

# **Appalachian Footnotes**

**Delaware Valley Chapter • Appalachian Mountain Club  
Fall 2021 • Volume 59 • Number 4**

**Ghost Town Trail  
Biography of the AT  
Ridgerunner tales  
Carry my pack?  
Plastic bags  
August Camp 2021**





# Appalachian Footnotes

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Delaware Valley Chapter  
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Chair	Bill De Stefano	dvchair@amcdv.org 267-640-6244
Vice Chair	Karla Geissler	vicechair@.
Secretary	Midori Wakabayashi	secretary@amcdv.org
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Bicycling	Robert Liston	bicycling@amcdv.org 908-313-9058
Communication	Eric Pavlak	communication@amcdv.org 610-650-8926
Conservation	Adrian Noble	conservation@amcdv.org 215-284-5222
Diversity	Janet Penner	dei@amcdv.org
Family Activities	Annette Sheldon	family@amcdv.org 609-587-0873
Hiking	Blase Hartman	hiking@amcdv.org
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Paddling	Eric Pavlak	paddling@amcdv.org 610-650-8926
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L. Smith Shelter	Patricia Sacks	shelter@amcdv.org 610-437-3227
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20s-30s Members	Katie Martens Kristen Falzon	20-30@amcdv.org
Lehigh Valley	Phill Hunsberger	lehigh-valley@amcdv.org 610-759-7067
Ombudsman	Allen Male	ombudsman@amcdv.org

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Amy Williams, Membership Chair  
[membership@amcdv.org](mailto:membership@amcdv.org)

Lehigh Valley area: Phill Hunsberger,  
610-759-7067, [lehigh-valley@amcdv.org](mailto:lehigh-valley@amcdv.org)

### AMC Information Sources:

Delaware Valley Chapter Website: [amcdv.org](http://amcdv.org)

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**Our cover:** Steve Leibrock photographed a bicycle ride on the Delaware Canal towpath with the leaves in full color.

Editor: Eric Pavlak  
Box 542, Oaks, PA 19456  
610-650-8926 e-mail: [newsletter@amcdv.org](mailto:newsletter@amcdv.org)  
Others editors who worked on this issue:  
Lennie Steinmetz and Susan Weida.

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## Bicycling through History in Western Pennsylvania

Story by Susan Weida

Photos by Theresa Berntsen and Joanne McDonald.

In July of this year, a small group of AMC friends traveled to do an exploratory trip to bicycle the Ghost Town Trail and the Hoodlebug Trail in Indiana County, just north of Johnstown, PA. This article is a bit of a tribute to an area of western PA that, despite being a resident most of my life and a student at Penn State, I never fully appreciated until the last few years.

Since tourism is an industry, this beautiful area is promoting tourism to improve economic development. I hope others will give this area a try for your outdoor pursuits.

The Ghost Town Trail and its branches provide 46 miles of beautiful trail walking or biking on the former Ebensburg and Blacklick Railroad track, following the course of the Blacklick Creek. The Hoodlebug Trail is a 12-mile trail that intersects the Ghost Town Trail at Saylor Park in Blacklick. More on this trail later in the article.

The Ghost Town Trail is designated as a National Recreation Trail by the federal government and was named Pennsylvania's Trail of the Year in 2020. The trail is named for the eight coal mining ghost towns that its route follows.

The Ghost Town Trail has an excellent website with information needed for riding the trail and enjoying the rich history of the area:

[www.indianacountyparks.org/trails/ghosttown\\_trail.aspx](http://www.indianacountyparks.org/trails/ghosttown_trail.aspx)

From the guide, I have quoted Charles Hasson writing in the 1904 Johnstown Weekly Tribune.

"Few people who have not been in the Blacklick Valley recently would be able to recognize the wilderness it was a few years ago. Prior to 1893, when the Pennsylvania Railroad Company extended the Ebensburg and Cresson branch to Vintondale, the country which the road traverses was wild mountain land. No effort had been made to till the soil along the Blacklick and miles on miles could be traveled without seeing a single habitation."

Hasson goes on to extol the progress of economic development in the Blacklick Valley created by the lumbering and coal industry, the products the rail lines were built to transport. As we know today when those resources have been taken from the land without attention to sustainability, business moves on and the land, the people, and their hopes for the future are left behind.

So it was for the Blacklick Valley. After the lumber and coal were depleted, business left, as well as many of the people, abandoning the towns on the railroad line.

The Great Flood of 1977 and the destruction of bridges

and the rail lines were major factors in the railroad's decision to terminate operations in the valley. The abandonment by the railroad ultimately made way for the development of the Ghost Town Trail.

Those remaining had few economic opportunities and the Blacklick Creek was left polluted by the coal mines. The Blacklick Creek was labeled one of the most profoundly polluted streams in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Today the Webster Discharge Project, a passive stream treatment project is visible from the trail with trail makers explaining how it is changing stream health. A 2020 article in Pennsylvania Angler and Boater expresses optimism that with the current clean-up project the Blacklick Creek will become a "very viable fishery in the near future."

The Ghost Town Trail was originally established in 1991 when the Kowalchick Salvage Company donated 16 miles of the former Ebensburg and Blacklick Railroad to Indiana County.

Additional land donations brought the trail total length including branch trails to 46 miles. The trail is surrounded by steep wooded hills and only has short sections that pass

continued on the next page







### **Ghost Town Trail** continued from previous page

close to small towns. The fine crushed gravel surface of the trail is well maintained and provides an excellent ride for hybrid bicycles.

Our group decided to ride the 32 miles of the main trail from west to east as there is a 1000 foot elevation gain from Saylor Park in the west to Ebensburg in the east. We spotted cars in Saylor Park and then returned to begin our ride in Ebensburg.

It was a beautiful and pleasant ride and we made many stops to read the historical markers at the three remaining old iron forges, the site of the Wehrum mine disaster of 1909



when 21 miners died, and the mine workers' memorials.

Trailside gardens and frequent bathrooms in small towns added to the welcoming nature of the trail. You get truly away from it all when riding through the Blacklick Natural Area.

We had decided to also do an out and back ride on the Hoodlebug Trail for Day 2. Hoodlebug was the local nick-

name for a self-propelled passenger coach that ran on the line until 1940. Although this trail was not as popular with the group since it had a steady uphill course next to a busy highway for the first few miles, it also had some small-town charms and other friendly riders. The trail's northern terminus in Indiana, PA, passes through the Indiana University of Pennsylvania campus before ending in a pretty downtown area where you can tour the Jimmy Stewart Museum in his hometown.

The other thing not to miss during a visit to this area are sites related to the story of coal and economic development in the area. The Allegheny Portage National Historic site tells the story of an impressive pulley system that brought canal boat cargo over the high mountains. The always impressive Horseshoe Curve National Historic site allows you to see an engineering marvel that continues to transport container cargo and passengers through the mountains today.

The compelling Johnstown Flood National Historic site further illustrates the complicated relationship people had with the geography of this rugged area.

Many other highly rated rail trails are being developed in this part of Pennsylvania, notably the Allegheny River Trail, Redbank Valley Rail Trail, Armstrong Trail, Oil Creek Park Rail Trail, and the Clarion-Little Toby Trail, and the famous Great Allegheny Passage.

I hope you journey to western Pennsylvania to enjoy some of these great trails, beautiful mountains and give a boost to the growing tourism economy in these small towns.





# The Appalachian Trail: A Biography

By AvaiPhilip D'Anieri, author's website: <https://www.atbiography.com/>

Available online and at many booksellers

Book review by Kathy Kelly-Borowski

I have read many books on the Appalachian Trail, but this book is different: it's a biography on the famous trail. Unlike other books I've read, this one depicts how the Appalachian Trail came to be. It describes the people who had the vision and made the effort to create the AT. Chapters illuminate the backstories of crucial players in the creation and protection of the trail.

Arnold Guyot is the subject of the first chapter. Guyot was a Swiss-American geologist and geographer. In 1861 he published an article *On the Appalachian Mountain System*. The second person presented is Horace Kephart, an American travel writer and librarian who lived in NC in an area that became the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Kephart wrote articles for *Field and Stream*.

Later the articles were used in his first book, *Camping and Woodcraft*, "an encyclopedic treatment of back woods technique" which portrayed outdoor life as a kind of spiritual practice.

D'Anieri talks about James P. Taylor, the founder of the Green Mountain Club, and the construction of The Long Trail between 1910 and 1930 by the Green Mountain Club. The LT is the oldest long-distance trail in the United States, running 273 miles through Vermont.

The LT provided "a model for — and a lengthy section of — the Appalachian Trail that would follow about a decade later. In 1989, while backpacking the AT, I completed a section of the Long Trail, then returned in 1990 to complete the LT, backpacking to the Canadian border.

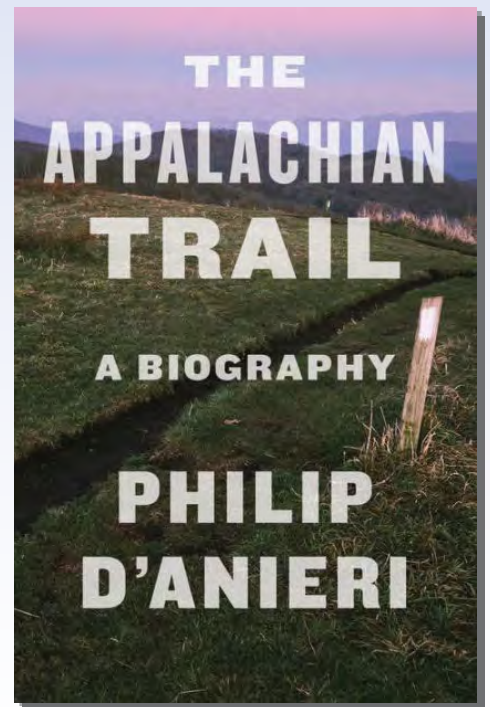
This brings us to the creation of the Appalachian Trail. Benton MacKaye is best known as the originator of the Appalachian Trail, an idea he presented in his 1921 article, *An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning*. Next, we meet the person most responsible for building the Appalachian Trail in the 1930s and a defender of the Trail, Myron Avery.

Now that the trail is created, we learn about a couple of thru-hikers. Earl Shaffer became the first person to claim he hiked the entire length of the Appalachian Trail in a single season in 1948. Emma Gatewood became famous as the first solo female thru-hiker of the AT in 1955 at the age of 67. She later became the first person to hike the AT three times by completing a second thru-hike in 1957 and a section-hike in 1964. (See Summer 2021 issue of *Footnotes* for a review of "Grandma Gatewood's Walk").

Gaylord Nelson, an American politician and environmentalist from Wisconsin who served as a United States Senator and governor, is the subject of Chapter 7. Nelson was a leading figure in the fight against environmental degradation and the founder of Earth Day.

D'Anieri moves on to the protection of the trail in the chapter "The National Park" with this cast of characters: Dave Richie, Pam Underhill and Dave Startzell. Dave Richie worked for the National Park Service and negotiated with private landowners to secure the path of the AT. Dave hiked the trail in sections. I actually met Dave in 1984 at a trail shelter in Pennsylvania while backpacking with a friend. Pam Underhill was employed by the National Park Service in the land acquisition office. She worked with Richie and continued to protect the AT after he retired. Dave Startzell was the executive director of the Appalachian Trail Conference and worked closely with Richie and Underhill, forming the relationship essential in creating the AT we know today.

Bill Bryson, author of *A Walk in the Woods*, is mentioned for bringing notoriety to the trail. D'Anieri states, "Bryson's is, by orders of magnitude, the most-read book about the Appalachian Trail. For many people it is almost synonymous with the trail itself, the instant association they make when the AT is mentioned."



*"Philip D'Anieri's tour de force fills a gap in Appalachian Trail literature that we didn't even know was there. By stringing together historical narratives so as to explore the trail's family tree, he constructs the AT as a living entity worthy of its own biography. This book should appeal as much to history buffs as it does to trail crew, thru-hikers and other AT devotees."*

Donald Kroodsmas, author of  
*Nature Beyond Solitude*

*"For those of us who live with wild places of the American East, the AT is more than a line on a map—as this book makes clear, its jagged path is the EKG of our heart's desires. And if you've read A Walk in the Woods, this volume is worth it for the depiction of Bill Bryson alone!"*

Bill McKibben, author of  
*Wandering Home*

# You Can't Make This Stuff Up: Ridgerunning on the AT

By S Matt Read, Ridgerunner

This is my second season as the Northeast Pennsylvania Ridgerunner covering a fairly rocky 41.5 miles, just south of the New Jersey-Pennsylvania border. I'm the eyes and ears on the AT for five local trail clubs - Allentown Hiking Club (which maintains one shelter in my section), AMC Delaware Valley, Batona Hiking Club, Keystone Trails Association, and Wilmington Trail Club.

Ridgerunning, with its predictable trash, blowdowns, and trail trials, can sometimes be a repetitive affair, so during this past season I've tried my best to spice things up.

For starters, in every single one of my weekly reports, everyone's first name is Team. If I work with Bill and Dan, I'll write, "I met up with Team Bill and Team Dan."

This is very entertaining to me. Team Dan even asked me one time, "Why do you always put Team in front of everyone's names?"

While I maintain that it's an effective strategy to engage readers by presenting the information a little differently, mainly I just find it hilarious.

Here's a favorite passage that came out of one report on July 14 during which I was doing a patrol with a member of the Batona Hiking Club:

We started south [from Fox Gap]. When we reached Wolf Rocks, there was a downed tree across some of the rocks. Team Doug didn't like this and started to move it. However, it had rained the night before. Very dangerous. Immediately Team Doug was slipping this way and that. I joined in after a bit, and then it was my turn to slip and slide while moving the tree. We finally got it off trail without killing ourselves. Team Doug was satisfied.

Team Doug has actually been a great sport about my style of reporting. On a separate patrol, we were trading stories as we hiked, and he told me that his nine-year-old grandson had started giving him pretty good haircuts. A couple of miles later, he was picked up by his daughter and her two boys.

I reported it like this: "Team Doug and I hiked into Wind Gap where he was met by his daughter, his grandson, and his barber. You can't make this stuff up!"

A few days later, I called Team Doug to see what he was doing, and he said he was just watching TV with his barber.

Aside from my reports, I also maintain an Instagram account (@smattathias) with pictures of my time on the trail. I highlight the job, the hikers, the problems, and little things of beauty along the way. I spent half of the season posting pictures in black and white, much to the outrage of my color-loving fans. But like Dorothy stepping through the door into Oz, I switched to color at the halfway mark.

In looking back, you can see how there's no convenient way to sum up the experience visually. There are shots of nature, people, vistas, and blazes. I posted before-and-after pics of clearing a blowdown, in-action shots of carrying out trash, hiking out some of the bigger items on my head and wildlife of all sizes. I tried to convey some sense of the job and the experiences I had.

Lastly, I've been processing the entire summer season by drawing comics and posting them on Instagram alongside my photos. My wife is a cartoonist, and she challenged me to keep up daily comics throughout my time on the trail. I am only just barely able to do this task, mostly with stick figures, but it's a wonderful way to reflect on my experiences and record some of the smaller moments that make up both the job and culture of the trail.

As a former thru-hiker (Rubberband Man, GA>ME '03), it's been my pleasure to work two ridgerunning seasons. I've seen this time as an opportunity to put into the AT what I took out so many years ago. I stand in awe of you all who have volunteered ten, twenty, thirty, even forty years toward this incredible American trail. It's been my honor to make you laugh, to surprise you with some small observation, and to work along the stretch of trail you've cared for so many years. I thank you for your service and for allowing me to do the same.

Until next we meet, happy trails.



*The suitcase is trail trash, and is full of trail trash. Matt hiked it out five miles and knew that it would be most comfortable carrying it on his head, rather than at his side.*







## Will you carry my pack?

Imagine you are hiking down a beautiful section of trail paralleling a rock strewn run through one of Pennsylvania's or New Jersey's forests and you come upon another hiker traveling in the same direction, but at a slower pace than you. After exchanging some trail pleasantries, the other hiker says to you:

"Would you mind carrying my pack for me?"

"What did you say?" you reply.

"I asked if you would carry my pack for me for the next few miles."

"Why? Are you hurt or not feeling well?"

"No. I'm fine. It's just that it would be easier and more enjoyable for me to hike if someone else were to carry my pack and I didn't need to carry that weight."

"Hmm..."

Although this scenario may seem absurd, it is basically what hikers, whether seasoned backpackers or new to the footpath experience, who never do trail maintenance, are asking of others in the hiking community who are involved in doing volunteer trail work.

These volunteers give of their own time and labor to help keep our region's hiking trails open and accessible to everyone. If you hike, but are not a trail care volunteer, then you are not, in essence, carrying your own weight.

Plus, you are denying yourself the extraordinary satisfaction that comes from giving back to the trails that you enjoy hiking. Helping maintain trails with AMC-DV is a way to become part of the movement that will carry the passion for foot trails forward. Who else do you expect to carry that weight? — Greg Bernet, DV Trails Chair

*If working on trails is not right for you, please volunteer for something else! Contact Volunteer Coordinator Deane Bartlett at [volunteer@amcdv.org](mailto:volunteer@amcdv.org).*

## Plastic bag ban is long overdue!

*It flies through the air with the greatest of ease.*

*As it rolls and tumbles for miles and miles.*

*Through parking lots, along beaches and yards.*

*Before finally coming to rest stuck in a fence or under a bush.*

But help is on the way because the New Jersey Plastic Bag Ban is coming to a store near you in 2022.

Governor Phil Murphy signed a new law on November 4, 2020, banning businesses from handing out single-use plastic and paper bags along with polystyrene food containers. These new rules become effective in May, 2022.

And beginning in November of this year, the same law also restricts food-service businesses from giving out plastic straws unless specifically requested by a customer. Paper bags were included because they take more energy to make and thus produce more greenhouse gases.

This bill is seen as the strictest stance against single-use plastics in the nation. The ban applies to a variety of businesses, including restaurants, convenience stores, food trucks, movie theaters, and grocery stores that are 2,500 square feet or larger. Businesses that break these rules will receive a warning for the first violation, a \$1,000 fine for the second and \$5,000 fines for the third and every violation after that. All fines collected would go to the Clean Communities Program Fund, which pays for litter clean-up grants across New Jersey.



To help adjust to life without plastic grocery bags, the law allocates \$500,000 each year for three years to fund a public education campaign, and to hand-out free reusable bags.

There are exemptions to the rules for some disposable items including: bags wrapping raw meat, polystyrene butcher trays, bags used for loose items like produce, bags that hold fish and insects from pet stores, dry cleaning bags, newspaper bags and bags carrying prescription drugs.

The environmental impact of plastic bags is that they take many years to degrade in a landfill and as they do slowly release toxic chemicals. Also, not to mention that animals eat them and often choke and die.

Change is never easy or convenient but in this case very necessary for the environment. And if you're like me and tired of picking up plastic bags from around your yard, this ban is long overdue. — Richard Puglisi





# August Camp 2021

Story by Agnes Sablow, with ideas from Linda Kelle

I was smitten. Maine holds a special edge of magic and adventure, especially the northern stretch of the final terminus of the Appalachian Trail. August Camp 2021 provided me with a glimpse of the famed 100 Mile Wilderness.

From the very first shy yet excited hello and million-watt smile of the welcoming volunteer committee to the cleverly placed humorous art in the communal bathrooms, I knew I was in good company.

I am in love with Little Lyford, Moosehead Lakes, and especially my camp-mates. I came away with a warm fuzzy feeling after a week of hiking, swimming, paddling, singing, sharing stories, pampering with gourmet camp food and catching up on beauty rest.

The more I got acquainted with fellow hikers, the more I was encouraged and refreshed in ways to venture and enjoy nature. The humor and experiences shared on the trails, uring happy hours and around the campfire were simply priceless.

## It was magical

The beautiful and varied terrain in the Maine Woods offered endless day-hiking opportunities. We traversed the old rugged Maine and new ridge-line trails, watched bald eagles on mountain tops, lunched by waterfalls, swam in water holes in the afternoon and morning with sunrise, paddled in fresh spring water ponds, and enjoyed all kinds of outdoor activities.

I was in awe of the bucolic splendor of Maine and honored to hike the registered natural landmarks of the USA — the slate canyon of Gulf Hags — despite some damp and humid summer days. We were entertained on every trail with sightings of mass varieties of mushrooms, trees, bird songs, fish, and animals, including the elusive moose.

## 75,000 Acres forest and water

"Maine is the last intact stronghold for native brook trout and Atlantic salmon," said AMC Land Management Director Steve Tatko, a handsome Maine native and certified forester with a legal background.

He offered two half-day tours demonstrating the forestry and fish conservation efforts by AMC and locals since 2003, funded by the AMC membership,

*continued on next page*

*Agnes Sablow took the photos on this page.*





# August Camp 2021

Agnes Sablow photo

*continued from previous page*

taxpayers, and philanthropists. More information about AMC's Maine Woods Initiative can be found at [amcmaine.org/committees/maine-woods-initiative](http://amcmaine.org/committees/maine-woods-initiative)

The highlight of this session (with light hiking) was seeing two processors on an active harvest operation site moving with precision and care, and the refurbished logging bridges to regain more brook trout breeding ponds.

With the knowledge gained, I found myself hiking with a much greater appreciation of AMC and the northern Maine forest, which was recently designated as an International Dark Sky Park, [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org).

**Bravo!**

A well prepared plan makes me a happy hiker; that's exactly what the August Camp Committee and website did in providing succinct information, including the parking spot and transportation method of our luggage.

A well-fed hiker makes me a happy camper. August Camp provided plenty of homemade organic food to fit any highbrow lifestyle. No one left losing weight nor blood despite the infamous Maine mosquitoes.

"August-Campers Got Talent" follies and the grand entrance of the elusive "moose" were a hilarious and fun finale to a great week together. Great friendships were formed with promises to get together again during the coming years as well as intentions to go to August Camp next year wherever it might be. A wholehearted thank-you for a lifetime experience, from me. Cheers to the AMC August Camp leaders and committee members!



Lennie Steinmetz photo



Lennie Steinmetz photo



# August Camp 2021



## August Camp returns to Maine

Given people's hesitance to travel by air due to COVID, August Camp was held at Little Lylford, Maine.

In its early days, August Camp was a group of hikers whose main purpose was to explore. The goal of the first one was to seek new routes to visit Katahdin in Maine. The 1887 camp was comprised of 20 men and women. Camp was a log shelter 20 feet long and getting there required a two-day climb. Ladies hiked in tweed skirts.

*The photos on this page are by Lennie Steinmetz, except for the 1887 photo from the first August Camp.*