



April 2021

A.T. Maintenance Work Trip- Saturday, April 3

We are glad that the National Park Service is allowing us to have a chainsaw window again this April to let us get blowdowns off the trail expeditiously. This trip will focus on blowdown removal in the National Park in the sections between Dry Sluice Gap Trail junction and approximately Silers Bald. ATMC needs sawyers, and volunteers to assist the sawyers with removal of debris after it is cut, and repair any tread as needed where trees have fallen. We would like to have at least 4 teams to cover the miles. Details of the work needed and how we will organize sawyer teams will await receiving information from our Ridgerunners as they travel through these sections and report downed trees to us. In light of the ongoing Covid policies, teams will be formed in advance of the work day and participants will be expected to drive individually to designated meeting points to meet up with their team. Alternate bad weather date will be April 10.

Bring gloves, lunch, snacks, and plenty of water. If you have a hardhat, ear protection, and/or safety glasses, please bring those as well. Our points of trail access will include Newfound Gap, Indian Gap, Spruce-Fir nature trail, Fork Ridge Trail, Collins Gap, and Clingman's Dome. Driving distances will vary based on distance from your home to any of these points.

To sign up for this trip contact one or both of the leaders below: e-mail is preferred.

Leaders: Dick Ketelle: 865-483-9345
rhketelle@comcast.net and Franklin LaFond 678-464-3380 OX97game@aol.com.

Update on COVID guidelines for SMHC Maintainers

At our recent Southern Regional Appalachian Trail Conservancy meeting, updated maintainer COVID guidelines were discussed. We have now cleared the following guidelines with our GRSM Land Manager partner, Ranger Christine Hoyer. We are hopeful for word of a similar go-ahead from the NNF, from Ranger Heath Emmons, next week. Please note the following:

1. SMHC maintainers may now work on shelters and privies on the Park miles that we are responsible for.
2. To clean up a shelter, wear a mask and gloves. and please ask all hikers to wait outside.
3. We can carry mulch to privies, fill mulch buckets, sweep and clean privies.
4. Before doing any bin emptying, we would like to have training by Chloe De Camara (of ATC) on proper techniques. We will be working with Chloe and the ATC to set this up, in addition to obtaining the proper JHAs for this work.

We do have Tyvek 600 hooded Hazmat suits, nitrile gloves, face shields and masks which were obtained through the APPA PPE grants made available to us that we will be able to use after training by Chloe.

As always, do this only if you are comfortable with it. Also, remember, vaccination for you or other hikers has no bearing on mask wearing. **Masks are still a Federal mandate in the Park if distancing of 6 ft. cannot be maintained.**

There are no changes at this time on work group size, carpooling, etc. Over the next few months, we expect to get more updates from the ATC's Adaptive Recovery Taskforce to guide us further. We appreciate your patience and great compliance with guidelines over the last year!



Appalachian Trail Conservancy March Volunteer Spotlight- Congratulations Ox!

*(From The Register, Stewardship Newsletter of the
Appalachian Trail Conservancy)*



Many people know Franklin LaFond by his trail name "Ox." LaFond's love of the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) started in 1997 when he thru hiked the Trail. He continued hiking when he could, section-hiking the Trail from 1998 to 2001. His volunteer contributions to the Trail began when he joined the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club in 1998. During those early years, LaFond learned about trail construction and maintenance, and the skills that go into building rock and log structures. Since those early days with the GATC, LaFond has accumulated approximately 5,000 volunteer hours throughout his over twenty-year timespan as a volunteer to the Appalachian Trail.

LaFond moved to the Knoxville area and joined the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club (SMHC) in February 2009. He has put all his training to use, on his adopted section of the A.T. and also by helping and mentoring other maintainers with their sections.

LaFond has been the SMHC's representative for the Deep South Regional Partnership Committee (RPC) since 2014. He is the current RPC chair. He also is currently a member of the Stewardship Council, where he sits on the PCRC and the Youth & Diversity committees.

Since June of 2014, LaFond has been the Co-manager in the Nantahala National Forest (NNF) and oversees its thirty-miles of the Appalachian Trail. LaFond's continuous dedication and attention to this section of the Trail has resulted in incredible

accomplishments. Thanks to his leadership, the once individual work of multiple maintainers has given way to group work trips where teamwork is used to accomplish the larger trail maintenance tasks. LaFond explains that plenty of work remains and he looks forward to all that is in store with this section of the Trail.

In the recommendation letter for the 2020 SORO Volunteer of the Year award that LaFond received last year, the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club board wrote: "Franklin is a model for commitment and leadership for the A.T. He has shown leadership and devotion in so many ways and has been the driving force behind many of the achievements along SMHC's segment of the Trail for the past several years. Furthermore, he continues to actively form partnerships and mentor on how to maintain the Trail, thus laying the foundation for more work to come and acting as a force multiplier for the Trail."

LaFond is always willing to step in wherever needed. In addition to supporting other maintainers and SMHC special projects, he also engages with summer trail crews and the other A.T. maintaining clubs in the Southern Region. He has been a staple for the Damascus Hard Core Trail crew for eighteen seasons and is a seasoned alumnus for the Konnorock Trail crew. He enjoys meeting fellow trail workers and has forged many long-lasting friendships.

LaFond puts in the hard work, the hours, the leadership, the planning, and continues to take delight in the Trail and its community. He is passionate and dedicated to the long-term success of the Trail and its surrounding landscapes. This passion is obvious whether he is leading a work team, teaching new skills, meeting with hostel owners and trail community leaders, or simply stopping to give an A.T. hiker enthusiastic words of encouragement, and share in their stories.



A. T. Work Trips From 2/8/2021 to 3/16/2021

2/8 - Phyllis Henry - Training - Participated in Ridgerunner training with ATC and GRSMNP.

2/20 - Franklin LaFond - Trail Assessments - Picked up several locust logs from along The Dragon and transported to Fontana where logs are staged. Walked trails around Fontana to identify if any additional trees need to be added to sawyer work trip scheduled

2/21 - Franklin LaFond, Rick Hughes, Taylor Weatherbee - Lewellyn Branch to Fontana Dam - Cleaned 7 water bars and 13 drainage ditches between Shuckstack and Lewellyn Gap, pruned vegetation in same area, and spent a fair bit of time trimming the large rootball that had tilted into the trail from the large blowdown that had been worked on back in October by Dick Ketelle et al. Then worked the trail south of Lewellyn Gap, cleaning out 45 water bars, trimming some vegetation up high (lot more of this to be done later, probably with sling blade and loppers), and removed a few small blowdowns from the trail. Also did around 24 feet of trail rehab north of Lewellyn Gap.

2/24 - Franklin LaFond, Taylor Weatherbee - Fontana Village NNF trails - Cleared blowdowns from trails around Fontana Village. Skinned and split logs transported to Fontana Marina earlier in the week.

2/25 - Franklin LaFond - Route 28 to Yellow Creek Gap - Installed 2 new, and 2 replacement log steps at the trail head. 35 linear feet of sidehill rehab near the ridgeline. Aggressive pruning of woody vegetation for 2 mile of this section. Inspected privy, filled buckets with leafy material. Further inspection of the shelter and got some more pictures for the shelter committee.

2/27 - Lisa Sumter - Davenport Gap to Chestnut Br Trail - I primarily went out to walk the trail & see how it has fared through the winter. I tossed aside any branches that were on the trail & in the water bars. I cleared out the back of the pipe at the shelter's water source & pulled out leaves above the pipe to boost the flow. I also gathered more branches & placed at the illegal campsite area to hinder use.

3/2 - Joseph ("Randy") Bullock, Sunaree Bullock - Cody Gap to Brown Fork Gap - Cleared scrub and briars along trail, inspected Brown Fork Gap

shelter and continued yearly maintenance. Removed trash and misguided food bag left in one of the trees. Sent photos for future renovation to the shelter. Cleared several small blowdowns across the trail with manual saw.

3/6 - Dick Ketelle, Ann Farrar, Bill Pyle, Joseph ("Randy") Bullock, Franklin LaFond, Kristi Knight, Amanda Beal, Leah Graves - Locust Cove Gap to Cheoah Bald - Cut back woody vegetation in areas where trail was getting overgrown. Flagged work projects for the upcoming Konnorock Trail crew. Cut blowdowns.



*Bill Pyle (above) and Dick Ketelle (below) in action!
(photos courtesy of Ann Farrar)*

3/6 - Keith Mertz, David Gall, Melanie Harmon - **Yellow Creek Gap to Cody Gap** - Installed one water bar. Rehabbed 2 sections of trail(@60')where hikers were walking on outer edge of trail causing slippage. Removed 2 small blowdowns off trail. Lopped out several trip hazard roots. Lopped encroaching vegetation from upslope side of trail.

3/6 - Philip Royer, Diane Petrilla, Elizabeth Weikert, Taylor Weatherbee - **Stekoah Gap to Locust Cove Gap** - Removed 11 blowdowns, removed a fire ring, removed some trash, and pruned some briars and other vegetation, and provided some entertainment for several hikers.



L to R, Philip, Elizabeth and Taylor: Before



*And after!
(photos courtesy of Diane Petrilla)*

3/7 - Terry Martin - **Mt Cammerer Side Tr to Low Gap** - Remove tree debris off trail and checked waterbars. There was one tree I was able to slide off the trail with gravity's help. Pulled down limbs dangling overhead. Dragged some big limbs of the trail. People were at some point burning at Mount Cammerer intersection. I gathered up all the wood and dispersed it off out in the brush then wiped the burn pile away. Hiked out a little bit of trash. The one item was canned ham that looked like a bear cleaned it out based on the teeth punctures in the can.

3/9 - Franklin LaFond - **Davenport Gap to Chestnut Br Trail** - Regraded 35 ft of sidehill trail that had been slipping. Pruned back rhododendron from a couple areas where it appeared that horse traffic was being pushed to the soft outside edge of trail. Regraded 8 ft of treadway where an old tree had fallen (reported by Stephanie Goss), leaving a hole where the rootball was. Excess dirt was used to fill in part of the hole. Inspected shelter for trash.

3/9 - Taylor Weatherbee - **Newfound Gap to Collins Gap** - Cleared 4 reported blowdowns, and 5 more because I was there and had the tool items.

3/10 - Charlie McDonald - **Mulch Operations** - Bagged 30/20Lb mulch bags for the Parks LeConte drop for Sunday March 14. Also added estimated 1000Lbs of mulch to the tent. Current inventory at the shed will be 22/20Lb bags. I will be adding to that inventory over the next couple of weeks as well as bagging mulch for the horsemen. As always, if you have a specific need for mulch please give as much notice as possible. Thank you.

3/10 - Pete Berntsen - **Dry Sluice Gap to Gap W of Masa Knob** - Trimmed low hanging brush, cleaned minor brush from trail and cleared water drainage devices in the area.

3/11 - Diane Petrilla - **AT Mgt, Mtgs & Admin** - Attended ATC Volunteer leadership Cohort Sessions lasting 1 hour each via Zoom on 1- 14-21, 2-9-21, 3-11-21 conducted by Amy Stork of Solid Ground Consulting. Discussed many valuable process that apply to SMHC and ATMC for leadership development, systems organization, succession planning and recruitment.

3/13 - Diane Petrilla - **AT Mgt, Mtgs & Admin** - Attended meetings over 3 days to discuss ATC regional staff re-structuring, as well as SPM and SORO RPC meeting. All very informative!

3/13 - Philip Royer - **AT Mgt, Mtgs & Admin** - Participated in ATMC SPM & SORO RPC Zoom meetings.

3/13 - Taylor Weatherbee - **AT Mgt, Mtgs & Admin** - Attended 3 Zoom meetings with ATC.

3/14 - Franklin LaFond, NOBO #1 Hiker, NOBO #2 Hiker - **Fontana Dam to Yellow Creek Gap** - Moved seat position at Cable Gap shelter. Filled mulch buckets with leaves. Improved drainage on privy trail, where runoff from a spring crosses near the privy. Dug out a small pool for water to collect at the spring location, to give hikers a secondary water source near the camping area. Inspected shelter for any traces of leaks on the roof. Removed 1 small blowdown 100 yds N. of the shelter with handsaw. Rehabbed 60 ft of sidehill where the trail had slipped downhill. Removed large amounts of loose leaves that had blown on the trail in several areas, and hikers were walking on outside edge of trail to get around. Removed 2 blowdowns .1 miles S. of Fontana Shelter. Notched a large down oak .5 S. of Fontana Shelter to allow hikers to cross more safely until we can get it removed.

3/15 - Mark Buckles, Edward Fleming, Dick Ketelle, Franklin LaFond, Bill Pyle, Taylor Weatherbee - **Training** - Attendees of Spring Trail Clearing Safety Meeting. Pickup and return paperwork (Volunteer Agreement and JHA) next Saturday (March 20) at FA/CPR Class at Sugarlands Training Room.

3/16 - Diane Petrilla - **Club Mgt, Mtgs & Admin** - Met with Christine Hoyer to discuss adjustments to maintainer COVID guidelines, and possibilities for National Trails Day this year.

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 you do!

Mulch Matters!

This Spring, we will be hiking mulch into the Double Springs, Mt. Collins and Icewater privy storage boxes. If you would like to be involved in a group doing this, please contact me at petrillad@gmail.com. As a "magnificent mulch mule" you just have to carry a 20 lb. bag of mulch in a large backpack (we have extras) to the shelters- the pack is much lighter on the way back! We do these as group trips (I can put you on the email list). You can also do it individually on your own time; I can provide you with all directions.

We are working with 2 equestrian groups to get mulch to Spence and Tricorner ASAP. Needless to say, this is a bigger endeavor, but plans are underway!

Our great thanks to Charlie McDonald, who steadily dries, bags and stores mulch for all of our mulch needs. If you happen to take mulch from the maintainer shed to take to a privy bin, please let Charlie know at charlie.mcdonald1900@gmail.com.

Spring is here! Time to dig those waterbars!!! Stay safe out there!

