

# CURRENTS

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## DAN RIVER BASIN ASSOCIATION MERGES WITH MARTINSVILLE/HENRY COUNTY RIVERS AND TRAILS GROUP

It's official. The knot has been tied. The three-year-old Dan River Basin Association has merged with the six-month-old Martinsville-Henry County Rivers and Trails Group. The engagement was a short one, but the prospect for a happy marriage seems good.

"It's a natural fit," says Lindley Butler, DRBA Treasurer, who with wife and DRBA Secretary T Butler has been attending the meetings of the Henry County group. "The emphasis with which DRBA started three years ago is the same as the one that has come to dominate the thinking of Martinsville-Henry County R & T: trails and river access." MHRTG has already obtained a VDOF greenway planning grant for a trail along the Smith River southwest of the Fieldale Bridge.

From its inception the Dan River Basin Association has been conceived as an umbrella group embracing sub-groups throughout the Basin. Henry

County is one of the eight Virginia and North Carolina counties that make up most of the area of the Dan River Basin. The Rivers and Trails Group is particularly concerned with the upper reaches of the Smith River.

"I think that this is a good match," said Kay Slaughter, a lawyer with the Southern Environmental Law Center in Charlottesville who has been convening the sessions of the Henry County Group under the aegis of the Harvest Foundation, located in Martinsville. "The members of the Rivers and Trails group think so too, so long as the group is able to maintain its identity." At its April retreat the group agreed to merge with DRBA.

Then at the DRBA annual membership meeting April 9 three members of MHRTG were elected to the DRBA Board of Directors: Roger Adams, Ellen Jessee and Ben Murdock. John Buck, a teacher at Patrick Henry Com-

munity College, who has been active in MHRTG, was already a member of the Board.

The two groups are now working jointly to secure grants to staff offices in both Virginia and North Carolina.



Board members and visitors preparing for meeting (#259). Left to right: Roger Adams, Linda Strange-Dillard, T Butler, Jeff Johnston, Ben Murdock, and Will Truslow

Submitted by Forrest Altman

## Spring Clean Competition Nets Cash Prizes

For two weeks each April, the Rockingham County Beautification Council sponsors Rockingham County Spring Clean, designed to clean up area roadsides and illegal dumps. Nonprofit groups register, clean up pre-approved locations, deliver the trash to the landfill, and compete for cash prizes. Friendly rivalries arise between groups, though not often so pronounced as in the Pyron family, where Julia and daughter Ashley collect and haul trash for DRBA but Julia's father George uses the same truck for the Rockingham County Naturalist Club.

Throughout the cleanup, DRBA and Naturalist Club members worked

side-by-side and wondered which would win the first prize. Milton Hundley, whose energy never seemed to flag, put his new trailer through its paces with daily hauls. Jane and Ron Norwood brought in dump truck loads of tires, and pickup trucks carried debris loaded by Barbara Solomon, Ken and Margo Perkins, Bill and Cheryl Garrity, Mike Vaughan, Jim Joyce, Tom Good, Kitty Williams, Charles Mallard, Sandy Connolly, Peyton Cherry, Wanda Hamrick, Jocelyn Gordon, Marion Edwards, Jane and Mike Haines, Cheryl and Bennet Nooe, Brenda Atkins, Ann and Jim Clark, and T and Lindley Butler.

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## FIRST SATURDAY OUTING April, 2005

### ROCK CASTLE CREEK GORGE HIKE

I am happy, as a new member of DRBA, to report on my first "First Saturday Outing" on the Rock Castle Creek Gorge Hike. The day began rather inauspiciously when I awakened to the sound of pouring rain. But I managed to entice my husband, Joe, out of bed with the smell of bacon & eggs and to convince him that we should head up the mountain anyway, just for the fun of the ride if nothing else. But, who would have believed it, we arrived at the trailhead with bright blue skies dotted with fluffy white clouds, although I can't say that it was particularly warm.

Our group set out with our fearless leader, Will Truslow, and we started to get acquainted with our trail mates, Gerald Witt, Ken Hilton, Diane Bartz, and the Knight family. (Sorry I couldn't remember your names; I got a chance to refresh my memory with the others again at trail's end.) When we came to the first big creek crossing, I'm afraid the Knights got "cold feet" and decided to turn back. That lucky devil, Joe, had on tall waterproof boots and just waded on across while the rest of us had to get along as best we could. Some of us, rather than get them wet, removed our boots and socks, and waded across. Then, not much further down the trail we had to repeat the process. But from then on we had much appreciated bridges for our treacherous crossings.

Forrest Altman and his young neighbor, Dylan Stiltner, coming from the other direction, joined us near a rather nice white farmhouse with capital rest area facilities. The porch was a great picnic area for lunch and the wooden outhouse was first class with a regular toilet seat and a concrete floor.

We continued our journey through the lovely gorge with rushing Rock Castle Creek cascading over rocks and cliffs crowded with rhododendrons. Although the rhododendrons are still a couple of months from blooming, we did discover numerous wildflowers in bloom, including Virginia Bluebells, Spring Beauties, Bloodroot, Cut-leaved Toothwort and Early Saxifrage. There were others, though not in bloom yet, the leaves have appeared such as Trillium, Trout Lilly, and Rattlesnake Plantain.

I noticed Gerald taking numerous notes and on questioning him about it, discovered that he is a reporter for the Danville Register and Bee writing an article on spring wildflowers! The article should be in either this coming Wednesday's or Sunday's edition.

Ken's brother, Kerry Hilton, who lives nearby, saw us off at the trailhead and met us at trail's end. A special thanks to Kerry and Forest for shuttling us back to the trailhead.

*Submitted by Ellen Jessee*

## FIRST SATURDAY OUTING May, 2005

### Stokes County Float

#### NC 89 BRIDGE TO DAN RIVER COMPANY

We began the May 7<sup>th</sup> outing in the parking lot of the Dan River Company on Flinchum Road in Stokes County. They provided the shuttle and quickly, expertly loaded us and our gear. We were taken to the put-in point, provided with up-to-date hazard info ("tree down river left..." etc.) and unloaded with "have a great paddle" ringing in our ears.

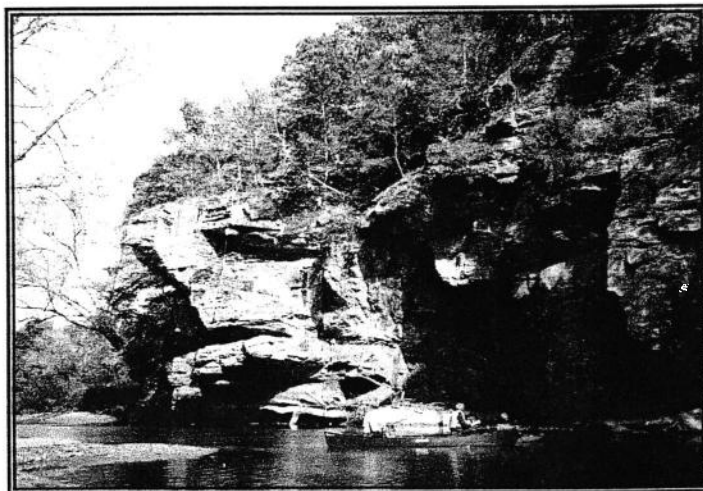
The weather was perfect for paddling. It was a very moderate temperature with a clear Carolina Blue sky and plenty of water in the river. Our group of 16 donned PFD's, loaded gear (better known as "stuff") into boats in record time and prepared to engage with the mighty Dan. Ah, but it was then that "Where's my paddle? Have you seen my paddle?" was heard from four of our group. It seems they were about to be "up the creek (in this case the river) without a paddle"...literally. Whoops! The day was saved by the quick action of our group leader who pulled out his cellphone and got...a signal. Most cellphones go dead in this area near Hanging Rock/Danbury. A quick call to the Dan River Company and within 10 minutes we were all on the river. Our deepest thanks!

This day's leisurely float covered a 6.5 mile scenic section of the Dan passing Moore's Spring Campground, Cascade Creek, Indian Creek and Demon Rock. It has Class I and II rapids. It is here too, that it is easy to believe that civilization has been left far behind. High bluffs, wildflowers, a variety of trees and birds; these are what can be seen from the river. There is no sound of

traffic and no visible pollution. As we neared our lunch stop at Demon Rock, there was a glimpse of houses high on the bluff. The first sign of civilization.

It was during lunch on the gravel beach adjacent to Demon Rock that the youngest member of our group helped a fisherman bring in a "single serving" size bass. It was a beauty. Good job! After lunch, we continued our leisurely float to the take-out at Dan River Company. We had enjoyed a day of perfect weather, beautiful scenery and good companionship.

*Submitted by Barb Solomon*



Demon Rock



## Surprise Discovery in Mayo River State Park

Some long-distance sleuthing has turned up architectural treasures in the old Mayo Park in Mayodan, NC, now part of the Mayo River State Park. Dr. William Whitaker of the University of Pennsylvania discovered that in 1948 Washington Mills employed internationally renowned architect Antonin Raymond to design the recreational buildings for the mill-owned property.

Born near Prague, Raymond came to America in 1910 and worked with Frank Lloyd Wright. According to Professor Whitaker, Wright's influence and Raymond's decades of work in Japan inspired a philosophy that "enlivens the spirit through the use of natural materials" and "captures the essence of nature." Constructed of local wood and stone, Raymond's buildings include elements of Japanese style and

seem uncommonly suited to their location.

Beloved by generations of mill employees and townspeople, the park achieved Raymond's goal of creating "an atmosphere of serenity and calm, life and joy." Clearly, Raymond was especially proud of the park pavilion, since he published a photograph of the building on the cover of a Japanese architectural journal and included it in his autobiography.

DRBA organized Professor Whitaker's visit to the park in early May to discuss the buildings' future with officials from NC State Parks, NC Cultural Resources, Rockingham County, and the Town of Mayodan. All are viewing the buildings with new respect, hoping that this architectural legacy can continue to inspire many generations to come.



*Above in the foreground,:* Joe Jessee, T Butler, Katy Drews, and Julia Pyron count insects and crustaceans netted from the South Mayo River to test the water quality.

### PHOTO GALLERY



*Left:* Ashley Parham, T Butler, Bill Garrity using the Pyron truck for Spring Clean.

*Above:* Milton Hundley's new trailer as it looked nearly every day for two weeks.

*Right:* The Pavilion at Mayo Park

*Below:* Dr. William Whitaker, hands on hips, with officials at the ruin of the bath house.



*Right:* One of many sites on the Chinqua Penn Trail



## Retiring Board Member Steve Carpenter Shares His Experiences

About eight years ago, when I was in the second or third time around in my second childhood I "rediscovered" canoeing. I grew up in the mountains near Morganton, about five miles from Wilson Creek but although I'd lived a third of my life there I never tried paddling rivers. Before I moved here to Roxboro, nearly six years ago Sheri and I bought a lake boat to paddle for bird watching. I thought my life was too dull so I decided to learn about river paddling.

When I moved here I read the "green book" written by our local Dan River guru, sorry Forrest this is not an advertisement just a truth telling, and a mutual friend suggested that I call him if I was interested in learning about the river and canoeing. Eventually, I did and he invited me to go with him to Mayodan to a meeting where a group was interested in increasing access and use on the Dan River in a manner what would preserve its' uniquely isolated and unspoiled state. I don't know why, but folks seem to think that's a natural conflict. He told me that if I'd help him he'd guarantee me some instruction on how to survive the river. It sounded like a deal to me so I took him up on the offer.

Anyway, after a couple of those meeting I accidentally became the temporary treasurer

of the group and was entrusted with the non human "assets" of the group. I believe it was about \$36 or so? can't really remember. A few more meetings and a group of us set some goals and mission statements and invited a whole host of people to another meeting in Mayodan. Although, the DRBA has a number of stated lofty goals, education, stewardship, preservation and the like, we all knew that unless we got folks on the river, we would never get enough people interested and committed to those goals so we concentrated in those first years on encouraging the recreational assets of the river and the "first Saturday" trips evolved.

In addition to being fun, and allowing folks to safely get on the river and live to tell the experience to others, the group really jumped in size. Although the interest of the Board was to share that experience all along the Dan River Basin the real focus came in Rockingham County.

I guess it was just their time! Others have lent their support and faithfully worked on core projects but those Citizens in Rockingham "got the picture" and have developed the curiosity of floating on the Dan into a local trade. I applaud them and hope others will follow them when they figure it out.

My work on the Board has been to represent local government and to share some of the things we know about how groups work and what it takes to keep developing new leaders and interests. Without new people coming into the organizations and picking up the challenges any group is destined to die.

That's why after about five years it's time for me to move along from the Board and watch from the side. It's kind of like when mom pushed me off on my first bike without training wheels on the "back road". It was a steep down hill dirt road with a 90 degree right turn and 30 foot bank on the end of it. She sure was brave to push her eldest progeny, did you like that one Forrest?, off the hill, but, in spite of the fact that I wrecked twice on the way down, I did eventually make it and gained knowledge, and experience in the process.

Good luck to those coming onto the Board and may your ride down the hill be rewarding as mine has been.

Watchin' from the side!

Steve

*PS guys, I just bought a new bicycle so maybe if I live long enough I'll be ready to try this again.*

## FIRST SATURDAY OUTING June 4th 2005

By all accounts the trip down the Dan on June 4<sup>th</sup> was a resounding success – the weather started out overcast and very warm, but progressed to be a hot and sunny early summer day. With 21 boats and 38 participants, it was a great group. Several commented that this was the largest group for an outing yet.

At the Settle Bridge Access Lindley Butler gave us all a good introduction to the history of that section of the river, noting points of interest that we would pass along the trip. After our "lesson" we all loaded up and headed to Madison where we launched a small flotilla of canoes and kayaks at the 704 Access on Water Street.

The journey began smoothly with everyone getting used to the boats and those sharing boats working together. We went along nicely, with T and Lindley leading the way and stopping to help people navigate under the bridges at Highway 220. But then came the first challenge – Slink Shoal Sluice – the water was up slightly so you really couldn't see the structures, and unfortunately two boats didn't make it through with out taking a dip. We understand the water was pretty cold. But the ones that overturned quickly got their boats set right, and we were on our way again.

About noon we stopped at Lone Island for lunch and a comfort break. After a nice respite, we loaded back up and were on our way again. We passed Jacob's Creek Landing and a large metal object embedded in the river that Lindley tried to convince us was a Confed-

erate submarine. (Nobody took him up on his offer of land that went along with that story either. It turns out the thing was a fuel tank of some kind that had been in that spot for years.)

The next challenge was Gravel Shoal – luckily everybody made it through without mishap. We traversed along for another hour or so, making good time until we spotted our final destination dead ahead – Settle Bridge. Everyone made it out okay and a few of us transported folks back to their cars at 704. All in all, a wonderful trip.

It's amazing how peaceful the river is even amongst a large group of people. You truly do feel as if you're in the wilderness, doing something that was commonplace in days gone by. It gives you the chance to look at the flora and fauna with more than a glance. We saw a number of species of birds, including a great blue heron, an osprey, and a red-tailed hawk; a turtle, all kind of water bugs, and the odd cow from pastures that border the river. What is most striking though is the trees along the river bank; they are amazingly tall and many are reckoned to be 100+ years old; you just don't see that along the roads we travel.

Everyone should take at least one of these outings....it's well worth it.

*Submitted by Julie Talbert*