



# Mendota Trail Newsletter

## Trestle 10, GIGI'S CROSSING, Dedicated May 13th

Our shortest bridge on the trail was officially dedicated on May 13<sup>th</sup>. In keeping with the wishes of the sponsor, the **Mitoraj Family**, this was a private affair. Attendees were limited to family members, several Board members and volunteers who were instrumental in bringing this 'baby trestle' back to life.



**Jim Lapis**, our Board President, lauded how the Mitorajs were linchpins for advancing the trail effort as early as 2020 by providing needed trail access for the reconstruction of Trestle 3 in Benhams and how the same occurred beyond Trestle 10 in 2022 for the trestle projects in the gorge. He saluted the trestle as being 'the Gateway to the Gorge.'



**Tom and Vickie Mitoraj** shared a message of their love of family and for the beauty of Southwest Virginia. They view the trestle sponsorship as being a legacy gift. Vickie explained the trestle name is in recognition of her grandma nickname, Gigi. They have eleven grand-

children. The younger ones in attendance enjoyed unscheduled activities of throwing stones in Leonard Creek, climbing on piles of gravel and collecting caterpillars.

Trail volunteers contributing to the project included **Brian Penley, Phil Young, Bill Tindall, Jim Lapis, Randy Olson, and Bob Mueller**. Other assists included engineering help from **Gary Tysinger** with Tysinger, Hampton & Partners, LLC and construction help from **David Villanueva** from Inland Construction, Inc.

Following the ribbon cutting, we gathered for a scrumptious lunch in the Mitoraj barn at their residence.



## Updates for Bristol Trailhead

The major construction has been completed, but work continues!



We shared news of the completion of the **Rotary Pavilion** in our last newsletter. It has now been adorned with a plaque recognizing the donor and an appropriate insignia.



**Randy Olson** helps install the Rotary insignia



Concrete picnic tables were purchased by a grant from **Virginia Outdoors Foundation** and assembled on several cold days in January. The assembly team included **Brian Penley, Phil Young, Randy Olson, Bob & Ellen Mueller and Sam**, from Inland Construction, Inc.



Assembly team including (L to R): Bob, Phil & Brian

Our next phase will be the addition of a restroom facility, largely supported by a generous gift from **Ballad Health**. We expect this will be in place by early July.





## Thank you, Wade Massie

The Mendota Trail Conservancy, Inc. has benefited significantly from pro bono legal expertise generously provided by Wade Massie, an officer with the **PennStuart** law firm.

Wade has helped us navigate nuances related to property claims of adjacent landowners and examine the complexities of contractual issues. Throughout, he has provided thoughtful and measured counsel. His love of the Trail and its future potential resonates repeatedly in his commentary with our Board.

Wade is a graduate of the University of Richmond School of Law. He was subsequently admitted to the bar in Virginia, West Virginia and Tennessee. He has been lead counsel in over 250 cases in federal court and has appeared in over 25 different circuit courts in the three states.

In recognition of his trial and appellate work, Wade was selected to be a Fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers in 2000.

Wade resides in Bristol, Virginia, with his wife Meredith, also a supporter of the trail.



Wade, enjoying a stroll through 'The Cut'

## Upcoming Trail Events in Our Area



**07/22** Creeper Trail Ride to Honor Lawrence the Legend

**10/07** Creeper Trail Annual Rails to River...Ride for Taylor

**10/14** Mendota Trail Cut to the Chase 5K and one mile run-walk

**10/15** Kiss the Gravel bike ride (Mendota Trail)



## Construction Update

We are frequently asked... 'When will the trail be fully connected between Bristol and Mendota?'

**The opening date is getting closer every day!**

We are currently restoring the two remaining trestles as well as doing trail surface maintenance work on adjacent sections of unopened trail. We expect to have the work completed by late summer unless we encounter major weather delays or supply chain challenges.

The engineering is being done by Tysinger, Hampton & Partners, Inc. out of Johnson City, TN and the construction work is being performed by Inland Construction, Inc. based in Abingdon. We have several volunteers playing a significant supportive role including **Brian Penley, Jerry Grantham, Jim & Susan Lapis, John Lapis, Joey Hills and Phil Young.**

This work is being funded by a Virginia state appropriation advanced by our outstanding Southwest Virginia legislative team including **Senator Todd Pillion, Delegates Terry Kilgore, Israel O'Quinn and Will Wampler.**

Please remember this remains an active construction zone and is closed to the public until announced otherwise. Please view our map on the final page of this newsletter to view the trail sections that are currently open.

## TRAIL RULES

- Open dawn to dusk
- No trespassing on adjacent private property
- No motorized vehicles
- No littering, tobacco products, alcohol or drugs
- No hunting or discharge of firearms
- No animals other than leashed, non-vicious dogs. Dog owners liable for injuries. 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 TRAIL OWNER, ITS AGENTS, VOLUNTEERS, EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS, BOARD MEMBERS AND REPRESENTATIVES**

**REMAIN ONLY ON THE 10.5 MILES OF TRAIL THAT ARE CURRENTLY OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. DO NOT TRESPASS ON UNOPENED SECTIONS OR POSTED SEGMENTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION.**



## Yeti Ultra Run Event on April 29<sup>th</sup> a Huge Success!

The inaugural **Troublesome Hollow 50K** took place on a beautiful sunny Saturday. Over 175 runners, representing multiple states and Canada participated. The organizer, **Jason Green** with **Yeti Trail Runners**, wanted to showcase his Bristol roots, the area's cultural heritage, and the grandeur of our surrounding countryside. He hit a home run!



**YETI TRAIL RUNNERS**  
TAKING TRAIL RUNNING TO A NEW LOW.

Runners picked up their registration packets on Friday afternoon at the **Birthplace of Country Music Museum**. They were able to reconnect with other participants and had an opportunity to learn about Bristol's unique role in being the "Big Bang" of Country Music.

The run covered a 50K course...that's a bit over 30 miles! Most of it was on the Mendota Trail, except for an added feature of a jaunt up a "small hill" to the Mendota fire tower for an amazing view of the surrounding landscape...a climb of 1600 feet over about 3.5 miles. The route also included an option to cross the swinging bridge over the North Fork of the Holston River.



The participants had glowing comments about the course although a few indicated they wanted to give Jason some grief about the "small hill." Many of these folks encounter each other on a regular basis at different ultra run events.



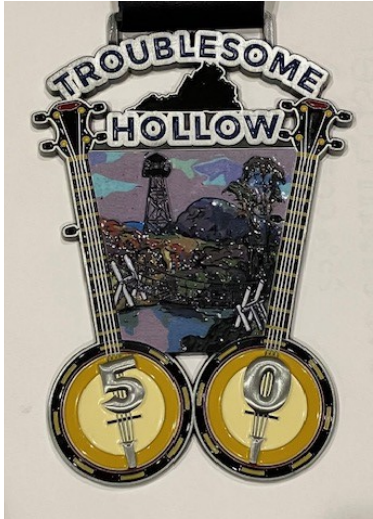
## Yeti Ultra Run continued...



There was a party atmosphere manifested by a varied display of creative outfits and the gyrations of the emcee at the start/finish line.



The camaraderie built upon a common bond of enduring such a challenge and sharing in its achievement was readily apparent. Jason greeted each runner at the finish line with a huge hug. Radiant smiles were evident on the faces of all who accomplished their goal. The overall winner was **Amy Hamilton** (Abingdon, VA) with a time of 4:23:38.



Significant preparatory work was required to make the course suitable for the event. Multiple trail volunteers contributed including **Brian Penley, Jerry Grantham, Jim & Susan Lapis, John Lapis, Phil Young, Ken Flenor, Bob & Ellen Mueller**. Parking assistance on the day of the event was provided by **Terry & Kiku Harvey, Randy Olson, Brian Miller, Kenneth Flenor, Brian Penley, John Lapis, Phil McFarlane, Joey Hills, Bobby Cheers, and Bob & Ellen Mueller**. Volunteer photographers at different locations along the route included **Shane Hensley, Adam Martin, and Tracy McCready**.

Plans are already being made for a 2024 encore. We thank Jason for bringing this event to Bristol, the Mendota Trail and beautiful Southwest Virginia!



## Hunting for Easter Eggs in Benhams



Two classes of students from the Benhams Head Start School frolicked on the Mendota Trail on April 4<sup>th</sup> while searching for hidden treasures. The hunters made short work of locating the plastic eggs that were hidden by our volunteer team including **Ellen Mueller, Kiku Harvey, and the Sietins family from Bel Air, MD (Julia, Liz, Jenny, and Alexis).**



Each child was provided a small gift packet from the Mendota Trail as they returned to school for their other scheduled activities.

Road crossings were monitored by **Phil Young, Terry Harvey, and Bob Mueller.** The Head Start administrator noted how special this event is for the kids. She shared the students have an opportunity to visit the trail at least once each month and that they are pleased the trail is so readily accessible to them.

## You are Appreciated

### George and Judy Houser!

Years ago, VDOT removed a trestle bridge over Abrams Creek in the Phillips area. At an early stage, our trail planners recognized this was a significant problem. George and Judy Houser offered a solution by allowing an easement on their property to bypass the missing trestle. They have since supported the trail in additional ways.

We have placed a plaque thanking them for this gift, adjacent to the area where the prior trestle was located. It is fittingly placed on a timber beam salvaged from one of our trestle restoration projects.

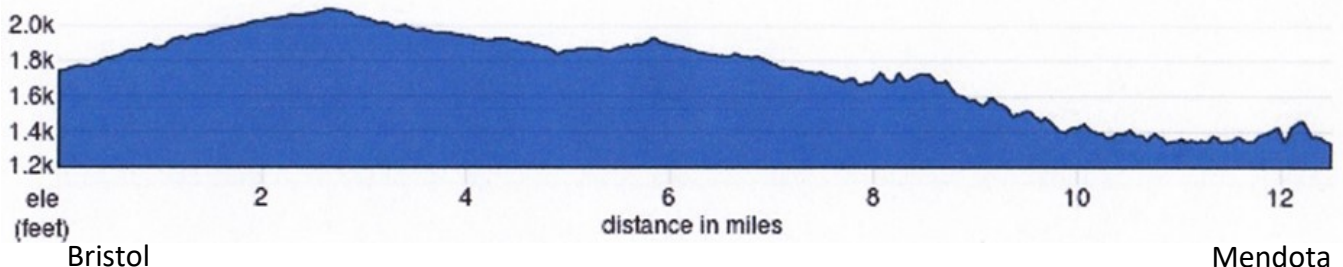




We thank the following for their support of the trail in special ways...

- Eric Fields and the Summit Companies, Bristol, TN, for providing meeting space and other non-profit assistance
- Dennis Leonard with Tri-State Sign, Inc., Bristol, TN, for signage design help
- Wade Massie of PennStuart, Abingdon, VA, for numerous hours of legal assistance
- Cullen Barker and Inland Construction, Inc., Abingdon, VA, for materials and construction support in multiple areas
- Dwain Miller of Miller & Miller Construction, Inc., Bristol, VA, for construction assistance
- Master Gardeners & Steele Creek Park, Bristol, TN, for providing plantings for erosion control
- Blue Water Industries, Abingdon, VA, for supporting our gravel needs
- Joe Thomas, with Thomas Hollow Nurseries, Bristol, VA, for landscaping help
- Asplundh Tree Expert Co., Tri-Cities, for donating traffic control cones
- Douglas Miller, for providing a location for directional signage on Gate City Hwy.
- Adam Martin, with Neoteric Video, Tri-Cities, for donating help with photography and videography
- Shane Hensley and Tracy McCready, Bristol, VA, for donating help with photography

## Trail Profile







## Ross Baker Erects Trail Bench & Bike Rack

**Ross Baker** organized a team of volunteers to construct a bench and bicycle rack adjacent to the trail on Saturday, May 13<sup>th</sup>. The site, near Trestle 18 (Wildwood) was chosen as a quiet shaded spot overlooking Abrams Creek. The project was initiated by Ross as part of his requirements to achieve the Eagle Scout rank. Ross is actively involved in Troop 8 and is a junior at John Battle High School, where he is a member of the cross country team. He also plays lacrosse as a club sport. He has plans to further his education at Virginia Tech and is considering a career in engineering. Proud parents are **Brad and Vanessa Baker**.



## Little Free Library placed in Mendota

We have a second Little Free Library on the Mendota Trail! The project was organized by **Keri Gilliam**, an art teacher at Valley Institute Elementary School in Washington County. Multiple second grade students were actively engaged with this endeavor.



The students coordinated their design ideas with the Washington County Career and Technical Education Center. The project emphasized the importance of “reduce, reuse and recycle.”

Trail volunteers, **Phil Young, Bob & Ellen Mueller**, collaborated with Ms. Gilliam and helped to erect the colorful library at our Mendota Trailhead. Please visit and make an exchange!



We continually look for opportunities for sharing updates on the trail’s progress with our surrounding community. **Ellen Mueller** did so on April 18<sup>th</sup> by providing a PowerPoint presentation to the Blue Ridge Garden Club at The Reserve in Bristol, VA. Fifteen were in attendance.





## Mendota Trail Merchandise for Sale

New trail merchandise has arrived! We now have shirts and hats available in various colors at Mountain Sports, Ltd. in Bristol, VA and The Store@Mendota in Mendota. We also have trail stickers for sale. Please stop by these stores and support the trail by making a purchase. We thank you!



### 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](http://www.facebook.com/mendotatrailblazer)



Instagram @mendota\_trail



Twitter @MendotaTrail

#mendotatrail

### 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!



## Celebrate Trails Day a Success

We had a great turnout for our annual Trails Day Celebration on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. We delayed it from Saturday to Sunday due to rain on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Mendota had an especially good showing, thanks to the presence of a large church group that took advantage of a beautiful day for their social outing.



**Susan Lapis** and church group preparing to enjoy time on the trail!



**Rick & Doreen Heppert** leading a walk from Benhams.

### Trail Etiquette

Courtesy is Contagious!

- You don't make a good hood ornament. Please stop at all road crossings.
- This is a trail, not a speedway. If riding a bike, keep it under 20 mph or slower when around others.
- The trail is not a silent disco. Please keep one ear open.
- Bikers defer to walkers, runners, and dog walkers for right of way.
- Stay to the right side of the trail. Practice Southern hospitality by saying "on your left" or using your bell when passing.
- Please carry out your trash.
- Please clean up after your dog.

Notify us at [info@mendotatrail.org](mailto:info@mendotatrail.org) if you see any unsafe or trail maintenance needs.

Thanks to Greenville County,  
SC Parks Recreation & Tourism



# Welcome to the Mendota Trail!

We are increasingly witnessing out of state visitors at our trail access points. We welcome them, as we know they are supporting our local economy during their stay.



## Memorial Bench for Dr. John Iskra

We lost a dear trail friend in 2022. John was an early trail supporter and enjoyed using it regularly.

His family requested that we place a memorial bench at one of his favorite locations on the trail, overlooking Little Creek. It is a particularly serene spot.

The bench surface is comprised of a beautiful stone slab retrieved from elsewhere on the trail. The leg supports were salvaged from some of our restored trestle work.



The plaque was custom made by **Johnnie Keene** from the Precision Machining Facility at Virginia Highlands Community College.

Trail volunteers involved with this special labor of love included **Jim Lapis, John Lapis, Phil Young, Bob & Ellen Mueller.**



*In  
Loving  
Memory*

Please consider joining other donors who have recently made special gifts to our trail effort in memory of those no longer with us:

**Rex & Justine Eades**

**Margie Leonard**

**James & Minnie Hendricks**

**Rachel Fowlkes**



## Mendota River Run

The community of Mendota and the Mendota Trail hosted 125 runners and over 50 walkers on Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup> to an outstanding event. Ideal weather complemented the festive atmosphere. The 5K course started at the Community Center and later turned onto the trail, reversing course after crossing Sunny Side and Wildwood Trestles. **Angie Thompson** did a great job in organizing the event, which was done as a fundraiser for the Community Center. **Ellen Mueller** helped with registration and welcomed participants to the trail and **Jim Lapis** announced medal winners afterwards for the various categories.

This was a great event for introducing more people to the trail and the Mendota Community.



**John Lapis** heading toward the finish line...

## Visit Mendota Expeditions...

Tube or kayak on the North Fork of the Holston River!

Contact Janet Meadows (276-696-2742) for information and to reserve a launch time. Groups are welcome! Located at 9310 Appaloosa Rd. Bristol, VA (along the river near Mendota).



**New this year!**...shuttle service for the Mendota Trail! (Requires reservations in advance)

## The Store@Mendota

Our friends at The Store@Mendota have reopened! Please stop by so they can welcome your visit.... whether for the first time or as a returning friendly face.

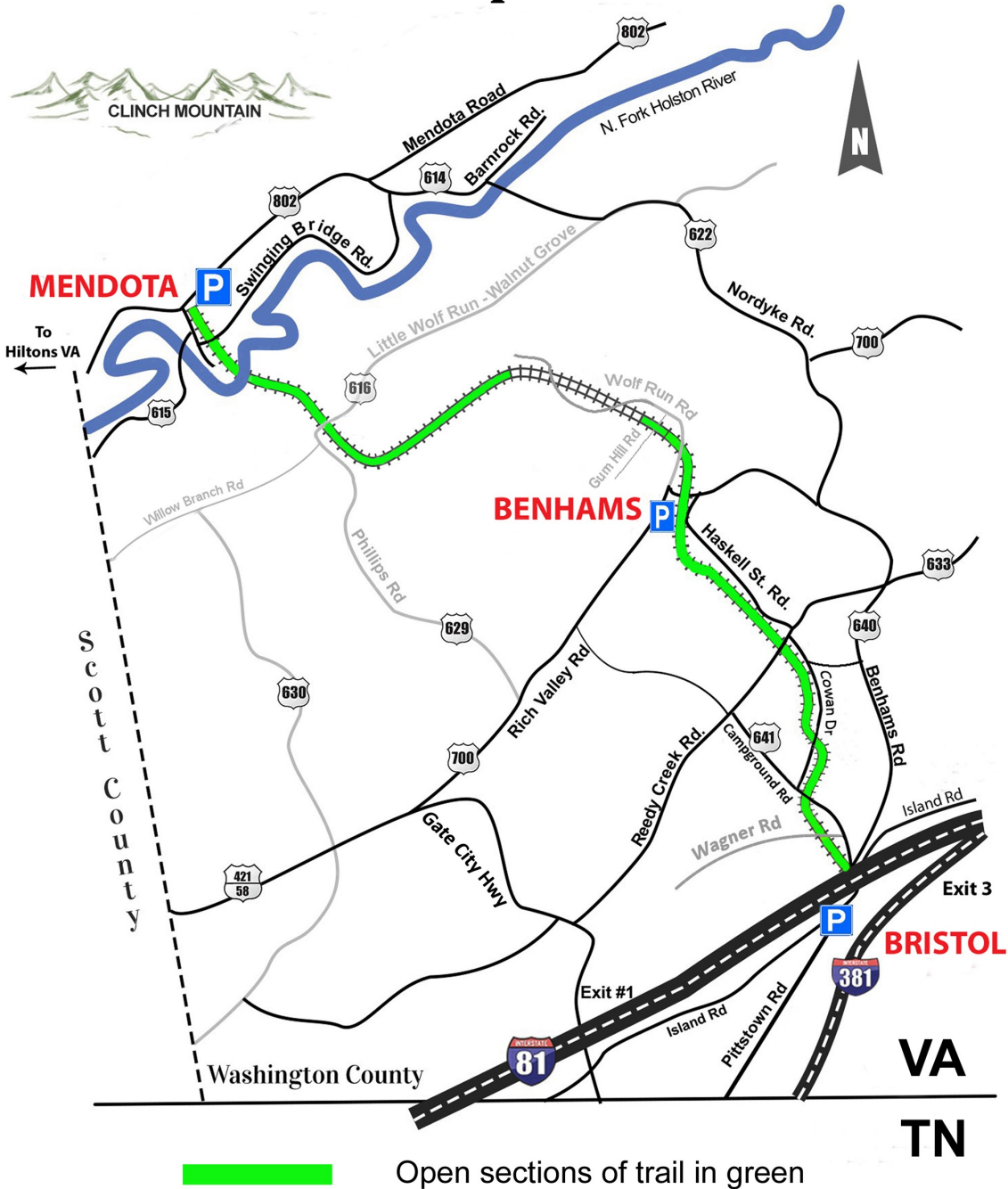
They offer a great selection of hearty sandwiches, snacks and tasty sweet treats. After all, you need to recharge after expending all that energy on the trail. By the way, the friendly atmosphere is calorie free!

Options include indoor dining or an inviting outdoor patio. Stop, sit a spell, and enjoy!

Hours: Wednesday – Sunday: 11 AM – 5 PM



# Mendota Trail Map



## Parking Locations:

- Bristol Trailhead:** beside 1788 Island Rd.
- Benhams:** 7720 Rich Valley Rd.
- Mendota Trailhead:** across from 2421 Mendota Rd.