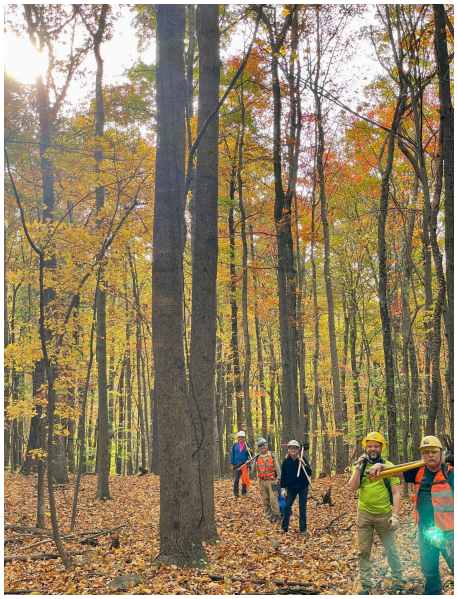
Photos included for reference. Full sized images to follow
The Cadillac Crew puts Blackburn to bed for the season

While helping cook breakfast on Sunday morning, I was chatting with a crewmember about why she chose the location she did for her college. She said “I’ve always belonged in the mountains.” This got me thinking about the magic of Cadillac Crew. In particular, the annual October Crew weekend at Blackburn Trail Center has a special way of making the mountains feel like home, like you belong there. It made me grateful for the simple things we enjoy together.



The picturesque Blackburn Trail Center on Sunday morning - Photo by Janey Arici

Saturday morning I was grateful for the bright sunrise, the autumn chill in the morning air, warm tea, and our big potluck breakfast eaten on the screen porch overlooking the piedmont from our perch just below the ridge. After breakfast, the Crew split up, about half heading out to the AT near Raven Rocks for trail work, and the rest staying at the Trail Center for routine upkeep.



Steve Philips, Mark Wrobel, Alice DeCarlo, Ian Page and Dave Jordahl stop to admire the golden fall scenery while hiking to the worksite - Photo by Dan Feer

Out on the trail, the Crew, led by Dan Feer and Robert Fina, de-rocked and stabilized 50 yards of the AT between Raven Rocks and Snickers Gap. They moved the trail back to its original alignment and re-contoured the tread so it had a slow-water shedding contour. Throughout the day, crew members dug through tough Virginia clay to create a durable, pleasurable section of trail. The Crew will be back in February to pick up where they left off, and make the popular section even better for all users.



Kate Walker, Paul R. Schmeling and Dan Feer cut sidehill shoulder to shoulder - Photo by Bill Greenan

The Blackburn Trail Center cabin maintenance crew led by Kirsten Elowsky and John Kittridge prepared the property for winter renters on the crew's last visit of the year. Dave Welker and Amanda Alleyne tackled the rebuilding of an insulated box to protect basement pipes from frost, then turned their attention to helping the firewood team leader, Jonathan Robertson. He picked up a few more supporters on Sunday in Karen Brown, Martha and Eddie Beckton, Kirsten and Dan Feer, nearly filling the woodshed and staged more rounds for next time.

JT Tucker continued winterizing by checking heaters and heat tapes in the main building and carriage house. Tysha Robinson, Ellen Feer, Eddie Becton, Christy Barber, and JT deep cleaned the house and the solar shower was drained. Jonathan also repaired one of the front lawn picnic tables. Tysha and Eddie cleaned and painted the interiors of the two privies.

Curtis Strong and Neil Hopper inspected the driveway down to the 2 chimneys parking lot, removing large rocks and cleaning leaves and debris from culverts. They also built a lateral to channel water off the driveway. Steve Barber, JT, Ian Page and Ellen installed two ceiling fans on the porch, which will make summer eating and relaxing much more comfortable. Jonathan and John installed post caps on the recently rebuilt front steps; the steps will be painted in the Spring. At the end of the weekend, Kirsten, Jonathan, and John did a final inspection and cleaning and took away the trash – Leave No Trace.



Photo by Tysha Robinson: Pictured: Ellen Feer, JT Tucker - Installing ceiling fans on the porch

After the day of work, the Crew was satisfied and happy as they shared stories over happy hour snacks on the big porch. The warmth of this chosen family almost overwhelmed me as everyone enjoyed an amazing dinner of slow simmered pot roast and turkey from Sandi Marra and JT. The sides and desserts were no less important. We were all reminded of the value of our work when we ate with and got to know four hikers who just happened to be staying at the Center. Our annual traditions like pumpkin carving, packing into Blackburn around the cozy fire in the wood stove, and a warm bed on a chilly night made me grateful for being part of a group of passionate and caring people dedicated to giving back to the trail community.



The Crew gathers around the wood stove in the living room on Saturday evening to enjoy each other's company and admire their jack-o'-lanterns - Photo by Robert Fina

Dawn broke Sunday morning with the autumn sun streaming through the living room windows, last night's jack-o'-lanterns atop the mantle, and a fire crackling in the wood stove as the early birds enjoyed the warm seasonal ambience of the trail center. More of the Crew rose and drank their coffee, while the breakfast crew got to work. The crew ate admiring the crisp morning and pink sky. Next, we all cleaned up the Trail Center.

As we said our goodbyes and wound down the long gravel Blackburn road, windows down with the crisp fall air blowing my hair and golden hickories passing by outside, the weekend had come to a close. I thought of all that had made the trip so perfect: the people, the satisfaction of volunteer work, the perfect fall weather, and the picturesque Blue Ridge setting. In one way or another, they'd all be present at our next October Crew trip, just as they have been for many years past and will be for many years to come.
Eddie

If this sounds like your kind of community, drop crew leaders Ellen and Dan a note at ccrewpatc@gmail.com and we'll get you connected.