

## THE HISTORY OF MCM'S ROLE MAINTAINING THE MARYLAND APPALACHIAN TRAIL

June 27, 2024

Most members know that in addition to our 90 years of service maintaining the A.T. in Pennsylvania (PA), MCM maintains 10 miles of the Trail in Maryland (MD) on behalf of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC). But most of us don't really know how our role in MD came about.

At the time the Mountain Club was formed, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) already existed and had responsibility for maintaining the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) in Maryland and southern Pennsylvania (all the way to the Susquehanna River). MCM was formed by a group of Baltimore-based PATC members in 1934, and PATC immediately handed over to MCM the responsibility for the northernmost portion of its Trail section in Pennsylvania (PA)—from the Susquehanna River south to the Long Mountain fire tower south of Boiling Springs. Later, in 1936 and 1941 PATC transferred to MCM two additional sections of the A.T., extending our Trail section south to Pine Grove Furnace State Park (as described in last week's history broadcast). But for 40 years we had no role on the MD section of the A.T., other than volunteering to help on occasional work crews to build shelters in MD.

However, our November 1974 Council Meeting minutes noted the possibility of a change in that situation. At that meeting the new MCM Trail Supervisor, Thurston Griggs, reported that he had discussed with the PATC Supervisor of Trails his desire for MCM to maintain some of the A.T. in Maryland. Afterward, the PATC council decided that if a section of the Trail in MD became available, MCM could take charge of it. In exchange, PATC would be allowed to take over a part of the MCM trail section in PA. This possibility was announced to MCM members in the December 1974 edition of the MCM New.

A few months later--at the February 1975 Council meeting, Thurston announced that MCM had now assumed responsibility for about 3.6 miles of the A.T. in Maryland from Gathland to Lambs Knoll. The following month, at the March 1975 Council meeting, Thurston announced that MCM had reciprocated by giving PATC the maintenance for a 3.5 mile section of MCM's Trail in PA--from Pine Grove Furnace to Pole Steeple. Soon after, the May 1975 MCM newsletter announced that for the first time, several MCM volunteers did maintenance work on a MD section of the A.T.

However, that new situation changed again the following year. The April 1976 Council minutes reported that the PATC had offered to give MCM maintenance responsibility for the A.T. from PenMar to Wolfsville Road (reported as 8.5 miles in length at that time) in exchange for MCM returning the Gathland – Lambs Knoll section. PATC would also give us back the area near Pine Grove Furnace in PA. The MCM Council voted to accept PATC's proposal. There are no insights provided in these documents about what led PATC to make this offer. A month later, the May 1976 Council meeting minutes stated that this northern section of the MD Trail was now assigned to MCM. The June 1976 MCM News announced this change to club members.

According to brief comments in our Council notes, PATC also offered the Hagerstown-based Maryland Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) the maintenance responsibility for a six-mile section south of the new MCM Trail section (probably from Wolfsville Road south to I-70). There are very few references to the MATC role in our later MCM Council minutes and newsletters in the following years, other than occasional mention of Trail-related meetings that included MCM, PATC, and MATC--but MATC did serve as a third Trail-maintaining club in MD—possibly for a couple of decades.

The following year, an article in the May 1977 News announced the first MCM relocation on its A.T. section in MD, with the Trail being removed from High Rock Road just south of PenMar. The relocation involved about 2 ½ miles of Trail and added about ¾<sup>th</sup> mile to the length of that section. In later years, other relocations—at first because of issues with private land owners, and later as the state of MD and the National Park Service made land purchases to take the Trail off privately owned land--would bring our section of the MD A.T. up to its current length of 10 miles.

Of course, our maintenance of the MD Trail section was being performed on behalf of PATC, which still had lead responsibility for the entire A.T. in MD. At one point in the 1980s, MCM apparently tried to have this northern section officially transferred to the Mountain Club, but PATC did not agree to do this—there are references to this topic in the January and July 1983 Council minutes.

A decade later, the May 1991 Council minutes mentioned a hope that MCM might take over MATC's Trail section (Wolfsville Road to I-70) in the future. It is not clear whether this comment suggests that MATC was actually entertaining ending its A.T. role in 1991. I can find no mention in our records to document when MATC stopped maintaining the Trail. But we know that at some undetermined date, the Hagerstown-based club did cease to exist and the maintenance responsibility for that Trail section reverted to PATC.

Devils Race Course Shelter. Another topic that appeared regularly in our records over several years was discussions between MCM and PATC about responsibility for the Devils Race Course shelter, a hiking shelter that was located on the Trail section that had been assigned to MCM. This old, traditional log shelter with a dirt floor (see photo) was located near the Devils Race Course rock formation, about .5 mile from the A.T. and very close to Ritchie Road. This location made it susceptible to partying, littering and vandalism. After I joined MCM in 2011, I recall hiking past the shelter on numerous occasions and thinking that it was an uninviting place for hikers to stop, especially since it was well off the Trail.



The October 1983 newsletter announced that PATC had turned over to MCM responsibility for the Devils Race Course Shelter. However, a few months later, the February-March 1984 issue of the News reported there had been a misunderstanding—PATC only intended MCM to serve as maintainer for the Devils Race Course Shelter, while PATC would continue to have prime responsibility. The article stated that MCM declined to serve in this role, but over the next few years there were multiple discussions about responsibility for this shelter.

In April 1984, PATC and MCM signed an agreement formalizing MCM's role as a Trail-maintainer group in Maryland. The agreement delegated to MCM the responsibility for the A.T. and related side trails and shelters between the MD/PA state line and Wolfsville Road. The following month, the MCM newsletter included an announcement of this new formal agreement and stated that the Devils Race Course Shelter is "now ours to move and rename."

However, the January 1985 Council meeting minutes indicate that PATC afterward clarified that MCM would be the maintainers of the Devils Race Course shelter under PATC's auspices, not the "owners." The implication is that MCM may have proposed to move the shelter and was told that PATC approval would be needed for any relocation. The MCM Council minutes expressed skepticism that MCM would be interested in taking responsibility for the shelter under those conditions. But we did apparently perform some basic maintenance at the shelter over the next few years, and the April 1985 Council minutes included a comment that the Devils Race Course shelter would be abandoned in a year and a new shelter built at another location. In actuality, the change would much longer.

The July 1985 newsletter reported that MCM's Thurston Griggs and Jack Mowl had made an assessment of the Devils Race Course Shelter and the prospect of changing its location. The brief article repeated previous concerns that the shelter was in disrepair and subject to misuse by non-hiking locals. This article suggested that construction of a new shelter on the ridge, closer to the Trail, was preferable to moving the shelter. "Now, if MCM assumes responsibility for the shelter, it is a question of either repairing the roof and extending the lifetime of the shelter in its present location or of building a new shelter."

Over the next few years, comments in various 1991 and 1992 Council minutes indicated that a few MCM volunteers were keeping an eye on the shelter and making minor repairs, and that any decision about which club might make major repairs would be addressed when such repairs became necessary. As late as 2002, there were still comments appearing in HHP that the Devils Racecourse Shelter will be replaced by a new shelter at the ridge top. PATC's construction of the excellent new Raven Rock shelter was finally completed in 2010, and the old shelter was dismantled and removed about five years later. The map below shows the location of both the old and new shelters.

