



Another WNC Trail Earns National Award: Weed Patch Mountain Trail in Hickory Nut Gorge

Weed Patch Mountain Trail, in the Town of Lake Lure, has been recognized as one of the best new trails in the nation. On Tuesday, June 11, in a ceremony on Capitol Hill, the national Coalition for Recreational Trails announced its annual achievement award in the category of trail design and construction. The award went to Peter Barr, Conserving Carolina Trails Coordinator & CMC member, and Chris “Shrimper” Khare for their work on Weed Patch Mountain Trail.

Senator Richard Burr and the office of Senator Thom Tillis presented the coalition’s Tom Petri Achievement Award to Barr, who designed the trail, and to Khare, of Terra Incognita Trail Specialists, who led the construction. Marianne Fowler and Derrick Crandle, co-chairs of the Coalition of Recreational Trails, presided over the ceremony. They were joined by Jay Leutze, representing the Blue Ridge Forever coalition.

It was the second year in a row that Conserving Carolina won the national award. In 2018, the award went to Barr and Conserving Carolina for Wildcat Rock Trail in Gerton, NC. Carolina Mountain Club was one of several entities that contributed to the construction of that trail.

Weed Patch Mountain Trail, which opened last year, travels for 8.6 miles through the Town of Lake Lure’s Buffalo Creek Park and connects to Chimney Rock State Park. It offers stunning scenery and backcountry adventure for both hikers and mountain bikers. It also provides the first access to Eagle Rock, a newly established destination for rock climbers. Its spur trail to Eagle Rock in Chimney Rock State Park passes through a natural rock tunnel.

“This is an outstanding achievement, and I join Conserving Carolina’s members, volunteers, and the surrounding communities in celebrating this honor,” said Senator Thom Tillis. “As an avid outdoorsman, I stand in awe of the spectacular views and natural beauty of North Carolina. I am glad that Conserving Carolina’s hard work, commitment to our community, and thoughtful design has been acknowledged.”

Conserving Carolina partnered with the Town of Lake Lure to create the Weed Patch Mountain Trail in only one year, completing it in 2017. In addition to designing the trail, the land trust helped fund the project through private donations to supplement the Town’s Recreational Trails Program grant. It also facilitated the creation of the Town’s 1,500-acre Buffalo Creek

Park through which the trail traverses, and its permanent protection via a conservation easement.

Barr and Khare spent much of the year on Weed Patch Mountain's steep slopes implementing the trail. A tight timeline due to an expiring grant forced Barr to design much of it with Khare digging just yards behind. The project faced additional obstacles including crossing private property, remote and rugged terrain, and the 7,200-acre Party Rock forest fire that engulfed the surrounding landscape during construction. The fire destroyed Barr's initial flagline, and Khare was forced to evacuate his equipment and crew for nearly two months on a project already strapped for time.

The trail was designed and constructed to high standards of sustainability, with features that help prevent erosion, minimize impact to natural resources, reduce needs for maintenance, and enhance users' experience. These features include a moderate grade, curvilinear design, and more than 200 masoned stone steps and hundreds of yards of rock armoring of the tread.

Khare constructed the trail both by machine—utilizing a narrow mini-excavator—and by hand, employing a small crew that included his two sons, Henry and Bergen, who cut vegetation, shaped and refined tread, and moved large rocks into place.

Others also contributed to the construction of Weed Patch Mountain Trail. American Conservation Experience (ACE) aided Khare with two miles of the trail and also built an ornate rock staircase at its crossing of Trout Creek. Deno Contos and Benchmark Trails of Greenville, South Carolina built the spur trail that reaches the Eagle Rock climbing area, installing 160 stone-masoned stairs leading through its rock tunnel. And Conserving Carolina's Rock Crushers Trail Crew donated 645 volunteer hours in its support.

“This project was an incredible partnership between Conserving Carolina, Town of Lake Lure, NC State Parks, and private landowners and donors. We were out of time, out of money, and had strict design and construction standards to live up to in order to protect the natural resources while still creating a fulfilling experience to users of the trail,” Barr said. “I am grateful to everyone who played a role in the creation of the Weed Patch Mountain Trail, and excited to share this honor with all those who made it possible.”

The Coalition for Recreational Trails presents the award each year to recognize projects that make outstanding use of funds from the federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP). This program uses revenues from gasoline taxes for off-highway recreation to fund trail development and maintenance.

“Weed Patch Mountain Trail features state-of-the-art sustainable design and construction that offers a world class user experience in the Hickory Nut Gorge to hikers, mountain bikers, and rock climbers. Its artful trail design and masterful trail construction demonstrate its outstanding use of RTP funding,” said CRT co-chair Derrick Crandall.

Conserving Carolina is a local land trust dedicated to protecting land and water, promoting good stewardship, and creating opportunities for people to enjoy nature. Learn more and become a member at conservingcarolina.org.

For more information including maps and trail descriptions of the Weed Patch Mountain Trail, visit: <https://conservingcarolina.org/weedpatch/>