

What's in the Box? **(And Other Cabin News)** **By Bob Adkisson**

[This article also dates to the year 2012-- from the Oct. / Nov. edition of the newsletter. It plumbs the depths of the Cabin Map Box, giving a brief description of most of the treasures held within. The article ends with a couple of updates concerning the cabin: about work that will soon be done, the loss of the nearest public phone to the cabin, and the cessation of bus service to and from the closest town—Waynesboro]

At the TATC Putman Memorial Cabin there is a fairly new, well built wooden box, stored in plain sight on top of a spare bench beneath the steps to the sleeping loft. Steve Babor (former cabin chairman and handy-man-of-all-trades) built the box, replacing an old wooden wine box I had brought up years earlier. The box is used for storage—it says right on top, **MAPS & STUFF**.

I have a feeling many cabin renters never bother to open it up at all, or explore its contents that deeply, so I will try here to pique your interest—

The main thing of interest (and it should be stored on top) is the Cabin Log Book, a 3 ring binder where cabin renters can write about their cabin stay, or look back and read what others have written about theirs (the main reason I think a lot of renters never open the box: sometimes months go by and no one writes in the book!) The cabin has been in rental use now for 29 years; the current log book goes back only about a dozen years or so. Still, it is fun to sit and spend some time reading through it, especially on a rainy day.

Digging deeper, you will find several books that have been donated to the cabin. The latest addition is a series of 3 books under the title Back Roads, each a compilation of newspaper articles written by Lynn Coffey, a local woman (though originally from Florida). The books are full of stories and pictures of her beloved mountain neighbors, with some of the history of the area woven in. You can get a taste of what the area used to be like, 100 years ago, how the people lived and worked. Also new is a book from the Images of America Series, titled The Appalachian Trail in Virginia, by A.T. thru-hiker Leonard Adkins. This is a history of the A.T. and the maintaining clubs told mostly in photographs; there is even a photo of our cabin (before it had a front porch). Several of our club members are pictured in the book.

Other books include: the Pulitzer Prize winning Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, which takes place just north of Roanoke and mentions the A.T. once or twice; The A.T. in Bits & Pieces, about girl scouts hiking the trail; Follow the River, an historical novel, the true life ordeal of a woman captured by Indians near Radford, Va. in the 1700's; Ed Abbey's classic Desert Solitaire, an exploration of the western U.S. and his adventures there as a part time park ranger and fire look out; and A Walk in the Woods, by Bill Bryson—the funniest book about the A.T. that I've read.

There is even a book titled Log Cabin Cooking.

In addition, there are some small nature guide books-- about rocks, lichens, trees and plants, and two coffee table type books about the A.T., both loaded with color photos—one is by National Geographic, the other is aerial photos of the trail from Georgia to Maine.

Also included in the box are several magazines or newsletters-- from the Wilderness Society, the Chestnut Foundation, A.T. Journeys, Outside, and Blue Ridge Country, as well as large booklets about Virginia State Parks and P.A.T.C. Cabins. There is a Blue Ridge Parkway Travel Planner too, and a A.T.C. member handbook; even a few old copies of the TATC Newsletter.

Of special interest is a reprint of Norfolk resident (and A.T. thru-hiker) Earl Swift's trip paddling the length of the James River, and also a 4 part history of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which appeared a few years ago in the *Virginian Pilot* newspaper, marking the road's 75th anniversary. Also reprinted, from an article in Outside magazine, is the well written story of club member John Donovan's last hike (on the Pacific Crest Trail); a couple of John's former hiking buddies, members of both TATC and ODATC, are interviewed and quoted in the article.

There is lots of local information too, about Waynesboro and Charlottesville, Nelson County and Shenandoah Nat'l Park—including maps of the same.

Yes, MAPS: there are lots of them!

I periodically rummage thru the box and try to put everything in some semblance of order; trail maps, along with the Pedlar District (of the Geo. Washington Nat'l Forest) hiking guidebook, are kept in a large zip lock bag. There are detailed P.A.T.C. hiking maps for both Shenandoah Park and for our section of the A.T., as well as southward. If I am not mistaken, we have the A.T. covered, from the James River north to Front Royal!! These maps show all of the trails in places like the St Mary's River Wilderness and around Sherando Lake, as well, of course, the area around the club cabin (see P.A.T.C. map # 12).

There are some ancient county road maps too (though you might want to always have on hand your own copy of the *Virginia Gazetteer Map Book*, by DeLorme).

While staying at the cabin, if you don't have your own maps or guidebooks, feel free to use the ones in the box—take a great hike, drive on some back roads, don't get lost, and return the borrowed items when you are done. The same goes for the books—read them to your hearts content, but **PLEASE** don't take them home with you.

Of even greater interest perhaps are some cabin historical materials, copies of stuff from the files of the Historical Committee. Read about how the club researched and studied the idea of building some sort of cabin (or fixing up one that was falling down), and then, with the help of a generous gift from the Putman family, ultimately bought land and built its own stone cabin near the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Nelson County, Virginia, about 3 miles distant from the section of the A.T. we maintain.

There are even a few miscellaneous photographs from years back, club members (like Otey Shelton) working on the cabin.

For a box that only measures something like 14 x 18 x 16 inches, it sure holds a lot!! Next time you are up there, take a look inside, read a book or a magazine, study a map, learn about some of the area's history, where to go and what to do and how to get there.

And.... Don't be shy—write about your thoughts and adventures in the log book.

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As sometimes happens in the dry months of Autumn, the cabin's spring is only trickling. Renters may need to pack in their own water this October and November.

The Cabin Committee used some of the money donated to the club (in memory of the late John Donovan) to buy a brass plaque for the picnic shelter, dedicating it to him. It will be put in place during the Sept. Cabin work trip, along with a new wooden sign for the Putman Cabin itself. The original cabin sign (from about 1980), made I believe by Jacque Jenkins son Scott, is showing its age and needs to be replaced.

I am also sad to report the demise of the nearest public phone to the cabin. The phone that had been mounted on the outside wall of the office building for Royal Oaks Cabins is no more; it will not be replaced. Likewise the indoor public phone at the gas station / store about 2 miles north of the entrance to Sherando National Forest campground. I also checked around in Waynesboro itself recently (I even asked the man at the desk of the YMCA-- 200 yards from where most of the A.T. thru-hikers camp when they stay in town-- if they had a phone or if he knew of any) and the conclusion is: there are NO PUBLIC PHONES any longer in all of

Waynesboro (if you know of one, please pass along its location!).

The only public phone I know of, the closest one to the trail club cabin, is in Sherando campground, in the small vending machine building next to the bath house at the lower lake. Even then, there is a roll down metal door mounted on the front of this building, and a lock, so probably during the winter months this building is shuttered and the phone inaccessible. This phone is about a 3 1/2 mile hike, via the White Rock Gap Trail, from the cabin, or about a 10 mile drive (*if* the Parkway is open, *if* the gates to Sherando are open, and *if* the building / phone is accessible— I emphasize the ‘if’ because, in the winter time, these roads may be closed because of snow).

If you don’t own a cell phone, you are simply out of luck. And of course, cell phone service within a few miles of the cabin is either non existent or spotty (which hey, I consider a blessing: the thought of someone sitting in the cabin talking on a cell phone actually makes me sick to my stomach, or at least sick at heart. I hope the day never comes and, if it does, there will be a new cabin rule: no cell phones allowed at the cabin during work trips—they have to be left in the cars, at White Rock Gap).

SIDEBAR: One summer a dozen years ago, about 10 p.m. on a Sunday night, I was exhausted from working all day with the Konnarock Crew and ODATC, and I stupidly locked my car keys, along with the key to the cabin, inside my vehicle there at White Rock Gap. A cell phone wouldn’t have been of much help, since there is no reception in the area. I had a choice of walking about 2 miles to Rusty’s Hard Times Hollow hiker hostel and seeing if I could find a blanket there in the bunkhouse, spending the night and dealing with the situation the next day, or walking 200 yards farther, to the Royal Oaks public phone, and calling AAA for help. I did the latter, waiting an hour for the wrecker to show up, drive me back to my vehicle, and open the car for me. I didn’t get back inside the cabin til about 1 a.m. that night.

Sadly, the prevalence of cell phones has caused the venerable public phone to go extinct, thus reducing overall service and choice for everyone.

Just a reminder: there is now an emergency cabin key on club property. If, like me, you lock your key inside your car, or lose it somewhere, or forget to take it with you to the mountains, you can try calling me, or Greg Hodges (cabin committee co-chair, who has his cell phone on him most of the time), and inquire as to its location—your weekend might be saved after all (this key, had it been there at the time, would have helped me that Sunday night—at least I could have entered the cabin, gotten some sleep, and gone to summon help the next day).

Another loss to the area: I just confirmed that Greyhound no longer has bus service to either Waynesboro or Staunton, Virginia. The nearest place to the cabin to catch a bus is now Charlottesville, about 40 miles distant.

There is taxi service in Waynesboro—you could take a 30 mile taxi ride to Charlottesville, and then the bus back to Tidewater from there. All by itself though, the bus ride seems a bit pricy—a one way ticket from Norfolk to Charlottesville runs about \$57. At least one other club member (Mason Newsome) and I have, in the past, taken the bus to or from Waynesboro while visiting the cabin. Now this too is more difficult. I would think this loss of bus service is a disservice to A.T. hikers as well, what with Waynesboro being a major trail town, a place where numerous people jump on or off of the trail.