



CHESSIE TRAIL TRACKS

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<https://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-the-Chessie-Trail>



Vol. 3 Issue.1

The YEAR that wasand the YEAR ahead

- Our two half-marathon/5Ks ... our Year on the Trail walks and talks ... our second Walk n Roll ... and our installation of the last of SEVEN user-friendly gates with the pass-through for pedestrians, cyclists, and all other permitted uses.
- All of this was accomplished with your help and the generous sponsorships and donations from local businesses. Our Friends of the Chessie Trail organization is not funded by any other sources, so we'd like to send a heartfelt shout-out to everyone who paid dues, made a donation, acted as a sponsor, or volunteered for an event. You made this possible.

Our Maintenance Committee (a.k.a. MainCom) tells us the last gate – toward the BV end of the Trail – was the hardest by far, as it involved extra support from the ground up, plus fencing to help keep cows off. A big thank you to our hard-working committee and the added volunteers who pitched in!

However, everything wasn't all peachy on the Trail this year. If you use the Trail, you're well aware that a section of it was blocked by private ownership last spring.

As we send this out, we are reporting from those who attended VMI's annual Chessie Trail Advisory Committee meeting in December that the Institute is currently pursuing the possibility of acquiring easements for those sections of the Trail, downriver from Veterans Bridge, where strips of the Trail are privately owned.

Meanwhile, VMI has installed a new parking area, with signage, right off Old BV Road, about a half mile from Veterans Bridge, and has installed signage reading "Welcome to the Chessie Trail" at that area, with a temporary "Now Leaving the Chessie Trail" sign on the reverse side.

FOCT is actively working to find ways to shorten the necessary detour downriver from Veterans Bridge, for all the runners, pedestrians, local users and visitors who do start their Trail use at the trailhead in Jordan's Point Park. And the City of Lexington has said it will be working to optimize the Trail's connections on both ends of the bridge.

We emphatically reaffirm that the Trail starts in Jordan's Point Park and runs 7.2 miles to its terminus near the Robey Bridge in Buena Vista. The Trail's ownership actually extends beyond its current last gate, and the City of Buena Vista is working to connect that end of the Trail with its own trails system. We will keep you posted as developments continue.

So meanwhile, for the New Year, what's ahead?

- Our FOCT Annual Meeting is at 7 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 22 in the Piovano room of the Rockbridge Library on Main street in Lexington. It's always a great way to help kick off the FOCT year ahead, so save the date! Plan to come enjoy hot chocolate/tea/coffee and desserts and a chance to chat with friends – then we'll hear a bit about our new Trail counters, which are measuring Trail use at three key spots. Board member, cyclist and Trail counter extraordinaire Paul Low will report on the counters and offer quick "virtual bike tour" with tips on Trail use and bike etiquette. Come join us to munch, sip, and enjoy.



Finally, the last gate is installed! We're thrilled – see Page 2 for more. Photo by: Lad Sessions



Nathan Green (in sunglasses) holds his own despite vision problems, as Forrest Wheelock (in blue) helps guide him in the October Half Marathon. Photo by: Judy Robichaux



RACI (Independent Living) community members and friends join FOCT's Joan Manley (far right) for a leisurely FOCT luncheon after an October Walk N Roll on the Trail.

- A Winter Walk at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 24 will be our final Year on the Trail walk, with Nature Camp Director Phil Coulling. It's a great chance to see the "bones" of the Trail, always more visible in winter, and also learn how to spot early signs of spring. Bundle up and come join us!

For more on 2018 events, see our **Calendar!**

FINALLY – THE FINAL GATE!

Friends of the Trail and other volunteers have worked for three years now to replace the user-unfriendly gates that were the rule on the Trail. All materials were either donated or paid for with your dues and donations, this last gate and materials costing about \$900. Our Maintenance Committee said it was the hardest one, as it required additional fencing to deter neighboring cows.



GETTING STARTED (from top left): Eric Sheffield, Betty Besal, Paul Low, Brian Richardson, Robbie Faulkner, Chris Wise, Frances Richardson. DIGGING IN, above right: Paul, Betty, Chuck Seelke, Eric. BELOW, far left: Chuck and John Miles with fence post driver; BELOW, center: Eric and Betty with auger kindly lent by Andy Rodgers; BELOW, far right: Frances and Betty at the auger. BOTTOM: From raw materials to final product, with that extra fencing for the bovines. Photos by: MainCom Chair Lad Sessions



FOCT 2018 Winter & Spring Calendar

- **Monday, Jan. 22, 7 p.m.:** Our FOCT Annual Meeting, in the Piovano Room of the Rockbridge Library Main Street branch. Enjoy hot chocolate/tea/ coffee and treats; catch up with friends and news of the Trail – see our lead article for more details! Free and open to the public.
- **Saturday, Feb. 24, 10 a.m.** Our final Year on the Trail walk, with Nature Trail Director Phil Coulling, A great chance to see the Trail as winter ends and spring comes on!
- **Spring Flower Walks:** In March and April with the Upper James River Chapter of the Virginia Native Plants Society. These typically start on the last Saturday in March and continue through May, with additional UJRC flower hikes on the Brushy Hills and below the Maury cliffs.
- **Preservation Month:** The month of May IS Preservation Month, and a great chance to visit the Miller's House at Jordan's Point and stroll through exhibits and crafts tables in Jordan's Point Park. Check out the great new historic signage in the park and support the reconnection of the Point to the rest of our 7.2-mile Trail. Watch email or Facebook for the date, and we'll see you there!
- **Solstice Walk:** Our June event is a twilight stroll on part of the Trail, with chances to watch how the Trail and its wildlife change as evening comes on. Date TBA – stay tuned.
- **And more: Bird walks? Walk n Roll? Weed/invasives pull? Walks and talks? A canoe/kayak tour? Please click here to tell us what brings you to the Trail, and what you'd like to see more of.**

A WORD OF THANKS TO OUR HALF-MARATHON AND 5K SPONSORS

The Friends of the Chessie Trail wish to express our deepest thanks to the local businesses whose generosity was crucial to the success of our two Half-Marathon/5K events in 2017. Without all of you, these major fund-raising events would not have been possible.

We hope this newsletter serves to give you an idea of how important you are to us, to the larger Trail community, and to our local community and our many visitors. From the bottom of our collective hearts, WE THANK YOU!

Southern Inn Restaurant ... Walkabout Outfitters...Welsh Construction

Ragged Mountain Running Shop ... Old Lex Mercantile Gourmet Market

CornerStone Bank...Great Valley Farm Brewery...Virginia Safari Park

Center of Gravity ...Heartstone Lodge and Retreat Center...Rockbridge Vineyard

AND SPECIAL THANKS FOR HELP in 2017 from:

- *The Leech and Spencer families for allowing pedestrian access to their properties abutting the Trail to allow for detours around the blocked section of the Trail;*
- *Con Rock and Randy Hostetter Excavating LLC for their generous donation of materials for the Trail.*
- *Pronto Market for their kindness in providing luncheon for the Walk N Roll.*



Cadets Manuel Bloch, Emma Quirk Cole Elliott,, Jonathan DeSteuben examine archeological evidence in October 2017 on The Trail.

Once again in the fall semester, members of Maj. Stephanie Hodde's English and Humanities seminar joined FOCT members to explore the Trail as their major term project.

Cadets Manuel Bloch, Cole Elliott, Jonathan DeSteuben, and Emma Quirk took on topics as diverse as educational Trail signage and community relations among Trail stakeholders.

Mr. Bloch's exploration of Trail lore and history led to a design for signage to introduce visitors to four significant eras of Trail History, while Ms. Quirk studied invasive and native plants to produce sample signage to be installed at various Trail sites, with a potential cell-phone app to let visitors connect to a website for more information.

Ms. Quirk also interviewed and profiled two FOCT Board members who were among FOCT's co-founders. In the process, she used a writing style known as ethnopoetic writing to capture the essence of core values shared by FOCT members and volunteers.

Mr. DeSteuben structured his examination of community stakeholders as three separate essays – one to be shared with the Institute, regarding its interaction with stakeholders; a second essay reflecting on the role of local government, for possible submission as a newspaper Op/Ed piece; and the third, examining the role of local environmental, recreational and other groups, to be posted on the FOCT website.

Mr. Elliott's approach was to assess the Trail's value to VMI as the Trail's owner, reflecting on how ownership of the Trail serves VMI's stated educational goals. Mr. Elliott's interviews included input from Institute administration and members of the Corps.

It's our hope that the finished work of these dedicated cadet observers may be posted on our FOCT website. We'll let you know via email and Facebook as new posts go up!

VOLUNTEERS: WE LOVE 'EM!

And in this edition of the Chessie Trail Tracks, we are sending an especially grateful thank-you to our FOCT MainCom and friends!

The Maintenance Committee does the lion's share of maintenance and improvements on the Trail year round. The gates are the best change the Trail has seen since FOCT was formed in 2014. Your editors are proud to know these folks – and grateful to those among them who have also provided construction materials, trash receptacles, and untold hours of labor at their own cost.

And the clean Trail you see when you run the Half-Marathon/5K? That is also our MainCom at work.

Here's a short list of Friends and volunteers who turned out for the first day of the final gate installation. If you came and are not on our radar here at the newsletter, please shoot us an email at chessietrail@gmail.com!

At the last gate installation, we know we saw: *Betty Besal, Robbie Faulkner, John Harralson, Paul Low, John Miles, Brian and Frances Richardson, Chuck Seelke, , Lad Sessions, , Eric Sheffield, and Chris Wise .*

Faithful FOCT MainCom volunteers from earlier sessions also include *Gary Ponder, Jack Humiston, Verner Daniel, and Maggie O'Brien.*

Are you one of those who've dug post holes and hoisted gates into place? Please let us know!!

To all of you, and our larger FOCT volunteer community– Y'all ROCK!

THANKS TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

In our next edition of Chessie Trail Tracks, we plan, as many of our fellow nonprofit organizations do, to list our membership as a way of thanking everyone for much-appreciated support and participation. We do not share our members' personal information in any way at any time – we hope that goes without saying. Thanking members and donors by name only in organizational newsletters is standard practice. If you don't wish to be listed, please let us know at chessietrail@gmail.com.

A SNOWY DAY ON THE CHESSIE

Photos by: Lad Sessions

