



September 2020

**A.T. Maintenance Work Trip –
Saturday September 12**

On this A.T. work trip, we will be hiking out of Cosby up the Low Gap Trail. Once at Low Gap, we will divide into groups of 4 or less, as per COVID guidelines. Some participants will go north and some south. We will perform general maintenance duties including clearing out vegetation and cleaning waterbars.

Pre-registration with the leader is required and the contact e-mail address is shipleymark57@gmail.com.

Bears!

There have been recent reports of persistent bears on certain sections of the A.T. (specifically from NFG to Icewater). Attached to this newsletter e-mail is a tracking form that the NPS would like us to use to report significant/ problematic bear interactions. This is what the NPS staff uses, and all information is combined to make decisions. The form can be faxed or emailed back to the Wildlife Management Office, using their contact info located at the bottom of the form.

**Important information reminder about Return-to-
Work in the GRSM and NNF**

Recently, information was sent to all regular Section Leaders and Crew in the Smokies and NNF, as well as several other regular maintainers regarding return to volunteer work. The emails included the new Job Hazard Analysis that must be signed and return to Christine Hoyer or Franklin LaFond (if you maintain in the NNF) On the Park side, you must receive confirmation that Christine received the JHA before returning to volunteer work.

There is also a requirement to watch a short video by the ATC regarding COVID and the A.T. at www.appalachiantrail.org/volunteeracknowledgment. About 30% of our maintainers have completed this; it is crucial for section leaders and crew, but the ATC is requesting that **anyone** who maintains, hauls mulch, takes care of blowdowns, etc. complete this very short video and acknowledgment form. Please help us get our numbers up on doing this, and thank you to those who have done it!

PLEASE don't hesitate to contact me with questions about any of this, or if I can help you with the video or JHA. Diane Petrilla petrillad@gmail.com or 931-224-5149.

Highlights of ATMC Meeting 8-19-20

16 members of the ATMC met via Zoom on 8-19-20. Here some highlights from the meeting:

- We remain in Phase 2 of the ATC COVID-19 Adaptive Recovery Plan for the A.T. related to volunteer activities. This means we can continue our general section maintenance, with no privy or shelter work, and in groups of no more than four. Other important guidelines have been previously published. Advancing to Phase 3 will require a significant decline in new COVID cases in our surrounding areas.
- We may expect to see a higher number of NOBO thru-hikers in the Spring of 2021 due to postponement of thru-hikes this year. This is an educated guess however.
- Ridgerunners are unlikely to return to the A.T. in the GRSM for the remainder of 2020 due to COVID. Plans for the 2021 RR program are being discussed.
- Blowdown removal plans by ATMC sawyers and equestrians (latter at north end of Park) using chainsaw variances are underway.
- Fontana Village Resort now has interim management and most facilities are open. We will continue to support Fontana Village as an A.T. Trail Town by helping with light general maintenance on about 8-10 miles of NNF trail near the resort. Please contact Franklin laFond at OX97game@aol.com if you can help out.



A. T. Work Trips 7/13/2020 to 8/15/2020

(Editor's note: So great to see all of these work trips, since we got the go-ahead with COVID guidelines and JHAs. Also interesting to read about assorted maintainer experiences on their sections!)

7/13 - Taylor Weatherbee, Bill Pyle - Fontana Dam to Locust Cove Gap - Cleared 4 trees between the Fontana shelter and the marina, then 2 trees just around 0.5 miles south of the marina, then 10 trees between Stecoah Gap and Locust Cove Gap.

7/18 - Terry Martin - Mt Cammerer Side Tr to Sunup Knob - First job as I pulled into Cosby parking lot was to help a group of lost hikers. They were trying to get to Gabes Mtn. Trail to go look at the falls. I love teaching moments so when pulled out my map and showed them where to go, I could see on their faces, 'oh maybe we should have a map.' I started at Sunup Gap trimming back vegetation and got as far as I could go before T-storms started to flare up.

7/20 - Patti Grady - Indian Gap/Rd Pr Tr to Rd Prng/Tom Prng Lead - Cleared 8 waterbars; blocked some areas where hikers are getting off the trail; cut two small trees - one across the trail and one across a **waterbar**.

7/24 - Keith Mertz, Judy Wade - Yellow Creek Gap to Cody Gap - Completed brushing out this section of trail. Hand sawed two saplings obstructing trail. Tossed some limbs off trail.

7/25 - Terry Martin - Mt Cammerer Side Tr to Sunup Knob - I realized this work trip I started south of Sunup Knob last work trip. That is what I get for listening to my Fitbit which is clearly more out of whack than I thought. So I have all the vegetation trimmed back roughly .6 miles from Sunup Knob down towards Low Gap. I started my section trimming back vegetation Sunup Knob for real this work trip 'til T-storms shut me down.

7/26 - Dick Ketelle - Dry Sluice Gap to Gap W of Masa Knob - Cut back weeds encroaching into tread primarily on uphill side of trail and trimmed a few low limbs.

7/26 - Mark Snyder, Janet Snyder - Sweat Heifer to Newfound Gap - Cleaned 74 waterbars-water turnouts, regraded numerous 'thin water' areas. Repaired 3 collapsed rock waterbars, cut 3 limbs down in the pathway. Met Mr. Radio Collared bear. He put on quite a show for all, as he had no fear of people. (Not all hikers shared the same fear level.) Spent some time telling

people to stay back, etc. Our work effort was slowed by the number of hikers and the bear.

7/26 - Terry Martin - Mt Cammerer Side Tr to Sunup Knob - I continued trimming back vegetation in my section.

7/27 - Mark Snyder, Janet Snyder - Sweat Heifer to Newfound Gap - Cleaned 29 waterbars/water turnouts. Cleared thin water locations, and repaired 2 waterbars. Removed 2 large previously cut logs, that magically reappeared on the treadway. (Thanks to mischievous hikers or Mr. Radio Collared bear.) Moved the logs well off the trail. A large toppled tree needed branches trimmed to near 8ft. tall. Cut vegetation along trail where it was needed most. Once again ran into Mr. Radio Collared bear. He has no fear of people, including shovels, pick maddock, loud whistle, throwing stones (he would chase the tossed stone as if food, when I blew whistle he came faster toward me.) This bear really slowed down our work efforts, as we had to keep retreating. We called the Park to report this bear.

7/27 - Taylor Weatherbee - Sugarland Mt Tr to Collins Gap - Cleaned out all the water bars, removed one blowdown (able to lift off the trail), reset one rock step and installed 2 more, trimmed one small area of encroaching vegetation.

7/29 - Mike Harrington - Sassafras Gap (Pk) to Lewellyn Branch - Cleared waterbars and cut vegetation. Removed a few small blowdowns.

8/1 - Barbara Allen, Lisa Sumter, Stephanie Gose - Davenport Gap to Chestnut Br Trail - Went out with new co-leaders of this section, Lisa Sumter and Stefanie Gose. Introduced them to the tool box in Cosby. Cleaned 87 water drainages, cut vegetation, and removed limbs from trail from Friday's storm. Checked out water source at shelter. Water running from pipe. Be careful heading down to water as there is a yellow jacket nest under the flat rock near the vegetation on trail to water source.

8/1 - Cindy Spangler - Mt Love to Clingmans Dome - Brushed the trail and cut LOTS of new shrub growth and grass on my section and also on the side trail leading to the AT from the Dome. Flagged the terminus of my section for new maintainer on next section north. Next trip I'll clean waterbars. There were a k-zillion people at the Dome though probably less than 10% were wearing masks and NO social distancing! Saw 6 day hikers on the A.T.

8/1 - Liz Ehr, Diane Petrilla, Kathy Williams -

Clingmans Dome to Goshen Prong Tr - Went out on this first Saturday with a new maintainer, Kathy, and a steadfast helper, Liz, to work on this section that doesn't currently have a leader. We trimmed vegetation and dug out waterbars (very blocked) for about .5 miles heading Trail S. Much work remains on this section, but we had a great day, saw lots of hikers, and talked about volunteering on the A.T. with the SMHC with many of them!



L to R, Diane, Liz and Kathy, ready to go! (photo courtesy of Diane Petrilla)

8/1 - Mark Snyder, Janet Snyder - Sweat Heifer to Newfound Gap - Added a new water drainage, removed numerous bowling ball sized rocks from Trail, cut 3 small trees growing out of CCC rock wall. Cleaned many waterbars and widened them where possible. Made an effort to get the side hill spring seep water off the trail ASAP. Had to use pick/maddox to loosen stone and dirt, took forever, was grateful for the respite the passing hikers provided. Talked to a couple who live in Knoxville who wish to become active doing what we do. Gave them info, they were very sincere and talked to us 'til dark. We walked .8 mile in dark with our tools after bidding them goodbye, hopefully they make contact.

8/1 - Taylor Weatherbee, Kristi Weatherbee, Betty Royer, Philip Royer, Kristi Knight - Sugarland Mt Tr to Collins Gap - Our crew of 4 cleaned all waterbars and cut encroaching vegetation from Collins Gap to the summit of Mount Collins. Including the work performed by Taylor Weatherbee earlier this week (separate report), our entire section has been covered this week. By chance, our crew of 4 was joined by another ATMC

maintainer who had decided to work solo today on the same section of trail.

8/1 - Terry Martin - Mt Cammerer Side Tr to Sunup Knob - I finished cutback of vegetation in my section. I constructed a new waterbar and got all the other waterbars cleaned out.

8/2 - Mark Snyder, Janet Snyder - Sweat Heifer to Newfound Gap - Finished clearing and widening all waterbars in our section. (We are opting to give up trying to get people to stay on the Trail, as all of our efforts of creating barriers have been destroyed, dismantled, etc. When we create a steeper slope as a deterrent it becomes a challenge instead.) Vegetation and overhanging branches have been taken care of.

8/5 - Patti Grady, Diane Petrilla - Indian Gap/Rd Pr Tr to Rd Prng/Tom Prng Lead - Diane cleared a tree off of the trail and stacked branches to stop the use of the trail that had occurred around the downed tree. We cleaned 22 waterbars, and did more blocking to try to stop hikers from going off trail to avoid the steep steps.

8/5 - Taylor Weatherbee - Collins Gap to Mt Love - Used scythe to clear low lying vegetation and briars from the trail. Went up to the junction with Cindy Spangler's section.

8/6 - Bill Pyle, Taylor Weatherbee - Sugarland Mt Tr to Clingmans Dome - Used crosscut to clear a blowdown just north of the Dome, another right at Collins Gap, around 0.2 miles south of the Sugarlands Trail junction, and one bonus tree on the Sugarlands trail on the way to the shelter we learned about this from a family we met who were returning from the shelter).

8/8 - Randy Mitchell - Low Gap to Cosby Knob Top - Cleaned water bars from Low Gap to Cosby Shelter. Didn't make it to end of section due to time considerations. I will need to return to finish water bars south of shelter to Cosby Knob. Met a total of 7 backpackers on section and was able to keep social distance. Most seemed to be weekenders but one was a long section hiker that had started at Springer and was going to Hot Springs. One of the backpackers complained that Tricorner Shelter area was "packed" with 15 overnights but fortunately his group was sleeping in hammocks. Cosby Shelter is currently closed due to an aggressive bear. I didn't enter but noticed that the tarp was being used to block off the bunk area of the shelter (I presume by Park Staff) and that a game camera was mounted nearby. I didn't enter the privy but did check on the mulch bin. There were a large number of very bold mice on top of the 1/2 full pile of mulch. When I opened the lid they just sat there and looked at

me. I attempted to open the tool bin to check on it's status but could not get the lock to open. The numbers did not operate smoothly. I tried several times but was not successful in opening it. WD 40 might help but it's in the locked tool box. At the tent overflow site above and south of the shelter I saw a very large buck but he ran away before I could get a picture. This is the first time for me to see a deer at this location. Also I did see a couple of fire rings in the camping area. Next trip I will disperse them.

8/9 - Dick Ketelle, Bill Pyle, Taylor Weatherbee - Indian Gap/Rd Pr Tr to Sugarland Mt Tr - Our work group used a variety of crosscut saws and associated tools to remove several very large blowdowns from this trail section. Log diameters were up to about 24 inches and many cuts were required. We made use of an underbucking tool on 3 of them. For moving one log out of the trail we used improvised light weight pulleys, nylon sling material, and rope to create a block and tackle setup. Blocked off bypass trails that had formed during the prolonged period these trees had obstructed the trail.



Using axe, underbucking tool, cross-cut saw on this big blowdown. Successful but tough work without a chainsaw! (Photos courtesy of Dick Ketelle)



8/10 - Diane Petrilla - Indian Gap/Rd Pr Tr to Rd Prng/Tom Prng Lead - Continued digging out waterbars. Huge rain today helped show functionality of all waterbars dug out so far on this section.

8/10 - Rick Waggener - Gap W of Masa Knob to Boulevard Tr - Cleared water bars from Boulevard to Masa Gap. Trimmed back overhanging limbs. Removed two trees from over Trail. Cleared trash from Icewater shelter

8/12 - Stewart Taylor, Linda Milbradt - Spruce Fir to Sugarland Mt Tr - Cleaned 21 water bars/drainage ditches and two turnpikes.

PLEASE REMEMBER!

COVID-19 Guidelines for A.T. Volunteers

Protect Yourself and Others While Maintaining the Appalachian Trail

Three Phases for Re-Engaging with Trail Maintenance, if state and local governments are open and lands host to the A.T. are open

Phase 1

- Local, county-level COVID-19 cases not decreasing
- Staff/volunteers on Trail by request only

Phase 2

- Local, county-level COVID-19 cases decreasing for 14 days
- Maintaining groups of no more than four

Phase 3

- Local, county-level cases continue to decrease after additional 14-day period
- Maintaining groups of 10 or fewer

Volunteers: Before You Participate



Read CDC Guidelines and understand health risks



Use the CDC Self Checker



Stay home if showing any COVID-19 symptoms



Bring washable work gloves and a CDC approved mask



No ridesharing beyond household. Limit stops.

Crew Leaders: Before the Trip



Disinfect all group gear



Bring extra hand sanitizer, face masks, and tissues



Establish hand washing routines and daily health checks



Ensure all participants are aware of CDC health and safety guidelines



Maintain participant rosters with relevant contact information

Volunteers and Crew Leaders: In the Field



Wash/sanitize hands frequently



Do not share tools and equipment



Maintain social distancing



Do not clean shelters or privies until further notice



Ensure appropriate personal protective equipment is available and utilized



If you show any COVID-19 related symptoms after participating in a volunteer activity, inform the crew leader immediately.

For up to date information on COVID-19 guidelines and current A.T. closures, visit appalachiantrail.org/covid-19.