



Spring comes slowly to the Mountains

—Leonard Adkins: The Habitual Hiker

Those of us who live in the Appalachians know this, but it was a rude awakening for some of our fellow Appalachian Trail thru-hikers. After temperatures reached into the upper 70s a number of days in late March, many were lulled into thinking winter had passed and they lightened backpacks by shedding cold weather gear.

...And then the April 7 Good Friday storm rolled through and dropped close to a foot of snow on the Great Smoky Mountains and Roan Highlands along the North Carolina/Tennessee border. We heard reports of hikers facing 50-mile per hour wind gusts while pushing their way through thigh-high drifts. Necessity became the mother of invention as socks were worn on hands as replacements for the gloves that had been sent home, plastic bags were placed in trail running shoes in an effort to keep feet as dry as if they were still encased in boots, and t-shirts were fashioned into makeshift hats. One couple awoke in a trail shelter to find their summerweight sleeping bags covered by several inches of snow. So many hikers left the trail during these few days that the hostels and motels in Erwin, Tennessee were overwhelmed and a church opened its doors to furnish a potluck dinner for close to 100 people.

By chance, I, Laurie, and MacAfee of Knob ("The Amazing Appalachian Bouncing Dog") were lucky enough to be visiting friends in Banner Elk, North Carolina when the white flakes began to fall. Even though Mac enjoys rolling and romping in snow, we realized he could never make it through such deep snow, so we had our friends drive us northward to Damascus, Virginia where we knew lower elevations would provide less snow to contend with. The plan was to walk southward for a week to allow all of that frozen precipitation to melt before we returned to walk across the southern Appalachians' famous bald mountains.

Southern balds are still a mystery to scientists. They are large, open, treeless meadows on the tops of mountains. Some researchers say they are naturally occurring; others contend that they were created hundreds of years ago when Native Americans burned the summits so that mountain oat grass and berries would flourish, thereby improving conditions for game. No one may know why they are the way they are, but Laurie and I knew that in good weather the balds provide 360-degree views and pleasant hiking mile after mile. The southward walking plan paid off and all the snow was gone when we returned to the balds. For two days we walked at 5,000-6,000 feet above sea level, reveling in thousands of acres of meadows stretching out before us, taking in dazzling views of deep valleys and high peaks. The scene reminded me so much of my ramblings in European mountains that I almost expected to come across Julie Andrews twirling around and bursting forth in song.

Because the Appalachian Trail has a tendency to stay to the ridgetops, it is always an unexpected treat to walk by a waterfall. Melt from the recent snows has only increased the eye-pleasing nature of these cascades. I'm not sure what it is about waterfalls that so draw us humans to them. Are we in awe of the unbridled power of hundreds of gallons of liquid rushing down the face of water-carved rock sculptures? Do we look forward to swimming at the base of a falls, enjoying the rainbow created by mist floating onto us like wispy raindrops? Do our eyes become mesmerized by the ever-changing water patterns, as they do when we watch the swaying flames of a campfire? Or is it simply the overall natural beauty of the scenery in which most waterfalls exist?



Laurel Fork Falls crashes through the deep and narrow canyon that it has created in the mountainous topography with such a thunderous roar that we could hear it for hundreds of yards before we reached it. Plummeting over five natural rock ledges, the water flies over the lip of the falls with such force that it creates its own small windstorm, making it hard for us to stand on the slippery, water-sprayed rocks at its base. We had to shout to each other to be heard.

In contrast to rushing through a gorge, Jones Falls tumbles sprightly down the face of a hillside. In some places, it froths into dancing whitewater, while in other spots it spreads out into a thin layer of water that washes over the smooth rock that its erosive action has created through the decades.

Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee are behind us. By the time you read this, we will be hiking through open grasslands and rhododendron thickets on the highest elevations of southwest Virginia in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area.
(reprinted from *hiking ga to me*, <http://www.habitualhiker.com/newsletter452877.htm>)

Leonard Adkins has hiked the Appalachian Trail five times and is the author of 17 books about the outdoors and travel. He is currently a columnist for *Blue Ridge Country* and the hiking blogger for www.richmondoutside.com. Leonard will present *Traversing Ancient Mountains: 2,000 Miles on the Appalachian Trail* as the spring rally's Saturday evening program on May 5th at 7:30 p.m.

Discover Life: Public participation in Natural History Surveys

— Dr. John Pickering

When it comes to climate change, one thing is certain -- uncertainty. Scientists are not only debating about how the weather is changing, they also do not have enough information to predict what will happen to species and their communities. Thus a website called Discover Life (www.discoverlife.org) has set out to study large-scale effects of climate change on living organisms, as well as effects of invasive species and pollutants. The website integrates species pages, customizable global maps and dynamic identification keys, among other tools.

The goals of Discover Life are

- to collect data on selected groups of species throughout a dense network of study sites, and then analyze shifting patterns of distribution, abundance and seasonality; and
- to improve science education through public participation in hands-on original research.

Because of the scope of the ecological questions, the researchers need public participation to help collect data from many sites. Discover Life has developed unique web tools and rigorous research methods that will enable everyone to collect high quality data using **digital photography**. Even if you are not a great photographer, your images will be useful as data. Take photographs of and moths, bees and other insects, wildflowers and other plants, lichens and mushrooms, salamanders and anything of interest to you, and participate in science research!

These photographs, once uploaded onto the website, will become part of Discover Life's integrated identification guides, maps, and databases. Information collected can be used at the local level, to build inventories and comprehensive, easy to use online field guides. Discover Life is near completion on an **online field guide** to the wildflowers of Roan Mountain, which you can use by following this link: http://www.discoverlife.org/mp/20q?guide=Wildflowers&cl=US/TN/Carter/Roan_Mountain.

After photographs are uploaded, identified, and mapped, the locally collected information from multiple study sites can be analyzed on a continental level and compared with information from other sites, to help us understand large-scale ecological patterns.

A great way to get started with Discover Life is to collect photographic data during the Spring Natural History Survey, April 20-22 (see <http://www.discoverlife.org/survey>). Every species you photograph, identify and map on Discover Life will be added to an ongoing "Life list." Start your Life list now! If you are interested in participating in the Spring Natural History Survey and wish to set up an album on Discover Life, contact Outreach Coordinator Nancy Lowe at nancy@discoverlife.org.

Discover Life's founder, **Dr. John (Pick) Pickering**, will present the Friday evening program at the Spring Rally, May 4th at 7:30. Dr. Pickering will demonstrate the website and its research projects, lead a "Moth Party" and "Photowalks" and be available to answer questions. This event will emphasize collecting data on moths (see <http://www.discoverlife.org/moth>) and wildflowers and their pollinators in a "Photowalk" (see <http://www.discoverlife.org/photowalk>). For more information on this event, see the Discover Life events page at <http://www.discoverlife.org/pa/ev>.



Xtreme Roan Adventures

The Nature Rally for Kids

– Larry McDaniel

Kids spend too much time indoors. There are many reasons for this. They have computers, video games, televisions and all sorts of stuff that they do inside. Staying indoors has led to an inactive lifestyle that has in turn had a detrimental effect on their health. Child obesity has become a serious problem. Many people believe that the psychological effects of children being too inactive are of equal concern. It's hard to imagine the negative consequences this phenomenon could have on the future health of the environment.

A few years back, members of the Friends of Roan Mountain began to address the problem we were having with such a low number of young people attending our rallies. In September of 2008, at the annual membership meeting, we decided to create a Summer Rally for kids. I agreed to be the Director and a committee was formed to start the process. Shortly after that meeting the Friends lost a very valuable member. Debbie Neeves lost her battle with cancer. The family requested memorial gifts be sent to the Friends of Roan Mountain in her honor. The Friends received over \$2000 which is earmarked for funding the Youth Rallies. This is not only a huge help in funding the Kids Rallies but it gave us an added determination to see this thing through.

Meetings were had, ideas were shared and plans were put into action. Many people contributed greatly to the effort. We decided to call the rally Xtreme Roan Adventures, as suggested by Nora Schubert. Janet Brown designed a logo. Much was accomplished in a short period of time and the first Kids Rally was a huge success in the summer of 2009.

Nora agreed to be the Assistant Director. She has had experience with the "More Kids In The Woods" movement and has been a real asset to the Kids Rallies. Ken Turner came on board as the Registrar and has devoted countless hours of hard work to make sure the rallies were successful. He became the Director for the 2011 Kids Rally and now he and I are serving as Co-Directors.

There have been too many people who contributed time and effort in so many ways, for me to mention them all in this article. Thanks to all of you. Of special note are the contributions from Roan Mountain State Park. They have provided us with facilities, manpower and support. A special thanks should also go out to Bay's Mountain Park with their Birds of Prey, the U.S. Forest Service for supplies and manpower, The Clyde Austin 4H Center with a fossil collection and Earth Fare for working with us to provide good healthy meals at an affordable cost.



The rallies offer kids nature hikes, crafts and exhibits. Keynote presenters were Wynnwood Wildlife Rehab Center in 2009, Doug Elliott in 2010 and Kris Light in 2011. A special afternoon hike on the balds offers the kids a chance to visit the Baatany Goat Project. In 2011 we added Friday night activities, Junior Hikes for the youngest participants, fossil casting, a "Skins and Skulls" presentation and an Adventure Map.

We will be looking for ways we can accommodate more kids with more activities and more fun. We will continue working with schools (including home school organizations) and scout groups. We will also be looking for grant opportunities and future sponsors. Xtreme Roan Adventures wants to be a recognized part of all the Roan Rallies.

The 2012 Kids Rally is will be at Roan Mountain State Park on Saturday, July 28th. More information can be found on the website: XtremeRoanAdventures.org or on our Face Book page.

We always need more volunteers to help with the Kid's Rally. You can contact me at Larry@PorchLightInsects.com or (423) 773-9234. Ken can be reached at Ken@XtremeRoanAdventures.org or (423) 538-3419.



Donations Welcome!

We are gladly accepting items to be given away as door prizes at our Rally events on Friday and Saturday evenings. Ideas: nature-related books, photos or art; plants; homemade goodies . . .



What's New in the Park?

Saving Hemlocks -

Not since the Chestnut Blight of the 1920's have the Appalachian forests seen as significant a threat as the exotic invasive insect called the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Unfortunately, the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) is already established in the park and threatens to completely alter our hemlock-dominated forest ecosystems. Many trees within the park have already succumbed to the destruction of HWA and are past the point of rescue. However, Roan Mountain State Park is collaborating with Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and ETSU Biology Professor Dr. Foster Levy in an effort to preserve some "legacy" stands of Hemlock trees within the park. Through a grant provided by TWRA, Dr. Levy is working with area scientists, ETSU students, and RMSP Staff hope to protect stands relatively healthy, mature hemlock trees throughout the park as "Hemlock Heritage Forest." These trees will be treated this spring and summer with insecticides shown to combat HWA and provide long-term protection. The preserved hemlock stands could potentially become a source of seed for future re-population of hemlocks in the park if the adelgid population ever declines or can be controlled.

Appalachian Bear Rescue to visit Junior Rangers -

This summer, Junior Ranger Campers will enjoy a special day of Black Bear educational programs provided by volunteers from the Appalachian Bear Rescue of Townsend, TN. Junior Rangers will learn all about these massive mammals of our forests, including how to protect themselves AND the bears in the event of a bear encounter. Roan Mountain State Park is excited to work with the Appalachian Bear Rescue, as both organizations work toward the common goal of educating the public and safely sharing the bears' mountain home.

Continuation of the Native Warm-Season Grasses and Wildflower Restoration Project -

The groundhog said we can expect a long winter this year, but who can trust a groundhog? Spring is just around the corner and it's soon to be planting time! Seed drilling begins this spring to sow approximately 10 acres of parkland with native warm-season grasses and wildflowers. Although the conservation plots scattered throughout the park currently look barren following the preparatory burning and spraying of these fields, they will shortly be bursting with plants such as Rumsey Indian Grass, Black-Eyed Susan, Purple Coneflower, Little Bluestem, Partridge Pea, and others. Not only will these plots increase the park's biodiversity, they will also beautify the park and improve wildlife viewing opportunities for visitors. Keep an eye on these fields throughout the year as they come to life with native species.

Improved View at the Strawberry Mountain Overlook -

We have cleared the area in front of the observation deck on Strawberry Mountain (*near the Dave Miller Homestead*). This should provide an outlook that more closely resembles the unimpeded view of the beautiful Roan Highlands depicted by the informational sign on the deck. The cleared ground below the deck will be converted into another park conservation plot, seeded with the same native grass and wildflower species as our other plots.

Winter Trail Maintenance -

With the high winds of winter that our area is infamous for, many trees have come down on our trails this season. However, given the unusually mild days that our area is NOT known for during the winter, park staff and volunteers have been able to put in several hours of trail maintenance to help keep our trails clear. Of course, this is always an ongoing project, so please let our staff know if you encounter fallen trees over the trails as you hike through the park.



Silent Auction at Spring Rally

Selections of Ed Schell's photography prints will be auctioned to benefit the Friends of Roan Mountain and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. A huge thank you goes to Ed for his donation and Gabrielle Zeiger for handling the logistics.



Snow on Round Bald for the 5th Winter Rally

--David Hall

Snow, wind and cold temps greeted a hardy crowd of participants at the Winter Rally on February 11th. In the photo at left (thanks to Nora Schubert) Jamey Donaldson leads hikers past snow-bent spruce to the top of round bald.

Charlie Williams, who has devoted much of his life to the study of the 18thC French plant explorer, Andre Michaux, began the rally program by recounting Michaux's trips across the Roan in the 1780's and 90's. Dressed in Michaux's 18thC garb,

Charlie laughingly reminded that when Michaux named the Roan's beautiful rhododendrons (*R. catawbiense*) they weren't covered with snow. A friend of Franklin and Jefferson, Michaux's favorite respite of hospitality in our area was the home of Col. John Tipton on Sinking Creek, now the Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site in Johnson City. Celebration of this plant explorer continues with "Andre Michaux Day" at Tipton-Haynes at the end of March.

Josh Kelly, an expert on old growth forests, brought us quickly from the forest magnificence of Michaux's time to that of today. Rather than catalogue two centuries of exploitation, Josh presented the beauty that is still with us; many areas of old growth forest in the southern Appalachians—too steep for agriculture or timber extraction, remote and roadless—still play host to flora and fauna much like the first settlers saw. His slides were inspirational.

During a welcome hearty lunch (City Market), Lisa Huff of TN Natural Areas Program gave us a brief update on the continued invasive plant incursion in the Roan Mountain area. Japanese knotweed and garlic mustard are two of the main culprits. Along with Roan Mountain State Park, she organized a volunteer "plant pull" for March 31, 2012.

Marty Silver of Warriors' State Park led a large group of afternoon hikers down to the Doe River to view and identify all the animal tracks in the morning's fresh snow. Jerry Greer's photography group headed up towards Twin Springs, cameras and tripods at the ready. Jerry also videotaped much of the morning's presentations. The hardest souls joined Jamey Donaldson at Carver's Gap for a snowy hike on Round Bald.

Once again, a really big thanks to Park Superintendent Pat Gagan and all of his staff for hosting this Friends' event.



Feb. 14, 2012

Dear Friends of Roan Mountain,

It was a real pleasure to bring my Michaux program to you last weekend. You are such a good, interested audience that you made me a better speaker. So, I want to both compliment you for a well-run event in difficult weather, as well as to thank you for inviting me. I appreciate the opportunity to share what I've learned about Michaux with you.

Merci!

Charlie Williams

Between Friends

Deadline for Rally Meal Reservations – All dinner and lunch meals must be prepaid. If you plan to eat the catered dinner or purchase a bag lunch at the rally, you must send your check in advance. The deadline is ***Tuesday, May 1st***. The reservation form can be found in the brochure or on our website. Mail your check and reservation form to Nancy Barrigar, 708 Allen Avenue, Elizabethton, TN 37643. We greatly appreciate your cooperation in helping us plan accurately!

Parking at the Rally – The parking location for all field trips will be in the field below the cabins. Look for our banner.



Roan Mountain Naturalists' Rallies

Spring	First Friday - Sunday in May	May 4- 6, 2012
Youth	Last Saturday in July	July 28, 2012
Fall	Friday - Sunday in September after Labor Day	Sept. 7- 9, 2012
Winter	Saturday in February nearest Valentine's Day	Feb. 16, 2013

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nbarrigar@friendsofroanmtn.org.



Editor
Nancy Barrigar
708 Allen Avenue
Elizabethton, TN 37643
(423) 543-7576
nbarrigar@friendsofroanmtn.org