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THE POTOMAC APPALACHIAN



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## President's Logbook

By Jim Fetig

I heard someone joke the other day that if his belly was a tree stump, it would have too many tree rings to count. It's doubtful that he was a PATC member.

It's winter and we are busier than ever. Our Meetup calendar is full of hikes, the cabin desk is

busy, and lots of groups are out working on trails, especially crosscut saw blowdown removal. We're building muscle, burning calories, and making memories. In a nutshell, that's why we're here.

While the Cadillac Crew and the North Chapter and some others never sleep, continuing to work at full scale through the winter, the Hoodlums suspend regular work trips during the winter months, relying instead on smaller subgroups to keep their trails open.

Yesterday (mid-January) for example, the Eager Beavers Hoodlums crew had 14 sawyers on the ground. Two of them were a chainsaw team working the ridgeline while 12 on two crosscut crews were clearing North District blue blaze wilderness area trails in Shenandoah National Park.. We worked until darkness slid down the mountains and filled the valleys.

For those who don't know, only muscle-powered tools can be used in a federally designated wilderness area. Using a swing blade to weed in mid-summer on steep slopes can be challenging. Otherwise, the crosscut and axe work can be fantastic exercise.



*Crosscut crew on the Tuscarora south*

Now for some more good news, our year-end fundraiser exceeded its goal, raising \$120,000. That is a fantastic response that is well ahead of previous campaigns. Here's a heartfelt thank you to everyone who donated to support the club.

It's also worth noting that we will have elections in November. The club has 12 elected officers who, together, compose the Executive Committee (ExCom). There's more on club officers [here](#).

We will be appointing two committees to run the election. The first is the nominating committee. Its job is to find and encourage candidates to run for office. The elections committee actually administers the election itself. Our elections are online, so administering the election process, a candidate forum if needed, and other functions is straight forward.

If you are interested in serving as an elected officer or on either committee, please contact Evan Hoffmann, staff director, at: [ehoffmann@patc.net](mailto:ehoffmann@patc.net) or John Hedrick, outgoing nominations committee chair at: [jhedrick@erolds.com](mailto:jhedrick@erolds.com)

Dan Hippe, ridgerunner coordinator, is hiring ridgerunners for this season. Ridgerunners are seasonal employees who spend the summer hiking the AT helping hikers and serving as the eyes and ears for the club, ATC and the park service. They report needed trail maintenance, render first aid, coach Leave No Trace, and scoop up trash as needed. They must be expert backpackers with diplomatic personalities. Contact: Dan Hippe at: [dhippe@patc.net](mailto:dhippe@patc.net)

Earlier in January, club leaders with responsibilities in Shenandoah National Park had their annual meeting with park leaders at PATC headquarters in Vienna. The park faces challenges along with the other parks in the system. The club pledged to step up to support the park in appropriate areas.

Shenandoah was PATC's first national park and our largest partner. In total, we have around 400 volunteers in the park during any given year.

Stay busy and don't let your belly grow any extra tree rings!

## Buzzard Rock to Veach Gap Trail

By Josh Silverman

Photos: Views Along Buzzard Rock by Annetta DePompa and Tim Muzzio



Here is a challenging, 10.5 miles hike, with 2400' elevation gain with spectacular views.

The hike includes several views of the Passage Creek Gorge in Fort Valley to the west and Page Valley and the Blue Ridge to the east. This is a one-way hike, so cars will be needed both at the beginning and the end of the hike. Start the hike early as both parking areas tend to fill up quickly in fair weather, and the

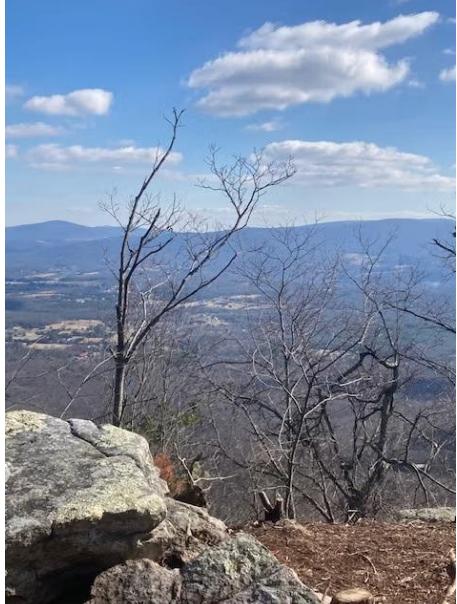
parking area for the Veach Gap trail is not very large. Coordinates for the Buzzard Rock parking area on VA-619, Mountain Road, are 38.93775, -78.28861 and the Veach Gap parking area on Rte. 774, Veach Gap Road, 38.87613, -78.37785.

Begin the hike from the Buzzard Rock parking area. From the Buzzard Rock trailhead, follow the white-blazed trail for 1.5 miles as it ascends to the saw-toothed, east ridge of Massanutten Mountain. The slope is gentle at first but becomes steeper as it bends to the left and approaches the ridge.

At the north end of the ridge is a view of the ponds of the Fish Cultural Station and the northern Shenandoah Valley. Along the ridge itself the trail becomes narrow and requires stepping up and down on rocks and squeezing between them, with narrow footing on very steep slopes.



Proceed along the ridge for 0.5 miles to a viewpoint along the sharply tilted rocks to the right, looking 700 feet down into Passage Creek Gorge. Across the gorge is the Buzzard Rock Overlook on the Massanutten Trail. Continue along various peaks and sags (ascents and descents are steep and rocky here).



The trail becomes broader and less rocky as it approaches the Front Royal Overlook to the left in 0.8 miles. After an additional 0.6 miles, the Buzzard Rock Trail reaches its highest point and then descends gently for 0.6 miles. It ends at the junction of the orange-blazed Massanutten Trail, the blue-blazed Tuscarora Trail, and the yellow-blazed Shawl Gap Trail. The total distance on the Buzzard Rock Trail is just under four miles. Take the second left to go south on the Massanutten Trail/Tuscarora Trail.

The trail soon begins a steep ascent up a sidehill with stone steps and a steep drop-off with a very rocky

tread. After 0.4 miles it reaches the ridge again and continues with various peaks and sags, for 1.75 miles to Sherman Gap.

The pink-blazed Sherman Gap Trail makes a T-intersection with the Massanutten Trail coming in from the right and then resumes its divergent path to the left in another 0.15 miles.

After the Sherman Gap diverges from the Massanutten/Tuscarora Trail, continue ascending for 0.2 miles and follow the trail over the twisting ridge where the Massanutten and Little Crease Mountains join. After an additional 0.7 miles the trail comes to The Point Overlook, with a magnificent view of Page Valley and the Blue Ridge. Several bends of the oxbows of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River can be seen. Depending on the starting time of the hike, this viewpoint is a good place to have lunch.

After leaving the overlook, in 0.2 miles the trail descends nearly 1000 feet on switchbacks to the drainage area between the Massanutten and Little Crease Mountains. Use caution, for portions of this descent are extremely rocky. Continue for 0.4 miles to a left turn at the head of Mill Run.



At this point the trail becomes significantly flatter and less rocky. Continue for 1.8 miles to the intersection with the Veach Gap Trail coming in from the right. The total distance on the Massanutten/Tuscarora Trail is slightly over 5.5 miles.

Turn right onto the yellow-blazed Veach Gap Trail. This delightful trail crosses Mill Run in about 0.2 miles (use caution—the rocks can get slippery here) and passes through the beautiful Veach Gap, a water gap in Little Crease Mountain. Go past a turnoff to the right 0.2 miles past the stream crossing and a second turnoff after 0.1 mile; both of these lead to private property. Continue on the trail to the Veach Gap parking area. The total distance on Veach Gap Trail is slightly under 1.2 miles.

### What's that Flower?

Article and Photos by Richard Stromberg

This article shows you some of the flowers to look for in early spring (March to mid-April) on the [Buzzard Rock to Veach Gap hike](#) described in this issue of The Potomac Appalachian.

**Trailing arbutus** (*Epigaea repens*) plants run along the ground, never more than an inch or two high. It produces

clusters of pink to white flowers as early as February. It has shiny, evergreen leaves.



*Trailing arbutus*



*Spring Beauty*

The **Spring Beauty** (*Claytonia virginica*) plant is only a few inches high. The flower has five white petals with pink-purple veins and pink anthers. It has strap-like leaves.

**Dwarf Cinquefoil** (*Potentilla canadensis*) half-inch, yellow flowers with five petals. Its leaves have five leaflets with teeth on the edges but not all the way to the stem of the leaflet.

**Common Bluets** (*Houstonia caerulea*) are half-inch blue flowers with a yellow center, less than eight inches tall. Each flower is on a single stem. Four petals flare out from a narrow tube presenting a flat top to the eye. The rosette of tiny leaves at the base and even smaller leaves on the stems are hardly noticeable. The blue varies from dark to almost white.

**Golden-alexanders** (*Zizia aurea*) have a flat-topped inflorescence with the flower stems arising from a common point like the struts of an umbrella. The tiny flowers are yellow. The leaves are two or three times divided. The leaflets are toothed.



Common Bluets



Wood Violet

Three Violet species may be seen on this hike. Violet flowers have five petals with the lower petal larger or different-shaped than the side and upper pairs of petals. The plants are usually only a few inches tall with basal leaves. **Common Blue Violet** (*Viola sororia*) has 1-inch, blue/violet flowers and heart-shaped, pointed leaves. **Wood Violet** (*Viola palmata*) has 1-inch, blue/violet flowers and leaves with many small lobes. **Birdfoot Violet** (*Viola palmata*) has flowers that are larger than one inch and have pale purple petals, sometimes with dark violet upper petals, with orange stamens in the middle. The leaves are deeply divided into narrow lobes, like a bird's foot.

**Moss Phlox** (*Phlox subulata*) is low-growing, forming mats. Purple flowers are up to an inch across. Petals flare out from narrow tubes and are notched at the tip. The leaves are entire (no lobes or teeth) and are in pairs, opposite each other.

**Early Saxifrage** (*Micranthes virginensis*) erect, branched stems rise above basal leaves. The up-to-three-inch long leaves are egg-shaped, tapering to the stem and toothed at the tips. The 1/4-inch flowers are white spreading from a stem about a foot tall.

**Eastern Redbud** (*Cercis Canadensis*) is small tree or shrub with bright magenta flowers that fill the branches before the leaves appear. The flowers have the typical pea-family form: the large upper, notched petal called the banner; two smaller, wing petals; and two petals at the bottom that are fused and look like the bottom of a boat or canoe and are called the keel. The flowers grow in tightly bunched clusters of three to nine flowers on old growth even on the main trunk.

Two species of Serviceberry are commonly seen along PATC area trails. They both grow as shrubs or trees up to 20 meters tall. **Downy Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier arborea*) leaves are small



Redbud

and folded when the flowers open and are wooly underneath. **Smooth Serviceberry** (*A. laevis*) leaves are half grown when the flowers open and are smooth underneath. Serviceberry flowers have many stamens in the middle and five petals. The petals are white and longer and narrower than other spring flowering Rose family fruit trees and are often irregularly arranged.



Squawroot

**Wild Pink** (*Silene carolinana*) is only a few inches tall. It has inch-wide, pink or white flowers with well-separated petals that are pinked (scalloped) at the tip.

**Squawroot** aka **Bear Corn** (*Conopholis americana*) is parasitic on Oaks. It has no stem or leaves. A fat flower stalk that looks like a pinecone arises from the ground with many cream-colored flowers, each protected by a brown scale.

## A First Day Tradition

By James Fye

**Lynn and Malcolm Cameron** are dedicated to the trails of the Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter and the North River District. They have led a First Day hike since 1988, and this year was no exception. Nineteen hikers braved low temperatures and high winds to climb from Braley Pond Day Use Area to the overlook on Bald Ridge. This seven mile out-and-back hike has been the go-to hike for a decade. The news of the event went out over email, Facebook, and Meetup so hikers even came from east of the Blue Ridge. **Jim Fye** assisted as co-leader since the group was so large. **Larry**

**Ragland** and **Craig Sease** are co-maintainers on the Bald Ridge Trail, and both were along on the hike. Craig stated that he liked the fellowship of the day and the “invigorating” weather. And we all appreciated the great shape the trails are in.

**Karen and Mike Waterman** also helped with the festivities by offering an easier hike along Madison Run Fire Road. Thirteen hikers met in Grottoes to hike in/out for a total of about four miles. Both hikes helped continue the First Day Tradition of starting the New Year off on the trail.



photo by James Fye—Hardy group braves the cold on New Year's Day



photo by Lynn Cameron—Several hikers enjoy the view from the overlook



photo by James Fye—The sun can't touch the ice covering Braley Pond

## Learning the Avenza Maps App in the Classroom and on the Trail

Article by Jeff Monroe, photos by Marit Anderson

With the recent introduction of PATC's Shenandoah map updates on the Avenza app, a number of members in the Charlottesville and Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapters requested a class covering Avenza use on the trail. January is a good time to do this, so 16 PATC members met at the Crozet (Virginia) Library on Saturday, January 10 to learn more about how to use Avenza and how it differs from other mapping apps used by hikers.

The library session also compared Avenza to the hiking app Gaia GPS and why the class leader insists that Gaia is superior to the widely used AllTrails app. Hosting and teaching the class was **Jeff Monroe**, Hikes Committee member and co-chair of the PATC's GIS Committee responsible for updating PATC trail maps and preparing them for uploading to the Avenza store.

After the library portion, many of the attendees reconvened at a nearby county park and field tested their knowledge of Avenza's capabilities, using a free map of the park downloaded to participants' smartphones from the Avenza map store.

Avenza now publishes electronic versions of all three of PATC's Shenandoah National Park (SNP) trail maps, allowing users who have purchased those maps to determine their exact location while on the trail in an area covered by those maps. Monroe recounted how he uses these maps extensively on Avenza while volunteering for PATC's Trail Patrol within the SNP boundaries. Screenshots document the location of trail issues that merit further action by other PATC volunteers.

Of particular interest to the attendees:

- The Avenza app comes in both a free and a paid version, but almost everyone can use the free version without restrictions. The paid version is most important to the small percentage of users who upload a lot of their own maps to the app.



*PATC members Jeff Monroe, Gary Flynn, Peggy Shy, Iva Gillet, and Andrew Scaglione are shown while out creating a route using the Avenza app.*

- Like other hiking/mapping apps, Avenza can be used on phones even when there is no cell service. The GPS functionality of current cellphones does not require connectivity to work and inform the user of current location. Simply download the required map in advance.
- Avenza's store is much broader than just hiking maps. Monroe recounted his use of both Avenza and Gaia GPS when touring Florence and Rome last year because the Avenza library included great free tourist maps of each city that could be uploaded in advance.
- One of the disappointing aspects of Avenza is the occasional difficulty in locating maps available in a predetermined area. Searching for "Shenandoah National Park," for example, should give priority to maps of the national park, but in practice, maps outside of the park were the first ones that came up during a recent search. Maps should be listed in order of distance from the search term.
- Avenza does allow users in the Avenza Store to search by the age of the map, allowing everyone to realize just how old the National Geographic maps are compared with PATC maps—just one of many superior aspects of PATC maps!
- Avenza maps can be updated in between print runs. Recent trail construction in the PATC's Entry Run district adjoining the SNP Central District (not found on any print maps) can be added to the Avenza version of Map 10 even though that map will not be reprinted for several years. Users are notified of map updates, which are included in the purchase price.
- Avenza and Gaia GPS have different strengths and can be used in conjunction with each other. Monroe recounted his personal experience in Florence, Italy switching between each app. Avenza's store included a free tourist map that was downloaded in advance and used often, while Gaia GPS allows for adding different types of waypoints in advance to its map, so the tourist can map their own critical locations before traveling, such as the train station, hotel, recommended restaurants, museums, historic sites, and even—in Florence—the famous "Wine Windows" where tourists can purchase a glass of wine to go!
- He also discussed his use of Gaia GPS while on Spain's Camino Primitivo in 2024. Downloading previous pilgrims' public tracks to Gaia meant that he was never lost



QR Code of PATC's Map 10 on Avenza.

and always had other users' routes to review along the way, limiting the stress of an insufficient command of the Spanish language.

- AllTrails routes are not nearly as reliable as other sources because AllTrails attracts newer hikers and the data uploaded is often of questionable quality. The discussion included this quote found online, "More than once, using both apps, I've found Gaia was on track while AllTrails wanted us to be 100 yards away in the middle of underbrush."
- Monroe added that his premium Gaia subscription allows access to a layer indicating private property ownership, which is essential for off-trail explorations in the national forest.

Following 90 minutes of class time, many of the participants headed out to a nearby park



*Class leader Jeff Monroe shows the class the best place for more instruction on using the Avenza app: YouTube.*

for hands-on experience. Because of rain, the class convened under a covered picnic pavilion to practice creating waypoints and adding information and photos to the waypoints. When the rain temporarily subsided, the class practiced tracking their route. A trip to Crozet Pizza (once named "Best in the World" by National Geographic) completed the day, where the group discussed the possibility of a follow-up

class in the future covering how to upload waypoint details to Gaia similar to the Monroe's Camino experience.

#### Editor's Note about GPS Map Apps

My friends and I have had good success with AllTrails. David Caviness said, "A few years ago I used Gaia and I found it more difficult to draw my own routes and there was no reviews or comments on a particular trail or route. AllTrails has that and drawing was much easier so I went back to AllTrails." Routes on Gaia or AllTrails can be off, but you don't follow

the route into the brush. You stay on the trail. Of course, routes derived from actual tracks are most accurate. — RS

## **PATC Joins Paris Mountain Alliance to Oppose Commercial Development Near AT**

By Lowell Smith with Laura Greenleaf

More than a century ago, Benton MacKaye envisioned what would become the Appalachian Trail: not just a 2,000-mile hiking path along the Appalachian Mountain range, but a place belonging to all. A place apart from the rapidly industrializing urban centers along the Eastern Seaboard where the work-weary could find respite, solitude, and reconnection with the natural world.

Eleven miles of MacKaye's vision—the infamous "roller coaster"—lie between Ashby Gap and Snickers Gap on Paris Mountain. The Appalachian Trail is one feature of an area defined by conservation—across Route 50, the trail runs through the 1,900-acre Sky Meadows State Park, which exists because of the conservation legacy of philanthropist Paul Mellon. Much of the land in the national and state listed Crooked Run Valley Rural Historic District is under conservation easement to preserve in perpetuity the valley's rural character and agricultural, natural, and scenic resources. But a commercial development proposal threatens this tradition of conservation and the treasured landscape that has endured because of it.

Fairfax-based Mountain Resort LLC and NY-based Eastwind Hotels have submitted a pre-application to Loudoun County to develop 150 acres on the southeastern slope of Paris Mountain into Eastwind Blue Ridge, an exclusive hotel, restaurant, spa, and event facility. The 17-partner Paris Mountain Alliance has mobilized to oppose the development which would include two hotel buildings for a total of 40 rooms running \$400 to \$600 a night, an 88-seat restaurant, and a spa/wellness center plus wells, septic, and parking lots. The property encompasses Clarke, Fauquier, and Loudoun counties, but the developers are planning to construct Phase 1 entirely in Loudoun County where zoning is less protective and intentions for Phases 2 and 3 are uncertain. The developers plan to route traffic from the narrow Mount Weather Road access spur from westbound Route 50 and onto Blue Ridge Mountain Road along a hairpin turn just south of the Appalachian Trail parking area.

The resources at risk cannot be overstated. According to state agencies, they include:

- forest value categorized as "outstanding" and habitat within the Crooked Run-Goose Creek watershed associated with 28 Species of Greatest Conservation Need

- steep slopes identified by Loudoun County as “very sensitive”, “sensitive” and “somewhat sensitive”
- shrinking reserves of groundwater documented in a recent Loudoun County study that sounds the alarm on chronic drought conditions and over-development
- surface waters that are a critical habitat component and support the mountain ecosystem, and
- the beauty of an intact mountainside not scarred by roads, buildings, parking areas, and lighting.

Unfortunately, the developers’ logging operations, which did not comply with regulations, have already fragmented the forest and created vectors for the spread of invasive plants, increasing the reservoir of invasive species reaching the Appalachian Trail.

This new threat of commercial development on Paris Mountain calls us to heed Benton MacKaye’s principled recognition that “. . . a realm and not merely a trail marks the full aim of our efforts.” Stewardship of the Appalachian Trail encompasses the sweeping landscape of the Blue Ridge Mountains as an integral whole—rural character, ecosystem health, wildlife habitat and migration corridors, climate resiliency, scenic viewsheds, and tranquility. As the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) notes in its focus on landscape scale conservation, “Experts agree that the Appalachian Trail Landscape must be conserved and connected to maintain its resilience and biodiversity while protecting species’ current and future opportunities to move across eastern North America.” (For more on the ATC’s conservation mission, read “C is for Conservation” in the Fall 2025 centennial issue of *Journeys*.)

This same ethic guides PATC as it joins its fellow mountain defenders in the Paris Mountain Alliance. Mountain Resort LLC and Eastwind Hotels have not yet submitted their formal application. The outlook for decisions by appointed and elected officials requiring public hearings is unclear, but the odds are that the fate of Paris Mountain is in the hands of Loudoun County leaders. The Paris Mountain Alliance will provide updated information as it becomes available. To get involved, please contact PATC’s **Lowell Smith** at [patcconserve@gmail.com](mailto:patcconserve@gmail.com).

You can read the Paris Mountain Alliance’s recent press release and see a full list of members [here](#).

## Park Service Issues RFP for Redevelopment of Rock Creek Tennis Center

By Alan Kahan



*Stadium tennis court at the Rock Creek Tennis Center*

The National Park Service recently issued a [request for proposals for redevelopment of the Rock Creek Tennis Center](#) (16th and Kennedy Streets, NW). This project is being fast-tracked and apparently bypasses regular National Park Service procedures for such leases. The Request for Proposals deadline was January 20, 2026.

Included in the RFP is a draft lease agreement with a proposed site map that closely resembles a redevelopment concept circulated earlier this year by Mark Ein, the Washington-area businessman who runs the DC Open professional tennis tournament, and first reported on in June by WAMU. That concept can be seen as part of a [change.org petition](#) that displays before and after map renderings that show the extent of the redevelopment. There is also a [recent article](#) in The Washington Post (dated 1/9/2026) about the tennis center renovation.

Of particular concern to some PATC members is the paving over of the picnic area for parking on the south side of the tract and the building out of the playground space on the west side. This will create more impermeable surfaces that have the potential to increase water runoff down to Rock Creek and negatively affect adjacent forest habitat and the Valley Trail down the hill from the tennis center.

PATC members may want to strongly recommend that, as part of the process, community input should be sought and an environmental impact assessment should be carried out. If you are concerned about or opposed to this potential redevelopment plan, please contact:

Brian Joyner  
Rock Creek Park Superintendent  
3545 Williamsburg Lane, NW, Washington, DC 20008  
202/895-6000

Jessica Bowron  
Acting Chief of NPS  
1849 C St NW, Washington, DC 20240  
202/208-6843

To send an email, you will have to use the National Park Service website  
at <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/contactus.htm>

## "What on Earth?"

Article and Photo by Raymond Barbehenn



Coyote

The howls of coyotes along the AT can make you want to stay inside your tent at night. If it seems like there are a lot more of them howling now than in the past, you are right. Coyotes only began making their way into our area in the late 1980s. They are now the dominant predators in most of the

eastern United States and Canada, and they are here to stay. However, the more you learn about them, the less concerned you may become. They are most active after dark, but flexible about hunting during the day if they need to. The coyote in the above photo was hunting near the AT in Duke Hollow (northern Virginia) on October 3, 2025. It was probably a young adult hunting solo. Notice its dark-tipped bushy tail, tall, pointed ears, and narrow snout.

### **Why do coyotes howl?**

- A. They are calling other pack members to come together.
- B. They are warning other coyotes to stay out of their territory.
- C. They are frightening prey animals into the open.
- D. A and B

The answer is at the bottom of the page!

### **Fun Facts and Musings**

Coyotes are primarily carnivores, feeding on a wide range of prey: insects, mice, rabbits, and even an occasional deer. Although they are considered pack animals, they typically hunt alone or with one or a few family members. Their social groups are families—usually a mother and father with their offspring. These families establish stable territories that vary in size from 5-25 square miles depending on the amount of food available in an area. The two parents remain together for life. Each year, mother coyotes have a two-month pregnancy during the winter and give birth in the spring. The father brings food to the mother and pups in their den, which is typically underground, in a rocky outcrop, or in a hollow tree. Young coyotes (commonly six pups per litter) grow to full size in about nine months. Both parents feed their offspring until they are able to hunt for themselves. They leave the breeding den permanently in the early summer (June to July). Grown offspring often roam away from their families later in the summer (August).

The successful expansion of coyotes into eastern North America had two main causes: coyotes are unusually resourceful animals and we created a landscape that favors them. The wide range of prey that they hunt is essential, but they are also good scavengers of animal carcasses. In addition, they have a taste for fruit, such as berries. Their success in urban and suburban areas comes from their ability to get part of their nutrition from our

garbage. Coyotes are normally most active in the hours after sunset and before dawn. However, to avoid people, they push off their hunting deep into the night when we are asleep.

The great forests that once covered the eastern United States did not suit coyotes; they were animals of the plains and prairies. As European settlers moved westward in the 1800s, they cleared these forests for agriculture and largely eliminated the coyote's competitors (gray wolves and cougars). As a result, two waves of coyotes began to move eastward. One wave of coyotes moved to the northeast around the Great Lakes through Canada toward New England. A second wave of coyotes moved eastward along a front that extended from the Great Lakes south to the Gulf of Mexico.

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) look similar to dogs (*Canis familiaris*) and gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) because they are closely related and capable of interbreeding. The coyotes in the northeastern U.S. are larger (weighing 30-40 pounds) than those in our area (weighing 20-30 pounds) because of interbreeding between the northeastern coyotes and Canadian gray wolves (weighing 60-145 pounds). Interestingly, the larger northeastern coyotes have been moving south, and are expected to converge with the smaller coyotes in our area. However, recent (2017) testing of over 100 coyotes in Virginia and West Virginia found that roughly 90% of them were still genetically similar to western coyotes. Of course, further mixing of traits from northeastern coyotes and even dogs is to be expected in the future.

The topic of coyotes is fraught with emotion: "They're eating our pets!" "They're hunting our deer!" "They kill people!" Cats and small dogs wandering outdoors in the darkness are easy prey for coyotes. Although there is little information on the numbers of pets and strays that are taken by coyotes in the U.S., even a single lost pet is sure to stir anger towards coyotes.

Hunters often take pride in shooting coyotes, believing that they are killing pests that are hurting the deer population. However, this popular opinion is not supported by the research of wildlife biologists. The roughly 400,000 coyotes shot by hunters each year are quickly replaced by new coyotes moving into the vacated territories, as well as by more baby coyotes. Importantly, coyotes in our area do not usually hunt adult deer or kill enough fawns to make an impact on the deer population. The sick and weak deer that coyotes do kill would likely have died anyway, meaning that the coyotes are not adding substantially to the total number of deer dying each year. This finding led wildlife biologists in Pennsylvania to conclude that coyotes have a negligible impact on the deer population. Even the adult deer eaten by the larger northeastern coyotes in New York were found to be primarily road kills (92% road kills vs. 8% prey).

Finally, are coyotes really a danger to people? No. There have been only two people killed by coyotes in the U.S. in the past 300 years. By comparison, 468 people were killed by dogs in the U.S. in just 10 years (2011-2021)!

None of the above argues against the potential local problems or ecological changes that coyotes can cause. The question here is what is the overall impact of this species in the eastern U.S. Certainly, the red foxes wish that coyotes were not here; they get chased around and marginalized where the two species now coexist.

**Answer: D!**

Coyote calls are remarkably diverse—not just howls, but also barks, yips and other sounds. These vocalizations are their language. They howl to call distant family members together. And, they howl to ward off outside coyotes from their territories. Much like dogs, their barks and yips and growls are used to communicate about danger or for play or aggression. Barking coyotes sound so similar to dogs that you could easily mistake the two, as I have. A video of coyote calls can be seen at <https://youtu.be/l-0aK59t42g>. (Some of the scenes are from Canada, showing larger coyotes and even a tussle with a lynx!).

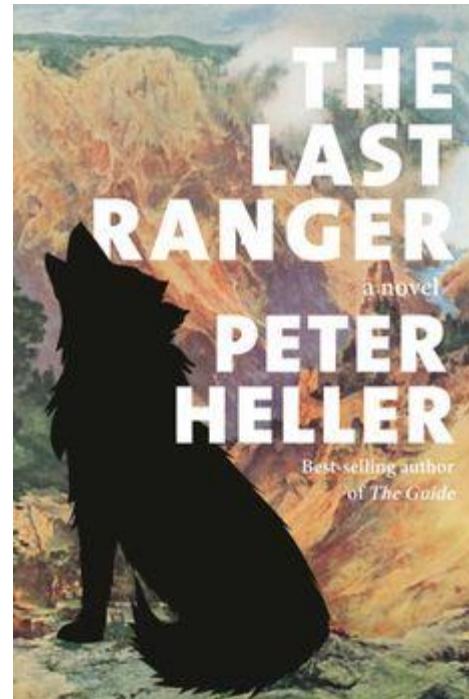
Send your photos and ideas for topics to Ray at [rvb@umich.edu](mailto:rvb@umich.edu).

### **Keep Calm and Read On: The Last Ranger**

By Wayne Limberg

A shout out to David Cox for recommending this month's book selection, Peter Heller's "The Last Ranger." Heller is a bestselling author of eight novels, including "The Guide" and "The Painter," which was a finalist for the LA Times Book Prize and won the Reading the West Book Award. In addition, he has written for Outside magazine, National Geographic, and NPR. He is squarely in the Western school of American writers with the likes of Ivan Doig and even Wallace Stegner.

"The Last Ranger" has a lot in common with Callan Wink's "Beartooth," which was reviewed in the [November 2025 issue of the PA](#). Both books are set in current day Yellowstone National Park and the hardscrabble communities bordering it. Both deal with poaching.



Both are good reads, whose authors have a real talent for describing the natural world and whose protagonists are trying to come to terms with earlier life tragedies. Both authors are grads of the Iowa Writers Workshop.

"The Last Ranger," however, takes a decidedly different turn. Where Wink's protagonist is living more or less outside the law, Heller's is a law enforcement ranger named Ren who is doing his best to protect the park and its human and animal inhabitants. In the process, Heller provides a behind-the-scenes look at law enforcement in a big national park, complete with locals, tourists, moose, wolves, and bears and how they do or don't get along. A bonus comes in the way of the book's second main character, Hilly, who is Ren's neighbor in the cabin area reserved for park staff and a wildlife biologist researching Yellowstone's wolf population. In the course of the book, she schools Ren—and readers—in wolves and their behavior.

Heller's publisher Alfred A. Knopf markets "The Last Ranger" as a mystery/thriller, but that may be a stretch. While there are some exciting moments, they do not drive the narrative. "The Last Ranger" is a page turner for other reasons. Nor is "The Last Ranger" a classic whodunnit. Rather, it is more of a why-dunnit. Early on, Ren confronts the book's main antagonist, Les, a suspected poacher. Ren is convinced that Les is harvesting pelts illegally and sets a leg trap near Hilly's wolf observation post that nearly kills her. After consulting with the local sheriff, who shares his suspicions, Ren realizes he cannot press charges because of lack of evidence. From that point on, tensions build as Ren seeks more evidence and Hilly makes it clear that she is prepared to do whatever it takes to protect her beloved wolves. The narrative shifts from plot to character development as Hilly's and Ren's relationship deepens and as Ren searches for why Les is breaking the law.

Along the way, Heller introduces additional—and familiar—characters, including a grizzled old park maintenance man and his sassy wife who runs the local bar, the sheriff who has seen it all, and a Native American and his daughter who remove animals killed in the park. At the same time, he introduces some subplots that may or may not be connected to the larger story. In one case, Ren discovers a rash of vandalism and at first suspects Les, but soon uncovers a group of well-heeled—and armed—locals who would love to see the park disappear. To that end they are recruiting gullible young white men to wreak havoc in the park. Trope? Stereotypes? Red herrings? Maybe, but they keep readers guessing and the narrative moving.

In interviews, Heller has explained his approach to writing. Since his earliest days, he has been fascinated with poetry, his main course of study in the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Along the way, he, like many others, learned that journalism and novel writing were more dependable sources of income. He continues, however, to be a poet at heart in that he has

to have an opening line that sings before he can get down to writing a book. He does not start with an organized plot and character sketches.

Rather, he lets the story and characters take him where they want to. Some might find this a bit quirky, yet his eight novels and loyal readership seem to testify that it works. In "The Last Ranger" this is best seen in the development of Les' character and backstory. He does not come across as your typical one-dimensional villain despite his rough exterior. Heller's use of language and images at times can be lyrical if not downright poetic whether he is describing a trout rising to a fly or the howls of lonely wolves. More than one reviewer has compared his writing to that of William Kent Kruger's in such books as "The Tender Land" and "Ordinary Grace."

Given his approach to his writing, it should come as no surprise that Heller does not necessarily tie up every storyline at the end of the book. Still, "The Last Ranger" literally ends with a satisfying bang—or two—leaving readers asking for more. The good news is that his twelfth book, "The Burn," came out last year to good reviews.

Do you have a good read? If so, send it along to [wplimberg@aol.com](mailto:wplimberg@aol.com). Meanwhile, keep reading and stay safe. See you on the trail.

## **New Boots Assigned in January**

### Trails

Roger Smith	AT ~ Loft Mt. Amphitheater Trail to Doyles River Trail
Chuck Troutman	AT ~ Trayfoot Mountain Trail to Blackrock Gap
Julie Liskey	AT ~ Blackrock Gap to SLD South of Horsehead Mtn overlook
Mary Beth Bowers	AT ~ Blackrock Gap to SLD South of Horsehead Mtn overlook
Edgar Howell	Co ~ Piney Branch Trail (upper)
Mike Dawson	Corbin Cabin Cutoff Trail
Matt Dawson	Corbin Cabin Cutoff Trail
David & Tonya Rhoades	Elizabeth Furnace Rec. Area Circuit
Kyle Smith	Ramseys Draft ~ Mountain House Picnic Area to Hiner Spring

## **Help Wanted for January**

Wood Sign Maker- contact John Hedrick at C 703-403-1479,

[jhedrick@erols.com](mailto:jhedrick@erols.com)

### Shelter Volunteer

Henry Horn ~ 301/498-8254, [shelters@patc.net](mailto:shelters@patc.net)

Rocky Run Shelter [Original] ~ PATC Map 5-5

Paul Gerhard Shelter ~ PATC map F

### District Manager

Co- District Manager ~ Tuscarora Central [Map L]

Bill Greenan, [wpgreenan@yahoo.com](mailto:wpgreenan@yahoo.com)

### SNP North District Blue blazed ~ Map 9

Tom Moran, (703) 715-0050, [twmoran19@gmail.com](mailto:twmoran19@gmail.com)

Dickey Ridge Trail ~ Low Gap to AT (2.2 mi)

Fork Mountain Trail ~ Co ~ Piney Ridge Trail to Hull School Trail (1.1 mi)

Jeremys Run Trail (middle) ~ Co ~ 8th Ford of Jeremys Run to junction Knob Mt. & Neighbor Mt. Trail (2.7mi)

Pass Mountain (lower) ~ Co~ "break point" to US 211(1.32 mi)

Sugarloaf Trail ~ Co ~ AT (Hogback Mt.) to Pole Bridge Link Trail (1.4 mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ SNP Boundary to Thompson Hollow Trail (1.5 mi)

### SNP Central District Blue blazed [south] ~ Map 10

John Hedrick ~ 540/987-8659, [jhedrick@erols.com](mailto:jhedrick@erols.com)

Rock Spring Parking/Cabin/Hut ~ Rock Spring Parking to AT/AT to Rock Spring Cabin & Hut (.2mi)

Rock Spring Cabin/Hut Spring Trail ~ Rock Spring Cabin & Hut to spring (.1mi)

SNP South District Appalachian Trail ~ Map 11

Bob Pingry ~ 434-981-5094, [bobpingry@gmail.com](mailto:bobpingry@gmail.com)

AT ~ Co ~ Loft Mtn Camp Store trail to Loft Mountain Amphitheater trail (1.3)

SNP South District Blue blazed ~ Map 11

James Surdukoski ~ 434-459-1122, [buslsurdukowski@gmail.com](mailto:buslsurdukowski@gmail.com)

Brown Mountain - Brown Mountain Summit to Big Run Portal Trail (3.5 mi)

Gap Run Trail - Junction of Rocky Mount Summit Trail to bottom of Gap Run (1.50mi)

Pennsylvania Tuscarora ~ Maps J & K

Chris Firme ~ 717-794-2855, [bncfirme@innernet.net](mailto:bncfirme@innernet.net)

Dave Trone ~ 717-778-1308, [traildavidt@gmail.com](mailto:traildavidt@gmail.com)

Pete Brown 410-207-2921, [trailpete@gmail.com](mailto:trailpete@gmail.com)

PA Tuscarora [J] ~ Fowler Hollow shelter to Hemlock Rd (2.2mi)

PA Tuscarora [J] ~ Mountain Rd. to Jct. PA 641 (6.2mi)

PA Tuscarora [K] ~ Alice Trail to Yellow Blazed Trail (4.2mi)

PA Tuscarora [K] ~ Yellow Blazed Trail to PA 456 (6.7mi)

Tuscarora Central ~ Map L

Bill Greenan ~ [wpgreenan@yahoo.com](mailto:wpgreenan@yahoo.com)

**Co-District Manager needed!**

Tuscarora Trail ~ Burnt Mill Bridge to Lutkins Passage (3.2mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Meadow Branch to Eagles Nest Parking (2.2mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Eagles Nest Mt. Parking Lot to Meadow Branch Trail (3mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Lerrick Overlook to Lucas Woods Trail (2mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Sleepy Creek Registration to Hampshire Grade Road (5.6mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Hampshire Grade Road to High Rock (2.7mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Co ~ Lucas Woods Trail to Powerline (3.5mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Sleepy Creek WMA Border to VA 671 (Shockeysville Road) (4.1mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ US 50 (Back Creek) to Gore Access Trail (1.3mi)

Tuscarora Trail ~ Co ~ Powerline to Dry Gap (3.5mi)

Devils Nose Connector Trail ~ Devils Nose Parking Area to Tuscarora Trail (.5mi)

Spruce Pine Hollow Trail ~ Tuscarora Trail to Spruce Pine Hollow Park Trailhead (.10mi)

#### Massanutten South ~ Map H

Paul Boisen, (540) 246-5662, [paulboisen@hotmail.com](mailto:paulboisen@hotmail.com)

Massanutten South Trail ~ Pitt Spring to Morgan Run Trail (1.4 m FR 65) (3.3mi)

Roaring Run Trail ~ Catherine Furnace to TV Tower Road (3.8mi)

Pitt Spring Lookout Trail ~ Massanutten South Trail to lookout point (.27mi)

#### Great North Mountain ~ Map F

Mike Allen ~ 540-333-3994, [michaelallen0056@gmail.com](mailto:michaelallen0056@gmail.com)

North Mt. Trail ~ Stack Rock Trail to VA 720 (4.3mi)

Stack Rock Trail ~ Forest Rd 252 to North Mt. Trail (1.5mi)

Long Mountain Trail ~ Trout Pond Trail to FR 1621 (4.4mi)

Big Schloss Trail ~ 2.3 Mile Marker of Mill Mt. Trail to Big Schloss View (.3mi)

Mill Mt. Trail ~ Wolf Gap to Big Schloss Cutoff Trail (2.8mi)

Gerhard Shelter Trail ~ Tuscarora Trail to Vances Cove (1.5mi)

North River Map-National Geographic Trails Illustrated #791

Lynn & Malcolm Cameron, (540) 234-6273, [slynncameron@gmail.com](mailto:slynncameron@gmail.com)

Braley Pond Loop ~ 491, 496, 654 from Braley Pond Parking to Braley Pond Parking (3.6 mi)

MD Montgomery County Parks ~ Map D

Lynn Gallagher ~ (301) 320-4862, or [lynn.t.gallagher@gmail.com](mailto:lynn.t.gallagher@gmail.com)

Cabin John Trail ~ Seven Locks Rd to Tuckerman Lane

Prince William Forest Park

Dennis Calhoun, 703-583-4386, [dennis\\_calhoun@comcast.net](mailto:dennis_calhoun@comcast.net)

Carl Nicholson, 703-314-6365, [cwnicholson@gmail.com](mailto:cwnicholson@gmail.com)

South Valley from Scenic Drive [3rd Intersection] to North Orenda Road (1.1 mi)

Maryland National Battlefield Parks – Antietam & Monocacy

Mary Ann Lepore ~ H 814-942-0670, C 814-327-8526

[shastalepore@msn.com](mailto:shastalepore@msn.com)

Antietam NBP

Final Attack Trail ~ Burnside Bridge to Snavely Ford Trail (1.74mi)

Monocacy NBP

Junction Trail (1.mi) plus Best Farm Trail (1.5mi)[one maintainer for both trails]

Worthington Farm Trail ~ Worthington House to through [including] Ford Loop (1.6mi)

Brooks Hill Trail ~ Worthington House to High Water Bypass Trail (1.9mi)

Gambrill Mill Trail (.5mi) plus Dam Ruins Trail (.3mi) [one maintainer for both trails]

