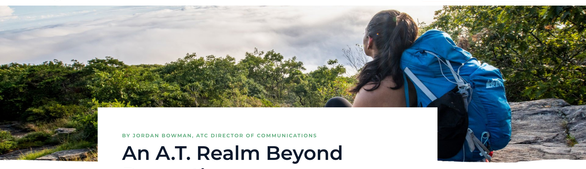

BY JORDAN BOWMAN, ATC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

An A.T. Realm Beyond Recreation

DECEMBER 11, 2020

Every year, millions set foot on the Appalachian Trail (A.T.), whether for an afternoon stroll or a thru-hike from Maine to Georgia. But if you were to ask visitors the parts of their hikes that they remember the most, the footpath itself is not likely the main thing people will mention.

Instead, they will explain how breathtaking the views are from the Trail's summits, which extend out for miles and encompass seemingly endless forests.

They will recount the times they saw a moose or deer as it hurried away into the woods or listened to the trills of songbirds overhead.

They will list the people they met and traded stories with at a campsite, and some will mention lifelong hiking companions they met during a hike.

They will talk about the communities they stopped in along the way, providing a sense of each community's unique character and the residents who helped them on their journeys.

They will praise the volunteers who were strengthening the footpath for the hikers to come — and some will mention how they became a volunteer as well.

And they will mention the brightness of the stars at night, and the time where the only sound was the breath of the wind through the leaves.

Louis Mason Photography

> We build for ourselves, on the frontier, a better, wider place in which to live a better, wider life.
> -Benton MacKaye

Each of these elements — and many more — are aspects of the A.T. realm that Benton MacKaye envisioned a century ago. He knew that recreation was only one part of a broader conservation effort, which extended well beyond a two-foot-wide footpath.

This is what informs the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's work: ensuring that the A.T. is maintained not solely in service of recreation, but in a protected realm that, as Benton put it, provides "a better, wider place in which to live a better, wider life."

One of the most important aspects of protecting this realm is landscape conservation. This work ensures ecosystems around the Trail remain healthy and resilient. It protects the habitats of native plant and animal species, as well as vital natural resources such as clean drinking water. And, by drawing visitors to experience a closer walk with nature, it provides tourism dollars and support for Trailside communities. By preserving an A.T. realm through landscape conservation, we provide an opportunity for all these aspects to flourish.

Kelly M. O'Neill

The 1,100-acre expansion of Cove Mountain Preserve will conserve key habitats and protect natural A.T. views on Peters Mountain. Click here to learn more.

On December 10, the ATC announced another success in its landscape conservation efforts. Working directly with The Nature Conservancy and the A.T. Landscape Partnership, an additional 1,100 acres of land was added to the Cove Mountain Preserve on the Kittatinny Ridge in Pennsylvania. One of the most important natural areas on the Trail, the Kittatinny Ridge is the core of the most significant bird and butterfly migration corridor in the northeastern U.S. — its fall raptor migration is a world-famous phenomenon. The forested mountainsides will add to the Trail's climate resiliency and overall forest health. And multiple viewpoints along the A.T. from nearby Peters Mountain will now be permanently protected, providing natural views of Cove Mountain and the meandering Susquehanna River.

The 1,100 acres added to the Kittatinny Ridge is a clear victory for a protected A.T. realm, and it also highlights the urgency of our work to secure these types of areas. The fragile landscape surrounding Cove Mountain Preserve has been targeted for development in recent years and could have been lost if quick action was not taken. The effects of climate change are becoming increasingly severe, making it essential to preserve carbon sinks such as those found in Appalachian forests. And, of course, preserving the natural beauty hikers seek when exploring the A.T. is an essential part of the unique Trail experience.

The history — and future — of recreation on the Trail is inseparable from the protection of a full A.T. realm of environments, opportunities, and experiences. By supporting our work, you are helping fulfill not only Benton MacKaye's vision from a century ago, but also our ability to build toward and benefit from its reality.

Your support helps us conserve the Appalachian Trail realm, ensuring it will benefit us all for generations to come.

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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) organization. Our CFC number: 12230. Our Tax ID number: 526046689.

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