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Rebuilding A Shelter: Birch Run



Archimedes is said to have claimed that, given a lever long enough and a place to stand, he could move the world. Members of the PATC North Chapter took him at his word two years ago when we used a mighty timber to jack up one of the old Birch Run Shelters; we then replaced the bottom-few courses of logs due to rot and insect infestation. At the time of the repair it became evident that the old shelters were well past their prime, offered no ventilation for drying, and thus were destined to rot quickly and forced hikers to eat and sleep in a very confined, dank, smelly area during heavy rain. “Give me a rock bar long enough and a place to drive, and I will replace these shelters,” claimed Shelter Overseer Dave Trone to his loyal henchman and Co-Overseer, and the quest began.

Planning Begins

Beginning in March of 2002, Dave e-mailed clubs from Maine to Georgia in search of inspiration for the perfect shelter design, googling inquiries and searching the Internet gamely until his fingers bled. The response from various clubs was very helpful, and finally Dave became enamored of the “Nantahala Shelter” of the Nantahala Hiking Club ([see www.maconweb.com/nhc](http://www.maconweb.com/nhc)). The pictures of the Wesser Bald Shelter (a “Nantahala Shelter”) were especially inspiring, and it was decided to copy the concept of sleeping area and eating areas that are separate but under one roof. In May of 2002 the paperwork began, and Dave developed a working plan in consultation with Bill Jones (Overseer of Toms Run Shelters) and Jim Stauch (Overseer of Quarry Gap Shelter). Bill Jones contacted Karen Lutz (ATC Mid-Atlantic rep) and the folks at Michaux Forestry Headquarters, Mike Kusko and Gary Zimmerman. Karen Lutz explained the

procedure we should follow under the guidelines of the ATC, PATC, and the DCNR. Pete Brown, PATC North District Manager, also lent crucial guidance. Neal Mishler, Forester at Michaux State Forest, reserved the right to review the plans and to be able to suggest changes and was eager to schedule an on-site visit. The project suffered a setback in early June of 2002 when Bill Jones was struck by a heart attack, but there's no keeping a salty old Master Chief down, and one almost imagines him straining for his power tools from his bed. Bill recovered with astonishing speed, however, and the shelter plans came together almost as quickly over the course of the summer of 2002. In the first weeks of June, Frank Turk's response to the initial design was enthusiastic, and Dave, Jim, Pete Brown, and Gary Zimmerman met at the shelter site to discuss plans and logistics. Meanwhile, Karen Lutz and Morgan Sommerville (ATC Southern AT rep) agreed to have the Nantahala plans sent to Dave for no charge. In July Dave, Jim, and Bill sketched up plans and developed a materials list; the main structural items were to be 44 15-foot milled logs from Kuhns Brothers, and it should be noted that Edie Seaton, our Kuhns representative, was a gem throughout the process.

Accessing the Site

In early September it was determined that it would be better to come in to Birch Run from the powerline access road (Fegley Road) rather than from Big Flat, because of the shorter distance, the width of the AT along this stretch, and the lack of private property concerns. Jim, Bill, Mike Kusko, and Neal Mishler then walked the AT from Fegley Road to the shelter site. Mike and Neal voiced some concerns but approved the route, and Jim and Bill then went to Boiling Springs and received Karen Lutz's verbal approval. The completed project plan was then sent to Frank Turk, and in December the PATC Council approved the new shelter and included \$6,000 for the construction thereof in its 2003 budget.

Soon thereafter Dave gleefully ordered the logs from Kuhns Brothers and began to look forward to spring as though Santa himself were to deliver them. We could have used Santa's sleigh last winter up at Birch Run, of course. A couple of February work trips planned to clear trees for truck access to the worksite had to be postponed, and Jim took advantage of inclement weather to drop by a local Kuhns Brothers construction site to gather building ideas. Eventually we managed to widen the trail for access, and on the first Saturday in April, construction began in earnest. El Presidente Pete Brown himself dropped the large tree at the back of our building site, and we all lived to report his feats of logging magic (whew!). We also dug 12 pits for sonotubes for the concrete substructure of the shelter and finished preparing the trail to become a highway. This was also the day that Al Black (master carpenter extraordinaire) stepped up to the fore and began being revered by the rest of the worker bees as nothing short of a god in a toolbelt; Al is now the Overseer of Antietam Shelter, and what a lucky break for Antietam!

Jim, Bill, Dave, Frank, and Henry Horn met the next week to go over the materials, and it was determined that a few more logs would make for a snuggler shelter. Through the good offices of our guardian angel Edie, however, all was well, and Kuhns generously donated 10 additional logs plus delivery at a nominal fee. The first Saturday in May was dedicated to pouring concrete, which Lowe's delivered complete with sonotubes and rebar; all went well, if you discount a little hole stretching in a few places.

Workers Get Going

Adams County Nursery took delivery of the logs from Kuhns early in the month and stored them until Memorial Day weekend, when the real festivities began! After a Friday evening drop-off at the Fegley Road intersection by ACN, Dave and Al took loads of logs through the gathering gloom and mist back to the worksite, balanced precariously in the beds of their pickups. All was uneventful until the "One Last Load" gods cursed our happy band with a flat tire as the darkness and rain gathered strength. All was not lost, however, and Al was once again the man of the hour, singin' in the rain like Gene Kelley while changing a tire in record time!

It took eight working days from that rainy night on Memorial Day weekend for the shelter to become fully functional. "I've got some tools," cried Al; "I've got a generator," sang Bill. "Let's put up a shelter!" chimed in Dave and Jim. The crew worked very well together, and our few minor injuries quickly healed. Sure, Bill suffered some minor lacerations and bruises when Al fell on him, but if a heart attack couldn't kill him, Al certainly couldn't! And what's a rafter dropped on Chris' head? It's not like he uses it! All in all we were a very lucky, jolly band, and great fun (and quite an education under the tutelage of Al) was had by all. Kuhns Brothers donated another five logs to plug up an unintended skylight, and Chris Fee and Brad Black took an early morning drive up the Susquehanna to take advantage of the great generosity provided by Kuhns (15 out of 59 logs were free!). Thanks are due to Kuhns and Edie, of course, and also to Donald B. Smith Roofing, whom Al convinced to donate the sheeting for the shelter roof. Bill also worked overtime coating the top and bottom of the flooring prior to installation, and boy, does that floor shine!

Special thanks to Santa and his little helpers: Al, Jim, and Bill, as well as to all of the elves from the North Chapter who made this shelter the showpiece that it is: Al Black, Barb Black, Brad Black, Chris Fee, Jim Stauch, Pete Brown, Dave Trone, Sam Trone, Abbie Trone, Jay & Katie Sexton, Bill & Carol Jones, Ron Burge, Pat Wolf, Neal Watson, Eric Haller, Chris Baugher, T.C. Senseney, and other names that I may have missed. Thanks also to Frank Turk for support throughout the project, and to Tom Johnson, who visited the shelter on the 4th of July and was generous in his praise of the design and construction. The next day the last of the old shelter was removed, and the repair of the erosion that was the result of torrential rains combined with 4x4 trucks has already begun by many willing hands from the North Chapter. This work will go on for the next few months, but already the trail is much better, and the shelter is a thing of beauty. Thanks to all who turned a dream into reality! ☐

—Chris Fee, Co-Overseer and Henchman

The shelter dedication is scheduled for 09/13/2003; all are invited, especially the North Chapter members who assisted in the project. For information on the dedication, please contact David Trone at tronefam@blazenet.net