



# NEWS FROM THE RIDGE



Last minute preparations at the lodge as dusk arrives on the eve of the race and some runners pitch tents.

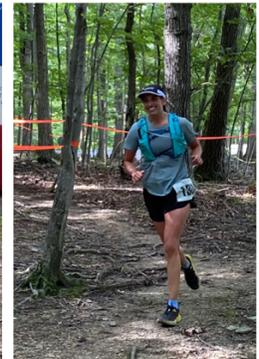


## Miner's Lady Runners Hit the Trails

On a gorgeous day in July, 123 runners set off at dawn for a personal endurance test on the trails. Now in its fourth year, the Miner's Lady race has become a favorite event here at Rolling Ridge because it draws such an enthusiastic, fun-loving community of runners and supporters who run hard on the trails while treading gently on the land. They challenge themselves to run as many 10K loops as they can in eight hours. Everyone feels proud of their own accomplishments, and they leave the trails just as they found them – except for the echoes of cheers and laughter singing through the trees.



The youngest runner, nine years old, did an impressive three loops!



Runners were supported by lots of volunteers ready with water, snacks, pickle juice, and sponges of ice-cold water down their backs!





## Deep History: Signs of the Past Beneath our Feet

It was the day after an early summer storm—one that backlit the woods with lightning and had trees bending and swaying against the winds—that we discovered a sturdy old oak that had been uprooted in the chaos. This particular tree came down along the Perimeter Trail, the seven-mile

loop that meanders from the ridge, down to the Shenandoah River, and back again. It had grown alongside a stretch of the stone wall that still snakes through the woods and reminds us that this rocky soil was used for farming and homesteading not very long ago. When the oak fell, it scooped up about twelve feet of the wall with it, unearthing unexpected treasures and clues about the people who lived here in the century before Henry and Mary Cushing Niles established Rolling Ridge as a land trust.

The kids love to climb down into the craters created when a large root system is exposed, ever amazed that they are tiny compared to a tree's tangled lifeforce that lays hidden just below the ground. My ten-year-old was the first to notice broken bits of pottery scattered in the debris. Some were painted and some were imprinted with the name and city of the maker: *W.H. Lehen & Co Strasburg, VA*. Then someone noticed pieces of decomposing leather boots. During our brief exploration, we also discovered glass and metal items that we couldn't easily identify.

In my excitement, I invited my brother (an amateur historian with a knack for identifying "old stuff"), to come and take a look. We poked around the crumbling wall and the surrounding forest, thrilled to stumble upon a house's foundation and dug-out cellar only a hundred yards off the trail. This homesite is not marked on any of the old maps he found in his research, but the signs of family life are everywhere: a harmonica bridge, a lantern knob, an eagle-shaped drawer pull, coins marked 1902 and 1907, antique shotgun shells, rusting horseshoes, parts of a saw, a decaying pocket watch, and bits of nails by the handful.



The Rolling Ridge Conservancy lands are quick to remind us that we are not the first human inhabitants here, not the first to love this corner of the world. Two cemeteries, the stone chimney near Friends Wilderness, the Christ Church ruins, and the schoolhouse along the Perimeter Trail tell us about the European descendants who settled or moved through here after the 1700s. Then there are other more mysterious signs—like the conspicuously bent Trail Trees—that seem to point to the indigenous people who lived, died, hunted, and celebrated here, venerating these spaces for millennia before that.

I often think about the fact that such deep history is not unique to these 1500 acres along the Blue Ridge. There are sure to be clues about who came before us under every fast-food joint and gas station in the world. I'm reminded of Wendell Berry's belief that *"there are no sacred and unsacred places; there are only sacred and desecrated places."* That's what makes the mission of Rolling Ridge Conservancy so very vital! Through its forest restoration projects, the Conservancy reflects on the legacy of the human inhabitants who came before. Ideally, that work will heal the scars of harmful logging practices...and in so doing, promote a healthy symbiotic relationship with the non-human inhabitants who call this sacred place home.