

The Douglas Lee Putman Memorial Cabin

Celebrating the 40 year anniversary

In the spring of 1982, I was invited to attend the dedication of the Douglas Putman memorial cabin here in Nelson County and do an article in Backroads about the Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club's unique building project. It took many people to complete the cabin; a large undertaking considering the club members live mostly on the Eastern shore and had to schedule work days for a large group of people four hours away from home. But they persisted and, in the end, created a beautiful and lasting tribute to a fellow hiker.



The Douglas Putman Cabin in the spring of 2022

Douglas Lee Putman was born in the Norfolk, Virginia area in 1953 where his father was stationed while serving in the Navy. In the 1960's the family relocated to northern Virginia and in the 1970's Douglas began attending Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond.

Doug was a musician and an outdoorsman who loved to hike sections of the Appalachian Trail along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was ironic that he hiked over Three Ridges Mountain just about the time that the Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club took over the responsibility for maintaining it.

Tragically, Douglas died in an automobile accident in July of 1977 and his family wanted to do something to memorialize his life and the idea of a cabin for hikers appealed to them. The club's president at the time (Jacque Jenkins) had put her name and phone number on file at Wintergreen concerning the possibility of obtaining an old cabin on the resort property that TATC could fix up and use when they came up for trail maintenance. One such cabin in the Laurel Springs area was located and considered, but ultimately rejected. About the same time, Mrs. Putman called Wintergreen to inquire about have a cabin built in memory of Douglas and was given Jacque's phone number. In December of 1977 Jacque received Mrs. Putman's initial call concerning the matter and they talked for several hours. She conveyed the Putman offer to the TATC board about a week later.

After several years of research and inquiry, with little or no money on hand to buy land or construction materials, and with TATC's only option being the possibility of fixing up or leasing an abandoned cabin, the club wholeheartedly supported the idea of accepting Mrs. Putman's offer.

In July of 1978 the general membership of the club agreed with the committee's recommendation and voted to accept the Putman family's offer of approximately \$15,000 to build a cabin in honor of Douglas. Detail was worked out and the deal was legally concluded that September.

In early January of 1979, TATC acquired 15 acres of land in Nelson County, surrounded by National Forest property. The acreage was very close to the club's western section of the AT and work on the cabin project began the same month. Almost four years later, though not entirely finished, the club had a dedication ceremony for the cabin in May of 1982 with the Putman family in attendance, along with Park and Forest Service officials, and approximately 87 TATC members. Work continued and by August of 1983, the cabin was completed to the point where rental usage to TATC members began.

The official dedication service began with the air being permeated with the smell of roast pork cooking. The day shared good weather; sunshine, a few droplets of rain, the sweet aroma of spring, a full moon and the many blessings of nature. Above all, everyone was surrounded by friends—friends of Douglas' in the name of family and others.

The ceremony was conducted by Reese Lukei, TATC President, who gave the invocation and welcoming remarks. Jacque Jenkins gave a brief history of the cabin and introduced Phyllis Putman Sullivan, the cabin's benefactor. Harold Crate explained the time capsule which was embedded in a cornerstone for the sake of history. The capsule contained pictures, a description of Doug's life and a poem, as well as a roster of TATC members.

There was a ribbon cutting by Phyllis, and Otey Shelton opened the door to the cabin to Doug's hiking friends. After the ceremonies, all gathered for barbequed pork, cole slaw, bean-hole beans and apple turnovers. In summary, it was a beautiful occasion.



May 8, 1982 Douglas Lee Putman cabin dedication

To give a little history of the AT in our area of Nelson County, the TATC maintains a 10.7-mile section of the AT from Reed's (Reid's) Gap to route 56. In 1978 they also built and continue to maintain the 3-mile-long Mau-Har trail which makes a loop from Maupin Field to Harper's Creek with both ends of the trail connecting up with the AT. The club was given the responsibility of maintaining White Rock Falls Trail in Nelson County and are responsible for the care of all the trails in the Saint Mary's River Wilderness Area in Augusta County.

The Appalachian Trail has had many different routes over the years. Before WW II, from Love Gap southward, the trail followed the watershed/county line between Nelson and Augusta Counties, to at least where route 56 crossed the Blue Ridge Parkway (a gravel road back then). After the war, the Parkway, soon to be paved and have a boom in usage, the AT was moved to get away from the traffic. It was routed and re-routed again over Three Ridges Mountain and the Priest and for many miles to the southwest. Research shows the original route of the AT in our area, the trail used to go down into Chicken

Hollow and around the south side of Entry Mountain, following the current route of country road 684. It swung around the mountain, passing about 150-200 yards uphill of the Putman cabin on an old farm road, eventually crossing the Parkway at White Rock Gap. From there it climbed up to the top of Bald Mountain, where there was a fire tower in earlier years

A Time-Line of the Cabin

By Bob Adkisson, 2013

Jan. 6th weekend, 1979 Construction begins, with work crews having to walk 3 miles to the cabin site, carrying tools and materials (the Blue Ridge Parkway was closed due to snow). Work trips would be scheduled once a month for the next several years; the names of the workers and what they accomplished each trip was recorded (not always legibly, and sometimes not all that completely) in the “Golden Book”. Early off, Chuck Jesse used a bulldozer to clear or create the access road from the Blue Ridge Parkway, and to level the cabin site. Also, first on the list of things to do-- create campsites, develop the spring, and build an outhouse.



Summer, 1979 The cabin’s foundation was poured; the cinder block footers were put in place; much fill work was done-- all by hand (shovels and picks, buckets and wheelbarrows, a mortar box, with load after load of sand and mortar carted to the site).

Nov., 1979 The first stones were laid and mortared into place at all four corners of the cabin; doorways were framed and rocks gathered from the nearby woods.

March 1, 1980 Work trip cancelled, belatedly, Saturday morning because of record setting snow storm (this is the storm where a state of emergency was declared in Norfolk Saturday afternoon; people attending the circus at Scope were snowed in—not allowed to leave). About a dozen club members had driven Friday night to a campground 3 miles from the cabin, only to have to turn around and drive home thru the storm Saturday.

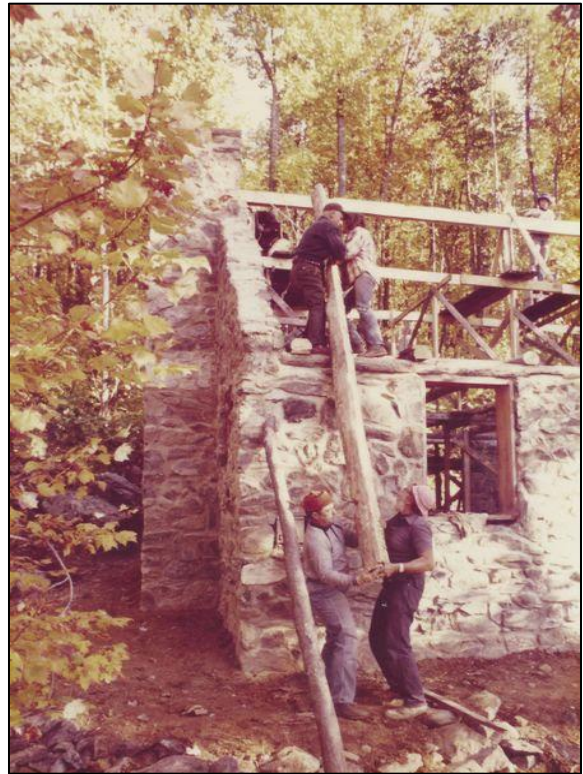
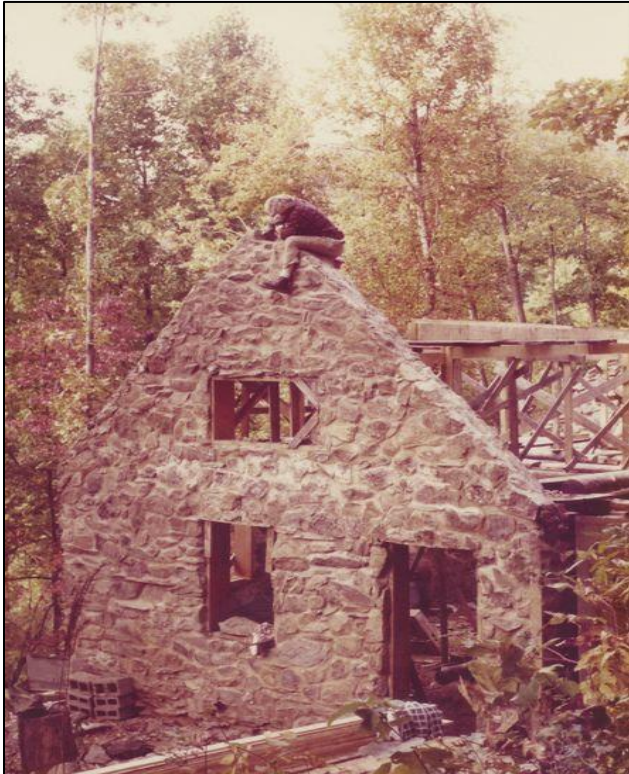
Spring, Summer, Fall 1980 The crews were so busy they didn’t record much of the work done during this period. It was mostly hauling rocks and materials, mixing mortar, and laying stones.

The stone walls rose from ground level to above the windows—to “plate level”. Also, heavy black locust





logs (for rafters, beams, and joists) were felled and hauled to the site, where they were worked and cut to shape; scaffolding was erected for work higher up.





Oct. 9 - 18, 1981 After a spring and summer of continued rock and log work, during this nine-night trip in Oct. the stone work at both ends of the cabin, including the main chimney, was finally completed, and the ugly scaffolding at either end removed. The ridgepole was put into place and the rafters started going up. A total of twenty-six laborers made it happen. Before and after photographs attest to the tremendous amount of work that was accomplished during this productive trip.

Jan, 8—10th, 1982 Probably the coldest work trip of all: after a good day's work on Saturday, club members awoke Sunday morning at the tenting area to -8 temperatures, with a -43-wind chill and a dusting of snow. They quickly retreated to Shoney's in Waynesboro for breakfast, then headed home.

March, 1982 Freezing rain fell as workers carefully scrambled on the scaffolding at the front of the cabin, hoisting and bolting the final rafters into place. Table salt was spread so that work could

continue. Bill Newsom becomes Cabin Committee chairman (1982—1992).

May 7, 1982 Cabin Dedication weekend! There were several extra trips and many long extra hours worked this spring to get the cabin as ready and as presentable as possible for the big day. Roof boards were carried in by hand and nailed into place; shutters and doors were assembled and prepared for installation. Park and Forest Service personnel attended the Dedication, as did Mrs. Putman and her two daughters, Deborah and Susan; approximately 87 people in all. A time capsule was put behind the cornerstone and mortared into place (among the items included was a list of names: 164 people who had worked on the cabin up to that point). A whole pig was slow roasted overnight for the Dedication lunch on Saturday.

Summer & Fall 1982 After almost 3 ½ years of construction, of camping out exposed to the elements, the loft floor was added, the roof above tar papered: we now had a dry and protected place to sleep-- inside the cabin! By Nov. all the security shutters and doors were installed; the cook stove (bought at a 2nd hand store in upstate N.Y., for about \$75) was hooked up to the just completed back chimney. We now had a working cabin; one we could lock up. At our request, Mrs. Putman made an additional donation of \$1,500, for materials.

March 5 & 6, 1983 Cabin broken into in late Feb.—minor damage, major insult. During the March work trip the shingling of the roof was completed, and the dirt floor leveled and readied for our first attempt at a floor—cement with 3-inch-thick discs of black locust logs set into it.

Summer 1983 Floor work was finished. In Aug. the cabin was in good enough shape that rental use began, at \$2 per person per night. Gene and Mary Ann Krah, with 3 friends, were the first paying customers, the nights of 8/19 & 8/20. Bob Adkisson, Evelyn and Leigh Smith, and a friend stayed 2 nights the following weekend. There would now be several years of finishing touches, mostly, of course, inside the cabin itself. The monthly work trips continued.

1984 Windows were installed, bunks were built, and much landscaping done (trails widened; rock walls built; boulders and stumps removed; the embankment behind the cabin cut back, stabilized with rocks and plants; flowers, ferns, red bud and white pine trees planted around the cabin). Donations from interested members were solicited to purchase the windows; small brass plaques recognize those who contributed.



Log cabin that was taken down during construction



The Holloway Coffey graveyard on the property

1985 Besides much continued interior work (building more bunks, installing screens and cabinets, painting, closing off the eaves and insulating them), the front deck was added.

1986 Construction work on the BBQ pit (the outdoor cooking structure) began—a very lengthy and exacting effort, mostly done by Harold Crate. Otey Shelton, over a few years-time, hauled in several loads of rocks from a mountaintop pasture in W.V.—for the BBQ pit, the patio flagstones, and the inside face of the cabin's fireplace and hearth.

1987 The inside walls were plastered smooth and eventually painted white. Although the monthly work trips continued, the pace of the work eased off somewhat, and the trips were nearly as much for the fun and camaraderie as the work itself.

1988 Continued work on outdoor cooking area; repaired the floor (several of the wooden discs had worked themselves loose and needed to be mortared back into place).

May 13, 1989 10-year Anniversary Celebration of the beginning of construction of the cabin: speeches and a feast on site, with about 65 in attendance. Reese Lukei made a movie of the event.

1990—1993 Work on the outdoor cooking area continued and eventually drew to a close; more finishing touches, but now a lot of the work was simple maintenance stuff—cabin upkeep; we started training new members or first timers in how to take care of the place when they rented it. Bob Adkisson replaced Bill Newsom as both Cabin Committee chairman and rental officer (1992).

1994 Club President Bob Giffin spent months investigating and researching wood burning cook stoves, eventually presenting his recommendation to the Board. After some debate, it was decided to replace the small and inefficient cook stove with a larger, better one. It was driven in and installed in early 1995.

May, 1995 The old A-frame storage shed finally emptied, torn down, and everything packed out. A Sunday morning brunch at the cabin was hosted by Harold and Margaret Crate after a Sherando work weekend—an off and on occurrence, and a great way to show off the cabin to club members.

Sept. & Nov., 1995 In Sept. a small work crew tore out the old cabin floor; concrete rubble was used as fill for an expanded wood chopping area; tree rounds were split and used for cook stove firewood; several inches of dirt were removed from the floor area and used to cover the concrete rubble outside. Bob Giffin led two work trips to install a new tongue and groove floor. Steve Babor became new Cabin Committee Chairman (Bob Adkisson is co-chairman, and continues as rental officer).

Early Jan., 1996 A group of a half dozen TATC members was seriously snowed in at the cabin. Cut off from any communication with home and work, all but out of food, Tuesday afternoon they finally struggled thru hip deep snow (along the Parkway) to county road 814 and a ride into the valley (they'd planned to be home Sunday afternoon). Their 2 four-wheel drive vehicles would be stranded and snowed in for another 10 days or so.

Jan. 26—28, 1996 Winter Maintenance / Orientation Trip: with icy conditions along the Blue Ridge Parkway (which was closed to traffic) Friday night, trip leader Steve Babor fell and suffered a compound fracture of his two lower leg bones, right at mile marker 18. He was fortunately being accompanied by 4 other club members, and within about 2 hours reached a hospital, where he spent the remainder of the weekend.

1998 Many dead oak trees along our access road were cut for firewood (the trees were killed by gypsy moths that had moved thru the area a few years earlier). Also, both on our property and in the area, hemlock and dogwood trees had died off, victims of insects / disease. It was especially sad to lose all of the dogwood trees from around the cabin itself. This year we'd discovered an old section of a road and decided to clear and use it as a new route from the Parkway; this alternate route was farther from the White Rock Falls Trailhead sign, and was also much easier to maintain. This change had the added benefit of immediately cutting down on the number of outsiders who mistook our access road for the White Rock Falls Trail, thus increasing the privacy of the cabin.

June 17—20, 1999 With permission of the Park Service we were allowed to drive close to the cabin with shingles and tar paper; the cabin roof was re-shingled. In late July the job was fully completed.

Winter 2001 The railings in the loft area (various pieces of scrap wood nailed 'temporarily' into place years before) were finally replaced, over 3 work trips, with black locust saplings. Bob Giffin becomes head of the Cabin Committee; Bob Adkisson co-chair, and continues as rental officer.

June 19—23, 2002 Work on a new outhouse began; the original one (23 years old) was nearly full. Using an enzyme treatment had bought us a couple of extra years—much needed after the earlier, back-to-back expenses of the new floor and cook stove.

Spring, Summer, Fall 2003 Digging the huge pit continued thru the spring and was completed during the June 21st trip; that same weekend, the wood under-cribbing was put into place. Concrete slab was later poured and, by the Nov. work trip, the new outhouse was all but finished. The cabin committee requested donations to cover the costs of the outhouse, and over \$900 was received.

May 2004 An Anniversary Celebration at the cabin—marking 25 years since work began. The anniversary was on a Sherando trail-work weekend, and the cabin crew hosted a brunch on Sunday morning, which segued into recognizing 25 years of history, work, and camaraderie. 2 benches, with plaques, were dedicated in memory of the late Harold Crate, and in honor of his wife Margaret. Their contribution to the cabin project was 2nd to none. Soon after, Bob Giffin leaves as Cabin Committee Chair, replaced by Steve Babor; Bob Adkisson continues as co-chair and rental officer.

40th Anniversary of the 1982 Putman Cabin Dedication

By Mal Higgins

Twenty-nine TATC folks showed up at the club's Douglas Lee Putman Memorial Cabin on a slightly overcast day, May 8, 2022, to celebrate the 40th anniversary when TATC hosted a dedication of the mostly complete cabin in 1982. Eight people hiked to the cabin from the Upper Lake of Sherando on the White Rock Gap trail: Robbie Krieger, Katie Steele, Melody Persinger, Jim Newman, Steve Crate, Keith Yeargin, Keith Forbes, and me. We joined another 21 folks who hiked in from White Rock Gap parking lot. Members of the Putman family were not able to attend, but we know they were there in spirit.





There was a delightful feeling of “party” in the air, as 29 TATC members, plus Bridgett the dog, owned by Lelia Vann and Greg Reck, were on hand to enjoy the cabin and socialize. Honored guests, Jeff and Ann Crate, and Steve and Linda Crate, were there. Others in attendance were Bob and Evelyn Adkisson, their daughter Leigh Liebert and granddaughter Sophia, Molly Payne (Leigh’s friend), Stephanie Stringer and Steve

Clayton, Judy and Ed Welp, Vic and Margaret Pisone, Bruce and Margaret Julian, John Barnes, Kim Newman, Sandra Canepa, and Tom Miano.

Jeff and Steve Crate are the sons of Harold and Margaret Crate, who were instrumental in the construction of the cabin, beginning early 1979. Many remembrances came flooding back about the Crates and Otey Shelton, another former member of TATC, now deceased, who oversaw the entire stone masonry construction, from gathering the field rock to mixing the mortar to laying it in perfectly plumb lines.

Thanks to the organizing work of Judy Welp and Stephanie Stringer, who worked out a head count in advance, we were able to enjoy Jersey Mike sub sandwiches, as we gathered around on every available seat and bench inside the cabin. The Cabin annual budget supported the cost. We even had a fire going in the fireplace to ward off the dampish day. Judy and Stephanie were the same planners who staged the community meal the previous night at the Sherando Williams Branch picnic shelter, after the maintenance day was done on the Appalachian and surrounding trails.

Bob Adkisson acted as master of ceremonies. Bob, his wife Evelyn, and daughter Leigh and I attended the 1982 dedication, though I admit I don't remember much about it! Bob recounted the history of the gift of \$15,000 from Phyllis Putman to the club and the role played by our then president, Jacque Jenkins.

Lynn's Note: Special thanks to the members of the Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club for the written information and photographs given to me for this article for the Nelson County Historical Society.



Two current views of the beautiful stone TATC Putman cabin