

# Hike • Save Trails • Make Friends

## Carolina Mountain Club eNews



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December 2023

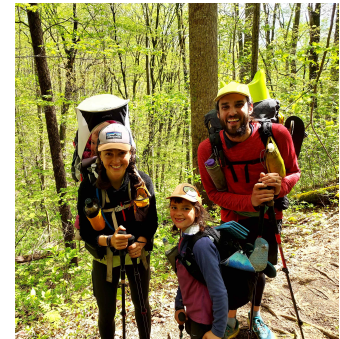
## Remote Overnight Crew Wrap-Up for 2023

by Paul Curtin

The Remote Overnight Crew (ROC) expanded operations in 2023. Typically, the crew does two overnights on the Appalachian Trail. The crew was initiated in 2018 by co-crew leaders Rich Evans and Paul Curtin. Up until 2023 all the outings have been on the A.T.

This year we started out with a continuing project on the A.T. near Lemon Gap going southbound towards Max Patch. In this section we have been remediating trail creep and roots, mainly by building a log crib on the outside edge of the trail and covering the roots with dirt. Each time the ROC goes out we get some new maintainers who want to experience backpacking or trail work or both. The crew works a Saturday and then half a day Sunday, spending the night on the trail. After a full day Saturday the crew is happy to have the lighter day on Sunday. It's always a fun time to hang out together on Saturday night after the work day and before hiker midnight.

Our first outing this year was at Lemon Gap in April. We got lots of work done and had fun. One of the highlights was meeting an Australian family of four hiking the A.T.! Mom was carrying the baby and Dad had all the gear, about 60 lbs. They were very happy!



In July we ventured into the Wilderness for the first time with the crew. We went to Shining Rock in July, and camped overnight at Ivestor Gap. This time we had 18 folks out including SAWS Wilderness ranger Blake Garrison and Simon Farr from the Pisgah Conservancy. They were a big help with getting tools and materials in and out of Ivestor Gap for the weekend with their UTV. We experienced a beautiful weekend in the high country. Everyone enjoyed it and we will be doing it again in 2024.

The last outing was in October, again at Lemon Gap. This time the crew was surprised during the walk-in by a massive downfall of cascaded trees blocking the trail. This unreported event must have happened just a few days before. Much of the first day was spent removing this obstacle. You never know what you will see on a trail work outing.

The crew removed the trees and eventually got to the work plan! But no matter what the work is the crew always has fun and does rewarding work.

In 2024 we plan to go to the A.T. twice, working up Bluff Mountain near Kale Gap. This event will be joined by the ATC as this is their assigned section. Those dates will be April 27-28 and October 19-20. We will also be returning to the Wilderness on July 20-21. These events are great for new backpackers and trail maintainers. We promise a good time!



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### Were you able to attend the 2023 CMC Annual Meeting/Dinner?

Whether or not you attended the 2023 CMC Annual Meeting, we're asking for your feedback to plan for the 2024 CMC Annual Meeting. Deadline: 12/20/23

Please take a moment to answer this brief survey.  
Click here:

<https://forms.gle/jeQagybrhuogtjCG7>

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## CMC welcomed UNCA McCullough Fellow Felipe Ahumada to speak at the CMC Annual Meeting

By: Karen Schultz



**FELIPE AHUMADA**

**Project:** *"Evaluating Inclusivity and Access to Outdoor Recreation in Western North Carolina and Exploring Equity in Trail Maintenance Volunteer Work"*

**Community Partner:** *Carolina Mountain Club  
Faculty Advisor: Jonathan Brown, Economics*

CMC was honored to support Felipe Ahumada as a Community Partner during his McCullough Fellowship research project this past summer. Felipe was invited to the CMC Annual Meeting to share how he approached his research project and the reasons he chose this particular project.

### **The McCullough Fellowship**

The McCullough Fellows program at UNC Asheville was launched in the summer of 2015. Through this competitive program, undergraduates complete an applied research project in collaboration with a faculty advisor and local partner organization. Each fellowship includes funding for students, materials support, and a faculty and community partner stipend. The projects address one or more of the following areas: land use and conservation; urban planning; sustainable agriculture; resilience and environmental sustainability.

The following text is a section from Felipe's initial research paper which gives an overview of the problem he was exploring.

### **Introduction – by Felipe Ahumada**

Trail accessibility in outdoor recreation is a prevalent issue that has affected those who are in more compromising positions ever since the idea of outdoor recreation has been around. This disconnect between nature and the more vulnerable parts of society is no secret, "...the disconnect between some minorities and nature as the result of a system of oppression and resulting cultural pathologies" (Cavin. D, A) means that as we progress as a community, those who are in the center of it all, only get more separated from those who do not have the same opportunities. This community break-up echoes along generations and only further separates those who have access from those who do not. Areas that are used for outdoor recreation are usually away from city centers, and in the case of Asheville, North Carolina, nestled deeply within the Blue Ridge Mountains. This means that there is a great distance needed to travel in order to get to these places. We believe that there are many barriers to entry, keeping people out from getting into outdoor recreation and reaping the health benefits of outdoor activities. We plan to find out which are those barriers in place, and how can we as a community, make it so that the outdoors is a space all can enjoy, regardless of financial status.

As part of his research process, Felipe developed a survey to explore the following thesis:

***“Evaluating Inclusivity and Access to Outdoor Recreation in Western North Carolina and Exploring Equity in Trail Maintenance Volunteer Work”.***

The survey was written to gather data exploring the following questions.

1. How can we increase trail maintenance volunteerism?
2. How can we make the outdoors more equitable?
3. How can we diversify the outdoor trail volunteer space?

The survey received IRB approval through UNCA and was first handed out at the CMC 100th anniversary celebration to attendees and members of CMC.

Felipe received over 150 responses to his survey, made possible in thanks primarily to the following organizations:

1. Carolina Mountain Club
2. Latinos Aventureros
3. NOIR Collective

Survey responses led to the data represented in the graphs that can be found through the link below.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KFZiWqyoPye4Cmm1cYvSlybNhtwYy-P5/view?usp=sharing>

Felipe was particularly interested in several written responses he received to the question; ‘What would make it more likely for you to volunteer in trail work?’

“More diverse demographic of maintainers“

“More Clubs/Organizations, Affinity work days for BIPOC”

“Trail maintenance is hard work! I'd wish for varying levels of participation, i.e., not all hard!”

**As Carolina Mountain Club continues to strengthen its commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) practices, Felipe’s research leaves us with several questions we need to consider;**

*“How can we increase trail maintenance volunteerism?”*

*“How can we make the outdoors more equitable?”*

*“How can we diversify the outdoor trail volunteer space?”*

We thank Felipe for choosing us as his local partner organization as he worked through his McCullough Research project, and we look forward to keeping in touch with him as CMC’s work in the JEDI space evolves.

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## Meet the Tuesday Wilderness Response Team!

By Priscilla Estes



At CMC's recent Annual Dinner, new Wilderness Response (WR) leader Paul Dickens worried not many would show up for Tuesday's work crew. He needn't have. At 9 a.m., ten gather where NC 215 meets FS97, just past Sunburst Campground in Pisgah National Forest. Dickens (Candler) says that CMC and WR maintain 54 miles of trails in the Shining Rock and Middle Prong wilderness. Nine additional miles are officially maintained by the Backcountry Horsemen of North Carolina, but WR often helps them.

Today's team, including Section Rovers, hoist the standard loppers and hoes, and also something different: a saw with two wooden handles and no motor. "This is a crosscut saw," says Steve Kuni (Waynesville), nestling it behind his shoulders. "I have to walk last in line." Crosscut saws are typically 4-to-6-feet long, and could whap you when least expected. Advance scouting determines what length saw to bring, and this one is just right. Bill Zimmerman (Waynesville) holds a one-handed manual saw. Where are the 17-pound chainsaws? Dickens explains that the Wilderness Protection Act of 1964 prohibits the use of motorized equipment and even mechanical transport, which includes wheels, in areas designated as wilderness. "They allow mules, though."

Leaving the tiny parking lot, we car pool down bumpy FS97 to the trail head, then walk a mile to the work site. "Today's an easy hike," Dickens says. "Sometimes we have to hike in four miles to do one hour of trail work." He muses this might be why trail

workers are older. “Younger people like to hike. To go somewhere and get it over with. It’s less of a commitment.”

Dickens re-reviews today’s project on the northern first mile of Haywood Gap Trail, adopted by long-time maintainer and tool sharpener Clayton Cathey (Waynesville). “We’ll cut a downed tree, remove a large tree crown [many-branched top of a fallen tree], and do some water management.” This former railroad bed is starting to gully. Safety is a priority. “Don’t rush, be safe. Tools down by noon.”

Rich Evans and Tim Graden peel off to fix a perennial mud hole problem. While Graden starts, puzzle, Evans talks about Dickens. “He started trail work in 2007 and logged in about 1,000 wilderness hours before we started counting hours. Then he left the Canton Mill in 2012 to take another job,” in regulatory compliance with Dominion Energy in Virginia. “It was our good luck he retired in April 2023.” Dickens has 13 years of active crosscut saw trail work, including ten years of training others, and has adopted Old Butt Trail.

Six people tackle the massive downed tree crown with handsaws and loppers. Carrie Barris, a trail runner from South Asheville who loves to keep the trails in running shape, says, “Les talked me into adopting Fork Mountain Trail last December.” She already maintained Poundingmills. At 110 pounds, Carrie “can do anything anybody can,” says this retired teacher from Polk County, NC, and member of the Trails Sisters running club.

Jan Onan (Hendersonville), CMC Membership Councilor, serves on CMC’s diversity committee and co-started the Youth Partner Challenge. She and husband Kevin also adopted Cat Gap Trail before learning it was 5.5 miles long. She laughs. “But Rich was great at teaching us the basics.”

Les Love (CMC President Elect, Weaverville), Paul Wulfing (on loan from Waynesville Wednesday crew), Dickens, and Cathey make up the rest. “One person alone would need about four hours to remove this crown. We’ll be finished in 45 minutes,” Dickens says, cautioning workers to watch for falling limbs and spring poles (a sapling that has been bent over by another tree.)

Further on Kuni, Zimmerman, and Dale Gerhardt (Hendersonville) discuss how to cut the large downed tree blocking the trail. “This can take an hour. Fifty minutes of discussion and ten of cutting,” Zimmerman says. “Any disagreement?” rings out often. Planning the “escape route” to avoid being hit by the cut log seems to take the most time. Gerhardt and Zimmerman wedge the tree to keep it from “running wild” and chop through the soft wood to save the crosscut blade from dulling or catching (a safety issue). They line the ground under the kerf (channel the saw makes) with leaves and wood to “save the teeth from eating dirt.” Kuni and Gearhardt make the saw sing, a can

of WD 40 at the ready. We listen for cracking noise, a sign the log is ready to give. “Slow down, let the saw do the work,” Kuni says. Crack! Saw removed, Zimmerman uses an axe to finish the break. Wedges, ramps, and rotations (versus back muscles) get the log off the trail.

“You should see us weed whack with swing blades and scythes in the spring,” Kuni says. “It’s all in the hips.” He reconditions older crosscut saws. Today’s saw is from Sutton’s Antiques in Waynesville. “Eighteen bucks. It was built before WWII and they used steel from old plow tools.” Kuni serves on Haywood County Search and Rescue, as does Zimmerman and mud-hole-fixer Graden.

Walking back, Dickens says WR cleared more than 60 downed trees between June and September 2023 (!) and brushed out Green Mountain Trail. “In July we overnighted on Art Loeb Trail.” On the question “Are trail workers left-brained and hikers right-brained?”, Dickens says, “I’m not sure. All I know is that trail work is hiking with purpose.” Onan comments, “Left-brain maintainers may be a majority, but I for one am a right-brain artist type who learns best by doing and observing. I hold a vision for what will look aesthetically pleasing and be easier to hike. Could be a fun project to see which type of thinkers maintainers are!”

Love has the final word. No matter what kind of brain you have, “Don’t be intimidated by trail work. You just need to get out here and see how easy it is. Even if you come out only once, you’ll know more about trail work than 99.9% of the rest of the world, and that’s a good thing.”

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