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THE POTOMAC APPALACHIAN



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Trail rehabilitation is hard!

By Dan and Ellen Feer



Photo by Janet Arici: Bill Greenan, Aidan Badhwar, John Spies, Ellen Shaw setting a base rock for the cribwall.

When District Manager and Cadillac Crew member **Bill Greenan** asked us to work on Lutkins Passage of the Tuscarora Trail in West Virginia near Spruce Pine Hollow for one of his trips, we knew it was going to be a challenge. The tract of land owned by PATC slopes at more than 40 degrees, and there is no place to park at the trailhead. For the past couple years we have been relocating a segment of the Tuscarora Trail on this hill to a route that is more

sustainable and safer to walk. This trip was planned to finish the relocation and finish a parking lot.

Saturday morning was hot, humid, and buggy so we loaded up on water, electrolytes, bug spray, and lunch and headed for the trail. Before we could work on the relocation several trees needed to be felled and bucked. **Robert Fina**, project manager and saw instructor, and **Aidan Badhwar**, recently carded B sawyer, headed up the trail with swampers **Kirsten Elowsky** and **Don Oellerich**. Crew leaders **Dan and Ellen Feer** cleared a leaning tree from the trailhead with just a few quick cuts.

Bill led the rest of the crew, **Janet Arici**, **Alice DeCarlo**, **Jarrold Marie**, **Marty Martin**, **Yves Pinsonneault**, **Ellen Shaw**, **John Spies**, and **Keith Tondrick**, and continued building the three-car parking lot for hikers that was started last season. When the sawing was done, half the crew headed up the hill to relocate the trail and the other half continued on and completed the parking lot that included a cribwall and a turn-around.

President's Logbook

By Jim Fetig

“You’re now free mama. Go build that fire so I can come find you in the night.”

This poignant prayer was offered by a former PATC ridgerunner as she posted her mother’s obituary on Facebook. Her mother was a former park ranger who instilled in her daughter a lifetime of love, respect and stewardship for the outdoors and the Appalachian Trail.



My hope is that her mother’s spirit finds its way to every campfire, everywhere, and spreads peace, love and joy in the cast of its flickering glow; its sparks our forgiven sins sailing away into the velvet beyond.

Campfires have a mythical place in the American psyche. The romance of cowboys’ chuckwagon fire and the ambiance of an American Indian pow wow fire served as literary and cinematic window dressing for more than a generation. Norman Rockwell’s “The Scoutmaster” inspired more than one boomer to outdoor leadership.

More recently, campfires have been recognized as a form of therapy. According to Axios, “A growing number of therapists and nonprofits are tapping into the therapeutic powers for fire to help veterans, recovering addicts and at-risk teens.” Sitting fireside reportedly can lower blood pressure and boost relaxation.

Watching flames dance and sparks fly can be soothing and even mesmerizing as you let reality slip into cruise control and you tune into a better channel.

One of my “happy places,” as a PATC volunteer, is parking my butt in a chair near the fire place at the Indian Run maintenance hut or gathering around the fire at Hoodlum’s September trail maintenance workshop. I love being with like-minded people, imagining the workday’s caterpillar becoming the night’s butterfly. Somehow the stress diminishes as my breathing slows and my muscles slacken and the stories unfold.

Terry Tempest Williams described the magic of the outdoors, “Public lands are public commons, breathing spaces in a country that is increasingly holding its breath.” She added, “We stand before a giant sequoia and remember the size of our hearts instead of the weight of our egos.”

Please build that fire Mrs. Hobbs. May your spirit light the way for all of us.

Hoodlums June Outing – Hot But Not TOO Hot

By Tom Moran and Wayne Limberg



Photo by Tom Moran: The Pass Mtn. A.T. trail bed crew, from left - Michelle Viggiano, Marissa Fulton, Rich Weisman, Chris Viggiano, and Rich Lordahl.

Summertime temperatures can make trail work uncomfortable, or even downright dangerous, but the June 21 outing beat a heat wave that in a couple of days would see temperatures rise above 100 in the region. But a high in the mid-80s and moderate humidity

passes for “excellent” in late June, and a solid turnout of 24 convened at breezy Piney River CCC camp for crew assignments and a safety briefing.

Trail maintainers vary widely in what aspects of the job are most appealing. Removing invasive plants, building or rehabbing water control structures, clearing blowdowns all have their fans. Few enthusiastically look forward to weeding, however. “Weeds” consist of all manner of unwanted vegetation that encroach on trail passages, including poison ivy, wood nettles, briars, and grapevines. The weeding process essentially chops the veg back to make the trail passable for hikers without requiring them to make contact. Besides the obvious benefits of avoiding contact with stickers, poison ivy, and stinging nettles, these plants are host to ticks that themselves represent a whole set of additional risks to hikers and maintainers. Although the task can be unsavory, reducing the risk of tick-borne illnesses as well as improving the hiking experience make the effort valuable. Several of the June crews had a heavy emphasis on weeding.

Jim Fetig led a crew down the Sugarloaf Trail from Skyline Drive. The regular maintainer for the trail had reported substantial weed growth blocking the section at the top but was not going

to be able to address the issue for some months. Aside from the known weed issue, it was not known what else the crew might find. As they worked downhill, they cleared the dense vegetation with a power weeder, and hand trimmed overgrown mountain laurel. Additional challenges presented—the crew cleared five blowdowns with their hand saws and a power pole saw, but didn't have the tools necessary to clear a 14" diameter blowdown before they had reached the end of their day. Jim's crew included **David Johnson, Rosemary Seymour,** and **Abbie Fine.**

Like Jim's crew, **Tom Troutman's** parked at Skyline Drive and hiked in to work a couple of sections of the AT adjacent to Beahms Gap that had known weed issues. They also addressed other typical maintainer duties, including fixing four water bars and clearing a blowdown with **Marie Seymour's** new hand saw. **Bob Malkowski, Dan Hippe,** and **Steve Parsley** rounded out the crew.

Certified crosscut sawyer **Justin Corddry** led a hardy crew up the AT from Thornton Gap, then down Pass Mountain trail all the way to its end at Route 211. If this is beginning to sound familiar, you would be correct! Just a month earlier, crews had covered the same trail end to end, clearing all but a single stubborn trunk. But in the month since the May trip, more storms had roared through and a number of additional trees had fallen, including yet another vine covered complete trail blocker and several other substantial trunks. Eager to try out **Bruno Carlot's** new crosscut saw, they found it a great tool for the job and finished the downhill run in time for the potluck dinner back at Piney River. **Roger Fast** and **Greg Foster** rounded out the crew.

Tom Moran's crew followed Justin's partway up the AT from Thornton Gap, but stopped to address some trail bed issues that had arisen from extreme rain back in May. Significant erosion and spring seeps had made a short section of the AT muddy and rutted. The crew identified three waterbars that had been buried in encroaching vegetation and sediment and restored these to function. Several locust logs had been dropped off by park staff, and the crew stripped the bark off three, but only was able to install one new water bar with one of these. The other two were staged for follow-up work.

They constructed a rolling grade dip in a place where they were able to take advantage of the existing contour of the ground. Then, they carried sediment from runoff back onto the trail and



Photo by Dave Nebhut: Cindy Ardecki (L) and Noel Freeman dressed up for the job.

packed it into where erosion had cut deep ruts. There is more work to do but the completed structures were certain to mitigate ongoing erosion issues. **Chris and Michelle Viggiano, Rich Weisman, Rich Lordahl,** and PATC Shenandoah Ridgerunner **Marissa Fulton** provided the muscle for this project.

Noel Freeman, Cindy Ardecki, Dave Nebhut, and **Wayne Limberg** remained at Piney River to continue work on the big shed the park service had turned over to the Hoodlums last year. At the May Hoodlums trip Noel had discovered a serious rodent infestation. After emptying the shed, he and Cindy donned gloves, masks and Tyvek suits and went to work with sprayers and scrapers. Four hot hours and four gallons of bleach later, the mouse problem was solved. Meanwhile, Wayne worked on a new workbench for the shed.

After work the Hoodlums returned to Piney River for a Mediterranean themed potluck dinner and were entertained with a reading by Marie Seymour of her latest poem – “Hoodlums Get It Done.” Indeed!

North District Crew Week

By Tom Moran and Wayne Limberg



Photo by Noel Freeman: Wayne Limberg salvages old posts for workbench.

Crew weeks generally have two goals: first, tackle projects beyond the scope of individual maintainers and even weekend crews and second, give crew members the chance to work with park service crew and gain valuable on the job training. For a portion of the PATC crew these objectives were met fully.

To avoid the mid-summer heat, the 2025 Crew Week was moved to the week of June 23. But trying to guess the weather months ahead of time can be folly. While the Hoodlums June outing on the preceding Saturday had relatively mild conditions, the forecast for Monday–Friday was dire—code red on the first “good” days, then code magenta for the days following. While not air-conditioned, the Pinnacles Research Center, where the volunteer crew planned to stay, has ceiling fans

in every room, and crew members brought other fans to help the air flow. Plus, Pinnacles sits at nearly 3,300 feet and generally gets an evening breeze. All these factors made the conditions tolerable, even cool on several evenings.

Still, the crew considered cancelling the work week. However, our NPS colleagues had a plan that had one PATC crew working in Jeremys Run for a couple of days, then another day in Buck Hollow Creek. Literally “in.” The cool waters of the mountain streams helped keep moderate temperatures and allow the joint crews to work. On Tuesday the 24th, for example, the temperature in nearby Luray was over 101, yet the temperature at the worksite in Jeremys Run stayed in the mid-80s.

The dire forecasts reduced the PATC crew turnout, but **Dan Hippe, Tom Troutman, and Tom Moran** decided to join a robust NPS crew on Monday at Jeremys Run to use boulders to build a stream crossing. The boulders were massive but could be moved by leveraging grip hoists attached to adjacent trees. Once an



Photo by Tom Moran: Dan Hippe moves a boulder into position on Jeremys Run, while park crew members Leanne Adamson and Josh Kirby supervise

appropriate site for steps was found, appropriate nearby boulders were identified and attached to the hoist cable and maneuvered into position in the stream. The boulder was then tested for stability and shimmed into place. Then, additional smaller rocks (20-50 lbs ea) were placed upstream to break the current and reduce the risk of flood damage. The first stream crossing took more than a day to settle six boulders into place.

The work area had been severely eroded by 2025 floods; much of the trail bed had disappeared in places. While a portion of the crew worked on the crossing, others built a raised footpath along the stream edge to redefine the trail and provide reasonable footing. To make a more permanent bed, a 20' section was filled with rocks which were then crushed by hand using sledgehammers, a physically challenging task that should result in a more durable tread.

After two full days in Jeremys, the crew moved on to Buck Hollow, where storm flow had created risky stream crossings in two places. The crew successfully created safer crossings before calling it quits for the day. Heat and time considerations forced cancellation of plans to return to Jeremy's Run so the joint crew effort was ended for the week.

Unsure of what the week would bring beyond sweltering temperatures, **Noel Freeman** and **Wayne Limberg** continued to work on the big shed at Piney River. With the mouse infestation under control, they removed old shelving and began painting the interior of the shed and filling holes and gaps in the siding, tasks which pretty much took the remainder of the

week. **Greg Foster** joined them on Wednesday to help get them over the hump. Even with a canopy and fans it was hot work.

Each day also saw them driving down to Luray for building supplies and food for the crew. By Wednesday afternoon they had completed painting and Wayne had finished a workbench.

"What on Earth?"

Article by Ray Barbehenn. Photos by David Cox, Richard Stromberg and Ray Barbehenn



Turkey Vulture



Black Vulture

Vultures live quiet, conservative lives, rarely uttering a sound and soaring as much as possible without flapping their wings. They are like living kites. But, compared with the majestic eagles, hawks, and owls, they seem to get little respect. Their association with death and their naked heads are unattractive to us.

There are two vulture species in the eastern United States: the Turkey Vulture and the Black Vulture. In our area, Turkey Vultures are more commonly seen, though usually at great distances. The left photo shows a close observation made by David Cox on August 16, 2017 in

the foothills of SNP. It shows the red, featherless skin on its head and neck for which it is named. From a distance, you can identify them by the upward, V-shape in which they hold their wings. The Black Vulture in the right photo was seen by Richard Stromberg in Catoctin Mountain Park on October 11, 2023. It has a black bare head, black feathers, and a shorter, broader tail compared to that of the Turkey Vulture. Like hawks, Black Vultures hold their wings flat while they soar. Both vultures pictured here were sunning themselves at their roosts. As the air warms in the morning, they ride updrafts ("thermals"), gaining elevation effortlessly to search the countryside for a carcass.

How can vultures eat dead animals without getting sick?

- A. "Good" gut bacteria.
- B. An active immune system.
- C. Strong stomach acid.
- D. All of the above.
- E. Unknown.

The answer is at the bottom of the page!

Fun Facts and Musings

A variety of toxic bacteria grow in carrion, including those that cause botulism (food poisoning) and gas gangrene. These bacteria probably produce their poisons to compete with each other and to try to ward off hungry animals, since their stomachs are harsh environments. As they feast, bacteria also produce the odors of death—the odors that attract vultures.

Although vultures are attracted to these odors, they actually prefer to eat recently dead animals. Thus, there seems to be a Goldilocks state for carrion: too fresh, and vultures cannot smell it, but too rotten, and even vultures will pass it by. They like their meat quite rare, and with just a hint of odor, please.

We mainly notice vultures when they are feeding at road kills, but Turkey Vultures also eat a variety of small dead animals, such as rodents and snakes. On rare occasions, Black Vultures will prey on live animals. This has given them a bad reputation in farming areas, where the loss of a young farm animal is not readily overlooked. By comparison, Turkey Vultures appear to only eat dead animals.

Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures have surprisingly different abilities to find their food. Turkey Vultures have an outstanding ability to smell carcasses, while Black Vultures rely

mainly on their vision. The superior sense of smell of Turkey Vultures gives them the ability to detect food that is hidden from view beneath the canopies of leaves in forests.

This powerful sense of smell in Turkey Vultures can be seen in the structure of their skulls: they have huge, oval-shaped nostrils just behind the tips of their beaks! You can see this in the bottom photo, which compares a Turkey Vulture's skull (front) with that of a visual hunter, the Red-tailed Hawk (back). Not surprisingly, the skulls of Black Vultures have much smaller nostrils than those of Turkey Vultures.

The air taken in through their nostrils passes back into their large nasal passageways, which are packed with huge numbers of odor receptors (these are specialized nerve endings that fire signals to the brain when certain odor molecules strike them). Thus, Turkey Vultures are the bird equivalents of dogs and bears, whose elongated snouts also contain huge numbers of odor receptors.



Turkey Vulture skull (front) and Red-tailed

The final component of the Turkey Vulture odor detection system is in their brains: An extremely large portion of their brains is devoted to processing the information about smells. Indeed, Turkey Vultures have the largest fraction of their brains devoted to smell of any bird! Even compared to Black Vultures the "olfactory bulbs" in the brains of Turkey Vultures are four times larger.

Given their superior sense of smell, as well as their good vision, Turkey Vultures are usually the first to find a carcass. By contrast, Black Vultures have been observed following Turkey Vultures to share their food. It is often repeated that Black Vultures are aggressive towards Turkey Vultures at carcasses. However, recent research using game cameras placed at carcasses showed that Black Vultures are actually much more aggressive towards each other than they are towards Turkey Vultures. Black Vultures are gaining in numbers in our area, and large numbers of them sometimes do overwhelm the Turkey Vultures at a carcass. You can imagine the strong competition for a meal at a carcass when a flock of vultures has landed!

So, how *do* vultures resist getting sick from their food? The three major possibilities ("good" bacteria in their guts, active immune systems, and highly acidic stomachs) are probably all important. Hundreds of species of harmful and potentially beneficial bacteria have been identified in the stomachs of vultures (and these are just a fraction of the ingested species that are able to tolerate the harsh conditions in a vulture's stomach). However, it is not yet known whether the "good" bacteria actually protect the health of vultures.

Likewise, there are hints that vulture immune systems are important for their protection from infection, but the research has just begun. Finally, it is commonly believed that vultures have unusually acidic stomachs. No doubt, their acidic stomachs play an essential role in killing most of the bacteria in the food that they eat. Just as in humans, this is their first line of defense against becoming sick from contaminated food. But is the stomach acid of a vulture far stronger than ours? Apparently not. Recent research showed that the stomach contents in actively feeding Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures has a similar range of acidity (pH) as ours, with the lower range of about pH 2 (pH 2 is equivalent to the acidity of vinegar).

Thus, vultures appear to "pickle" their food in a similar fashion as most other vertebrate animals. It is frustrating to find that most of what you can read about these topics is based on just a handful of recent scientific studies and centuries of anecdotes and speculation.

While vultures are high in the sky, it is difficult for us to recognize their social interactions. Male and female Turkey Vultures (and probably Black Vultures) bond for life. So, the next time you see a couple of soaring vultures, you can imagine that they are probably husband and wife, sharing a life-long devotion to each other to raise their young and, yes, dine together on stinky food.

Answer: D is a very good guess, but right now it's E! More research is needed on vultures.

Send your photos and ideas for topics to Ray at rvb@umich.edu (I am looking for anything "normal" that you think is interesting and have a good photo of).

Conley Cabin

Article and photos by Ben Danforth

When you book a stay at Conley, or any of the club's 26 primitive cabins, you are leaving the modern world for the duration of your stay. Except, you do get about two bars with Verizon at Conley. But other than that, get ready to kick it like it's 1899.

A perfect trip to Conley starts with your expectations and preparation.

There are so many things to consider, from the food and gear you pack, to the weather, and the drive up Goose Pond Rd. A well-prepared cabin renter is sure to have a great time.



For those who have ever visited one of the six primitive cabins on the 675-acre Vining Tract, you know Goose Pond Rd. could be the setting for any sport utility vehicle commercial. The winding mountain road is state maintained, but dead ends into PATC's private parking for the cabins, so the dirt road has no through traffic and can become treacherous in bad weather. High clearance vehicles are recommended, but that hasn't stopped my own Ford Fusion sedan from conquering the journey a handful of times. Keep your tires on the high spots, and it can be done. If you really know how to party like it's 1899 then you might even have a hand saw with you in case any limbs or blowdowns complicate your journey. Once parked at the top of the road you have a relaxing 5–10-minute hike-in on a gated service road to reach Conley cabin.

That's where proper packing comes in handy because you don't want to take several trips back and forth to the car and everything you pack in must be packed out.

For food, I recommend resealable containers. This helps reduce odors that can attract pests, and conveniently keeps your gear clean when packing out any leftovers or scraps. For example, if I know I want to cook a meal with diced onions or fresh peppers I like to pre-slice those ingredients ahead of time and zip-lock bag them. That means no onion peels or pepper seeds need to be discarded or packed out. Any meat cooked on the wonderful stone grated grill should be boneless so you don't need to pack out the bones. This reduces your waste and helps cabin renters follow the principles of Leave No Trace. I always try to consider what trash the food I pack will create. If the trash does not all fit in a gallon zip-lock then I don't pack it.

The next important step in planning is to make sure you have the correct bedding for your stay. All PATC cabins have mattresses, so you just need to pack the linens. In a backpacker's effort to reduce weight and space I have found that a simple sheet makes a great mattress cover and in the summer months a lightweight down quilt is all I need for a comfortable sleep. In the winter a 20 degree down bag is my go to sleep system. Instead of hiking in your MyPillow, consider using your clothes bag as your pillow to save some more pack space.

The last necessity to make sure you have packed is your lighting. Primitive cabins have no lights so a headlamp is useful for getting around the property at night. Once your gear and food are in order, you hopefully have room for a beverage or two in your pack. Keep in mind the cabin has no refrigeration so something consumable at room temperature is probably best if you don't want to hike in a cooler. For larger groups, a backpack cooler is a great option. Someone in the group



can carry in the backpack cooler as long as their linens and necessities fit in someone else's pack.

With logistics planned and packs packed, you are ready to immerse yourself in a past world and enjoy the charming cabin. Conley cabin features a spacious covered porch with built-in benches, a hanging swing, and Adirondack chairs to soak in the east facing views of Virginia's Piedmont. The spacious yard features a picnic table, and a covered primitive outdoor kitchen.

The cabin interior features single bunks to sleep eight. For cooking, there is a primitive kitchen including a wood burning cook stove with a drain basin for cleaning dishes, counters for food prep, and cabinets well stocked with cooking utensils. A large table occupies the center of the cabin for a comfortable dining option especially in bad weather. The cabin is one large room but is partitioned by a built-in storage cabinet separating the sleeping quarters from the kitchen area. In addition to the bunks the sleeping area features a cast iron wood stove to warm the cabin on cold days or chilly nights.

Once you are relaxed, refreshed, and acquainted with your surroundings you'll want to take inventory of what you'll need to enjoy your stay. In colder months the wood stove can be used to heat the cabin, but that means you'll need some wood to burn. Each cabin includes cutting tools so you can forage for downed trees and limbs. Conley has a convenient saw buck on the south side of the cabin just steps off the covered porch. Cut wood has a place to be stacked on the porch to keep it dry in rainy weather.

In addition to wood, you might need to gather some water for cooking, cleaning, and drinking. Like a true homestead, water can be gathered at the creek just about 200 yards down the trail towards Wineberry. This creek is as pure as the alps but in the event of animal waste or decay upstream, it is always best to treat your water by boiling or filtering it before drinking.

With water collected, and wood cut and stacked, you are truly ready to immerse in all this beautiful cabin has to offer. There are miles of private hiking trails connecting several historic man-made vestiges and breathtaking natural features and views scattered throughout the property for you to explore. When you're not hiking, relish the old-world pace of preparing a primitive meal on the stone grated grill and as the long shadows of the evening succumb to the bright stars and moonlit nights, recap the day around the warming glow of the covered stone fire grill. Enjoy!

Trail Maintenance Workshop

Saturday and Sunday, September 20 & 21, 2025

Shenandoah National Park - North District

For more than 35 years, the PATC's Hoodlums Trail Crew and Shenandoah National Park staff have conducted a Trail Maintenance Workshop in the North District of the Park. The objective is to teach basic skills to new and prospective trail maintainers and to provide experienced trail

maintainers with advanced training in trail design, construction, and maintenance. SNP trail professionals and experienced PATC crew leaders provide instruction that will help novice and veteran trail maintainers alike. Workshop participants typically camp for the weekend at the Mathews Arm Campground in the North District of the Park. Participants will have free entry to the Park and Campground.

The Workshop will begin Saturday morning at 9:00 a.m. and end Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Participants are encouraged to arrive Friday afternoon/evening and camp at Mathews Arm, socialize with other participants, and thereby avoid an early-morning drive. The fee for the workshop, which includes dinner Saturday and breakfast and lunch Sunday is \$40.

The workshop is limited to 30 participants, which we typically reach by early-August. The registration deadline is Friday, September 5th. When we reach capacity, we will maintain a waiting list. For more information contact **David Nebhut** via e-mail: david.nebhut@gmail.com or by phone: 571-465-1041.

***Registration is almost full!**

If you are ready to register click here: [Hoodlums 2025 Trail Maintenance Workshop](#)

Participation in the Workshop is available only to PATC members age 18 and above, and registration in advance is required.

What's that Flower?

Article and photos by Richard Stromberg



Woodland Sunflower

The Old Rag loop hike is described on pages 54-57 of PATC's "Circuit Hikes in Shenandoah National Park" and pages 252-255 of "Appalachian Trail Guide to Shenandoah National Park." In addition to the challenging rock scrambles and spectacular views, Old Rag offers interesting flowers, some of them found only in rocky places like Old Rag.

This month shows notable plants to be seen in late summer.

You may see several species along the wooded trail before you come to the rock scramble.

Woodland Sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*) leaves have no stalks. **Thin-leaved Sunflower** (*H. decapetalus*)

leaf stalks are at least a quarter of an inch long and the leaves are smooth, green underneath, and sharply toothed.

Sweet-scented Joe-Pye Weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*) is the species of Joe-Pye Weed you will find in dry woods. It has whorls of pointed leaves and the joint where they leave the main stem is purple. Many, small, purple/pink flowers form a dome at the top of the six-foot plant.

Entire-leaved False Foxglove (*Aureolaria laevigata*) flowers are eye-catching: leafy racemes of 1-2 inch yellow tubes with five, flaring lobes at the end. It has a smooth, green stem and most leaves are entire, though lower leaves may be toothed.

Hog-Peanut (*Amphiocarpea bracteata*) is a twining vine. It stays low and often just lays across other plants rather than wrapping around them. The leaves alternate along the stem and have three leaflets. The leaflets can be almost three inches. They have a round base from which each side extends straight for two-thirds of the leaflet to a point. They have been teasing us all summer and only put out flowers at the last moment before cooler weather. The half-inch purple-pink flowers are arranged in a raceme. They hardly seem to open, the banner petal peeling back from the other four petals, and the wing petals barely unwrapping from the two petals that are fused into a keel.

Three species of Tick-trefoil may be seen on Old Rag. Individual flowers are less than a half inch, but each inflorescence has several of them. The flowers have the typical pea structure: the upright banner is pink-violet with dark splotches at the bottom middle of the base and white spaces underneath the splotches; two wing petals are the same pink-violet; the keel is elongated the wing petals may hide it.



Naked-Flowered Tick-trefoil

Naked-Flowered Tick-trefoil (*Hyloidesmum nudiflorum*) flower stems have no leaves. The stem may reach over three feet, often leaning into the trail, with a panicle of flowers at the end which later become pods, ready to grab you. The stem comes straight out of the ground. The leaves arise from ground completely divorced from the flower stem above ground.

Dillenius' Tick Trefoil (*Desmodium glabellum*) flower stems and leaves have with very short hairs that have a hook at the tip. Leaves have three leaflets also have a fringe of hairs along the edges. The leaflets are one to two inches and one-and-a-half to three times longer than wide. It has a lot of flower stems with many flowers on each stem. **Narrow-leaf Tick Trefoil** (*D. paniculatum*) is similar but has narrow leaflets, four times longer than wide.

Starry campion (*S. stellata*) blooms in late summer. Its flower petals are fringed (eight to 12 lobes). It is also called widow frills. Its leaves are in whorls of four except, possibly, for a top pair.

On the rocky top you may see some of the plants described last month:

American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) trees will now have fruit, a spiky, two-inch ball, starting out green and turning brown when ripe and falling to the ground.

Michaux's Saxifrage (*Hydatica petiolaris*) leaves are all at the base of the plant. Each leaf is thick and shiny, up to six inches long, and has five to eight teeth on each side. The inflorescence is wide and spreading. Each flower has five, long, separated, white petals. Two smaller petals point one way and three larger ones point the other way. The larger petals have two yellow dots at the base. Slender stamen filaments spread brown anthers above the petals.

Mountain Sandwort (*Minuartia groenlandica*) is a northern species as its species name *groenlandica* (of Greenland) indicates. It is rare in the PATC area, only found on top of Old Rag Mountain where several clumps of it grow in crevices and sandy pavements. It forms mats of leaves that look like little clumps of grass, but, if you look closely, you will see that the individual leaves are fleshy. Flower stems with up to five flowers extend above the leaves. The half-inch flowers have five white petals.



Cardinal Flower

Other plants you may see in rock crevices include: **Orange Grass or Pineweed** (*H. gentianoides*) with wiry stems with scale-like leaves topped by quarter-inch, five-petal, yellow flowers; **Allegheny Stonecrop** (*Hylotelephium telephiodes*) with upright, green or purple stems, with wide, flat leaves, entire or lightly toothed and star-shaped flowers with five, pointed, greenish-white to pink petals with puffs of stamens protruding; and **Southern Harebell** (*Campanula divaricata*) has wide spreading branches with quarter-inch, blue-purple, bell-shaped flowers with a protruding style.

On your way back on the fire road, in wet places look for two spectacular Lobelias. Lobelia flowers have two lips spreading from a tube. The upper lip has two, erect lobes. The lower lip has three, spreading lobes. **Cardinal Flower** (*Lobelia cardinalis*) flowers are

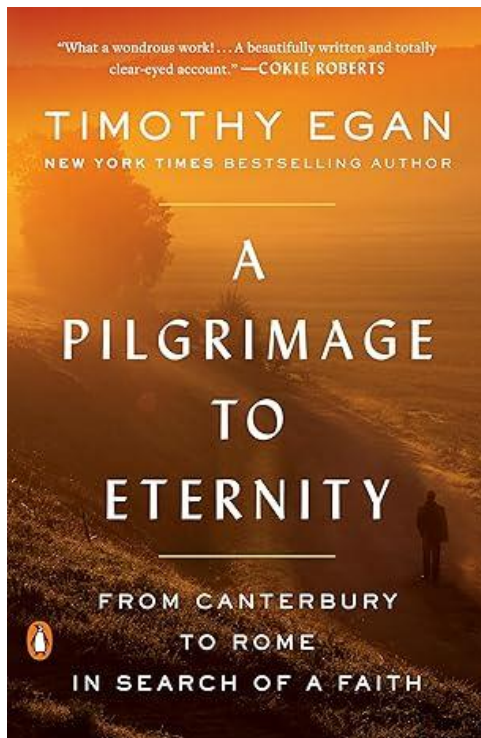


Great Blue Lobelia

bright red. **Great Blue Lobelia** (*L. siphilitica*) flowers are blue.

Keep Calm and Read On: Saints & Sinners

By Wayne Limberg



Following the death of his mother, Timothy Egan decided to take a long walk. His choice was the 1300 mile Via Francigena (VF), which runs from Canterbury to Rome. The result was his 2019 book “Pilgrimage to Eternity.” As a self-described “lapsed but listening” Catholic, he felt the need for “a stiff shot of no-bullshit spirituality.” He was not alone. An estimated 200 million people a year embark on some type of spiritual journey, be it the AT or the centuries old Camino de Santiago. Forty thousand walk all or part of the VF annually, seeking “to learn how to waste time” and in Egan’s case, find answers to questions that have haunted mankind since at least the time of Job. Getting away from it all is a major draw. Indeed, McKaye saw it as the major goal of the AT. This retreat from civilization can bring psychological and some would say even spiritual returns.

Egan’s name may be a familiar ring. He is a former NYTimes op-ed columnist and award-winning author of ten books. His previously reviewed “The Big Burn” dealt with the Great Fire of 1910 in Montana and Idaho that gave a boost to the new US Forest Service and, alas, its policy of fire suppression.

The first VF pilgrimage is traditionally credited to Archbishop Siguric, who made the trek around 990 AD to receive official papal recognition of his new position as archbishop of Canterbury. He kept a journal of his return journey, which averaged 12 miles a day. Unfortunately, it is little more than a logbook with few details. Records of a “Lombard Way” or “Frankish Route” from northern Europe to Rome predate Siguric’s, but he added Canterbury. Later pilgrims continued their travels from Rome to Appulia in Italy’s boot heel to book passage to the Holy Land. The VF was never a single, defined road; it used several routes, depending on the seasons and political situations in the various regions it crossed. At its peak in the Middle Ages, the VF saw upwards of 2 million pilgrims make the trek.

Egan’s decision to walk the VF was only partly in response to the death of his mother, a devout progressive Catholic, who was shaken by the sex scandals that rocked the Catholic Church and had even touched the Egan family. In addition, Egan’s sister-in-law was undergoing treatment for cancer. At the same time, he felt that secularization and declining congregants along with the sex

scandals posed an existential challenge to the Church and Christianity in general that threatened to reduce the shrines and chapels that dotted the VF to quaint curiosities akin to Stonehenge. Like Siguric, Egan started in Canterbury, picking up his official VF passport that he dutifully had stamped at shrines along the Via to earn his pilgrim's certificate in Rome. As it turned out, he did not walk the entire Via. Weather and injuries forced him to take trains, bum rides and rent a Fiat for a number of miles. He justified this by musing that Siguric surely did not pass up an offered ride.

Egan clearly read deeply and widely in preparation for his trip. "A Pilgrimage to Eternity" is packed with relevant quotes from Augustine to Pope Francis and a cast of characters that include Thomas Becket, Assisi, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, and Diderot. Assisi and Erasmus are clear favorites. Luther gets a passing grade despite his antisemitism but there is no saving Calvin. As he recounts his various stops on the Via he offers thoughtful insights into local culture as well church and European history in general.

"A Pilgrimage to Eternity," however, is no pedantic slog. Egan's enthusiasm for his topic is catching in no small part because of his sense of irony and humor—often in combination. When he is hiking through the WWI battlefield the Somme, he observes that over one million soldiers died fighting for purportedly Christian nations. On the lighter side, Egan tells of meeting a woman in Italy who says she no longer considers herself a practicing Catholic. When she learns Egan hopes to see the pope in Rome, however, she asks Egan to ask the Holy Father to pray for her. He also has a chuckle when he discovers at the very beginning of his pilgrimage that Canterbury Cathedral does not sell copies of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." Too racy.

Throughout "A Pilgrimage to Eternity" Egan manages to bring a human dimension to the various places, events and characters—living and dead—he encounters. A prime example is when he visits the stops at the Moët & Chandon tasting rooms in Epernay and finds swarms of tourists. Pilgrims in the Middle Ages visited the church in Epernay because it once held the remains of Helena, the mother of Constantine, but now they come to see the final resting place for Dom Perignon, "the father of champagne." Like Egan, Dom Perignon was educated by Jesuits but became a Benedictine monk at 18 and spent the next half century perfecting "methode champenoise." Like the monks who created illuminated manuscripts, Egan sees Dom Perignon's "doing something good and well and dutifully until it was close to perfect" as a form of prayer.



Via Francigena in Villafranca, Lunigiana, Italy

In the end, Egan makes it to Rome. Many of his questions go unanswered but like many an AT hiker he concludes that each must hike his or her own hike, or as St. Labre, the patron saint of the homeless, once said, "There is no way. The way is the way."

Do you have a favorite read? Send it along to wplimberg@aol.com. Meanwhile, keep reading. See you on the trail.

Letter to the Editor

By Lois Dunlop

I've been a member since my mid-twenties and am now 79, happily a Life Member.

Back when I first joined PATC, I was privileged to know **Egbert and Dorothy Walker**. Egbert was the head of (and mostly the only person) the maps committee. He was the one who really set the standard for PATC's maps, spending hours at the N Street headquarters location working on the maps.

One of Egbert's strict requirements was that all trails be measured using the trusty bicycle wheel distance counter. I'm sure it had a formal name but I don't recall what that was. I only remember it was sturdy and accurate, depending of course on the skill of the user. I think he would be pleased to know his high standards are still in effect. Any articles about PATC maps should include a kudo in Egbert's direction.

Dorothy was also a force to be reckoned with. She came out on more club hikes than her husband. Carried her gear in a vintage (even then) L.L.Bean backpack basket. A small built woman with her gray hair neatly in a bun and a very sweet smile, Dorothy could really put in the mileage. Hard for a 20-something-year-old to keep up with.

I joined the club at a very fortuitous time in my life and in the life of the club. I also knew **Ruth and Fred Blackburn, Paula Strain, Ray Fadner, Robert Humphrey** and many others who truly helped PATC become the strong, active organization that it is today.

Happy Trails everyone.

VolunteerFest Registration is now Open!

You should have received an email describing our exciting event October 11th beginning at 7am and ending with Happy Hour and a BBQ Volunteer Award Ceremony followed by a bonfire. The minimal \$25 registration fee will give you access to our Saturday events, BBQ dinner, and onsite lodging options Friday and Saturday. Register [here](#) and check our website for more information [here](#).

