

# Mendota Trail Newsletter

## The Mendota Trail Moves on to Benhams!

**Trestle # 3 is dedicated and 2.2 more miles of trail now open to the public**

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, a celebration was held in Benhams to mark the opening of the “high trestle”, which enabled our trail to add two miles on the Bristol end. This beautiful timbered trestle, 193 feet long and 40 feet above Abrams Creek, has been a work in progress for over a year. Despite numerous challenges, including weather delays and shortages of building materials, we were able to reach our completion goal of Fall of 2020.



Trestle # 3



The celebration was attended by multiple local elected officials, the media, trail volunteers and several firms who played a role in making this dream become a reality. The engineering work was performed by Tysinger, Hampton & Partners, Inc. out of Johnson City, TN and the construction was performed by Inland Construction based in Abingdon.



## The Mendota Trail Moves on to Benhams! Continued...

Our big day had about 75 in attendance. Speakers and elected officials included:

**Bill Hartley, Mayor of Bristol, VA**

**Jim Lapis, President, Mendota Trail Conservancy, Inc.**

**Frank Kilgore, Mountain Heritage, Inc.**

**Saul Hernandez, Supervisor for the Tyler District, Washington County**

**Will Wampler, Delegate for the 4th District**

**Israel O'Quinn, Delegate for the 5th District**

**Representatives from the offices of Sen. Todd Pillion and Del. Terry Kilgore**

Major donors for the project were presented with plaques in recognition of their support. They were:

**Teresa Kilby Cloyd & Rob Simis**

**Jim & Susan Lapis**

**Bob & Ellen Mueller**

**Mike & Karen Spear**

The **Doppelt Family Foundation** was also recognized for their substantial donation that was fully used for engineering expenses.



The gathering assembles for celebrating this major milestone in the advancement of the trail



## BENHAMS OPENING DAY PHOTOS



Jake Holmes, John Ferguson, Tyler Lester,  
Del. Israel O'Quinn, Supervisor Saul Hernandez



Mayor Bill Hartley



Supervisor  
Saul  
Hernandez



Jim Lapis



Frank Kilgore



Delegate Will  
Wampler



## BENHAMS OPENING DAY PHOTOS CONTINUED....



Delegate Israel O'Quinn



John Ferguson with Del. Terry Kilgore's office



Left to right: Del. Will Wampler, Teresa Kilby Cloyd, Frank Kilgore, Saul Hernandez, John Ferguson, Bill Hartley, Tyler Lester, Del. Israel O'Quinn, Jim Lapis, Bob Mueller





## THE PASSING OF THE BATON...

The dream of the Mendota Trail, a 12.5 mile recreational corridor linking Bristol and Mendota, had its genesis shortly after the former excursion train ceased its operations. Several efforts for realizing that dream occurred during the ensuing decades but fell short. However, all that changed in the spring of 2016 when the City of Bristol, VA transferred the property for the former railroad to Mountain Heritage, Inc. (MHI), an organization with a proven track record of trail development in South-west Virginia.

Under the leadership of **Mr. Frank Kilgore**, the first mile of trail was opened on the Mendota end in October 2017 and the first trestle was fully restored in 2018. Three miles were opened on the Bristol end in August 2019 and, most recently, two miles were added earlier this month. We now have 6.3 miles of open trail!

One year ago, Mr. Kilgore indicated it was time for a local nonprofit organization to manage further development of the trail. A new nonprofit organization, the Mendota Trail Conservancy, was incorporated in July 2020 and an organizational meeting was held in August to adopt bylaws and elect board officers.

"A goal without a plan is just a wish."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Mr. Kilgore deserves full recognition for the instrumental roles he played in helping this dream become a reality. He was an organizer, fundraiser, energizer, teacher, legal advisor, volunteer laborer and cheerleader.

His sister, Jean, and daughter, Joyce, also played major roles from the beginning. Frank would be the first to admit he relies heavily on **Team Kilgore** in helping him be the visionary and achiever that he is.

**This trail will forever be indebted to the Kilgores and Mountain Heritage, Inc. for resurrecting this trail from the dead.**



**Frank Kilgore**

This is pure Frank on the Mendota Trail.....wearing an outfit suitable for trail work or the enjoyment of a walk on the trail, adorned with a smile .







## MENDOTA TRAIL CONSERVANCY, INC.

In late July, we became incorporated as the Mendota Trail Conservancy, Inc. Frank and Joyce Kilgore were instrumental in helping us develop our Articles of Incorporation and with completing our submission to the Commonwealth of Virginia. After receiving our certificate, we then worked to develop bylaws for our corporation.

Following that, we had an organizational meeting and elected officers and board members. We have since applied for 501 (c)(3) status with the IRS.

Meetings are typically held monthly.... some in Bristol and some in Mendota. Our agenda is usually full with all that occurs with a new organization and the many projects we are currently tackling related to the further advancement of the trail.

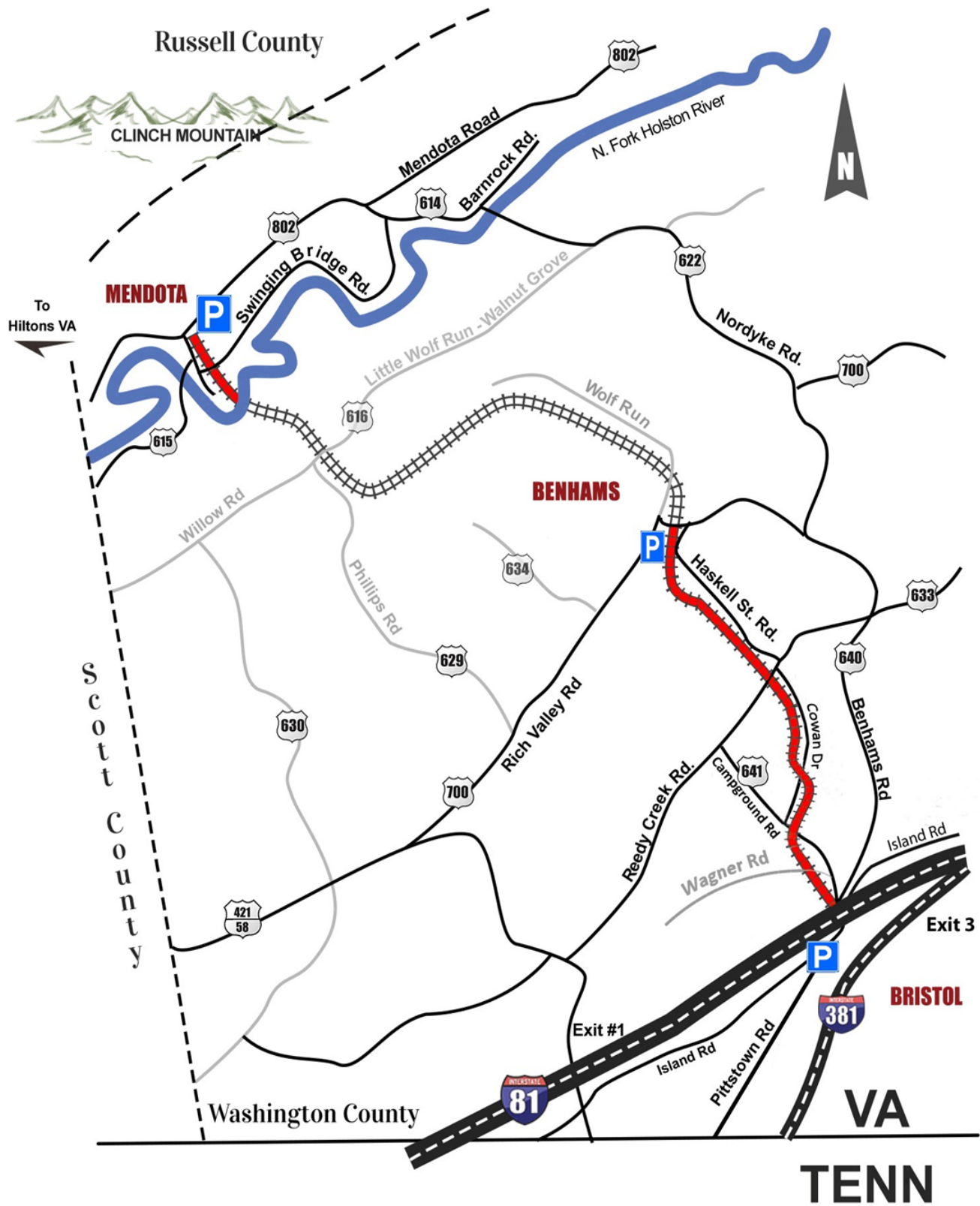
Jim Lapis.....President  
 Brian Penley.....Vice-President  
 Randy Olson.....Secretary  
 Bob Mueller.....Treasurer  
 Bobby Cheers.....Board Member  
 Ken Fleenor.....Board Member  
 Randi Goodman.....Board Member  
 Eva Beaulé.....Board Member  
 Bill Tindall.....Board Member  
 Jerry Grantham.....Board Member

## MENDOTA TRAILHEAD

Brian Penley recently added an amazing sign to the archway entrance to the trail at the Mendota Trailhead. He created a design concept and fabricated the result shown below. The lettering on the sign is made completely from recycled rail road materials found along our trail....spikes and associated railroad hardware.

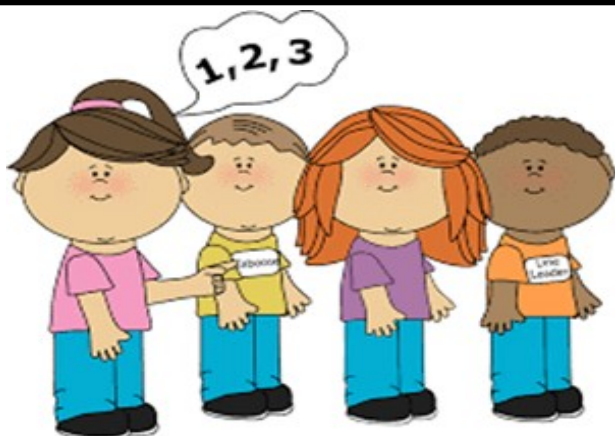


Further enhancements to the entrance are being developed by the ladies of TheStore@Mendota (Katie Harris, Dawn Sims, Lisa Edwards and Dorothy Dye) funded by donations provided by the community of Mendota and sales of trail merchandise. They are planning to complement the archway with stonework and plantings.



Open sections designated in red

## Trail Counts



During the month of October, we conducted trail counts to give us a better idea of how many people are using our trail. We collected data using a combination of electronic measuring devices and volunteer counters. Documentation of this information is important, especially as we witness increased trail usage over time, in our requests for funding from grantors and governmental entities.

October was a busy month for trail activity... beautiful fall colors and great weather encouraged many to enjoy the outdoors. Our opening of Trestle # 3 and the addition of two more miles on November 13<sup>th</sup> significantly added to the numbers we collected in October.

Thank you to the volunteers who assisted with the count!

Cheryl LeBlanc, Randy Olson, Jim & Susan Lapis, Bob & Ellen Mueller, Bill Hardee, Ben & Anne Cowan, Brian Penley, Bill Shanks, Amy Denton, Laura Rasor & Bowie, Randi Goodman, John Iskra and Fred Greear (apologies if we missed anyone)



We didn't include these four trail users in our count on October 14<sup>th</sup> ....

## 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!





## TRESTLE # 4 (HEPPERT TRESTLE)

We are enormously pleased to announce a significant contribution for the advancement of the Mendota Trail! Rick and Doreen Heppert have most generously committed to covering the projected expenses for the full restoration of Trestle # 4. It is the trestle that crosses Rich Valley Rd. (700) on the east end of Benhams near the Head Start School.



Rick and Doreen have been active supporters of the trail from the very beginning. They explored and photographed numerous sites along the trail, including remote areas in "the gorge" that were overgrown with vegetation. Rick, our "trail scout", created a Scribble Map early in the process that documented trestle locations and described trail conditions. He has been updating this regularly. Rick has promoted the trail on Facebook and on the website for the Kingsport Bicycle Association.

See: <http://kba.tripod.com/mendota/>

The Hepperts regularly participate in many of our special events and work days. They are active recreational cyclists and hikers.

We are most grateful for this major gift on behalf of the Mendota Trail!



**Doreen and Rick Heppert**



## SPONSOR A TRESTLE!

Of the 17 trestles spanning our 12.5 mile trail, two have now been fully restored. Four have been reserved by generous donors for future restoration. Eleven more are seeking a family or corporate sponsor. Contact us if you have interest:

[info@mendotatrail.org](mailto:info@mendotatrail.org).





## TELLING OUR STORY...

We have had significant outreach with the public and elected officials over the last several months. These included a WCYB segment on 9/27 involving Eva Beale and Ellen Mueller showcasing our pending opening of Trestle # 3 and a PowerPoint trail update presentation by Ellen Mueller to the Washington County Board of Supervisors on 10/27.

Jim Lapis has met with several elected officials including Bill Hartley, Mayor of Bristol, VA; Saul Hernandez, Washington County Tyler District Supervisor and Delegates Will Wampler and Israel O'Quinn. Brian Penley and Eva Beale recently met with Delegate Terry Kilgore. Several board members contributed in providing interviews and background information for the recently published feature article about the Mendota Trail in the Bristol Herald Courier on Sunday, November 8th. Thank you, Joe Tennis, for so artfully communicating our amazing story and for being a supporter of rails-trails in Virginia.

## MEET OUR ENGINEERS....



We are currently working closely with an engineering firm, **Tysinger, Hampton & Partners, Inc.**, on several projects along the trail corridor. They were of enormous help on the Trestle # 3 restoration as it required special diligence due to its length, height and design considerations. Their other areas of focus include the Bristol trail-head and preliminary assessments of other trestles beyond each end of the currently open trail.

TH&P, based in Johnson City, has been involved with numerous other trail projects in the area and has special expertise in timber design work. The Project Leader, Gary Tysinger, has commented that he views the Mendota Trail as being a "diamond in the rough." He has over 54 years of civil engineering experience. Gary has repeatedly demonstrated that our project is a labor of love for him and his team. His eyes light up and a broad smile surfaces when we show him another trestle we want to add to our wish list.



**Gary Tysinger, LM, FASCE**



## ADOPT SOME OF OUR TRAIL AND BE A CAREGIVER!

This involves maintaining trail segments, our trailheads and road crossings to insure safe visibility.

Several MT volunteers have already been doing so this year.....

Darin Denton, Ken Fleenor, Jeff Fleming, Oscar Harris, Bob & Ellen Mueller, Randy Olson and Mike Spear

**Dana Booher** recently joined our caregiver team and will now mow along Haskell Station Rd. Thank you, Dana!

Jim Lapis will continue as a foster parent (where needed)

Please consider adding your name to the list!

Contact: [info@mendotatrail.org](mailto:info@mendotatrail.org)



### The Mendota Trail deeply appreciates the following for their in-kind support over the last six months:

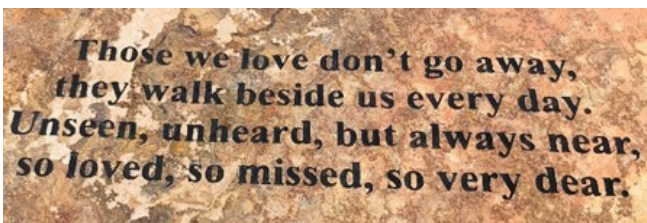
Miller & Miller Construction, Inc.	Bristol, VA
El Shaddai Church	Bristol, VA
Ken Fleenor	Benhams, VA
Bart Long & Associates	Bristol, TN
Boulder Look Stone Co.	Bristol, VA
Danny Tate	Benhams, VA
Tri City Tent & Event	Bristol, VA
The Williams Company, Inc.	Bristol, VA
City of Bristol	Bristol, VA

## CHARLES KILBY MEMORIAL BENCH

Teresa Kilby Cloyd and her husband, Rob Simis, adorned the south end of Trestle # 3 with a beautiful natural stone bench to memorialize her father, Charles Kilby, who passed away on September 21, 2019. Dwayne Ball of Boulder Look Stone Co. supplied the stone and delivered it to its new home on the trail.



Many have commented on how attractive the bench is and how touching the inscription is on its surface.



Thank you, Teresa, Rob and Dwayne for this amazing addition to our trail!

## GRANT UPDATE

### ARC / Tobacco Commission

The Mendota Trail is continuing our partnership with Friends of Southwest Virginia, the grant administrator for the above grant earmarked for the development of a Master Plan and Economic Impact Forecast. This will greatly benefit us in terms of budgeting for future trestle restorations and serve as a guideline for establishing near term priorities. In addition, this study will strengthen our applications for future grants. An added benefit will be the exploration of routing for a connector trail from the trailhead on Island Rd. to downtown Bristol. This trail will be ~ 2.5 miles long and will help trail users access the city center to enjoy our nearby restaurants and shopping. We have recently contracted with Equinox, a consulting firm based in Asheville, NC to coordinate the project.

Team members: Bob & Ellen Mueller, Brian Penley from the MT; Sally Morgan & Ellen Tolton from BV City staff

### Recreational Trails Program

We are continuing to work on the Preliminary Engineering Phase of this project for the development of the Bristol Trailhead on Island Rd. We hope to complete that in early 2021 so we can proceed with the Construction Phase. Ultimately, we will have restroom facilities, a picnic shelter and designated parking at the trailhead. We will also construct a ramp for mobility challenged trail users that will lead to the trail entry under I-81. The ramp and first 0.5 miles of the trail will be surfaced so they will be ADA compliant.

Team members: Bob & Ellen Mueller



## ELECTRIC BIKES (E-BIKES) AND THE MENDOTA TRAIL



The Mendota Trail currently allows Class 1 e-bikes. These are equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling, and that ceases to provide assistance when the e-bike reaches 20 mph.

Normal rules of courtesy apply.... announce you will be passing on the left, after slowing to 10 mph, when overtaking slower trail traffic.

Electric bikes offer users the opportunity to enjoy outdoor recreation and the benefits of nature that may not otherwise be an option for them.



Benhams parking area, Rich Valley Rd

## REEDY CREEK ROAD



Several trail users have inquired about parking availability at the Reedy Creek Rd. crossing at 3.1 miles. We are evaluating the future feasibility of this. However, this is currently a **NO PARKING** area, except for authorized trail maintenance vehicles.

**Parking is available at the trailheads in Bristol and Mendota as well as at a large parking area in Benhams.**





## Let's Keep on Movin' On!



We recently reached a major milestone with the completed restoration of Trestle # 3 and the opening of two more miles on the Bristol end of the trail. Your financial contributions have truly made a difference!

Our next goal is to extend each end of the trail toward the middle. Our focus will be on the Mendota end and working further to complete the trailhead project in Bristol. Funding is urgently needed to cover current operational expenses related to further trail development.

**Please help maintain our current momentum!** Your gift will help open more miles.

Mail your tax advantaged contributions, payable to Mendota Trail, to:

Mendota Trail Conservancy

P. O. Box 1322

Bristol, VA 24203

Or deliver to:

Mountain Sports, Ltd.

1021 Commonwealth Ave.

Bristol, VA 24201



**Limited quantities and sizes of T-shirts are available at Mountain Sports Ltd. in Bristol and at TheStore@Mendota in Mendota. Trail stickers are available at both locations.**

## STAY CONNECTED!

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

[www.mendotatrail.org](http://www.mendotatrail.org)



[www.facebook.com/mendotatrailblazer](https://www.facebook.com/mendotatrailblazer)



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Twitter @MendotaTrail

**#mendotatrail**