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## **Leading the Way: How to Become a PATC Hike Leader**

Michael DeMarco and Sue Collins

This article looks at learning to become a PATC hike leader from two perspectives: the trainee and the mentor. Below, the article's authors give their thoughts on leading hikes and why they hike. Hopefully that insight will encourage others to pursue leading hikes for PATC.

### **The Trainee**

My name is Michael DeMarco. I am continuing my training to be a hike leader. I have leadership experience in many forms but have mostly led hikes with my family and friends. I led three backpacking trips on the AT across Georgia, North Carolina, and Maryland. Maryland was a group of five and a dog (he did well). I had first aid and CPR training at my last job and some when I was a scout leader. In addition, I was a leader for a youth group with many outdoor events.

I want to lead day hikes and backpacking trips in Northern Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. I am still working so, weekends and extended weekends are mostly what I am interested in, but I have done 9-10-day backpacking trips. I can do anything from easy to difficult.

I first attended the PATC hike leader training webinar to start learning what it takes to become a hike leader. Then I expressed my interest in completing the requirements. Susan Collins and David Manning were provided as my hike leader mentors. I created Meetup events for the required two hikes, co-led the hikes with David and Susan and completed a PATC hikes report on each. Additionally, I will lead an independent hike as well as complete training for Red Cross First aid (Wilderness First Aid is both acceptable and encouraged). Finally, I studied the PATC Hike Leaders Handbook which covers logistics, emergency planning and the "10 Essentials." I'm near the finish line!

I have a deep-rooted connection to the land. Whether you are a trail maintainer clearing blowdowns on the Tuscarora Trail or a weekend explorer on the AT, you understand the vital work required to keep the 1,100-mile network open and accessible.

While maintenance crews ensure the trails are physically sound, hike leaders are the bridge that connects the public to these spaces. Leading a hike is a unique way to give back, share your expertise—whether in botany, history, or photography—and advocate for the trails you help preserve. I personally have an interest in photography and sharing the natural beauty I capture at a local gallery in the town where I live.

What motivates someone to become a hike leader?

People become hike leaders for a mix of rewards: a deep love for nature and sharing it, the satisfaction of helping others grow and experience the outdoors safely, building personal leadership skills, community involvement, all while enjoying personal benefits like stress relief and connecting with like-minded individuals.

### **The Mentor**

My name is Sue Collins. I have been a PATC Hike Leader for two years. The training to become a PATC Hike Leader includes planning and leading two mentored hikes. Michael, the mentee, has a mission to complete the AT in sections. To capture his enthusiasm and work on my 2026 PATCH hiking goal, we planned a leisurely-paced hike that included a section of the AT at Sky Meadows State Park. My 2026 PATC hiking goal is to offer leisurely-paced and family-friendly hikes.

Why choose a state park for a family-friendly hike?

Restrooms, accessible parking, park rangers, and in an emergency, you can call the park emergency office. In the winter, state parks tend to plow their roads and parking lots.

How did we plan this hike?

We used AllTrails and the Sky Meadows State Park trail map to plan our route. We included the AT, elevation at the front end of the hike, a few beautiful overlooks, and a smooth finish (not rocky). When planning a hike, we also consider the weather. This hike has an open meadow, with no shade, and I prefer to hike this trail in the winter, spring, and late fall. When we mapped the trail using AllTrails, it was 4.7 miles, and after the pre-hike, it was 5.2 miles.

Sky Meadows State Park is near Paris, VA, an hour west of the beltway. The park offers 22 miles of hiking trails, nine miles of biking trails, and 10.5 miles of bridle trails. The park also has a Children's Discovery Area, an open and safe space for children and families to enjoy the park.

### **Conclusion**

Are you interested in becoming a hike leader? If so, contact PATC at [Hikes@PATC.net](mailto:Hikes@PATC.net) for more information.

## President's Logbook

By Jim Fetig



*Fundraiser Abbie Fine working with the Hoodlums*

Fundraising is the bedrock that supports every nonprofit mission. For PATC, it's the second largest source of revenue after cabin rentals. Membership dues are third. Imagine how expensive cabin rental rates or dues would be

without fundraising.

One of the reasons I originally ran for president was to establish fundraising and embed it as a robust aspect of PATC's culture. Much easier said than done. After several fits and starts dating back to initiatives during Joe Lombardo's presidency, we are consistently achieving our goals and growing our donor base. Thank you to the more than 1,200 of you who donated in the past year!

These results are due in large part to the efforts of Evan Hoffmann, our staff director. He is not only a professional nonprofit manager, he's also a skilled fundraiser. Evan led us to Abbie Fine, who we hired on contract as a part time fundraiser. Together, they have strengthened PATC's fundraising foundation and positioned us on a clear upward trajectory.

Our initiatives have included the ability to make monthly donations via the website using a debit or credit card. Recurring donations are more affordable for many, including myself.

They often produce donation amounts larger than it would be possible or practical to make in a single gift.

Planned giving is now possible through our new initiative called the [Overlook Circle](#). We are surprised several times a year to learn that the club is receiving a donation from someone's estate. Sometimes the money is unrestricted and can be used to support general operations. Other times, it is restricted to specific purposes such as trails, lands, cabins, or the quasi-endowment.

Overlook Circle participation allows club members or other donors to share their intention to include PATC in their estate plans. It does not create a permanent obligation. Circumstances change. But by documenting their plans, donors allow PATC to recognize their foresight and commitment to sustaining our mission. Most nonprofit leaders appreciate unrestricted donations most. They allow flexibility in their use and can be deployed for the greatest good of the club. As the leader most responsible for the future, and in the context of our soon-to-begin second century of service, for me, the one exception to the bias toward unrestricted donations is the quasi-endowment.

A quasi endowment is a fund established for a specific purpose. The principal is protected while earnings can be spent as specified in its charter. The PATC quasi-endowment was established in 2011 to provide financial support for the club in perpetuity. It provides a predictable level of funding for capital improvements, operating expenses, and sufficient cash to meet financial obligations.

The quasi-endowment charter allows five percent of the fund's value to be spent on capital programs annually and two percent for operating expenses. The fund grew by 16 percent last year. Learn more about it [here](#).

Having an endowment in any form is rare in the nonprofit world. In that sense, the PATC of today is the beneficiary of far-sighted leadership. In practical terms, the quasi endowment provides money that we are expected to use to supplement operational budgets, cover major expenses, and buy cabins and lands.

Planned giving to the quasi-endowment through the Overlook Circle has many benefits. Chief among them is that the donation will grow and work for PATC as long as the club exists. Moreover, the quasi-endowment offers incredible flexibility to purchase lands or cabins or fund initiatives that may add value to our mission.

For example, the club does not insure all of its cabins. It is beneficial to insure the most expensive ones, but the club self-insures the smaller primitive cabins. If one of them were to be destroyed, the replacement cost could be covered by the quasi-endowment.

The quasi-endowment is managed by a committee composed of the president, treasurer, and three club members who are accomplished financial professionals. Brown Advisory manages the account and also offers market insight. The chair is Jay Jupiter.

The PATC quasi-endowment's current value is approximately \$6.2 million. Last year, it was capable of providing \$120,000 that the club could use for current operations. As a back of the envelope calculation, if the fund were to double in value, it could provide \$240,000. That is a solid hedge against financial emergencies and future cabin rental and dues increases.

As we look toward PATC's second century, we need to think about both what the club requires today and what may be needed tomorrow. Unrestricted gifts give us flexibility to handle the work in front of us — training volunteers, maintaining trails and cabins, and responding when storms or unexpected expenses arise.

The quasi-endowment also contributes to current operations. However, continuing to grow the fund strengthens the club's long-term position. Both forms of support matter. Together, they help ensure PATC remains steady, adaptable, and prepared for whatever the next hundred years may bring.

In my judgement, donating to the endowment leaves a lasting legacy and is a solid investment in PATC's long-term future. As a geezer waiting for my turn to push up daisies, the quasi-endowment is included in my estate planning and hope you will consider doing so as well.

**Benton MacKaye  
and Myron Avery:  
Two Visions  
Making One Trail**

Matt Waurio, PATC  
Communications  
Supervisor

Caught up in the  
demands of the  
present, it's easy to  
forget the century-  
long path that led  
to the trails and



*Benton MacKaye and Myron Avery*

cabins we steward today. The labor of thousands of PATC members before us created the conditions in which we now work - for better or for worse. Our stewardship is inherited, but it's also ongoing.

Along these lines, the Appalachian Trail didn't emerge from a single vision or personality. Instead, the trail and the systems that support it were shaped by a productive tension between two very different frames of thought: dreamers and doers. Dreamers imagine possible futures; doers work within existing realities to bring projects to completion. These contrasting approaches are embodied by two historically central figures in AT history: Benton MacKaye and Myron Avery. Their differing philosophies forged the trail as we know it today: MacKaye rooted in imagination, regional planning, and social renewal; Avery grounded in execution, policy, and discipline. For the PATC, their contrasting perspectives offers a framework for how the Club continues to balance ideals with action, vision with stewardship, and tradition with adaptation.

As we plan for PATC's centennial in 2027, we call on both dreamers and doers to help imagine the future of our club for the next 100 years. Benton MacKaye is often credited as the intellectual father of the AT and conceived the project in 1921 as much more than a recreational footpath. His ideas were shaped by the pressures of the early twentieth century: industrialization, urban crowding, and social fragmentation. MacKaye envisioned the trail as a form of regional planning, a spine of wild lands and intentional communities that could counterbalance development trends. In his mind, the trail was a social experiment in human renewal and ecological balance. Hiking was secondary.

Myron Avery, a central figure in PATC's own legacy, was a pragmatist. A lawyer with seemingly inexhaustible energy and legendary organizational skills, Avery cared little for philosophical abstraction and a great deal for practical outcomes. He focused on where trails existed, where they could be routed, and whether they met clear, enforceable standards. Setting aside many of MacKaye's broader ambitions, Avery believed the Appalachian Trail should be continuous, clearly marked, and rigorously documented. Where MacKaye saw possibility, Avery saw ambiguity and he worked relentlessly to eliminate it. Under Avery's leadership, the trail became real: miles were surveyed, blazes painted, maps corrected, and gaps closed.

The tension between these two men was real and, at times, deeply personal. MacKaye worried that Avery's emphasis on uniformity stripped the trail of its broader social purpose. Avery saw MacKaye's expansive ideas as impractical and potentially destabilizing. Yet history suggests the AT required both. Without MacKaye, there may have been no unifying vision to inspire a movement. Without Avery, that vision might never have left the page.

PATC emerged and has endured largely by leaning toward Avery’s model. The club embodies his insistence on stewardship, standards, and accountability. Trail sections aren't merely admired; they're maintained. Cabins aren't romantic relics; they're managed assets. Volunteers aren't loosely affiliated enthusiasts; we're trained, organized, and supported. This operational discipline combined with grassroots commitment has allowed PATC to steward a thousand miles of trail and infrastructure for a century. But as we approach our centennial (and perhaps catch our breaths in the tail end of winter months), we might also allow ourselves to be a little more like MacKaye.

The trail network that gives PATC its purpose now faces pressures neither MacKaye nor Avery could have fully anticipated: unprecedented visitation, climate-driven erosion, and shifting patterns of recreation. Addressing these challenges could benefit from more Avery-like rigor - with data-informed decisions, consistent standards, and sustainable maintenance models. But it also demands MacKaye-like imagination: rethinking how people engage with trails, how volunteers are recruited and retained, and how stewardship values are communicated to new generations - what it means, in practice, to belong to PATC.

If you’re interested in sharing your PATC centennial ideas, contact our VP of Volunteerism, Jayne Mayne at [jmayne@patc.net](mailto:jmayne@patc.net). For our hundred-year celebration, no dream is too grand.

## Flying McLeods to Fly Again

By Ruth Stornetta



by Ruth Stornetta: Joel Brown, Roger Friend, Ruth Stornetta, Kevin Cwalina, Roger Smith, Pam Heinrich, Kim Durland, and Michael Durland

Something is stirring in the South District of SNP. It’s not just the bears coming out of hibernation this spring, but the Flying

McLeods, a trail crew dormant for years, is coming back into action. Kevin Cwalina and Pam Heinrich took the initiative to revive this group, launched the first get-together, and discussed ideas to get the Flying McLeods organized. The meeting was held at Crozet Pizza with Michael and Kim Durland, Kevin Cwalina, Joel Brown, Chuck Troutman, Roger Friend, Ruth Stornetta, Roger Smith, Pam Heinrich, and Mark Perschel attending.

The plan is for workdays every fourth Saturday from April through October. The Flying McLeods are inspired by the successful model of the Hoodlums and Cadillac Crew and will initially focus their efforts on the AT in the Southern District.

To suggest a project for the Flying McLeods, get information, or to join the mailing list, contact Kevin Cwalina ([trails@kevinmadeit.com](mailto:trails@kevinmadeit.com)).

## Hiking with a Focus

Article and Photos by Lisa Peterson

By hiking with a focus individuals become more conscious of their surroundings,



*PATC member Susan Collins examines moss beside the trail*

experience physical and mental growth, and learn about and delight in the beauty of the natural world. A hiking focus could be sensory-based or target a specific goal or theme. The possibilities are many.

Engaging one or more of the senses with intention while immersed in a woodland setting, sometimes known as forest bathing, gives hikers a strong present-moment experience that reduces stress and increases relaxation, and brings about feelings of wellbeing. Setting and reaching a specific fitness goal, such as improving hiking pace or difficulty, boosts hiker confidence and fosters a real sense of accomplishment, in addition to building mental toughness and physical strength.

A series of hikes planned around a featured theme, such as, waterfalls or overlooks, old growth forest, streams and rivers, offers much enjoyment. Hikes to swimming holes are invigorating in the heat of summer. In late fall through early spring when leaves are off the trees, ridge hikes often inspire awe with 270-degree mountaintop views.

Ramblers express creativity through photography, or develop drawing, painting and writing skills through a nature journal, capturing observations of the outdoor world with increased skill, deeply absorbing the journey.

Explorers center hikes on learning and discovery. Hike leader **Susan Collins** has a goal to study moss this year. On a recent Shenandoah River State Park hike, her group made close observation of moss on the side of the trail before beginning to hike. Hikers used the Seek app to make identification. A few minutes of careful study piqued interest and attention, so that hikers noticed more moss and other interesting plants along the route than they might have otherwise.

Another hiker aims to learn at least two or three native wildflower species yearly, using the wildlife calendar published by SNP as an aspirational checklist. This slow and steady approach encourages lifelong learning, improves memory, and makes the process manageable and rewarding.



*Pebbled Pixie Cup lichen (Cladonia pyxidata) growing in Broom Moss (Dicranum scoparium)*

To this end, hike leader **Lisa Peterson** is offering a series of spring wildflower hikes. These are not expert-guided nature walks, but exciting hikes in known wildflower areas to enable observation and deepen appreciation of the glorious bloomers.

Join fellow wildflower enthusiasts on one of these upcoming hikes:

April - Trillium & Wildflowers 5.5 Miles, 1000 feet, Moderate Hike

Walk among the largest stand of Large-flowered Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) in

Virginia at G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area north of Linden. These iconic woodland wildflowers are identified by three large petals, which are white or various shades of rose. A great many other wildflowers growing in this area promise to delight both expert and beginning naturalists.

May - SNP Sugarloaf Blooms 5 Miles, 1120, feet, Moderate Hike

This hike offers a great view and spring flowering bushes in the north district SNP. Floral highlights include Wild Azalea aka Pinxter Flower (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*), the incredibly fragrant Wild Azalea (*R. prinophyllum*) and, blooming a bit later, the pale pink to white flowers of Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*).

For more information and to register for these wildflower focused hikes please visit the [PATC Hikes & Events Meetup page](#). Registration will open a few weeks prior to each hike.

Resources mentioned in this article:

The Seek/iNaturalist app [https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek\\_app](https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app) uses image recognition technology to identify plants and animals using a smartphone camera. Free.

SNP Wildflower

Calendar [https://www.nps.gov/shen/learn/nature/upload/WildflowerCalendar\\_Web.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/shen/learn/nature/upload/WildflowerCalendar_Web.pdf) names the most frequently seen or asked about flowering plants in the park by the month in which they bloom, April through October.



Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*)

## A Cadillac Crew Recalibration - January means Skill-Building

By Molly McKinley, Ellen and Dan Feer



by Ellen Feer: Robert Fina, Dan Feer, Molly McKinley, and Kate Hopper preparing for a litter carry

Lacerations, abrasions, falls, climate threats and medical emergencies, oh my! Safe trail work is much more than schlepping and shoveling.

No surprise, but January work trips do not always go as planned. That doesn't mean they can't be planned. With the depth of talent and generosity of the Cadillac Crew and the AT community in general, amazing events can happen. The

plans for our January 2026 trip began in January 2025 when Scott and Lisa Jenkins agreed to again host the Cadillac Crew at their home, the beautiful Mountain Home Bed and Breakfast outside of Front Royal. The AT runs practically across their front porch in the Mosby District. There is always work to be done in **Jon** and **Katherine Rindt**'s District so planning the trail work is just picking a priority. A creek crossing near Whisky Hollow shelter was the winning priority for our January 2026 trip. As it was going to be January, we also started thinking about contingency plans for bad weather. What kind of event could we plan that would be fun and a good use of everyone's time? The top priority is always trail work, but wielding a mattock isn't the only skill we need. A first aid refresher sounded like a great plan B.



*by Ellen Feer: Molly McKinley, Ellen Shaw, and Brian Napier roll someone onto their side using inline stabilization to protect the neck*

Most of the crew has had first aid training but rarely uses the skills. Moreover, formal first aid classes are often just an introduction with little time spent mastering the skills. There are also considerations unique to trail work that we need to address directly. Several crew members helped design a day of first aid featuring big- and small-group working sessions

focused on first aid kits, CPR, critical decision making, and teamwork. Crew members **Molly McKinley**, **Brian Napier**, **Robert Fina**, and Crew Leaders **Ellen** and **Dan Feer** made sure it would be ready if inclement weather made outside work impossible or inadvisable.

As the January trip got closer it became clear it would be too cold to work outside. You can't sidehill when the ground is frozen solid. Sharp tools and slick footing are a bad combination. Rather, we left our tools stashed for warmer days and instead started off with everyone pulling out a different set of tools, their first aid kits.

Brian and Molly led a group discussion about first aid kit components and how to organize them for different outings. A trauma kit might not be necessary on a day hike but it's a necessity when the crew hits the trail. Everyone made lists of missing items and threw away old medications (which many of us were guilty of harboring among aging bandages). Afterward, breakout sessions included CPR led by Ellen



*Chris Glembocki doing chest compressions*

and Dan and bandaging and splinting led by Molly and Brian. Later we regrouped for Robert to facilitate litter fabrication using backpacks and other creative materials. Most importantly, we workshopped as a group how we navigate wilderness decisions such as letting first responders come to us or bringing an injured crew member to the trailhead.



*by Robert Fina: Paul Fitch, Kate Walker, Molly McKinley, Lor Reardon, Nina Blagrove, Neil Hopper, Tysha Robinson, Brian Napier, Don Oellerich, Steve Phillips, George Jones, Ellen Shaw, Erica Glembocki, Ellen Feer, Dan Feer, and Chris Glembocki are better*

We wrapped up with a mouth-watering pasta bar dinner courtesy of hosts Scott and Lisa. We all left with plenty of time to get home before "Snowcrete" hit, poetically reminding us that nature remains a force deserving our respect on and off the trail.

The Cadillac Crew works from Charlottesville, VA to Mercersburg, PA and from Turkey Run in Virginia to Sleepy Creek in West Virginia.

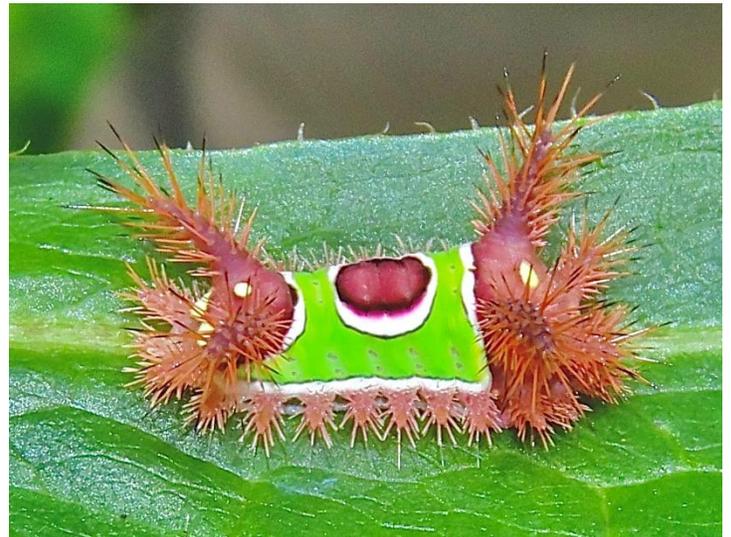
We welcome members of all ages. Contact us at [ccrewpatc@gmail.com](mailto:ccrewpatc@gmail.com) if you'd like an invitation to our trips.

## "What on Earth?"

Ray Barbehenn



*Woolly Bear*



*Saddleback*

Caterpillars, like most insects, have tiny hairs on their bodies to provide them with a sense of touch. Otherwise, their exoskeletons are about as sensitive as a piece of plastic. However, caterpillars that are covered with long hairs, spines, or bristles are likely using them for self-defense. Sometimes these defenses can make them harmful to touch.

The Woolly Bear caterpillar in the left photo taken by Ray Barbehenn (about two inches long) was galloping across the ground in Duke Hollow (northern Virginia near the AT) on October 26, 2025. This is the time of year when they need to find a safe place to hibernate. Note its bands of stiff black and red-brown bristles. Its head is tucked underneath at the left, partially covered with bristles.

The Saddleback caterpillar in the right photo (about three-fourths of an inch long) was found by David Cox in the foothills of the Blue Ridge (Washington, VA) on August 24, 2024. Its head was tucked under the clusters of spines on the right. Notice the bright white and red-brown eyespot in the "saddle" on its back. It has a low, flattened shape compared to the barrel-like shape of a Woolly Bear.

**Which species is dangerous to handle?**

**A. The Woolly Bear.**

**B. The Saddleback.**

**C. Both.**

**D. Neither.**

**The answer is near the bottom of the page!**

### **Fun Facts and Musings**

The annual running of the Woolly Bears in the fall, as they search for a place to overwinter, has attracted a lot of attention. And, it has led to one obvious question: "How do they survive through the winter?" Most adult insects freeze to death in the winter. The insects that make it through the winter are usually at the stage of an egg or a pupa (a bullet-shaped structure with a hard, protective shell). Woolly Bears are able to overwinter as caterpillars because they make glycerol, a chemical that is similar to the antifreeze in cars and trucks! They make this glycerol by breaking down some of their stored fat. Antifreeze chemicals keep large ice crystals from forming and rupturing the animal's cells. Thus, they are able to thaw out again in the spring without damage from being nearly solid.

Woolly Bears are fully grown when they hibernate in the fall, and they turn into pupae and then moths soon after they emerge in the spring. However, a relative of the Woolly Bear, the Arctic Woolly Bear, needs to keep growing after it emerges from hibernation. A wonderful video of this caterpillar can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHzEOrtKA1Q>. It shows how they withstand seven years of arctic winters before they can finally grow large enough to complete their development into moths.

Forecasting winter weather from the appearance of Woolly Bears is on par with forecasting spring weather by looking at a groundhog's shadow. Supposedly, a wider brown band predicts milder weather, but there has been no scientific research to support this idea. The width of the brown band can vary greatly between the Woolly Bears in one area. Though the internet is full of speculations about what causes the variability in Woolly Bear band width, the cause is not the upcoming winter weather.

Woolly Bears and Saddlebacks have warning coloration – bold colors that are meant to get the attention of would-be predators. It is the opposite of camouflage. Naive predators quickly learn to avoid these caterpillars if they get a mouth full of spines or a painful jolt of poison. Sometimes humans are the naive ones; some toddlers who have tried to swallow Woolly Bears have ended up in the Emergency Room with badly irritated throats! Thus,

although Woolly Bears do not sting, their bristles do come off if they are handled roughly. It is not yet known whether Woolly Bears are also defended by toxins that they absorb from some of their food plants. Some of their close relatives (also called "Woolly Bears") do contain toxins from their food plants, and it seems likely that Woolly Bear caterpillars would have toxic defenses to back up their colorful warnings.

A covering of hairs or spines around a caterpillar can be a good defense against predatory or parasitic insects, such as wasps. Yellowjackets and hornets need to be able to get at the surface of a caterpillar to kill it, and parasitic wasps need to land on a caterpillar to lay their eggs inside it. A caterpillar's hairs or bristles can serve as an early warning system: If a wasp touches them, it alarms the caterpillar, causing it to either curl up in a defensive ball or wriggle away violently and escape. Interestingly, though the spines of Saddlebacks are venomous, they do not defend against parasitic wasps as well as a full coat of bristles. Small female parasitic wasps are able to land on the exposed backs of Saddlebacks to inject their eggs. The parasitized Saddlebacks are eaten from the inside by the wasp larvae.

The unpleasant way to find a Saddleback caterpillar is to brush up against one on a leaf. I would compare its sting to that of a wasp, but it will vary with the amount of contact that you have with the caterpillar (the venom dose). Like wasp and bee venom, Saddleback venom evolved to cause pain. (More pain means better survival.) Similarly, your response to the sting can vary from rash-like bumps at the point of contact, to more severe reactions for sensitive or allergic individuals. Some of the more severe symptoms include weakness, nausea and dizziness.

Both Woolly Bear and Saddleback caterpillars can eat a huge range of plant species, including both trees and non-woody plants. Woolly Bear caterpillars prefer to stay on the ground, eating virtually any kind of plant that they run into. Caterpillars usually stay put on one plant for days, if not for their entire lives as caterpillars. The way Woolly Bears move around and graze like little goats is truly remarkable. Saddleback caterpillars prefer to stay in trees and shrubs and are relatively sedentary (normal).

Saddlebacks are also known as "slug" caterpillars. Their flattened bodies and short legs give them an unusually low position. They appear to glide along a leaf surface like a slug. However, they do not secrete mucus and move like a real slug, as is sometimes stated. Instead, Saddlebacks move with a wave-like series of contractions of their body segments from back to front, just like most other caterpillars. See a great video of Saddlebacks crawling [here](#). Also, notice how they continuously lay down a strand of silk as they move their heads from side to side. This is also normal caterpillar behavior. If they were blown off a leaf, they could hang from this thread.

**Answer: B!**

Take another look at the spines on the Saddleback. They taper down to sharp black points. In the insect world, structures that are black have typically been hardened. These are not like Woolly Bear bristles; they are meant to penetrate and inflict serious pain. Indeed, the tips of their spines have a weak spot so that they snap off easily, releasing greater amounts of venom and pain in their would-be predators.

Most hairy or bristly caterpillars are safe to handle gently; there are very few species that I would not allow to crawl on my hands. The hairs and bristles of caterpillars do not normally come off and impale your skin if they are just crawling around. If they did, they would get worn off during their daily lives, and they could not grow new ones. However, I have been stung by Saddlebacks, and suggest that any contact with them should be avoided.

**Send your photos and ideas for topics to Ray at [rvb@umich.edu](mailto:rvb@umich.edu). Does anyone have a good photo of a Blue Jay, a Crow or a Raven?**

**What's that Flower—Buzzard Rock to Veach Gap in Late Spring**

Article and Photos by Richard Stromberg



*Deerberry flowers*

This article shows you some of the flowers to look for in late spring (mid-April through May) on the [Buzzard Rock to Veach Gap hike](#) described in the February 2026 issue of the Potomac Appalachian.

**Plantain-leaved Pussytoes** (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*) have fluffy, white flower heads atop straight stems up to a foot tall. It is dioecious, which means each plant has unisexual flowers with staminate (male) and pistillate (female) flowers on separate plants. The sexes tend to grow in separate clumps. The male flower head can be up to an inch across and consists of many, tiny, tubular, white flowers with yellow/brown, clumped stamens protruding from the middle of each flower. The female flower head is much narrower and most of what you see are hairs that will eventually help the seeds disperse in the wind. Plantain-leaved Pussytoes has wide basal leaves (greater than 1.5 centimeters) with multiple veins. These big leaves often lie on the ground. The whole plant is woolly, making the green of the leaves look very pale.

Huckleberries are the genus *Gaylussacia* and Blueberries are *Vaccinium*. Huckleberry twigs are generally brown, while Blueberries twigs are green. Huckleberry seeds have a hard covering, so, when you eat a Huckleberry, you detect the seeds like little bits of grit. You do not notice the seeds in a Blueberry. Both genera are shrubs. The petals of most of the species are joined and contracted near the mouth where five points flare out. The flowers vary from red to pink to white. **Deerberry** (*Vaccinium stamineum*) is an exception. Its white flowers dangle like other species but are wide open with protruding stamens. Deerberries fruits are larger than the non-cultivated Blueberries and stay green and are not edible. **Black Huckleberry** (*Gaylussacia baccata*) is the only common Huckleberry in our area.



*Black Huckleberry*

**Northern Lowbush Blueberry** (*V. angustifolium*) and **Early Lowbush Blueberry** (*V. pallidum*) are the common Blueberry species.

**Maleberry** (*Lyonia ligustrina*) bushes also look like Blueberry bushes. The white flowers are similar too, though they are more globe-like. The fruit is hard and brown.

Rock Cresses (*Boechera* genus) have small, four-petal, white flowers (less than quarter inch). They are tubular, flaring at the tips. **Smooth Rock Cress** (*Boechera laevigata*) has a smooth stem with entire or slightly toothed leaves that clasp the stem. The long, narrow



*Rattlesnake Weed*

fruits are flattened and tend to point upward. **Sicklepod** (*B. canadensis*) may be smooth or hairy at the base. The stem leaves narrow at both ends and may be slightly toothed. The long, flattened fruits curve down like a sickle.

**Rattlesnake Weed** (*Hieracium venosum*) has green leaves with a pattern of large, dark red veins that you will notice even when there are no flowers. The flower head looks like a small Dandelion hoisted up in the air by a stem up to a meter tall.

**Solomon's Seal** (*Polygonatum biflorum*) plants have a single erect or arching stem with several ovate leaves alternating along the stem. The leaves have no stem and have distinct, parallel veins.

Flower clusters hang down from the leaf axils, so you must look under the plant to see them. They are shaped like elongated bells with six pointed lobes at the tip. They are greenish white or tinged yellow.

**False Solomon's Seal** aka **Solomon's Plume** (*Maianthemum racemosum*) plants are like Solomon's Seal, but the flower clusters grow at the end of the stem. The flower cluster is branched and pyramidal. The individual flowers have six tepals but are only about an eighth of an inch across. (When petals and sepals look alike, they are called tepals.)

A **Dwarf Dandelion** (*Krigia virginica*) may be taller than a Dandelion, but the flower heads and leaves are smaller and the stems are spindly. Each Dwarf Dandelion plant has many stems, so it looks like a forest compared to the separate or single stems of

Dandelion. Each leafless stem has only one flower head. Like a dandelion the flower head has only ray flowers and is yellow.

**Black Cherry** (*Prunus. serotina*) and **Choke Cherry** (*P. virginiana*) have long racemes of 20 flowers or more. Each flower is ½-inch or less with numerous stamens filling the center of the flower and five round petals completely separated from each other and narrowing to a claw that attaches to the center of the flower underneath the stamens. Black Cherry is a tree up to 100 feet tall. Its leaves are shiny and the teeth on the edges of the leaves are curved. The bark on larger trunks is broken up into scaly platelets. Choke Cherry is a shrub up to twenty feet tall. Its leaves are dull and wider than black cherry and the teeth point straight out from the leaf.



*Black Cherry*

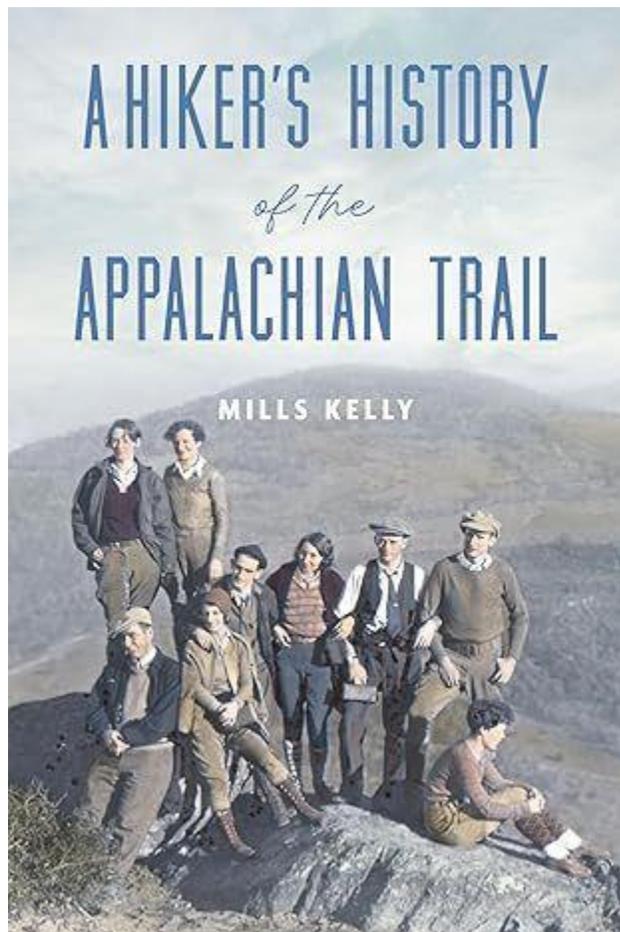
**Venus' Looking-glass** (*Triodanis perfoliata*), has starry purple/blue flowers. Its leaves are small and round and clasp the stem, forming a little cup, and the flowers sprout out of axils of these leaves. The plant is usually about 12 inches tall.

**New Jersey Tea** (*Ceanothus americanus*) is a small (up to 42 inches) shrub. It has alternate, simple, toothed leaves. Cylindrical clusters of tiny white flowers grow from axils at the top of the shrub. Pollinated flowers develop into small black fruits.

**Goat's Rue** (*Tephrosia virginiana*) have typical pea flowers. The upright banner of the one-half to three-quarter-inch flower is white to light yellow, forming a background to the bright pink joined petals called a keel. One or more flowers appear among the leaves at the end of branches. The leaves are pinnate (resembling a feather with leaflets on opposite sides of an elongated axis).

## Keep Calm and Read On: An AT Birthday Gift

By Wayne Limberg



Thanks to Dan Hippe, SNP North District Hoodlum and Ridgerunner coordinator, for recommending Mills Kelly's new "A Hikers History of the Appalachian Trail." Kelly is professor emeritus of history at George Mason University and no stranger to PATC. Along with serving as the club's volunteer archivist, he maintains the Manassas Gap shelter on the AT and is on the board of the AT Museum. His 50-episode podcast on the AT, "The Green Tunnel," helped many a homebound hiker maintain their sanity during the pandemic. It is still available online.

"A Hikers History of the Appalachian Trail" comes as the AT turn 100 and follows closely on the heels of Kelly's "Virginia's Lost Appalachian Trail," which appeared in 2023 and deals with the trail's relocation in southern Virginia in 1952. Kelly began writing "A Hikers History of the Appalachian

Trail" in 2016. For some time, he had believed that most books on the AT with their focus on the trail's founders and builders, while valuable, neglected an important AT population-- hikers. He was especially interested in non-thru hikers whose books abound. While he includes an entire chapter on thru-hikers, his main goal in writing "A Hikers History of the Appalachian Trail," was to tell the story of the AT from the bottom up and focus on the hikers that Benton MacKaye had in mind when he proposed the trail's creation and actually are the majority of hikers on the AT: urban dwellers looking for a few hours or days in nature as an escape from the hurly burly of daily life.

Kelly himself grew up in the suburbs of Northern Virginia. His first AT experience was in the summer of 1971 with the Boy Scouts. It was a disaster on many levels. But he loved it. A year later, Ed Garvey, author of "Appalachian Hiker: Adventure of a Lifetime," spoke to his Boy Scout troop, and Kelly was hooked.

The main sources for "A Hikers History of the Appalachian Trail" were AT shelter logs, contemporary newspaper accounts and ads, and interviews. The book has a short but useful bibliography in the form of a future reading list. Kelly also references sources in the text. Readers are spared footnotes, and Kelly's style is conversational. His chapter on forest bathing and the appeal of nature borders on the lyrical. He includes a raft of contemporary photos, drawings, and advertisements dating back to the AT's creation in the 1920s.

Throughout the book, Kelly tries to strike a balance between readers new to the AT and those with a range of experience on the trail. Thus, despite his promise to look at the trail from the bottom up, he opens with a short chapter on the history of hiking in the US, the birth of the AT, and the trail's construction and use in its early pre-WWII days. Much of this will be familiar to those who have read works like Philip D'Anieri's "The Appalachian Trail: A Biography," which Kelly includes in his suggested reading list. The chapters are a good introduction to both the trail and book, especially if paired with D'Anieri's. The cast of characters in these chapters includes Emerson, Thoreau and of course MacKaye and Myron Avery as well as organizations like the Appalachian Mountain Club, Sierra Club, and AT Conservancy. Kelly notes that current day hikers would hardly recognize the AT in its early years. A good deal of the trail was a patchwork of old farm and logging roads and footpaths. It was also not as generally wild as the current trail. Outside of New England, shelters or huts were rare. Hikers often hiked from one village to another and depended on the generosity of the locals for food and lodging and other early manifestations of trail magic. Organized group hikes tended to be the rule. For those who ventured out alone, hours even days could pass without seeing others. Thru hikers had yet to appear.

More experienced hikers will find later chapters to be trips down memory lane. In the one on gear, Kelly traces the evolution of packs from Trapper Nelsons to Kelty, Jansport and ultra-lite and the introduction of Vibram soled boots. The chapter on food is particularly fun because of its inclusion of grub lists from the 1920s and 1950 and ads for delicacies like Knorr's Erbswurst and Dri-Lite.

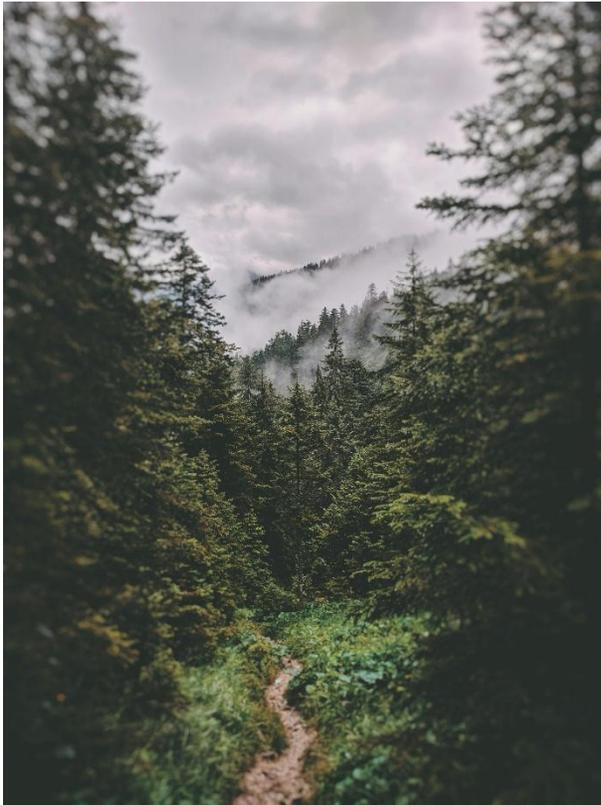
Some may quibble with Kelly's choices. When discussing outfitters, he includes LL Bean and even Duluth Trading Co. but makes no mention of REI, nor is there mention of Colin Fletcher's classic "The Complete Walker." Some of these omissions may be the result of Kelly's reliance on the hiker entries in the shelter log books. In any case, he deserves high marks for a chapter on the AT's history as a "bastion of whiteness." Kelly also includes a chapter on shelters complete with a copy of the original 1938 plans for one but provides few details on trail maintenance beyond noting that it has fallen mainly to the various

regional clubs that make up the ATC. This could be a good sign. We might get another book. We can always hope.

Have you come across a good read? If so, send it along to [wplimberg@aol.com](mailto:wplimberg@aol.com). Meanwhile, keep reading and hiking. See you on the trail.

## Practicing Mindfulness on the Trail

By Meg Drennan



Step by step, often through snow and frigid temperatures, a band of Buddhist monks recently completed their ‘[Walk for Peace](#)’ from Fort Worth, TX to Washington, D.C. On the final day of their 2,300 mile journey, they held ceremonies at the Lincoln Memorial and the National Cathedral, where the Venerable Bhikkhu Paññākāra spoke about mindfulness as the ‘key to peace.’

“All you need to do is just practice mindfulness to unlock that box where you have kept peace and happiness inside ... Now it's your job. It's your duty, to find it, and unlock it. You're the only one who can do this,” he said. But how do we start?

First, by unpacking the concept of mindfulness. “Mindfulness is the basic

human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us,” explains Barry Boyce, founding editor of [Mindful Magazine](#).

The concept also refers to cultivating the ability or skills to be mindful, such as through meditation or mindful movement. If this appeals to you, then here are a few tips to get started when you hit the trail this spring.

**Tune into your breath:** Pausing to pay close attention to your breathing will help orient your mind and thinking to the present moment and your current surroundings. In their book [Hiking Zen: Train Your Mind in Nature](#) [Pháp Lưu](#) and [Phap Xa](#) describe the ancient practice of walking meditation, which is part of daily life at [Plum Village](#), the Buddhist monastery and mindfulness practice center founded by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh in France.

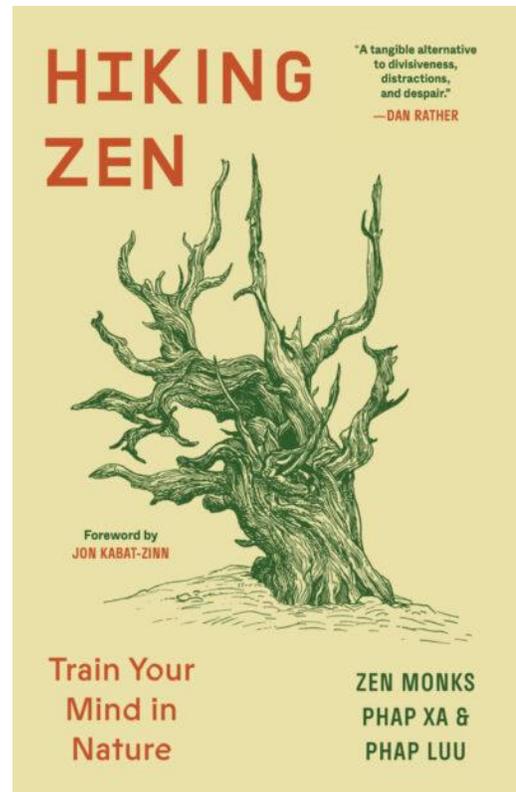
“As monks, we take mindful steps. We go slowly. We keep our mind 100% on breath and steps. We let go of past worries, future worries. We keep in the present. It brings healing. If our mind races, we can calmly bring it back.”

They recount leading seven-week backpacking retreats, starting from the [Blue Cliff Monastery](#) in the Catskills and wending their way south through the PATC region. Every moment on the trail, they believe, is an opportunity to practice mindfulness. “Stand on the earth, feel the ground under your feet. Put your hands on the belly, feel it rising and falling. Walk slowly to start. Take one breath with each step. Breathe in, step with your left foot. Breathe out, step with your right foot.”

As you progress, you can add steps as you inhale and exhale. Find a pace, rhythm that helps you to link your breath and steps together. Rather than counting, you might say a simple mantra. Think about what would motivate you or calm your mind. [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) suggested, “As we walk, we can say: Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I bring peace into my body.”

**Let go of the destination:** For many of us, walking is a means to an end - to do errands, to get to our cars. But, the Zen monks observe, “If we only focus on destination, then we miss wonders around us. Walk without somewhere to go.”

Give it a shot. Try not to have a fixed goal in mind when you set out. Rather, reconsider why you’re on the trail. Is it just to complete a five-mile hike or summit a particular mountain? Letting go of a fixed destination will allow you the freedom to experience walking in a different, more mindful way. You may still reach that physical goal, but the experience of



getting there will be different. As Ralph Waldo Emerson counseled, “It’s not the destination, it’s the journey.”

**Boost your senses:** To fully engage with your surroundings, try activating all five senses using the simple 5-4-3-2-1 technique. It’s a fun way to engage young hikers as well. Here’s how it works. Stop your hike, look around, and answer these five questions out loud. What are: Five things you see? Four things you hear? Three things you smell? Two things you feel? One thing you taste?

Activating all your senses collectively and intentionally will ground you in the moment and heighten your awareness and appreciation of your immediate environment. It’s also an easy, quick way to stimulate your brain and create new memories.

**Re-think your phone:** Before hitting the trail, reflect on how the phone fits into your hike. Do you really need to bring it along? If so, then consider these options. Put the phone in airplane mode to minimize distractions and use a paper map to navigate.

Finally, [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) advises, “Don’t forget to practice smiling. Your half-smile will bring calm and delight to your steps and your breath and help sustain your attention.”

## **Help Wanted for February**

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

District Manager ~ SNP South Blue-blaze [Map 11]

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

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)

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)

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, [bussurdukowski@gmail.com](mailto:bussurdukowski@gmail.com)

**New District Manager Needed~ SNP South Blue-blaze [Map 11]**

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 ~ Larrick 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 (Shockeyville 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]