

Proposed Tennessee Extension Awaits Appeal

MacKaye Trail: Story Of Dedication

It is a project that has drawn labor from the likes of ministers, electricians, plumbers and schoolteachers.

They have worked on the Benton MacKaye Trail like one giant family.

It has been an incredible labor of love involving the hands of people whose ages range from three to 83.

It has involved romance as well. At least two couples have made the trip to the altar as a result of their dedication to building a backpacking trail. They met as they worked together cutting back brush, constructing foot bridges and carrying out the other deeds necessary on such a project.

And the result of the effort has been the 78.6 miles of the Benton MacKaye Trail through North Georgia. So far, it extends from Springer Mountain, Ga., to the Tennessee line.

Scores of boosters of the project want to take it further. Into Tennessee perhaps, through the Cherokee National Forest, and on to the Smokies.

There is even talk in other quarters of connecting the Benton MacKaye to Alabama's Pinhoti Trail and thence to a Florida path.

Dan Cook

Outdoors Editor



This, according to speculation, would make it possible for a hiker to begin at Florida's Everglades in the dead of winter (it's warmest at that end of the line) and hike to Maine, covering a distance of close to 3,000 miles afoot.

Chattanooga Kirk Johnson is one of the trail's most ardent supporters, as are other businessmen Ted Reissing of Atlanta and Marty Dominy of Perry, Ga.

Johnson was among close to 60 enthusiastic trail builders who were present last weekend to construct a bridge on the trail across Noontootla Creek, near Springer Mountain.

Observed Kirk, "The Benton MacKaye, at present, does not have a lot of 'through traffic,' but, while we were there, I was surprised at the number of backpackers and day hikers walking past. One group had 15 people, another about eight. There must have been 75 people on the trail on Saturday."

According to Reissing, Benton MacKaye — hailed as the father of the better-known Georgia-to-Maine Appalachian Trail — actually wanted to take the AT on a similar route. But, back in 1921 when the AT idea was conceived, already-present logging roads and a lack of funds make an eastern route through North Georgia more feasible.

Currently, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association is seeking permission to extend the trail into the Cherokee National Forest of Tennessee.

Back in March, the U.S. Forest Service issued an environment assessment approving the first 12 miles of extension into Tennessee. But the hope of carrying it into the Cherokee ran into a snag, with one appeal filed. Currently, the idea is in the appeals process.

Jerry Hamby, who operates the Ocoee Inn at Ocoee, filed the appeal.

"I hope to have the problem resolved with the forest service in the next couple of months," he said.

Two important meetings involving the idea for the trail are forthcoming. One is the Tennessee State Chapter of the Sierra Club meeting planned for Pickett State Park, near Jamestown, Tenn. (Johnson, who may be reached at 615 892-6609, can provide more details.)

Additionally, the MacKaye trail group has scheduled its annual meeting at Cohutta Lodge, located east of Chatsworth, on Nov. 2.

(Persons interested in more information of the MacKaye trail may contact Clayton Pannell, another strong supporter of the trail, at 615-263-9730.)

Additionally, a set of eight maps

on the Benton MacKaye Trail is available by sending \$8.50, plus a

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— Kirk Johnson

30 cents handling charge, to the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, P.O. Box 53271, Atlanta, GA 30355-1271.



— Staff Photo By Laura Walker

KIRK JOHNSON TRAIL BUILDER Boosts Benton MacKaye Path

