

Mendota Trail Newsletter

WE HAVE BEEN BUSY!!!

Since our last newsletter, we have:

1. Completed several maintenance projects on different segments of the trail
2. Cleared trees and brush adjacent to Trestle # 3 to allow construction to commence
3. Acquired easements to allow a parking area near Little Wolf Run Rd. and to allow a sewer connection from Bristol Trailhead to a manhole on Island Rd.
4. Removed about 50 tires and other trash from a dump adjacent to Trestle # 3 (see photo)
5. Did significant preservation work on several trestles on the Mendota end of the trail as well as Trestle # 4 in Benhams and initiated engineering studies to determine needs for their restoration.
6. Applied for multiple grants
7. Cleared parking area in Benhams and placed gravel at entrance
8. Erected an archway entrance at the Mendota Trailhead
9. Completed surveys on several segments of the trail to better clarify property boundaries

10. Drafted an RFP for engineering proposals for site development at the Bristol Trailhead, selected a firm and initiated engineering

11. Cleared numerous fallen trees

12. Cut out log jams under two trestles spanning sections of Wolf Run Creek.



Need a spare?



SAVE THE DATE.....ON HOLD

Similar to other organizations that have been impacted by COVID-19, we canceled several events we had scheduled earlier this year. Our Spring Gathering, a fundraising event and a 5 K run were all abandoned as the enormity of the pandemic grew. We also canceled our annual spring clean-up. We will be reviewing the possibility of rescheduling events as guidelines become better clarified going forward with respect to group gatherings and the pandemic.

Despite the above challenges, significant hours of volunteer work were recorded thus far year to date. We focused on projects that were suitable for small work teams and easily allowed for physical separation.

KROGER REWARDS



Shopping at Kroger with a Rewards Plus Card can now earn money for the Mendota Trail!!

Link your Kroger rewards card to the trail and Kroger will make a donation to us every three months.

1. Go to Kroger.com and sign in.
2. From the menu at the top, click on Save, then Kroger Community Rewards.
3. Scroll down and click I'm a customer.
4. Type Mendota Trail in the organization search box then click Save.

The more people that register, the more money we receive!

ADOPT A TRAIL SEGMENT

Our trail needs your TLC! Please consider adopting a trail segment or a trail road crossing for the benefit of the trail. These areas require regular mowing and trimming to preserve trail width, general neatness and visibility for safety.

Segment volunteers as of early June:

Mike Spear

Mowing & Trimming Bristol Trailhead

Bob & Ellen Mueller

Mowing Wagner Rd crossing

Trimming Cowan Rd crossing

Darin Denton

Mowing along Haskell Station Rd

Oscar Harris

Mowing Mendota Trailhead

Jeff Fleming

Mowing trail in Mendota to the river

Ken Fleenor

Mowing Benhams parking area

We have several areas that deserve adoption!
Please contact us if you are interested:

info@mendotatrail.org



SHARE YOUR PHOTOS!

In each newsletter we will devote a page to share photos that highlight natural wonders encountered on the trail or recognize trail usage by individuals and groups such as scouts or hiking clubs. Remember to share your content on Facebook and Instagram as well. Please send your submissions to: info@MendotaTrail.org



Above: **Winter solitude** by Jim Lapis

Below: **Second Sunday Ramblers Hiking Club**
by Sally Morgan



Beaver activity by Brian Penley



Enjoying the run! by Jim Lapis

HELP US GET TO BENHAMS!

We have recently embarked on restoration of Trestle # 3, a hallmark trestle on the trail. It is a beautiful timbered trestle, sitting 40 feet above Abrams Creek and 195 feet in length. It is located 4.9 miles from the Bristol Trailhead, just 0.3 miles short of a large parking area and trail access point in Benhams.



After railroad traffic ceased, a brush fire below the trestle got out of control and scorched some of the uprights. Thankfully, no structural damage resulted.

Over the last 12 months, Jim Lapis and his dedicated trail maintenance crew have removed adjacent trees, uncovered concrete piers and timber supports and hauled off about 50 auto tires and associated trash located near the site.



In February, Mountain Heritage, Inc./Mendota Trail contracted with Tysinger, Hampton & Partners, Inc. out of Johnson City, TN to initiate engineering studies related to the trestle restoration project. We have since contracted with Inland Construction to complete Phase I of the restoration work. This will include repair of the existing abutments, placement of new flashing on the stringers and securing new cross-ties on the stringers.

Phase II will involve the placement of wood decking and safety railings on the trestle, as well as building approaches to the trestle.

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HELP US GET TO BENHAMS!.....CONTINUED

Please consider supporting us on behalf of our Trestle # 3 project. Thus far, we have received multiple donations to further the effort, but now have an urgent need for substantial help from our supporters to help us get across the finish line. Private contributors have helped us reach 51 % of our targeted budget amount of \$138,000. Our goal is to fully complete the restoration this summer. Your contribution will make a difference.

Major donor levels are: **Golden Spike - over \$20,000**



Silver Spike - \$10,000 - \$19,999



Iron Spike - \$5,000 - \$9,999



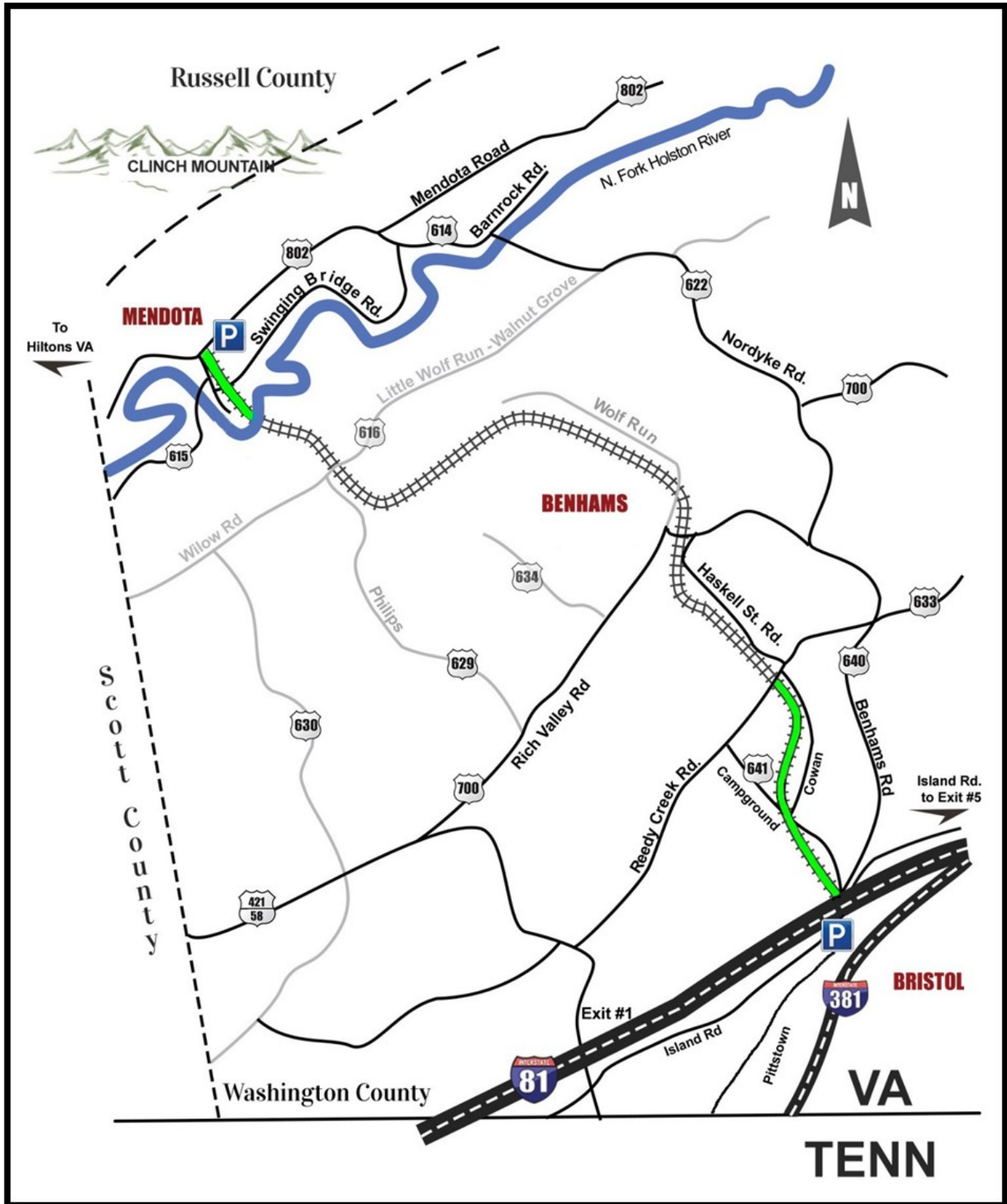
HELP US MAKE THIS HAPPEN!!!

Please mail or drop off your tax advantaged donations, payable to **Mountain Heritage, Inc. -- Mendota Trail** (Trestle # 3 noted on the memo line) to:

Mountain Sports, Ltd.
1021 Commonwealth Ave.
Bristol, VA 24201

Thank you!





Trail map with currently opened sections designated in green: . Completion of Trestle # 3 will enable us to add 2.1 miles from Reedy Creek Rd. to Rich Valley Rd. in Benhams.



BRISTOL HERALD COURIER EDITORIAL 10/31/2019

Rails-to-Trails Projects Bring Visitors and Help to Preserve our Heritage

For those of you not already on board, it's time to embrace a phenomenon that's spreading throughout Virginia and across the nation, it's called "rails to trails," and it involves saving and repurposing some of the thousands of miles of abandoned railroad grades by turning them into hiking and biking trails. Some of us are old enough to remember when railroads were much more prevalent than they are now, both for hauling cargo and transporting people. And for those who've never ridden a train, there was a huge benefit that most of us today will never experience: Trains have run on thousands of miles of track through scenic landscapes that we'll never see by just riding around in our cars. Mountainous areas such as Southwest Virginia are a prime example of this, where rail beds were carved out of mountainsides in areas far removed from roads and highways.

Riding a rail route for the first time, one never knew for sure what stunning beauty might lie around the next bend. These lines ran over countless rivers and streams, mostly on wooden trestles that were themselves works of art and fine examples of then-contemporary civil engineering. Some of the trestles were high enough to catch a rider's breath when looking out over a deep mountain gorge from a coach window. We're fortunate to have many railroad historical groups across the nation dedicated to preserving some of these scenic rail routes for excursion trains. But there are still thousands of miles of abandoned rail beds that will never see another train.

That's where the rails-to-trails concept kicks in. The reasoning is that if we can't ride trains on these secluded lines through some of the most-scenic places on the planet, we could at least preserve the rail beds - along with their bridges and historic trestles - for those of us who want to travel them under our own power. We're fortunate to have about 50 rails-to-trails projects open, underway or partially completed in our region and across the state, including the already quite-popular 35-mile Virginia Creeper Trail from Abingdon to Mount Rogers, and the eight-mile Salt Trail from Saltville to Glade Spring. Our newest local stretch of rail bed turned to hiking-and-biking trail is part of the planned 12.5-mile Mendota Trail, which when completed would stretch from Bristol, Virginia, to Mendota, all of it entirely within Washington County.

As reporter Joe Tennis has chronicled in the Washington County News, two sections of the trail are already open to hikers and bikers: a one-mile section from Mendota toward Bristol, which opened in late 2017; and a 3.1-mile stretch at the other end, running from near the Interstate 81 underpass on Island Road in far north Bristol to Reedy Creek Road. This section was opened to the public in August.

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BRISTOL HERALD COURIER EDITORIAL 10/31/2019 CONT.

Mountain Heritage, Inc., a nonprofit based in St. Paul, Virginia, is the owner and developer of the Mendota Trail, and is still very much in need of donations to help bring this entire project to completion. (See mendotatrail.org)

These rails-to-trails projects need and deserve our support. Here in Southwest Virginia, the ones already open to hikers and cyclists are contributing to our growing recreational and tourism industry, which is bringing people, jobs and money to our region.

Even those of us who aren't into hiking or biking can enjoy parts of these trails, and visit some of the historic places they are helping to highlight. Among those is The Store at Mendota, run by Katie Harris, who inherited it from her father. She reopened the store recently to take advantage of the town's newfound public interest resulting from the Mendota Trail.

Rallying behind efforts such as these new trails helps to preserve our heritage and build a brighter future for our children and grandchildren.

UPDATE ON GRANT AWARDS

Appalachian Regional Commission and Tobacco Commission Grants

Mountain Heritage, Inc./Mendota Trail has collaborated with Friends of Southwest Virginia to receive planning grants for the Mendota Trail, Virginia Creeper Trail, and several regional planning projects. Mendota Trail was allocated over \$100,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission to fund a Master Development Plan and an Economic Impact Forecast. Requests for Proposals for these exciting projects were released on 6/11/2020. These studies will provide foundations for future grant requests related to construction projects for the trail.

See the RFP here:

<https://friendsofswva.org/opportunities/>

Recreational Trail Program administered by VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation

This grant applies to the development of the Bristol Trailhead and the first 0.5 mile segment of the trail that will be ADA compliant. Preliminary engineering studies are underway related to development of the site plan, design concept for our shelter facility and layout and construction plans for the ADA trail.

Grant Award from Virginia Department of Forestry

Jim Lapis submitted a grant application for an award from Virginia's Urban & Community Forestry Grant Assistance Program. He was notified on April 7th that his proposal for a surveying project was approved for funding. This will be helpful in better determining our borders in relationship to our neighbors in certain areas along the trail corridor.

TRAIL RECOGNITION PLAQUES AND BENCHES

We have installed several acknowledgment plaques and benches along the trail to recognize major donors for their generous contributions or in-kind support. Later this year, a stone bench will be placed at the approach to Trestle # 3 to serve as a lasting memorial and tribute for a loved one who passed away last September. Trestle naming opportunities are also available for private donors or corporations interested in covering the full cost of restoration of a given trestle.

Please contact us if you have any interest in these options.

info@mendotatrail.org



MENDOTA TRAIL MERCHANDISE

Show your love for our trail and help support the trail effort!

Car stickers and T-shirts (soon) are available at:

Mountain Sports, Ltd. in Bristol, VA and

The Store@Mendota in Mendota, VA.

We thank you!





MENDOTA TRAILHEAD IMPROVEMENTS

Brian Penley and a team of volunteers erected a trailhead archway at the Mendota end of the trail. This will enhance the visibility of the trail entrance from the parking area. The volunteers found it challenging to dig holes 4 feet into the ground, as our arms weren't quite long enough, but we finally prevailed! The project was completed in January of this year.

The volunteer team included: Brian Penley (Project Manager), Joshua Penley, Mike Beale, Bob & Ellen Mueller, and Bobby Cheers. Funding for the project was collected by our trail friends at **The Store@Mendota**.

More recently, signage was added for **Trail Rule** and signage to better designate parking/no parking areas.



IN THE NEWS....

Since our last newsletter, The Mendota Trail was referenced in two articles:

Washington County News:

Joe Tennis

October 23, 2019

https://www.swvatoday.com/news/article_4db4a068-ac8b-5d43-9338-ed13ceea5327.html

The Appalachian Voice:

Rachael Kelley

October/November 2019

<http://appvoices.org/2019/10/11/mendota-rail-to-trail-moves-forward/>





Trail Courtesy & Guidelines

With increasing trail usage, it is important we remain mindful of established “rules of the road” as we meet others who are also enjoying nature’s beauty and fresh air. Please:

- respect COVID-19 norms of social distancing per Commonwealth of Virginia’s guidelines
- ring a bell or verbally advise slower traffic of your intent to pass when approaching them from behind
- pass slower traffic on their left
- slow to 10 mph or less when passing others on the trail
- stop and remove litter you may encounter on the trail
- bag deposits left by our four-footed friends

Please inform us at info@MendotaTrail.org if you encounter safety or maintenance issues, such as a fallen tree, on the trail.



RULES FOR TRAIL USE

Only officially announced portions of the trail are open to the public. The rest of the corridor is closed due to dangerous conditions; non-permitted usage is solely at the user’s own risk. Additional rules are:

- The trail is open dawn to dusk
- No trespassing on adjacent private property
- No motorized vehicles
- No hunting or discharge of firearms
- No animals other than leashed, non-vicious dogs; dog waste must be disposed of properly
- Minors must be accompanied by adults

TRAIL USERS DO SO AT THEIR OWN RISK AND BY USING THE TRAIL WAIVE ALL CLAIMS OF INJURY OR PROPERTY DAMAGE AGAINST THE OWNER OF THE TRAIL, ITS AGENTS, VOLUNTEERS, EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS, BOARD MEMBERS AND REPRESENTATIVES

STAY CONNECTED!

Please visit our website! Our brochure, video and prior newsletters are available for viewing.

www.mendotatrail.org



www.facebook.com/mendotatrailblazer



Instagram @mendota_trail

#mendotatrail



TELLING OUR STORY...

Ellen Mueller delivered a PowerPoint presentation about our trail to the Bristol Chamber of Commerce on November 21st. Jim Lapis shared trail updates with the ROMEOS (Retired Old Men Eating Out), a social group for us older guys, on December 11th. Both were well received and generated a lot of interest in our project.

A team from LEAD Bristol! recently completed a most informative PowerPoint presentation for our future presentations to community and civic groups. Their work also included an amazing video that highlights the economic impacts of the trail on the communities of Mendota and Bristol. A link to the video can be found on our website and Facebook pages. Thank you to the team members: Hunter Arnold, Jessica Bruner, Cody Cornelius, and Kristal Harman. We enjoyed collaborating with these bright and talented future leaders of our community. We also share our appreciation with the Bristol Chamber of Commerce for their role in coordinating the projects and the corporate sponsors who helped make it all possible.

If you are aware of a civic or community group that may be interested in learning more about our story please notify us at:

info@MendotaTrail.org



THE STORE@MENDOTA REOPENS!!

Great news! The Store@Mendota recently re-opened.

Visitors will be welcomed to a warm and friendly atmosphere, delicious sandwiches and scrumptious homemade desserts that are way too tempting! The Store is conveniently located opposite from the parking area at the Mendota Trailhead.

Hours are: Wed – Sun, 11 AM to 5 PM

Phone: (276) 669-2401

Visit them on Facebook to learn more.

The Store@Mendota is an enthusiastic supporter of the Mendota Trail and is a vendor for our trail merchandise. Please stop by, sit a spell and enjoy good food and hospitality!

