



May 4, 2020,

Dear Members of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club,

The purpose of this letter is to share with you the careful decision-making process by the SMHC Board of Directors prior to the vote to cancel Club hikes for June, 2020. We are all eager to get back to regular Club hiking events. However, we are still moving through a very uncertain time with the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know this much regarding the places we love to hike:

- TN and nearby states, cities and counties are in various stages of “safer-at-home” vs. “re-opening” processes.
- The Great Smoky Mountains National Park plans a “phased” re-opening beginning Saturday May 9.
- Most Tennessee State Park trails are open. Overnight stays and events remain prohibited, through mid-May, at a minimum
- North Carolina State parks remain closed. There is some indication they may open by mid-May.
- The A.T. remains voluntarily closed throughout its length. Our maintainers are not permitted on the A.T. for maintenance now. After the Park opens, A.T. maintainers will not be allowed on the A.T. (in either the Park or the NNF) until the Park and ATC have coordinated guidelines/ safety practices for resuming volunteer work.

We know this about COVID-19:

- For national and international data, please see: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>
- These are absolute numbers, not models or projections, and the Hopkins Dashboard now includes a USA specific map on which you can zoom in, state-by-state, county-by-county to look at case numbers.
- Tennessee met 5 of 6 “Gating Criteria” for a phased re-opening of the State, instituting recommendations to try to prevent a resurgence of the disease. Please see: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/#phase-one> “Proposed State or Regional Gating Criteria”. Only 5 were necessary but the one criteria not met by TN was “Downward Trajectory of Documented Cases within a 14 Day Period.” Cases are continuing to rise in TN. Please see TN State Government Unified Command Dashboard: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/885e479b688b4750837ba1d291b85aed>
- The novel coronavirus, SARS Co-V2, is an aggressive disease with no proven treatment or vaccine, at this time. There is hope for certain medical treatments and vaccine development in the future.

There are still many, many unknowns. Will the phased re-opening of states (and parks) manage to avoid a resurgence of disease? When will we have enough testing, contact tracing and isolation practices in place to contain new cases? Will there be a significant “second wave” as in the 1918 flu pandemic?

We do not have the answers to these questions. Our feeling as a Board was to let things play out a bit more, see how-it-goes, err on the side of caution. A rushed “one-step-forward” could mean “three-steps-back.” Club group hiking calls for some carefully defined parameters. The benefits and joys of group hiking as a Club at this time seem to be outweighed by the unknowns and potential risks due to COVID-19. (Although my husband Eric would likely say that for me, not being able to hike with my friends, creates significant risk for him!). Ultimately, it’s a judgement call.

We have formed a COVID-19 subcommittee, which now will meet (via distance) once a month to assess upcoming hikes, beginning with July.

We must work on developing safe guidelines to hike as a Club, such as some of the ones suggested by these sources: American Hiking Society <https://americanhiking.org/blog/hiking-responsibly-faq-covid-19/>; American Trails Association <https://www.americantrails.org/resources/need-your-trail-fix-during-covid19-answer-these-5-questions-first>; Wilderness Medicine Society <https://wms.org/magazine/1259/covid-19-updates>; CDC; note page 7 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community-mitigation-strategy.pdf>

In the meantime, I hope you are able to get outside, respecting and staying away from places that are closed and observing safe practices as suggested by the sources above. I am hopeful we can hike in July, as a Club, (likely in smaller groups and with other safety guidelines).

We appreciate your patience in this unusual time. We appreciate the commitment you have made to the SMHC by being a member, by hiking, by being a hike leader, by being a maintainer, by paying dues. We honor that. Please do e-mail or call me if you have any questions or concerns.

All my best, and I hope to see you soon. Stay safe and healthy!

Diane

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Smoky Mountains Hiking Club History

The first club “handbook” was a paper pamphlet listing the hikes and other information for the year 1926. The club emblem was pictured on the front of the pamphlet and has remained unchanged to this day. There were twelve hikes listed for that year: Look Rock (March), Mt. Harrison (April), Gregory Bald (May), Mt LeConte (June), Thunderhead (July), Abrams Falls (July), Alum Cave (July), Pinnacle (August), Round Top (Sept), Indian Gap (October), House Mountain (November), and Indian Cave (December). Most hikes were listed as two-day outings; leaving Knoxville on Saturday afternoon, staying overnight in a hotel or camping out, and taking what we now consider a day hike on Sunday.

The recommended gear and meals for these outings were listed in the pamphlet. The list of gear: canteen, mess kit, knife, fork, spoon, matches in air-tight tin, first aid kit, axe, lantern or candles, compass, nails, string, and field glasses. The recommended food list: bacon, bread, butter, cocoa, sweet chocolate, cheese, eggs, ham, evaporated milk, raisins, chipped beef, malted milk, figs, dates, apples, rice, potatoes, pancake flour, oatmeal crackers, coffee (Geo. Washington), jelly, prunes, sugar, salt, lemons, apricots, and a canteen of water. It was advised to choose carefully from the list to keep the weight down.

The club extended “a cordial invitation to all hiking and mountaineering clubs to make a visit into the beautiful Smoky Mountains, in which it is proposed to establish a National Park.” Two clubs were mentioned as already having accepted an invitation to visit: The Prairie Club of Chicago and the Green Mountain Hiking Club.

The club officers for 1926 were: Brockway Crouch, president; Edward Ivey, vice-president, and Albert Roth, secretary-treasurer. The mailing address for the club that year: Flower Craft, Inc., 614 S. Gay St, Knoxville, Tenn.

The pamphlet was a total of 4 pages front and back including the cover page and a page with a picture of the club on Mt. LeConte and a picture of three club members on the Chimneys. The pamphlet dimensions were very close to the same dimensions as all the following yearly handbooks, 1927 to current. What a tradition!

Brian Worley, Historian

Trail Maintenance Special Events Cancelled in June and July

1. After consulting with partners and receiving guidance from ATC leadership, I'm sorry to report that the Fontana Kill the Dam Invasives event is no longer going to occur on July 11th this year. We'll look at rescheduling as the situation evolves. Everybody stay safe and healthy and I'll be in touch.

Matt Drury

Resource Management Coordinator - Southern Region Appalachian Trail Conservancy

2. June 6th is [#NationalTrailsDay](#) and while we won't be gathering together in person, we still want to celebrate and protect trails and access to quality green spaces.

Take the [#PublicLandsProtector](#) Pledge and you will be entered to win one of five prize packages of gear. The sooner you take the pledge the more chances you have to win! bit.ly/trails-day



Welcome New Members

Thomas and Alisandria Snyder tswhitewater@gmail.com 423/453-9321 2031
Creekside Manor Ln Knoxville TN 37932
Stephanie Ramsey steph.ramsey@yahoo.com 770/455-7179
4056 Forrestal Drive Chamblee GA 30341
Robert Bobinsky gactbo1959@gmail.com 770/757-1923
828 Cotton Creek Dr Canton GA 30115

Suggested non-crowded hikes

With health concerns due to large groups in the Smokies, the following are a few trail options that are easily accessible, not overly difficult, and generally not crowded.

Big South Fork (Northern TN and Southern KY)

<https://www.nps.gov/biso/planyourvisit/tntrails.htm>

House Mountain (Knox County)

<https://knoxcounty.org/parks/pdfs/hiking.pdf>

North Boundary Greenway (Oak Ridge)

<http://tnlandforms.us/greenways/maps03/nb.html>

Firetower (Frozen Head State Park near Wartburg)

<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/us/tennessee/old-mac-mountain-and-frozen-head-firetower?u=m>

Devil's Racetrack (Cumberland Trail, Caryville)

<https://www.cumberlandtrail.org/trail-segments/cumberland-mountain-segment/eagle-bluff-section/devils-racetrack-and-i-75/>

East Lakeshore Trail System (Loudon County)

<https://tennesseerivervalleygeotourism.org/entries/east-lakeshore-trail-at-tellico-lake/98603bc2-9316-4946-9354-85a07a8078d5>

Cumberland Trail State Park

<https://www.cumberlandtrail.org/>

Franklin LaFond Awarded Appalachian Trail Conservancy Deep South Region Club Volunteer-of-the-Year Award!

We want to extend a HUGE congratulations to Franklin LaFond, for winning the ATC Deep South Region Club Volunteer-of-the-Year Award! This is a prestigious honor, recognizing both the quality and quantity a volunteer's commitment to the A.T. over time. We would have preferred to announce this in person at an ATMC meeting, but of course have not been able to due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here is the nomination, submitted on behalf of the SMHC BOD by Taylor Weatherbee.

"Franklin's love of the A.T. started in 1997 when he thru hiked the A.T. He then returned to a professional career, but his love of the Trail and its people continued to grow. He continued hiking when he could, section-hiking the Trail from 1998-2001. His contributions to the Trail began when he joined the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club in 1998. During those early years, Franklin learned about trail construction and maintenance, and the nuances that go into building rock and log structures.

Franklin moved to the Knoxville area and joined the SMHC in February 2009. He has put all of his training to use not just on his own 3.1 mile adopted section of the A.T., but also helping and mentoring other maintainers with their sections of the A.T.

Franklin is always willing to step in wherever needed. He has been involved with the construction of 12 backcountry moldering privies, 2 shelter remodels, airlift operation support, construction work at the Soak Ash Facility that supports the seasonal crews and Ridgerunners, leading volunteer group crews, blowdown removal, trail assessments, summer trail crew support, trail relocation planning, trail structure construction, general treadway rehab, and Fontana lakeshore cleanup. Franklin not only does the work, he teaches others to do it as well, always adhering to the maintenance standards for the A.T.

In June of 2014, Franklin was asked to be a Co-manager in the Nantahala National Forest (NNF) to oversee the 30 miles of the A.T. These miles of the A.T. were in need of some major rehabilitation. As a result of Franklin's leadership, several group work trips were arranged and maintainers started working as a team instead of a group of individuals to address these concerns. The NNF trail miles have had a major turn around and Franklin continues to focus on making these miles even better.

Since February 2, 2009, Franklin has accumulated more than 3,000 work hours and 900 travel hours for a total of over 4,000 hours dedicated to the A.T. These hours speak for themselves, but to summarize Franklin's additional contributions, he:

- Serves as the SMHC's representative to the ATC Deep South Regional Partnership Committee since the Fall of 2014 and currently serves as the SORO RPC Chair.
- Serves on the ATC Stewardship Council on the PCRC and Youth & Diversity Committees.
- Volunteered with the TEHCC/MRATC Hard Core crew for 18 years.
- Assisted Nantahala Hiking Club with coordinating volunteer crews to repair damaged treadway in damaged areas after the fires of late 2016.
- Assisted GATC with blowdown removal after Hurricane Irma in 2017.
- Continues to build partnerships with organizations across the country to help promote conservation and to teach trail building techniques.
- Led the efforts to collect and document trail assessment inventory as part of an ATC wide initiative and maintain the information in an electronic format.
- Serves as the Conservation Committee Chair, regularly informing the Board about conservation and environmental issues that affect the A.T. and the National Park and National Forest, with suggested actions to take.

From the perspective of the Appalachian Maintainers Committee and Board of Directors of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Franklin is consistently a forward and logical thinker, a strategic planner, and a tremendous knowledge resource; we rely on his knowledge and opinions. He is always eager to learn new skills and techniques and apply them to improve the A.T.

In summary, we can think of no other person who exemplifies the "initiative, effectiveness and dedication" to the A.T. which this Award recognizes. Franklin puts in the hard work, the hours, the leadership, the planning, and yet still takes delight in the Trail and its community. This is obvious whether he is leading a work team, teaching new skills, or simply stopping to give an A.T. hiker enthusiastic words of encouragement, and share in their stories."

I wanted to publish all of this, so you know the extent of Franklin's work and dedication to the A.T., including so much of what we manage. Please congratulate him if you have a chance. Thank you, Franklin!

~Diane Petrilla

