Appalachian Trail celebrates 75 years

Usually I write about trails in and around Sturbridge, but I could not let the 75th anniversary of the grand daddy of all trails pass without a few words to mark this milestone so from the press release of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy some history on, and a celebration of the Appalachian Trail.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the completion of the Appalachian Trail (A.T.), the longest hiking-only footpath in the world, measuring roughly 2,180 miles in length from Georgia to Maine. The anniversary will occur on Tuesday, August 14, 2012.

The original Trail took more than 15 years to build and was completed on August 14, 1937. Construction involved the cooperation of hundreds of volunteers, state and federal partners, local Trail-maintaining clubs, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC).

The A.T. travels through fourteen states along the crests and valleys of the Appalachian mountain range from its southern terminus at Springer Mountain, Georgia, to its northern terminus at Katahdin, Maine. Over 250,000 acres of contiguous Trail lands are protected and managed along the footpath.

An estimated 2 to 3 million people visit the A.T. every year. Hikers from across the globe are drawn to the Trail for a variety of reasons: to reconnect with nature, to escape the stress of city life, to meet new people, strengthen old friendships or to experience a simpler life. About 2,000 people attempt to "thru-hike" the estimated 2,180 miles of the Trail each year, with only one out of four completing the entire journey.

The conception of the A.T. came from the October 1921 article "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning" in the Journal of the American Institute of Architects. Written by Benton MacKaye, he proposed the idea as an escape from daily life in an increasingly industrial nation. MacKaye originally called for a series of work, study and farming camps along the Appalachian Mountains, but building a trail to connect them soon became his primary objective. The Appalachian Trail Conference (now called the Appalachian Trail Conservancy) was founded four years later in 1925.

Since the A.T was first completed in 1937, it has undergone a remarkable transformation. Almost 99% has been relocated or rebuilt. Hundreds of miles of the original route were along roads and passed through private lands. Thanks to the determination of Myron H. Avery and the ATC, the passage of the National Trails System Act, and the work of many partners and volunteers, more than 99% of the A.T. is now in public ownership. Not only is the footpath itself protected, but a corridor of land, averaging one thousand feet in width, is also protected.

The Trail today is not only better protected but traverses more scenic landscapes than the original route. Many of the A.T.'s most cherished highlights were not part of the A.T. in 1937: Roan Mountain, Tennessee; the Mt. Rogers High Country, including Grayson Highlands, Virginia; the Pochuck Creek swamp, New Jersey; Nuclear Lake, New York; Thundering Falls, Vermont; and Saddleback Mountain, Maine, to name a few.

The treadway itself each year becomes more sustainable. Except for places where the Civilian Conservation Corps provided additional support (mostly in Shenandoah National Park, the Great Smoky Mountains, and Maine), the original Trail was often routed straight up and down mountains, making for rough hiking and a treadway prone to severe erosion. The ATC's trail crews and volunteer trail-maintaining clubs have relocated or rehabilitated countless miles of Trail and each year continue to improve the treadway.

As a unit of the National Park System, the Trail is managed under a unique partnership between public and private sectors that includes the ATC, National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, 31 local Trail-maintaining clubs and an array of state agencies.

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the completion of the A.T., the ATC will host a weekend celebration on August 11 and 12 at its headquarters at 799 Washington St., Harpers Ferry, WV. Highlights include guest speakers, workshops, activities, food, music and games.

Trail-maintaining Clubs across the East Coast are also preparing events to celebrate the anniversary. The Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers in Ceres, Virginia, are hosting a hike on June 14 to 18, and volunteers from the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club in Damascus, Virginia, have planned a day hike on August 18. Members from the Maine Appalachian Trail Club in Carrabassett Valley, Maine, also have celebratory activities planned on August 18.

For more information about the 75th anniversary of the completion of the A.T., including ways to give back and local celebrations, visit [www.appalachiantrail.org/75](http://www.appalachiantrail.org/75)

About the Appalachian Trail Conservancy

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail - ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. For more information visit [www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org) Contact: Javier Folgar Marketing and Communications Manager Appalachian Trail Conservancy Tel: (304) 535-2200 ext. 117Fax: 304.535.2667

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