

**Clay County Communities Revitalization Association Press Release**  
**July 5, 2018**

**Hayesville students participate in archaeological study at Jackrabbit**

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Eighteen years ago, Hayesville School nurse Joanna Atkisson began teaching mountain biking safety and riding skills to approximately 35 Pathways students each summer. Finding safe places for children to ride in our rural, mountainous community proved challenging. Since then, due to the collaboration of the US Forest Service, Southern Appalachian Biking Association (SABA), and Clay County Communities Revitalization Association (CCCRA), a 15.5-mile biking/hiking trail system was built in the Nantahala National Forest at Jackrabbit Mountain on Lake Chatuge. Plans are underway to add 4.5 miles of trail, bringing the total to 20 miles of trail and providing new challenges for experienced riders.

Six lucky Pathway students were recently shown how to conduct an archaeological study, which is one of the environmental impact studies needed prior to building a trail on forestry land. Jane Eastman, PhD at Western Carolina University, and four anthropology majors, Katy Mikley, Savana Hopper, Miranda Black and Savannah Plemmons, traveled to Jackrabbit to conduct soil samples and to sift for artifacts that may be present in the proposed trail area.

The State Office of Archaeology set the standards for field methods for this type of project. Guidelines for slopes less than 20% require test pits to be dug every 20 meters in two transects that fall 10 meters on either side of the proposed trail route. For areas steeper than a 20% slope, the proposed trail is walked, looking for signs of anything that indicates a site might be there, especially noting any rock outcrops or caves that might have been used as shelters. The soil from the shovel test pits is then sifted, looking for artifacts. The different layers of soil are documented, using Munsell's book of soil colors, noting the soil texture and depth of each soil type. The Pathways students were able to participate in two shovel test pits. "I learned that when sifting the dirt, the things that get caught in the sifter are what need to be looked at closer," stated Pathways student Alexia Fields.

Eastman will prepare a report that will be submitted to the Tusquittee Ranger District office. The results of the archaeological study will be added to the findings of the botanical study, which was conducted by Lloyd Raleigh of Helia Environment, LLC in Asheville. If artifacts, endangered plants or invasive plants are found, the proposed trail will be rerouted. Other feasibility studies will be conducted by US Forest Service personnel. Once approval is given, CCCRA and SABA will begin pursuing funding for the Jackrabbit Trail expansion of approximately 4.5 miles. The cost of building the current 15.5 miles of trail at Jackrabbit was approximately \$374,000. These figures do not take into account the thousands of hours donated by community and SABA volunteers, who cleared the trail route, provided the finishing for the trail surface after the trail builder had finished, and installed signs along the trail route. SABA members maintain the trail throughout the year, in addition to clearing debris after a weather event.

An estimate of \$120,000 and many hours of volunteer help will be needed to complete the additional 4.5 miles of trail. The proposed expansion will provide different challenges and experiences for more advanced and expert mountain bikers. The longer length will make Jackrabbit attractive to visitors

from farther distances and is expected to encourage longer stays in the Hayesville area.

As evidenced by the participation of several thousand walkers, runners, hikers and bikers monthly during the summer, Jackrabbit is one of the most popular trails in the southeastern United States. The trail attracts families with young children to expert mountain biking enthusiasts. In 2017, Best of the Blue Ridge Outdoors readers voted Jackrabbit the best Biking Trail, the most Pet-Friendly Outdoor Destination, and the best location for a Bike Race, which is incredible when considering the competition from largely populated areas like Roanoke, VA and Asheville, NC.

Funding for the archaeological and botanical studies was provided by a grant from the Creating New Economies Fund. The CCCRA Trails and Greenways Committee is co-chaired by Joanna Atkisson and Ron Guggisberg. If you would like to see the Jackrabbit Trail Expansion become a reality, you may make a donation by mailing your check to CCCRA, PO Box 1533, Hayesville, NC 28904 or visit our secure website: [www.cccra-nc.org](http://www.cccra-nc.org) and donate through PayPal. As CCCRA is a 501(c)(3), you will receive our thanks and a receipt for your tax-deductible gift.



Jpg: 0236 Jane Eastman PhD instructs Pathway students how to determine soil composition in a pit that was dug as part of the archaeological study being conducted for the proposed Jackrabbit trail expansion.



Jpg: 0212 Luke Lee shovels soil from a pit while WCU students Katy Milkey and Savana Hopper teach Pathway students Nicholas Wilson, Marques Gatewood, Alexia Fields, Phoebe Pietila, and Klover Carter how to sift the soil for artifacts.