



BMTA's Hiking Program Through the Years

A Successful Endeavor on Many Levels

by Joy Forehand

From 1980 until 2005 when the grand opening for the Benton MacKaye Trail was held, the focus of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) was on trail construction and recruiting volunteers to do just that. But, once the trail was completed, the association's focus changed to trail maintenance and the need for volunteers with expertise in other areas.

It was the vision of Pam Sullivan that provided BMTA with a new direction, not only for a new activity, but also as a way to recruit/retain members and to fill positions requiring expertise in fields other than trail construction/maintenance. And it was the perfect venue for BMTA to fulfill its purpose: *'to promote hiking, camping and a wilderness experience in the Southern Appalachian Mountains; and to instill in its members and the general public a conservation ethic'.*

When Pam and her husband, Richard, relocated from Warner Robbins, GA, to Morganton, they had enjoyed canoeing and kayaking on rivers from Georgia to North Carolina – but they were not hikers.

An article on Mountain High Hikers (MHH), inspired the Sullivans to investigate hiking in the North Georgia Mountains. Through MHH, they met George Owen and Darcy Douglas. Owen's boundless enthusiasm for trail maintenance was contagious and Richard soon began helping with trail maintenance.

Pam's attention turned to what she saw as basic needs of the association –attracting and retaining new members, recruiting members with proficiency in administration, etc. Until now, the association's recruitment efforts focused on volunteers with expertise and skillsets suitable for constructing and maintaining the trail. Now, administrative positions (record-keeping, newsletter editor, publicity, raising funds for tools and training, etc.) came to the forefront. The expertise needed for these jobs would be more office/computer related.

Pam believed encouraging camaraderie/socializing among BMTA's members would be a key to ensuring the future success of the changing needs of the association.

"I thought hikes would be a great way to boost the membership while picking up a few trail workers. Hikes would attract people from a variety of backgrounds. There are a lot of people who might enjoy hiking and would like to help BMTA, but they don't have the physical ability to be a trail worker," said Pam.

"On hikes, people could enjoy chatting as they walk side-by-side on the trail. The camaraderie and friendships that follow would provide a firm foundation for retaining members. An added bonus – hikers would get to see more of the BMT and other trails in North Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina – and it would make them want to see more."

Pam asked Owen, "Why aren't you doing hikes?" His reply was, "Well, if you want to do it..."

Pam accepted the challenge and set up what has become BMTA's highly successful hiking program.

Because the BMT begins on Springer Mountain, the route chosen for the first hike was from

Springer Mountain to Three Forks. At the conclusion of that hike in March 2010, everyone gathered at the Pink Pig to relax, chat and eat.

“We did a hike a month. My favorite was Bald River Falls in Tennessee – such a beautiful waterfall – and then we’d go to the bakery in Tellico,” said Pam. “Dick Evans led what he called an ‘extreme hike’ in the Slickrock area. It wasn’t a long hike, but hikers really enjoyed the challenge of scrambling over the rugged terrain.”

After Pam retired, Ralph Heller and Sara Bland built on Pam’s foundation, encouraging the public to “Join BMTA for an easy trek hike”. Mike Pilvinsky expanded the program further to include a “backpacking 101 overnight”. Ken Cissna recruited even more Hike Leaders, initiated dog-friendly hikes and significantly increased the number of hikes offered each month.

An “outgrowth” of the Hiking Program, the Annual Meeting Hike Fest has become one of the most popular events on the BMTA Calendar.

The association’s current Hike Director, Tom Sewell, added multi-day camping/backpacking treks at Fort Mountain State and Falls Creek Falls State parks.

We invite you to join us for a hike! To choose the hike that’s right for you, go to [BMTA’s Event Calendar](#). For more information and/or if you would like to become a BMTA Hike Leader, contact [Tom Sewell](#).

Extreme Hike



Lost Creek Hike



Bald River Falls Hike

