

BLAZING NEW TRAILS



EXPANDING OUR TRAIL SYSTEM

by Dan Dunsmore

The Blue Ridge School campus is fortunate to include a myriad of trails for both running and mountain biking. Thanks to the generosity of Tom Walton '02 and the Walton Foundation as well as the excellent work of Progressive Trail Design, multiple improvements and extensions have recently been made to those trails. More developments are now underway thanks to additional generosity from Ms. Sharon Rymer, current parent of Robert '07, who goes by the nickname RoRo, and the Robert and Hoyle Rymer Foundation.

Sharon's appreciation for the School in general and the trails more specifically is obvious as she explains why the Foundation has chosen to lend its support to the improvements. "Knowing Robert would have two seasons of mountain biking and the Outdoor Program were major factors in his decision to attend Blue Ridge School. He has had remarkable experiences with Coach Brown, Mr. Woods and Mr. Bruton. When Mr. Daniels approached our family about participating in specific campus enhancement projects, it was immediately clear that the Gateway Trail System was the project we wanted to support. The Robert and Hoyle Rymer Foundation has always been focused on improving educational opportunities and expanding the Gateway Trails at Blue Ridge School fits our mission very well. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to be a part of creating something so unique that truly sets Blue Ridge School apart from its peers."

FYI, while hiking or biking along one of the new trails, one should be sure to keep an eye out for a mischievous and elusive troll by the name of Elder. He just might be spotted under one of the many bridges or elsewhere. Pictures have been taken, and Elder has moved, so watch your step.

In the fall, Josh and Ben from Progressive Trail Design rerouted some of Sweeney's Trail. This will now be called Bryson Hollow. One may find this trail at the top of Twin Lakes where

From left, Jared Brown '17 and RoRo Rymer '17

it crosses over a small stream up from Hidden Lake. As a hiker or bike rider approaches, he will see the trail go left across and down. This trail ends just past Senior Rock. You might find Elder on this trail as there are many bridges!

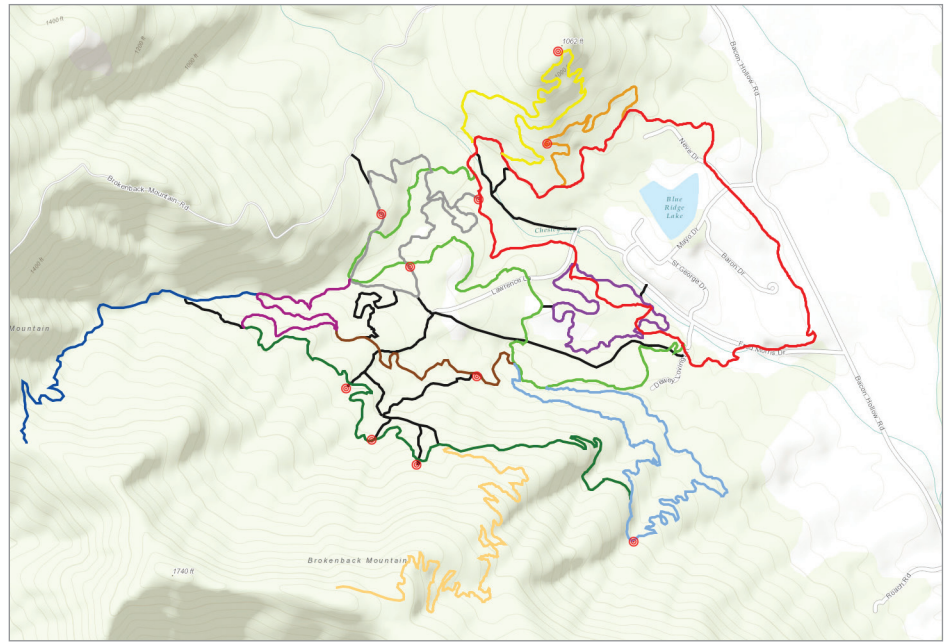
Josh and Ben have also rerouted Cabin Lake Trail. It is an easier climb up or a more fun way down. Some nice turns have been constructed and access to McFarlane (see below) will be at the top. This trail loop is now called Crawford Hollow and will no longer be called Cabin Lake. An adventurous soul may access it from Twin Lakes below Senior Rock.

A continuation of Bryson Hollow has been completed as well (see above to make it there), and one will see it to the right as he goes across. This climb is really new and will be muddy for a while. Once at the top, the brave traveler will see old Sweeney's to the right, which will begin the Ridge Line trail. McFarlane starts here, too, headed left.

The name of the McFarlane Trail stands out from the others. Dr. Ed McFarlane, while Headmaster of Blue Ridge School from 1992 to 2000, sought and received the original grant to start the current Outdoor Program. It is therefore fitting that the main trail in the system honors his legacy.

McFarlane has been mentioned twice so far as it stretches across the mountain from Bryson Hollow to Crawford Hollow for 1.5 miles. This may become the future jewel of the trail system. Across McFarlane, hikers and bikers will see an old spring box and wishing well from days past. Little Big Rocks is incorporated. Rappel Rock will tower over any adventurer and a new overlook (winter view of campus). Once past the overlook, some neat turns have been constructed that drop a wanderer down to the top of Crawford. Of course, one will be able to go either way he likes on this trail. McFarlane is currently completed to Little Big Rocks.

A couple of existing trails have also received some improvements, including a large bridge up Crawford behind Mr. Jon Baker's home. The top



The Mountain Biking (MTB) Project app offers the location of all of our trails.

of Twin Lakes has been the recipient of some work done to help with drainage. These new developments make the Ridgeline Trail much easier to traverse.

An area further up the ridge line off of McFarlane and just after Rappel rock is now the entrance to the newest trail called Moonshine. This 1.5-mile trail takes hikers and bikers to “the top of the top” past several fascinating pieces of scenery including old home sites and a hundred-foot rock wall. The wall appears to have been terracing for gardening or maybe to keep livestock enclosed. An old chimney also rises majestically from the surrounding foliage.

Signage for these trails is also important. Students, under the direction of Mr. Tony Brown, are currently carving trail names and other information into wooden signs that will assist both hikers and bikers. And further trail developments will soon follow! Blue Ridge School thanks Tom and the Walton Foundation as well as Sharon and the Robert and Hoyle Rymer Foundation for making these improvements possible.

Sharon offers this perspective on why the trails should be important to each of us. “The location of the School in the middle of the Blue Ridge Mountains provides so many opportunities to be out in nature — to just unwind, as part of a sports team or in a formal outdoor learning

program. Today's children grow up so ‘wired’ to their electronics and miss out on the physical and mental benefits of connecting with nature. Scientific studies have shown the link between time spent outdoors and improved short term memory, better concentration, increased creativity, reduced mental fatigue and many other benefits to the brain and the body. Improving the trail system will allow greater opportunity for the students, staff, faculty and community members to get OUTSIDE and explore with the added benefits of increased physical and mental health.”

One small way in which electronics and the outdoors may come together, though, is through the Mountain Biking (MTB) Project app. This app offers the location of all of the trails on the Blue Ridge campus. You'll find the School listed under St. George in Central Virginia. Have fun! And don't forget to check on Elder!



Elder the Troll