Weatherbee, Bill Pyle - Derrick Knob to Thunderhead - Cleared blowdowns just south of Derrick Knob shelter, just south of Starkey Gap, and two small bonus trees in between. There is a 33 inch maple on the ground around 0.5 mile south of Derrick Knob shelter. We started to cut it with the crosscut, but ran out of time. It has an easy walk-around.

3/18 - Pete Berntsen, Rick Waggener - Gap W of Masa Knob to Boulevard Tr - Cleaned all water bars. Topped of mulch pails at shelter privy. Policed shelter and surrounding area; packed out small amount of trash +chainsaw file. Took pictures of ~20 trees felled by chainsaw in the immediate area of the shelter. Many of the trees are among largest in the area, and ~25% of these were live. All were standing. Trees lay where felled.

3/19 - John H Gassler - Davenport Gap to 1 mi N of Cam (4250' EI) - Cleared debris from entire 4 mile section. Cleared vegetation from uphill side of trail at southern end of my section.

3/21 - Pete Berntsen - False Gap to Dry Sluice Gap - Refurbished four water drains prior to Masa Knob. Removed trash that was stored in tool storage box. Repaired five-foot long trail side-hill slide at 0.11 mile NE of Dry Sluice Gap (DSG). Moved trail around four-foot side-hill slide at 0.12 mile NE of DSG. Cut and removed five-inch diameter tree that was blocking access to steps in trail located 0.42 mile NE of DSG. Trail vanished with rock slide located 0.65 mile NE of DSG. Moved trail over large remaining rock and cut back 4-inch blowdown to widen trail. Refurbished trail located 1.17 mile NE of DSG.

3/22 - Dick Kettle, Ann Farrar - Dry Sluice Gap to Gap W of Masa Knob - Cleared all water drains from Masa Knob to Dry Sluice Gap Trail Junction.

4/10 - Dick Kettle, Kristi Knight, Diane Petrilla, Cindy Spangler, Philip Royer, Michael Vaughn, Kristi Weatherbee, Taylor Weatherbee, Phyllis Henry - Other Work - Initial planning for National Trails Day 2020 on the A.T., initial sponsor solicitation, and subsequent conference call to discuss in light of COVID- 19 pandemic.