



◀ Olor aut officiis accus.  
Tur, cuptae pra quidebis  
rerum sinullescit optatat

**AFTER ONLY 30 MINUTES,** I realize a pea-sized callous is already forming on my right hand. My back feels like a small gorilla is hunched on top and my arms weigh down with the knowledge that I still have another three hours before we break for lunch.

Trail work, it turns out, is a lot tougher than it looks.

That sunny Saturday morning found me, along with 70 others, slinging fire rakes and pickaxes to build a new trail at Carvins Cove. A larger workday than most (typical crews range from five to 10 people), we were bound with the same purpose – to connect the Bennett Springs parking lot with the main trail system a mile down the road.

As a mountain biker and erstwhile trail runner, I figured my foray into trail building would not only give back to the community but also introduce me to all those folks I whizz by on the trails. Be it on the rolling hills of Songbird, Hi-Dee-Ho's narrow, steep switchbacks or Enchanted Forest's otherworldly, dense pine grove, you're always bound to pass another cyclist, runner, hiker, birder, or horse enthusiast. It's this community, in addition to the 42 miles of multi-use trails spread across 12,000 acres, that makes Carvins Cove such a special place.

**NAMED FOR WILLIAM CARVIN,** a pioneer settler known for his reputation as an Indian fighter in the French and Indian war, the area was settled as early as 1746, making it one of the first communities in the area. By the early 1900s, more than 35 families made their homes in the Cove, sustaining themselves with market gardens, cattle, lathe mills and even a canning factory that opened in 1915. At its peak, the canning factory, run by Ernest Riley and his family members, processed 5,000 cases of tomatoes, 2,000 case of green beans, and several hundred cases of apples each year – everything processed by hand from the skinning of the tomatoes to the application of labels.

# CARVINS COVE: 70 YEARS OLD AND ABOUT TO DOUBLE UP ON THE TRAILS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JES GEARING

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The year 1926, however, brought many changes to the Cove with the proposal to dam the Cove's waterfalls to create a six-billion-gallon reservoir, a project that would be completed in 1928. At this time, some residents began to move out of the area, but many were unaffected and did not relocate until 1942 when the City of Roanoke acquired the Roanoke Water Company with its reservoir at Carvins Cove. The final community structures were auctioned off 70 years ago, in 1944, effectively ending the community's presence in the area and transferring all property to the city.

**SO HOW DID A THRIVING** small community built next to a stream turn into one of Roanoke's most popular outdoor destinations? If you talk to Dave Perry, director of the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, he'll tell you that it all comes back to one thing: people who want to protect land for future generations.

Perry, an energetic mover-and-shaker of the conservation community in Roanoke, was new to his job at the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy when it, along with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and the City of Roanoke, began the process to protect Carvins Cove with a conservation easement. With this legally binding easement, the land surrounding the reservoir at the Cove would be protected against development forever.

The easement was split into two phases, the first signed on April 21, 2008 and the second on September 3, 2009. These two easements protect all of the land acquired by the City of Roanoke up to that date and restrict all commercial or private development (other than small recreational buildings and trail construction) above the 1,200-foot elevation contour line (the property below that – namely the reservoir – is managed by the Western Virginia Water Authority to provide water for Roanoke and the surrounding area).

"Basically, we created the second largest city park in America," Perry explains, second only to White Tank Mountain Regional Park (sizing in at 30,000 acres to Carvin Cove's 12,700 acres) in Maricopa County, Arizona.

Leading the push to create the easement was Rupert Cutler, "Mr. Environment of Roanoke," as Dave Perry fondly calls him. Cutler was director of the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy (Western Virginia Land Trust, at the time) when Perry first joined the team, but his reach into conservancy goes far beyond that. After serving at the The Defenders of Wildlife, the Wilderness Society, the Na-



tional Wildlife Federation, and as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture in the Carter Administration, Culter moved to Roanoke in 1990 to escape fast-paced Washington, D.C., and to help develop Explore Park's environmental education program. He quickly integrated into Roanoke environmental politics and, as part of the Blue Ridge Parkway By-State Commission in 1996, learned about Asheville, N.C.'s reservoir with an easement on it. After visiting the reservoir and seeing the conservation potential an easement could lend to Carvins Cove, he returned to Roanoke fired up for the cause.

"I felt there was a need to view the Cove as a natural area, not just a water impoundment," Cutler clarifies – and

that distinction is an important one. Culter wanted to establish Carvins Cove as not just the water supply for the Roanoke Valley, but as a natural treasure for outdoor enthusiasts and environmental education initiatives. Given all the bureaucratic anomalies – before 2004 with the development of the Roanoke Regional Water Authority, Roanoke City, Roanoke County, and Salem all used Carvins Cove for water – the easement actually progressed quickly with the central tenet of "protecting water quality in perpetuity."

**PROTECTING THIS WATER SUPPLY**, however, doesn't mean that you can't have fun at the Cove. In fact, it's encouraged. Appropriate activities allow for day-use ranging from mountain biking to kayaking and nature studies to fishing. While swimming and hunting aren't allowed, there's still plenty to do – especially on the trails.

Take Jeremy Woods, a special education teacher and cross country and track coach at William Byrd High School in Vinton. He not only runs by himself at the Cove, but also brings his cross-country team to the trails to introduce them to running on different terrain.

"It's great to watch them start out on the fire road and get their footing," he says. "We then run Enchanted Forest and eventually work up to Songbird," he tells me one morning when we meet up at Carvins to talk. "They hate Songbird though – too many hills," he laughs.

Too many hills for the high school students, maybe, but everyone I interviewed seemed to agree – Songbird is one of the best trails at the Cove.

"It's like riding a roller coaster," says Henry Smith, an endurance horseback rider. Smith, along with his wife Leslie, can be found at the Cove once or twice a week training their Ariabians on the trails. I came across them one afternoon when I was biking and was immediately impressed with how well trained their horses were.

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"We bring the bikes to them," says Smith, and explains how from an early age they train the horses to not be afraid of cyclists. "When we first take them out, we bring a bag of treats. When we approach mountain bikers, we ask them to hand out a treat – that way the horses associate bikes with positive outcomes."

**THESE POSITIVE** experiences can only happen with the kind of back-breaking work I was introduced to at the trail workday – and most of that labor

falls onto several groups of dedicated volunteers who maintain the 42-plus miles of trails. Incredibly, in 2010, Roanoke unveiled a Trail Management Plan for Carvins Cove that details 40 additional miles of trail to be built, and, as of this year, there is now a city trail manager, Renee Lavin, to implement the development plan.

Deciding what trails to build and where was no small task, but between Pathfinders for Greenways, the Roa-

noke chapter of the International Mountain Bike Association and Blue Ridge Gravity, plenty of trails ranging from beginner to advanced are on the docks. Every trail will even be multi-use with a 36-inch wide tread pattern for everyone from horses to hikers. Inclusivity is the name of the game for trail development – as Lavin says: "We want to bring people excited about trails into the fold, to let them develop and shape the future of Carvins Cove."

In a nutshell, that's exactly what's happening at Carvins. On that morning while I chunked away at a rock-riddled hillside with my fire rake, I struck up a conversation with Mona Raza, a newly minted mountain biker, and her daughter, Zoya. Even though they only had an hour before Zoya's soccer game, it was important to Raza that both of them help build the trails.

"I love coming out here, especially in the morning when the light is really beautiful in Enchanted Forest," she says. "When I'm riding with a group, I'm always trying to keep up and I feel like I'm holding everyone back. But when I'm by myself, I can take it all in."

For Raza and every other person who enjoys the Cove, pitching in an hour or two to help build and maintain the trails means that many more hours to enjoy everything that Cutler and countless others helped to create – a protected, natural wonderland owned and managed by the people for the people.

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