Friends of Blackwater

Celebrating The Blackwater Canyon Trail

Working to protect West Virginia's Highlands, the Blackwater River watershed and the Blackwater Canyon.
After Years of Unrelenting Effort, We Have Achieved Protection for the Blackwater Canyon Trail!

July 30, 2010 was a great day for West Virginia, for the magnificent Highlands, and public lands.

On that day, the United States Forest Service ruled that the Blackwater Canyon Rail-Trail, on our public land, will not be turned into an industrial hauling road. We who love the Blackwater Canyon and the Highlands say, to the men and women of the United States Forest Service: “Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for doing the right thing."

And all of us who have worked for eight years for this victory must to say to each other: ‘Thank you for everything, for staying the course, for pulling together for so long and hard to win this victory’. Happy!”

The Blackwater Canyon Trail holds so many treasured. It is the gateway to a unique Highlands ecosystem. As you travel the 10 miles from Thomas to Hendricks, the surrounding majestic forest canopy begins with “a little bit of Canada” (West Virginia), and then merges into the rich mixed-coniferous forest of southern Appalachia. The rare creatures of the Canyon Trail include “Ginny” the flying squirrel, and “Charlie” the Cheat Mountain salamander, as well as bats and bears and rattlesnakes (be on your toes)! Bird song is everywhere, and the sound of rushing water fills the air.

The Blackwater Canyon Trail is a showpiece for history. In 1852, the artist and author Porte Crayon ascended the Canyon, and declared that “nowhere in all this fair land of ours, has a scene more beautifully grand broken on the eye of the poet or painter...” In 1876, Harry Gassaway Davis funded and labors from 15 nationalities built the steepest railroad grade in the East here -- and hauled coal, coke and timber from the Blackwater Industrial Complex. Their hardwork is still visible in the cut-stone archways, coke ovens and bridges that line the Trail.

As J. Lawrence Smith wrote in Blackwater Country, “This is a land apart, the winter wren sings its boisterous notes by the rushing waters of the Blackwater in the depth of the Canyon. This is where the junco sings its ringing notes that sound like the tolling of a delicate bell from the heights of an evergreen throughout the summer months.”

Our campaign to protect the Canyon Trail began in 2001, when a timber company demanded the right to use the Trail to cut timber on adjoining land. Their proposal would have turned an intimate, scenic recreational gem into a bleak, barren industrial haul road.

The unique qualities that make the Trail the centerpiece of the scenic Blackwater Canyon would have been destroyed. And destroying the Canyon Trail would have been a blow to the growing tourism and recreational economy of the Highlands region.

We could not let this happen. Friends of Blackwater and our allies -- Appalachian Region, American Rivers, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Appalachian Biodiversity Project, the Sierra Club -- Appalachian Region, American Rivers, and the American Hiking Society, the West Virginia Environmental Council, the West Virginia Sierra Club, the Appalachian Biodiversity Project, the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the West Virginia Mountain Biking Association.

Thank you to every member and supporter and supporter of these groups, whose efforts created the “people power” that has protected our magnificent Trail.

Thank you to the professionals and experts who helped make the case for Trail protection -- including the following wonderful people: Deirdre Pundy, Brian Glasser, Andrea Fister, Eric Glitterstein, Mike Smith, Jeff Davis, Mike Caplinger, Dr. Peter Weigl, Dr. Michael Gannon, Dr. Donna Ford Wer- niz, Dr. Robert Leo Smith (“Smitty”), Dr. David Sissel, Tim Blackdum, Dr. Ben Stout.

Thank you to the generous foundations who supported the Trail protection campaign financially, including Patagonia, the Martino Family Foundation, the Educational Foundation of America, the Kyle Family Fund, the World Wildlife Fund, the National Wildlife Foundation, Biophilia, and the Fund for Wild Nature.

Thank you to the hundreds of people who supported cleaning up the North Fork of the Blackwater River besides the Trail, including the Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation, Stream Partners, Project Flow; Town Creek, Marqart, the Oakland Foundation, Best Buy, Norcrosse, Southern Partners, Partners United, the DEP, and the EPA through the 319 Program.

Thank you to the elected officials who helped to protect the beauty and heritage of this area, including Senator Robert C Byrd, Congressman Alan Mollohan, Congressman Nick Rahall, West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin, West Virginia House of Delegates Speaker Rick Thompson, Delegate Michael Capucho, Delegate Tim Manchin, Delegate Linda Longsom, Delegate Brady Paxton, Delegate Sharon Spencer, Delegate Charlie Marshall and West Virginia Senator Brooks McCabe, Senator Jon Hunter, Senator Randy White, Senator Mike Oliverio, Senator Jon Hunter, Senator Randy White, Senator Mike Oliverio.

As we went forward in this effort, we were inspired by the example of Walt Ranallt, a former Mayor of Thomas, who “lay down on the tracks” on the Trail in 1984 to protect public access through Blackwater Canyon.

Walt’s example showed us that we can make a stand to protect the things we love. So many of us followed his courageous example. Every single postcard and e-mail -- (and every penny donated to Friends of Blackwater) -- made a difference!

Now we need to protect the remaining private land in the Canyon. We know that people of all political persuasions want to protect our special places, and they can do just that – we have just shown that! Let’s get to work!
Above: Henry Gassaway Davis, founder of the Davis Coal and Coke Company and the man behind the railroad through Blackwater Canyon.

Left: The Wratchford family lived at Limerock along the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail.

Below: A train travels along the railroad that ran through the Blackwater Canyon from Thomas to Hendricks. The railroad was considered an amazing feat of engineering when it was constructed.

Left: Coal tipple and coke ovens of the Davis Coal and Coke Company at the turn of the 20th century.

Below: A close up of one of the coke ovens circa 2005.

Right: The Engineering Building of the Davis Coal and Coke Company. This building still stands today.

Above: Henry Gassaway Davis, founder of the Davis Coal and Coke Company and the man behind the railroad through Blackwater Canyon.

Below: The Quattrochi children who grew up in Coketon along what is now the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail.

Below: A train travels along the railroad that ran through the Blackwater Canyon from Thomas to Hendricks. The railroad was considered an amazing feat of engineering when it was constructed.

Left: The Wratchford family springhouse is one of the few remaining structures in Limerock.

Below: The Quattrochi children who grew up in Coketon along what is now the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail.

Below: Judy Rodd and Emily Samargo enjoying the Big Run Culvert along the trail. This culvert was constructed by Italian stonemasons in 1904 and is one of many historical resources along the trail.

Joyce Edgell shows Evan Porter how to test water during water monitoring along the North Fork of the Blackwater.

Hikers took to the trail for the Blackwater Challenge in October 2006.

Max Herbert kayaks the Blackwater River.

Janel Farron, former NFWP VISTA leads a nature tour for third graders along the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail.

Biking along the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail.

Pagi Mattix behind Douglas Falls.

John Hoyt hikes for the Blackwater Challenge.

Cross-country skiers in Blackwater Country.

Tom Rodd recovers from hiking the Canyon Trail.

Judy Rodd and Emily Samargo enjoy visiting the Big Run Culvert along the trail. This culvert was constructed by Italian stonemasons in 1904 and is one of many historical resources along the trail.

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Along the Trail: Historic Resources

Along the Trail: Recreation
THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE TRAIL
“Let’s hang on to the integrity of our beautiful state. As a West Virginia educator, I teach my students about the natural treasure this state holds for each of them. They are excited to explore the rivers and trails that they have read and heard about. They will be the ones to carry on the pride in the natural beauty of our state. Do we want to destroy this enthusiasm and support? I am proud to be a mountaineer. Are you?” - Cynthia Webster, Shepherdstown, WV.

“If you have never been there to see it in the spring, summer, and fall you will never understand. Please do not do this to the trails. I have hiked as a kid and the trails I would like to someday take my kids to.” - Christina Mckale, Reynoldsville, WV.

“Please note that I live out of state and that I care passionately about this trail and the entire Blackwater Canyon. I travel routinely to the Blackwater region to kayak, hike, and cross-country ski. When I travel I often spend money on lodging and almost always spend money at the restaurants, shops, gas stations and other businesses. Please do not support the destruction of this pristine recreation magnet that draws visitors like myself to your wonderfully wild state to invest in your economy.” - Robert Gedekoh, Elizabeth, PA.

“My family for years has enjoyed the scenic Blackwater Rail Trail. We look forward to our annual family gathering in the scenic Blackwater Rail Trail. We look forward to our annual family gathering in the fall. The beautiful fall foliage, the peace and tranquility of the forest and the Blackwater River.” - Michele Book, Bunker Hill, WV.

“I have traveled this trail and it is spectacular. I have also taken members of Boy Scout Trout 64 from the Mountaineer Council on a spectacular bike ride from the Oisen Fire Tower down to Douglas and then down this trail to Route 72. It is an experience I will to continue each year with new scouts as it is one of those experiences that they never tire of talking about. Please don’t take this opportunity away from our youth.” - G. Ballard, Brucetown Mills, WV.

“Please save our forest...I am only 16 and would like to have it there when I’m 20 to take and show my kids...like my mother did me.” - Darynnell Ellis, Foster, WV.

“I have hiked and biked this trail many times. It is a naturally beautiful location that lends itself to total natural enjoyment. I am not an activist or an environmental wacko. I am a hardworking father and husband that enjoys the beauty of this special place.” - Jeff Stine, Martinsburg, WV.

“My wife and I are both retired and own a second home in Canaan Valley. For 30 years I worked in the Canaan Blackwater area for a major resource company. During that 30 year period, I became very familiar with this area, falling in love with its beauty and its cultural history. We would hate to see a piece of that destroyed forever.” - Richard Drabish, Elkview, WV.

“It would be a travesty to lose an amazing piece of West Virginia. I am partial to this Canyon, to the protection and preservation of this spectacular river, for my generation, for my son’s generation, and for all to come and enjoy this spectacle of Mother Nature.” - Mike Moore.

“My parents introduced me to this beautiful area of our state as a child in the early 60’s. We went there for summer vacations, hunting, and fishing trips at least once a year. I started taking my wife there while we were dating. Now after 24 years of marriage the places have a very special place in our history and our hearts. Please do all you can to stop the plan to use the Canyon for use as a right of way for the personal gain of only a few. And protect it so many more who visit this area can come away with great memories like we have.” - John Haynes.

“Please keep West Virginia Wild and Wonderful!” - Chelsea Sencivodt.

“My wife and I and our 4 children have enjoyed hiking and camping in the beautiful Blackwater Canyon. West Virginia is slowly climbing out of itsrupation for denuding mountains and polluting streams, and becoming a place to visit again.” - John O. Mullin.

“From several sources, I have learned of the Forest Service’s principle of ‘Leave no trace.’ Let me quote from one of your publications: ‘Your challenge is to leave no evidence of your visit so that the next person can enjoy a natural scene. Tread lightly so that nature can endure and replenish.’ Driving trucks through the forest definitely goes against this policy. I urge you to follow your own principles in issuing easements, especially perpetual ones, such as proposed for the Blackwater Trail.” - David Herbst.

“I’ve been to the Blackwater Canyon several times, and I can believe that a proposal to turn the trail into a logging road has even more seriously been considered. As a tax paying citizen I absolutely request that this proposal is withdrawn.” - Briana McElfish.

“The upper Tucker County economy is trying to build its foothold on eco-style tourism and the ability to get away from the hustle and bustle of the eastern population center which this area serves.” - Gary Beri.

“The Blackwater Canyon is West Virginia’s geological classroom equivalent of Arizona’s Grand Canyon.” - Steve Keating.

“Please – leave us more than photographs of what has been to teach our children with. Leave nature be.” - Cherry Grimm.

“Letting this land alone is key to the ecological and psychological health of an increasingly technological and crowded civilization.” - William Stremic.
Special Bird of Blackwater, the Curious Crossbill

by J. Lawrence Smith

At first glance, the bill of a crossbill seems an unfortunate defect, but the overlapping mandibles are actually for extracting seeds from evergreen cones. The crossbills are mainy birds of the vast spruce forests of Canada that wander south irregularly in winter into the eastern states. The sight of a flock of red crossbills with males in brick-red plumage moving among snow-draped evergreen branches creates a striking image.

Crossbills are nonconformist in the bird world and often seem to play by rules of their own. They are winged vagabonds that are almost constantly on the go in flocks that move and twist in flight as though they are one body. Their presence is revealed by an almost incessant chatter that is unmistakable.

Largely permanent populations of red crossbills are found throughout much of the Allegheny “spruce belt”—the higher mountains where spruce is abundant forest cover. Among early records during the breeding season were a number found is abundant forest cover. Among early records during the breeding season were a number found

Griscom, famed Massachusetts ornithologist, for his determination of the subspecies or variation they represented. Griscom had published a Monographie Study of the Red Crossbill which concluded that the crossbills are prone to wandering vast distances. Crossbills occasionally turn up at places and times of the year when they are unexpected. I encountered a small flock of Reds near Hills Creek Falls in September, 1972. They were on the ground by the highway and, due to their tameness, allowed my approach within a few feet before flying. Additional surprise were three White-wings at Briery Knob, Pocahontas County, in June, 1986.

The white-winged crossbill, with its rosy color and striking variation in height above ground from several feet up to over eighty. Three or four greenish or bluish eggs blotched with brown are laid in a nest of conifer twigs lined with moss and cottony plant fibers. Unlike most birds, crossbills may nest at most any season with breeding seemingly expected, an evergreen although there is wide variation in height above ground from several feet up to over eighty. Three or four greenish or bluish eggs blotched with brown are laid in a nest of conifer twigs lined with moss and cottony plant fibers. Unlike most birds, crossbills may

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Above the Blackwater Trail is the old mining town of Douglas. Its mining history and former residents are commemorated in this home made sign. Early mining and finally restoration of the land are illustrated in three dramatic panoramas. Climb up from the trail or drive to the head of the Forest Service’s Canyon Rim Road to visit this site.
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YES! I WANT TO JOIN FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER

☐ Porte Crayon Society $1000  ☐ Family $50
☐ Crown Jewel Club $500  ☐ Individual $35
☐ Sustaining Steward $250  ☐ Senior $20
☐ Patron $100  ☐ Student $10
☐ Other _______________

Name

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E-mail

Mail completed form and check made payable Friends of Blackwater to:

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Charleston, WV 25311