

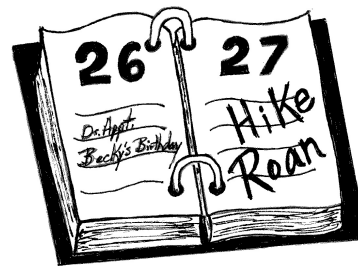
HIKING THE ROAN, MONTH BY MONTH

By Elizabeth Hunter

Journal entry, December 28, 2002: A perfect climax yesterday to Gail's and my year of monthly Roan hikes. Sky was perfectly clear, an intense blue; snow was gorgeous—a foot deep in places, in others not even covering the ground. Clumps of low bush blueberries (or huckleberries) were completely packed with drifted snow; they must have been perfect seines for the whirling white on Christmas day. (I can only imagine what it must have been like up there then.) Those netted branches had captured the flakes—and thus the clumps must soon have been protected in a way that other living things were not. Gives you an idea of why they do so well up on the exposed balds—protected from the wind and intense cold by captured snow, then receiving more than their share of moisture as the snow slowly melts. I hadn't thought of that before. We saw not a single bird—no raven or junco—though there was absolutely no wind. Ate icicles hanging from the firs and spruce. There was some rime ice, only slowly shelving off, despite the bright sunlight. A fine, nearly transparent mist filled the valleys on the North Carolina side, above which the peaks and ridgetops rose, a more sublime shade of azure. The delicate, subtly varied hues were amazing. We looked and looked. We hiked over to the Jane Bald and stopped there to talk, and eat the orange/walnut muffins we'd brought with us. On the way back we met a couple who were heading for Grassy Ridge to camp for the night, and another, from Illinois, accompanied by a beautiful Samoyed—in his element, glorying

in the snow. I thought about the vivid green of our June hike, and how amazingly beautiful I had thought that—and then this absolutely glorious December day. Made me want to get up to the Roan a lot more frequently—but then, that is often my reaction!

As the above journal entry suggests, my friend Gail Westall and I agreed, in late January last year, to hike once a month on Roan Mountain. Our reasons for doing this differed. Gail wanted



to get to know the Roan, a mountain she's lived within 12 miles of for better than a decade, but never spent much time on. I wanted to renew a love affair with the mountain that began in 1968,

when I moved to Johnson City from my native New England. As the decades passed, I let months, seasons—even years—pass without visiting my favorite mountain, a situation I wanted to rectify. We began our monthly Roan sojourns on Jan. 27; on Dec. 27, we achieved our goal. (We waxed so enthusiastic about what we were doing that, in the course of the year, two other friends joined the venture. Neither was able to make the Dec. 27 hike, but they each hiked on Roan before New Year's Day. So much have we enjoyed the trips that we're continuing the tradition in 2003.)

We always hiked from Carver's Gap across the balds, stopping sometimes at Jane Bald, sometimes at Grassy Ridge. Perhaps this year we will hike farther, or resist the balds' siren song and head occasionally into the spruce-fir forest. Not that racking up miles, or covering new ground is our object. We're looking forward—at least I am—to whatever presents itself to us on that amazing mountain. One of last year's revelations was how begrudgingly winter cedes its territory to spring. Month after month, we arrived at Carver's Gap expecting to see some sign of what was happening all around us at home, and finding ourselves in a still-dormant landscape. Was it *May* when we discovered, on the backside of Round Bald, a golden carpet of trout lilies? I can't remember, though I do remember how huge the flowers were, compared to those that had bloomed on the hill below my house at least six weeks earlier—and how unexpected. Would the grass never turn the glowing green of summer? Well, yes, it finally would. But all in a rush, like the charge of an army that succeeds in capturing a hilltop after months of maneuvers, to hold it only fleetingly. Until last year, I never fully realized how ephemeral summer is on the Roan, how circumscribed the growing season. Visiting month after month creates a time-lapse mental picture that fascinates us—and is obtainable, so far as I can tell, by no other method.

Our hikes bestowed many other benefits, both looked and unlooked for. Great exercise. Wondrous views of mountains, clouds and shifting light. We took luxurious lolling breaks at our turnaround spot, reclining on lichen-brightened billion-year-old rocks to absorb sunlight and distances—becoming better friends in the course of the long, considered conversations the mountain seemed to elicit from us. One month, we combined our hike with a yearly pilgrimage another group of friends makes to the Roan (and were rewarded with the sight of Gray's lilies in bloom, an experience I hadn't had in years). In August, Gail and I returned an extra time to pick blueberries. We spent the morning barely looking up, filling plastic bags with berries to store away for winter muffins and pancakes (when we weren't filling our faces), then lunched on a rock and rested our eyes on the horizon. On a fall afternoon, we

encountered Cape May and palm warblers flitting about, and wave after wave of gliding turkey vultures, all in their great fall migration.

We had some fine encounters with other hikers too—folks out for the day, or a few days, or engaged in 2000 mile treks of a lifetime. The hikers I remember best were a pair of AT thru-hikers we encountered in November, a handsome looking pair of twentysomethings who would have made great models for LL Bean or REI or Eddie Bauer outdoor wear, who were hiking with two equally stunning-looking dogs. The couple had started their hike in Maine in August (the dogs had joined them in Vermont), and were crossing the Roan on Nov. 20. They were looking forward to taking Thanksgiving week off—and to returning to the trail on Dec. 1. They aimed to be at Springer Mountain by Christmas.

"It was windy and got progressively colder as the afternoon progressed," I wrote in my journal, of that day. "We went as far as the intersection of the AT and the trail out to Grassy Ridge. All of the beautiful color that cloaked the mountains and ridges below us last month is gone. It looked and felt like winter—everything gray and shut down, the angelica already bleached and knocked sideways by the prevailing winds." Of the thru-hiker's dogs, I noted that "each was wearing its own pack. They looked to be having a wonderful time. Amazing, standing there absorbing what the people are telling you about their hike, to look at those dogs and realize that they have no idea that they have walked through ten or eleven states the last few months, and are hundreds of miles from home. They were just lifting their heads and smelling whatever was coming to them on the breeze, exactly as though they had left some house down in the valley that morning, the way we had, and were glad for the chance to spend a whole afternoon outside."



"View from the Highlands"

Seasonal Ecologist Report for the summers of 2000, 2001 and 2002

By Allan J. Trently, Seasonal Ecologist

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy



As seasonal ecologist for the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC), I had the privilege of working on one of the most precious mountain ranges in the world, the Southern Appalachians, in particular, the Roan Mountain Massif. I worked from May to August in 2000, 2001 and 2002. This article is meant to highlight some of the important discoveries and accomplishments made in those three years.

My personal goals for each summer were: to augment the available information on biodiversity, to be influential in the conservation of the massif, to record new and rare findings on birds, and finally to get a better understanding of the ecology of the massif. Encompassing these goals was the goal of providing the SAHC with a service that is commendable. I hope that I have accomplished or at least come close to accomplishing these goals.

2000:

Since most of my training is in ornithology, I concentrated much of my work on documenting birds. In 2000, I spent much of my time trying to gain new information on the avifauna of the massif region. With the help of Nathan Klaus and Anthony Whitted, an old Alder Flycatcher nest was located in Carver's Gap between the gravel and paved parking lots. An Alder Flycatcher male was observed singing in this area throughout the summer. This data highlights the importance of the area to the Alder Flycatcher and therefore, should add weight to the argument against paving the area for parking. I surveyed other sections of the massif for Alder Flycatchers. This data updates surveys done by Lisa Hull back in the 1980's. The Alder Flycatcher is ranked as S1 (Extremely rare) in Tennessee.

A Golden-winged Warbler nest was located in Hampton Creek Cove State Natural Area (HCC) containing four golden-wing eggs and one Brown-headed Cowbird egg. The cowbird lays its eggs in other birds' nests (called parasitism) many times to the destruction of the host bird's young. This was the first documented case of a cowbird parasitizing a Golden-winged Warbler nest in Tennessee. The finding prompts the question, "What percentage of golden-wings is parasitized by cowbirds in HCC?" A very important question considering that the Golden-winged Warbler is a Species in Need of Management in Tennessee.

University of Tennessee research associate, Pennie Jennings and I made a series of invertebrate collections on Roan Mountain and in HCC. The samples were sent to taxonomist, Dr. Ernest Bernard of the University of Tennessee. He identified fourteen undescribed (not known to science) species of Collembola (springtails), a European species of springtail not previously reported in North America, and finally two undescribed species of Nematode (roundworm). The roundworms were collected from horse feces in Hampton Creek Cove. Six of the undescribed species of springtail were collected from the SAHC cabin property in Bakersville, NC! Not only does this information add to the known biodiversity of the Roan Mountain Massif, but it also adds to the world's understanding of its species richness. SAHC had a part in this.

2001:

In 2001, I concentrated on getting a thorough understanding of the number of Golden-winged Warblers in the massif area with especial attention to HCC. The greatest number of golden-wings ever reported in HCC was obtained in 2001. There were at least 22 but possibly over 30 golden-wing territories exist in the natural area. I also located one Brewster's Warbler territory in 2001. Golden-wing territories were also located in Sugar Hollow Cove, Yellow Mountain Gap, and other areas. Two nests with eggs were located in the cove. Neither of them contained cowbird eggs. This data helps us gain an understanding on cowbird parasitism pressure, which appears to be small.

While hiking up to Grassy Ridge one day, I heard a bird that I never heard before in the wild. I tried to rationalize it by saying that it was a Common Yellowthroat singing a strange song. Luckily, it kept singing and I gathered up enough sense to go look for the bird. The bird turned out to be the best bird find of the summer for the massif. I located a Mourning Warbler male singing from the trail going up to Grassy Ridge. This would be only the second possible breeding record location for the Southern Appalachians (south of Virginia). The Mourning Warbler breeds as far south as West Virginia and here they breed only in the mountains. Unfortunately, no female, nest, or young were observed so nesting can not be confirmed.

In both years, species were added to the Hampton Creek Cove inventory list. Forty-six new plants were added to the floral inventory of HCC in 2000 and 60 new plants were added in 2001. This makes a total of 265 plant species for the cove. Also, twelve amphibians and reptiles and seven butterflies were added to HCC's faunal inventory. Seventy-four species of bird have been observed in HCC. This includes sixty-six breeding birds. There's a long way to go before a full inventory of the biodiversity is known in the cove.

2002:

I started the field season by continuing the Golden-winged Warbler surveys in HCC. I was able to use my knowledge of the 2001 surveys to improve upon my work in the cove this year. As a result, the data is much more accurate and therefore is much more useful than the 2001 surveys. In 2002, I counted 20 golden-wing territories and one Brewster's Warbler territory. The Brewster's was located in the same place as in 2001.

Lisa Huff brought SAHC seven bluebird boxes to place into HCC. Tom Gatti and I placed them throughout the open areas in the cove. The program was a success since we had Eastern Bluebirds, House Wrens and one Tree Swallow use the boxes to build their nests.



I relocated the Mourning Warbler at the junction where the Appalachian and Grassy Ridge Trails meet. I spent considerably more time on the mountain watching the bird than I did in 2001, but I was never able to establish breeding. In fact, no female was seen by me or others. So this bird remains a mystery; maybe 2003 will be the year to find a nest.

Inventories of HCC continued in 2002. One mammal was added to the inventory. I found a dead Opossum along the road going up to the back of the cove. One new amphibian was added. I heard the singing of Southern Leopard Frogs at the Shell cabin site. Four new birds were listed in 2002. These include the potential breeding birds: Eastern Screech Owl and American Woodcock, and two migrants: Bobolink and Swamp Sparrow. The plant list grew by ten in 2002 giving a total of 276. Of the ten new ones listed, one unfortunately is an exotic-invasive called Privet. This plant should be eliminated from the cove before it becomes too widespread.

I put together a mushroom foray into HCC in August. Brad Jones, naturalist from Winged Deer Park in Tennessee, led a small group of people into the cove to find and identify mushrooms. Unfortunately, this was during a drought. Most mushrooms dry up and melt or wilt in constantly dry weather. As a result, we were only able to find 12 species, but these 12 are the first listed for the cove. Not a great start, but a start nonetheless and there is always next year.

Finally, I put together and led four walks. One walk was announced to The Tennessee Ornithological Society, The Sierra Club and to the Unitarian Universalists Church in Gray in order to recruit new members to SAHC. Unfortunately, only five people showed up, though of the five, I am positive that at least one became a member.

I like to finish by acknowledging those that have helped with the various activities talked about in this article. I like to thank Don Holt, Brad Jones, Jamey Donaldson, Pennie Jennings, Dr. Ernest Bernard, Nathan Klaus, Anthony Whitted, Tom Gatti, Lisa Huff and especially Judy Murray of the SAHC. The SAHC deserves a hardy acknowledgment for all the work towards conservation that they have so far accomplished. May they continue for generations.

Notes from the Friends of Roan Mountain Membership Meeting September. 7, 2002

(Submitted by Kathy Wing, Secretary)

*The membership present voted in favor of a recommendation by the board to **increase the annual dues to \$15 (individual) and \$20 (family) as of January, 2003.** This was felt necessary because of the rising cost of producing and sending the brochure and the newsletter.

*Approval was given to institute a **Friends of Roan Mountain Grant** as a way to encourage valuable research projects related to the natural or cultural history of the Roan.

***Gary Barrigar stepped down as president** of Friends of Roan Mountain, but will continue (thankfully!) as a board member and as the fall rally director (even more thankfully!). Cudos to Gary for everything that he does.

***Bob Whittemore was selected by the Board as the new president.** Bob has been an active board member for several years and also has very ably presented programs and workshops on the geology of the Roan.

***Board Members nominated** and elected to 2 year terms were Nancy Barrigar, Jennifer Bauer, Jerry Nagel and Kathy Wing.

***Note for future rallies:** IN ORDER TO INSURE THAT EVERYONE IS WELL FED, **PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOUR RESERVATIONS FOR MEALS ARE MADE ON TIME!**



The James and Edna Potter Conservation Award

—Jennifer Bauer

The scene on Friday evening, as the Fall, 2002, Roan Mountain Naturalists Rally got underway, was one of fun and friendship. Folks were visiting, laughing, and enjoying the company of those they hadn't seen in a while. We were readying for a long anticipated weekend of naturalist guided hikes and explorations with a host of magnificent leaders and speakers.

Soon it was time to gather everyone's attention and begin discussing what the weekend had to offer. The director of the fall rally, Gary Barrigar, came to the podium and began by greeting the group and speaking on a few items of interest. I had previously asked Gary if I could say a few words about the spring rally before our guest began, so he introduced me; he was so unsuspecting.

I really had very little to share about the spring rally at the time, but instead had been given the honor of implementing a more secretive plan. The Friends of Roan Mountain, based on the excellent idea put forth by Dan and Rosalee Russo, had decided to implement a very special award. This award would be given only to those individuals who had served the Roan and the Friends mission; "to foster greater awareness and understanding of the natural, historical, and cultural significance of Roan Mountain....an interpretive organization providing financial and people support to the spring and fall naturalist rallies at Roan Mountain...."

Thus, The Friends of Roan Mountain created the James and Edna Potter Conservation Award, an award which honors not only the recipient, but the Potter's, two individuals who have devoted their lives to the Roan Mountain Naturalist Rallies. They have been a driving and devoted force to the rallies since their inception, directing many events, finding speakers, organizing hikes, and taking care of the many small things that needed to be done to keep such an event going. The Potter's are, and will always be, known as educators and interpreters in the truest sense of the word and have lived our mission long before our organization event existed.

The fun and entertaining part of the story comes in knowing that the recipient did not have a clue as to what was going on! Gary Barrigar, the recipient of the award, sat unknowingly in his seat, as he waited for me to talk about the spring rally. But alas, I did not, instead reading off the accomplishments of an unnamed person. As I spoke about Gary, his many contributions to the rallies, Roan Mountain, and environmental education as a whole became very evident. He had received many Teacher of the Year and Conservation Educator of the Year awards from various organizations, from his work as a teacher of in the Science Department at Elizabethton High School. Since 1993, Gary took over the directorship of the fall naturalist rally AND the responsibilities of being a founding member and first president of the Friends of Roan Mountain. As I listed these accomplishments, I would glance occasionally at Gary, to catch the moment when he realized that I was talking about him. The look on his face was priceless once he realized what was going on!

It goes without saying, that without Gary Barrigar's commitment and caring, many of the experiences we enjoy today when attending the rallies at Roan Mountain, may not be taking place. So to honor Gary, and the Potter's, we presented the James and Edna Potter Conservation Award to him. Mrs. Edna Potter stepped forward to present the award to Gary, and, well, the rest of the scene speaks for itself. It was rewarding to pull off a surprise of this nature, and we truly feel that it was well worth the effort to honor Gary in such a fine manner. He is, without a doubt, what some folks call a "do-er;" he not only thinks of good ideas, he puts them into action!