



BY JORDAN BOWMAN, ATC COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Trail Reroute Provides Hands-On Training

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Drawing crowds of visitors from nearby Atlanta and thousands of aspiring thru-hikers each year, the section of the Appalachian Trail near Gooch Mountain in Georgia is one of the most heavily visited areas along the entire footpath.

“Gooch Gap is in the first 20 miles of the Appalachian Trail so it sees a lot of traffic,” said Stephen Eren, ATC’s Trail Facilities Manager for the Southeast Region. “The A.T. in Georgia requires a lot of maintenance to ensure it is resilient enough to sustain so many visitors.”

This also makes it a perfect place for the next generation of Trail stewards to get their hands dirty and learn firsthand what it takes to maintain and preserve the A.T. This summer, ATC partnered with the Georgia A.T. Club (GATC) and LatinXhikers to introduce young hikers and maintainers to A.T. conservation and tackle an important Trail project: rerouting the A.T. on Gooch Mountain to make it more resilient and erosion resistant.

“When I got the call from ATC and was told there would be hardcore work with sledgehammers, that honestly got me excited,” said Luz Lituma, co-creator of LatinXhikers.

LatinXhikers was formed in 2017 to introduce communities of color to outdoor recreation and provide opportunities for individuals to get involved in conservation projects. Luz recruited multiple members of LatinXhikers to spend a week working with ATC and GATC, knowing it would be a great way not only to spend time outdoors but also to see the impact they could have in Trail maintenance and preservation.

“I let everyone know that it was going to be tough work — and it was — but everyone had an awesome attitude and was prepared for heavy work,” she said.



The A.T. on Gooch Mountain was severely eroded due to a lack of proper water drainage and unsuitable trail siting.

As with many of the trails constructed decades ago on public lands, this section of the A.T. was built without modern Trail-building knowledge and engineering.

“After years of water runoff, the Trail eventually became a trench,” said Eren. “Relocations like this one are meant to limit the steepness of the Trail and the amount of water using the A.T. as a drain. While a half-mile reroute may not sound like much, this relocation will make a huge difference in limiting erosion, making it a better experience for hikers and easier to maintain over the Trail’s future.”

After multiple years of planning and allocating funds, ATC, GATC and LatinXhikers spent an intensive rain-drenched week lifting rocks, swinging mattocks and building stone steps in order to construct this much-needed reroute. Once their work was finally completed, Luz and her team looked back on their work with a sense of ownership and achievement.

“The stairs we made will be there for decades and we have pride in saying that,” she said. “Many of us, especially in the Southeast region, are the first generation raised fully in the United States. Our parents didn’t recreate on these trails, so we didn’t get to recreate on them when we were little either. But now we are, and now we have the right to feel like we belong here, too, especially knowing that we’re giving back to these trails. I will never see a trail the same again after having this volunteer opportunity.”



The half-mile Gooch Mountain trail relocation was completed after a week of hard work, creating a more sustainable section of the A.T. and a lasting legacy for those who helped build it.

By working with groups like LatinXhikers, ATC hopes to provide individuals of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to enjoy and preserve our public lands.

“No matter what your experience is with trail building, everyone should volunteer for a crew or club,” said Eren. “Doing trail work for a week can sound like a lot, but our crew leaders are amazing at not over-extending volunteers, feeding everyone well and being invested in each volunteer’s individual experience. There is good reason that some people have returned back to these trail crews year after year.”

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