

Preliminary Report of the Cabins Committee of TATC [Mid-1978]

[This long, comprehensive, melded together, and at times self-reflective Report by the Cabins Committee is the place to start when it comes to the history of the trail club cabin. The first part (2 pages long), was apparently written a few years prior to 1978, by the first head of the Committee, Lance Lavenstein. The rest of the report is by the 3rd Chairman of the Committee, Ray Levesque; it sums up all the work and thought of the previous few years as concerns the clubs pursuit of a cabin, and makes a recommendation of how to proceed]

1. Background

During the years 1973, 1974, and 1975, to increase the winter hiking experience, the club scheduled one or two trips during the winter to mountain cabins. Some of the cabins were privately owned (in one case by a club member) and others that were used belonged to the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club. These trips were very successful and were enjoyed by all who participated.

Because of their success, the leadership of the club felt that it might be a good idea if the TATC had its own cabin. During the 1975 year this proposal was brought before the general membership and was approved by an overwhelming majority of members present. At that time many members expressed a willingness to donate their own funds for the project. A Cabins Committee was directed to look into obtaining the use of a cabin for the club. No specific method was given—all options were to be considered, such as purchase, rental, donation, owner's permission to use, etc. A savings account was started by the Board of Directors with excess funds from the treasury put into this account. However, the purpose of this account was not passed on to the incoming officers of 1976 and funds from the savings account were ultimately used in part for other club purposes.

The Cabins Committee under the direction of Lance Lavenstein reported to the club in January 1976 of several possible alternatives for cabin acquisition as follows:

REPORT FROM THE CABINS COMMITTEE

The Cabins Committee met on October 14, 1975, to establish a plan for the acquisition of a cabin for the club members and public's use.

Five alternative approaches to accomplish this objective were suggested. Each alternative is described below with its major advantages and disadvantages.

ALTERNATIVE 1. Restore Harpers Creek Cabin-- This approach meets all criteria such as: located in or near the George Washington Forest (area with good hiking trails), accessible by foot and car, water supply available, economically feasible, rustic, and able to sleep 10 to 12 persons. The major disadvantage was the need to get the Forest Service's permission.

ALTERNATIVE 2. Restore Maupin Field Shelter-- The advantage was its use during the interim period before we are able to acquire the place and use as a cabin. This shelter is close to the Parkway and Appalachian Trail, not the rustic cabin structure, and has bad access.

ALTERNATIVE 3. A large corporation like Wintergreen or Massanutten donating a usable cabin-- The advantage would be that no purchase dollars would be required. The disadvantage would be to relocate the cabin and finding and purchasing a suitable parcel of land.

ALTERNATIVE 4. Secure a cabin from the Forest Service within the George Washington National Forest. The advantage would be that the cabin would be in existence and in an area with good hiking trails. The disadvantage would be finding a cabin to meet our criteria and getting permission to restore and maintain the structure from the Forest Service.

ALTERNATIVE 5. Relocate Harpers Creek Cabin-- The advantage would be the possession of a cabin in good condition. The disadvantages would be the removal of the cabin from an existing desirable location and the finding and purchasing of a suitable parcel of land.

I would suggest Alternative #1, trying to get permission to restore the Harpers Creek Cabin, and as a second approach Alternate #5, which suggest relocating the Harpers Creek Cabin to a suitable location.

This approach, in my opinion, gives us the best chance of immediately acquiring and maintaining a cabin for the club's use with a minimal amount of dollars and time involved.

Thank you,

Lance Lavenstein

Alternatives #1 and #5 were initially considered most viable. However, it was Alternative #3 that was finally pursued with Wintergreen Development agreeing to donate the use of a piece of land with a "run down" cabin already in place. Club members took several trips to explore the Wintergreen cabin. It was felt by several board members in 1976 that the Wintergreen location was unsuitable for a number of reasons. The Wintergreen proposal was presented to the general membership and was overwhelmingly rejected, but the membership did vote to keep looking for another cabin site.

Little was done during the first part of 1977 in locating another possible cabin. The cabin at Maupin Field on our section of the trail had been suggested to the Cabins Committee as worth looking into. However, no one knew who the owner of this cabin was.

During September of 1977, while visiting a general store, TATC President Jacque Jenkins found out that the owner of the store, Mr. Maxie Campbell, was also the owner of the Maupin Field cabin. Maxie Campbell agreed verbally to allow TATC to use the cabin since he was no longer using it. He also agreed to provide materials to repair the cabin, provided TATC made the repairs. The cabin was in a state of disrepair due to lack of use and vandalism. It was agreed to delay the repairs until after a gate with a lock was installed by the Forest Service on the service road to Maupin Field. The gate was not installed until November 1977, too late to start repairs until the spring.

In December 1977, Jacque Jenkins was telephoned by Mrs. Phyllis Putman who wished to build a memorial cabin in honor of her son, Douglas, who had recently passed away. Mrs. Putman desired to donate approximately \$15,000 for the purchase of land and a cabin. This offer has been under consideration since December 1977.

2. The Committee

In May 1978, due to the resignation of its previous chairman, Jim Hall, and at the request of the TATC Board of Directors, the Cabins Committee was reorganized. The reorganized committee elected its chairman. The new Cabins Committee is as follows:

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|-------------------------|----------------|
| Ray Levesque - Chairman | |
| Ernie Edwards | Gladys Blair |
| Jacque Jenkins | Herb Coleman |
| Tom Bailes | Norm Blumberg |
| Allison Bailes | Harold Crate |
| Marilyn Horvath | Margaret Crate |

3. The Proposed Cabin Site

Several sites for the cabin had been looked at, but a site in Nelson County seemed to hold the most promise. The property had been looked at several times since January 1978, however, its exact location could not be determined.

On the weekend of June 17, 1978, members of the Cabins Committee went with a real estate agent and Forest Ranger Harry Fisher and determined the exact location (boundaries) of the proposed cabin property.

1. Size, about 15 acres.
2. Location—less than 3 miles from Maupin Field Service Road. It is south of route 814, exactly 2.2 miles on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The property abuts both the Forest and Park Service land; and this land must be crossed to gain access to the property from the Parkway.
3. Elevation—approximately 1900 ft.—2400 ft.
4. The property is wooded with a 20—25% grade slope. There are 2 small springs on the property. Access is by an overgrown road from the Parkway which crosses both Forest Service and Park Service property. This access road was built for a structure which previously existed on the property.
5. There is also an access road from routes 814 and 684.

The Cabins Committee considers this property to be the best for a cabin site and recommends its purchase. The sale price of the property is \$5,500. The Forest Service is interested in this piece of property, however, the Forest Service is most happy for us to have it.

4. The Proposed Cabin

The exact type of cabin is not definite, however it is intended to be a simple one room log cabin, approximately 20 ft. x 24 ft. The Cabins Committee is currently looking at a pre-fabricated log cabin. The cabin would be delivered as a unit from the factory to the site. The current access road most suitable would be used to bring the cabin onto the site. The cabin will be located in an area that will have an excellent vista of the surrounding mountains.

The total cost of the proposed cabin would be \$8,000 plus sales tax plus an estimated \$300--\$500 delivery fee. It is estimated that the total initial cost of the project would be \$15,000--\$16,000, which includes cost of the cabin delivered, the land, real estate settlement, and Nelson County attorney's fees.

Rules for use of the cabin are being prepared by the Cabins Committee. The Cabins Committee is using rules currently in use by PATC for their cabins as a guideline. The cabin will be named after Mrs. Putman's son, Douglas, and a plaque will be placed on the cabin. In consideration of her contribution, the Putman family will have fair use of the cabin; however, ownership of the cabin and property will be titled to TATC.

The initial cost of the cabin and land will be paid by Mrs. Putman. It is expected that continuing costs will have to be borne by TATC. The continuing costs will be property taxes, possible liability insurance, and maintenance costs. These costs should be recovered through fair use fees for TATC members and their guests and probably related ATC clubs. The exact amount of these costs is not known at this time.

5. PATC Cabins—Summary of Acquisition History and Usage

1930—(first cabin built): 269 members, \$15 in treasury. By 1939, 11 cabins built (1 private, others public).

1947—1948: first “club project” cabin. Cabins first built as base camps for AT construction. 13 of 17 present cabins on public land—public use.

1972 Statistics

115 available bunks per night

365 nights per year

42,000 bunk nights available per year

10,500 bunk nights used in 1972

70% usage by non-club members, includes guests of members

25% usage rate—each bunk used 91 nights per year

Cabin should have a unifying effect, and give a feeling of accomplishment and substance to the club. Use by members will naturally include their guests. Cabin is a means to attract new members and is also a means to expose more people to wilderness they may not otherwise experience. PATC used funds to maintain cabins and acquire other cabins.

Maintenance

Keynote should be USERS maintain and report deficiencies.

Fees

Schedule to be determined by anticipated costs (taxes, etc.) and expected cabin usage.

Rules and regulations

Best determined by the facilities as they become available as they may improve over the years.

If we follow the same guideline as PATC, \$700--\$900 a year income would take care of all cost with some left to bank.

6. Why a Cabin? Questions and Answers

Q. Why a cabin for TATC?

A. The reason TATC has been looking for a cabin was pointed out earlier in the background section of this report. We feel the cabin will broaden the hiking and social experience of the club and will present another facet of outdoor experience. Many members are not equipped for winter backpacking; the cabin would provide an ideal base for winter hiking.

Q. Will maintaining the cabin take away from our main purpose of maintaining our section of the trail?

A. No! In fact, we think it will actually increase the number of participants for trail maintenance hikes. The cabin is very near our section of trail and will provide a place of shelter for our members who do not have overnight backpacking equipment, or just prefer to stay at the cabin. Experience has shown that the more activities the club has, the more and better we tend to do. The Mau-Har Trail and Dismal Swamp Trail projects have not detracted at all from maintenance of our section of the trail.

Q. Will the Cabins Committee maintain the cabin once it is in place?

A. The cabin is a club project, not just the special area of one

committee. It would be unfair to expect a small group of people to do all concerning the cabin. The Cabins Committee will be in charge of overseeing and determining cabin maintenance and obtaining volunteers from the membership. In accordance with the by-laws, expenditures will be cleared through the Board of Directors. Also, the Cabins Committee will write, maintain, and update cabin use rules and changes obtained from the Board of Directors.

Q. If the club is against damaging the environment and is for minimizing environmental impact to the wilderness, doesn't building a cabin seem to violate this?

A. Good question. It should be pointed out that everything we do in the mountains has environmental impact. Backpacking, particularly in great numbers has a significant impact. The A. T. itself and the heavy use it causes has a significant impact. We feel that a single cabin on a 15 acre site will actually have very little impact. The access road will be allowed to grow over with trees once the cabin is in place. It should be remembered that this site is 15 acres of private land. Our ownership will prevent its further development or sub-division. We know what we will do and what we won't do, but if the land remains in the hands of others, we have no control over its future use. It has been the experience of PATC that as new club members and non-club members become exposed to the wilderness through their cabins they learn respect for the environment.

Q. What will it cost the club to maintain the cabin and where will this money come from?

A. The exact cost per year is unknown at this point. The following are things that will cost us:

- a. Property taxes (\$17, undeveloped)
- b. Liability insurance (tentative)
- c. Fire and vandalism insurance (tentative)
- d. Preventable maintenance
- e. Repairs
- f. Possible additions

This money should be recovered from use fees.

Q. What about vandalism? Look at Maxie's cabin.

A. Vandalism is always a possibility. Maxie Campbell's cabin at Maupin Field has been subject to vandalism, but its circumstances are different from the proposed Douglas Putman Memorial Cabin. Maxie's cabin is in a high traffic area bordering right on the A.T. There are many backpackers, day hikers, and motorized vehicle users in that area daily. There is also a direct service access road. The more exposure to people, the more chance there is for vandalism. In addition, Maxie's cabin has been in disuse for many years. Disuse or apparent abandonment is an invitation to potential vandalism. The Putman Memorial cabin will be in an

area away from hikers, backpackers, and motorized vehicle users. It will be out of sight and little known to the general public. The access road will be allowed to grow over. There will be hopefully a high weekend use factor of at least twice a month. Active use will discourage vandals. If some vandalism occurs, efforts will be made to repair it immediately. This will eliminate the “abandoned cabin” look which encourages further vandalism. In short, immunity from vandalism is not foolproof, but its potential can be minimized.

Q. Who has final approval of whether or not we obtain the cabin?

A. The TATC Board of Directors. The cabin will require little or no initial expenditure of club funds. Since the expenditure of club funds will be less than \$500, only Board approval is required. However, club tradition has been to bring final approval before general membership. Initial approval for the project, rejection of the Wintergreen site, continuation of a cabin search were all accomplished by a vote of the general membership. It is felt that the consensus of the current Board of Directors is that the ultimate decision concerning the Putman Memorial Cabin should be up to the general membership.

Q. How will we dispose of the property if the club becomes defunct?

A. The deed will stipulate that the property is to revert to ATC if they want it, or to the Forest Service. This is consistent with the articles of incorporation.

Q. Who will use the cabin?

A. TATC members and guests. Then other ATC members and their guests.

Q. What if Mrs. Putman's offer is rejected?

A. \$15,000--\$18,000 donations don't come along every day. If this offer is rejected, the club should call a halt to its effort to purchase a cabin and consider the acquisition project which started four years ago as a dead issue. The club does not have the financial resources of its own to pursue purchase of a cabin.

Q. Then the club would remain without a cabin?

A. Without a cabin of its own, yes. We could still more actively pursue Maxie Campbell's offer of use of the Maupin Field Cabin. This would not involve ownership, but then it would not involve any of the obligations of ownership. This project may still be advantageous to the club.

Q. If the Putman Memorial Cabin is accepted, what about Maxie's offer?

A. First priority should be given to the establishment and maintenance of the Putman cabin as it will be owned by the club. Then consideration should be given as to whether or not it is feasible to maintain the Maupin Field cabin. Whether or not repairs should be made to this cabin can be decided at a later date; however, since it borders on our section of trail, the club has an obligation to keep the area clean.

7. Proposal

The Cabins Committee recommends to the Board of Directors and the general membership that the club accept Mrs. Phyllis Putman's generous offer. If this is done, the following steps should be taken:

1. Have a Nelson County attorney to research legal aspects of the purchase:
 - a. Title records
 - b. Easements
 - c. Taxes
 - d. Septic restrictions
 - e. Access rights (coordination needed with Forest and Park Services)
2. If all legal aspects are satisfactory, purchase the land.
3. Purchase the cabin.
4. Establish rules of use.

Mrs. Putman has the money and is ready and anxious to write TATC a check for the purchase. The longer we put this off, the more it will cost.

*Respectfully submitted,
Raymond D. Levesque
Chairman Cabins Committee*

[NOTE: The Maxie Campbell cabin (also referred to, in "Alternative 2", as "the Maupin Field Shelter") and property were located at the intersection of the A.T. and the side trail that goes downhill about 100 yards to the Maupin Field Lean-to. It was, literally, right beside the A.T., where the trail briefly followed a then un-gated dirt road that comes in from Love Gap on the Blue Ridge Parkway (a road that local hunters often drove in on). Sometime in the late 1980's the Forest Service bought all or some of the Campbell property, including the cabin itself. On the weekend of October 21-22, 1990, a TATC work crew razed the structure, with the Forest Service using a truck to haul away the debris. The site was subsequently naturalized and reseeded. Looking at the area now, you would never know that a

large, old, ugly hunting cabin sat there in the gap, right alongside the A.T., complete with dog kennels out back, wire fencing, and several rusted, abandoned appliances. Now there is only woods. I have been unable to learn anything at all about the so called "Harpers Creek cabin" that is mentioned near the beginning of this report (as "Alternate 1", the first head of the Cabins Committee recommended it over the other alternatives for the club to pursue). It was, apparently, an old, abandoned cabin, on National Forest land, located somewhere along Harpers Creek—probably just downstream of the Harpers Creek Lean-to.]