



Newsletter of the

BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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BMTA Officers

President: Ralph Heller
 Vice President:David Blount
 Secretary:Margaret Meadows
 Treasurer: Darcy Douglas
 GA Maintenance:..... Tom Keene
 TN/NC Maintenance:....Richard Harris
 Smokies Maint.: Dick Evans
 Construction:Eric Eades
 Membership:Bill Hamrick
 Publicity:.....Jeff Hunter
 Hiking Director.....Bob Ruby
 Newsletter Editor.....Betty Petty
 Conservation:Denny Rhodes
 Past Pres.: Steve Cartwright
 State Rep. - GA: Walt Cook
 State Rep. - TN:Ken Jones
 State Rep. - NC: Butch Horn

Announcements

!!!Dues are Due !!!

The membership renewal/membership application form is located on page 5 of this newsletter.

The first board meeting of 2009 will be held on Saturday January 3, 2009 at the new president's home. Any interested member may attend although only board members may vote.

Please note that the revisions to the bylaws were approved at the annual meeting. The bylaws are published on our website.

www.bmta.org



2009 BMTA Board (seated) David Blount, Ralph Heller, Margaret Meadows, Darcy Douglas (standing) Denny Rhodes, Bob Ruby, Bill Hamrick, Richard Harris, Betty Petty, Walt Cook, Jeff Hunter, Tom Keene, Dick Evans

BMTA Annual Meeting '08: A Great Success

by George Owen

A pleasant evening it was indeed on Saturday, November 8, when the BMTA celebrated its annual meeting at 6:00 p.m. at the Appalachian Bank Community Center in Blue Ridge, Georgia, completing 28 years of trail development and protection.

The evening began with a delightful catered meal featuring two meat choices and other tasty dishes, with plentiful supply for seconds. Afterwards the featured speaker, business, and entertainment rounded out a fast-paced almost three hours with some fifty in attendance.

One highlight of the evening was the after-dinner speaker, George Minnich, backcountry specialist for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and our ongoing contact in establishing and preserving the Benton MacKaye Trail in that national treasure. Mr. Minnich spoke about our ongoing trail commitment there, problems of currently changing the southern entrance route to the park, and then answered several member's questions that had arisen recently including whether or not bicycle use would be allowed on the Lakeshore Trail portion of the BMT.

President Betty Petty then presided over most of the rest of the evening of awards and business. First were three awards: Rick Harris received the "Trail Maintainer of the Year" Pulaski Award; George Owen was given a Distinguished Service Award plaque recognizing his 29 years of devotion to the BMTA; and Betty Petty was presented a plaque recognizing her completion of two years as BMTA president.

(continued on pg 2)

Annual Meeting '08

(continued from pg 1)

Next came the reports of the president, treasurer, and various directors and chairs. At the end came the report of the Bylaws Revision Committee given by Chair Tom Keene summarizing the year-long work on this revision, recent publication, and calling for a vote of approval. The revised bylaws were approved overwhelmingly without dissension. Following this was the election of the officers and board for 2009; the slate presented by the Committee on Nominations was approved and voted into office. (See listing of our new 2009 BMTA Board elsewhere in this newsletter.)

The evening was concluded with the entertainment of fun music featuring humorous songs played and sung by Darcy Douglas and Jim Quail. The two topped off and ended the night with the ever-appropriate Rogers and Hammerstein's "Climb Every Mountain."

BMT-AT Loop Dayhike Nov. 7

by Bob Ruby

On the Friday afternoon before the BMTA Annual Meeting weekend, four of us met at the Three Forks trailhead to hike a six-mile BMT-AT loop, one of several loop configurations between Three Forks and Springer Mountain. We started up on the AT along Stover Creek, where we noticed the beginning signs of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid infestation in this major stand of Hemlocks. By coincidence, Dahlenega was holding its annual Hemlock Fest that weekend to raise funds to fight this scourge.

We visited the recently rebuilt AT Stover Creek shelter and continued up the AT to the first intersection with the BMT on Rich Mountain. From there we looped back down to Three Forks on the BMT. On the way we encountered a few light rain showers, but a good time was had by all. Fortunately, this was the only precipitation of the Annual Meeting weekend.

Members: Ralph Heller, Rick Harris, George Owen, Bob Ruby



Linda Davis Memorial Hike

by Darcy Douglas

Despite the chilly day, the hikers felt warm inside, remembering some wonderful things about our friend and co-trail-builder Linda Davis, who passed away very suddenly last June. It seemed to be an obstruction when tow vehicles were attempting to pull a truck out of a ravine, totally blocking the road to our starting point. However, when we got back to the parking lot, there were Linda's daughters and 2 of her grandsons, come to join us! Had we not turned back, we would have missed them! We changed the plan and hiked up the switch-backed stairs from Thunder Rock Campground to proceed south along the course Linda had faithfully maintained. With the sun peeking through the tree tops, and the leaves at the end of their magnificent color change, the path was lovely to behold.

We stopped at a special spot with several good sitting logs to share memories of Linda, each in our own way. Several of us felt she was there with us. The laughter which we shared was so positive, remembering the upbeat attitude always displayed by Linda. After we closed our sharing time, the group continued along the trail, crossing the new power line access area into the hemlock bordered old road bed. We split into smaller groups for the return, some backtracking, some coming down the dirt road, and others going farther on the trail.

When we joined again at the campground day-use area, we broke bread together. There was carrot cake, made fresh as Linda would have baked it, healthy drinks like she would have chosen, and potato salad to share, in addition to lunches we each brought.

We were fortunate to have a lovely day to celebrate Linda's life, and were also fortunate to have the company of the following: Jack and Coty Dowling who had to leave early, Claire Broadwell, Richard Harris, Melina Harris (Linda's daughter), Jacob Harris (Linda's grandson) Ashley Keith (Linda's daughter), Jacob Harris (Linda's grandson), Margaret Meadows, George Owen (who served as Co-Leader), Betty Petty, Jim Quail, Nancy Shofner, Mona Street, and Debbie Tuten. Special thanks to George for serving as Co-Leader! - Darcy Douglas, Leader

Annual Meeting Hike: Falls to Weaver Creek

By George Owen

This Saturday annual meeting longer hike on November 8 was a splendid one. We met at the Appalachian Bank Community Center in Blue Ridge, and departed for our shuttle at 10:00 a.m. First we left some vehicles at our trail exit point on Weaver Creek Road, then we traveled to our trailhead on the Stanley Creek Road near the falls.

The ten of us on this 6.3 mile trek began our hike on a very pleasant morning by first visiting 55-foot Fall Branch Falls only 0.2 miles from the trailhead. Then we launched uphill to the high ridge where we could enjoy views to the south of the three 4,000-foot peaks in the nearby Rich Mountain Wilderness. After lunch on the southeast side of Rocky Mountain, we soon rounded the peak to gaze northeast to Lake Blue Ridge miles away in the valley.

Soon after lunch we reached our high point just below the summit of Rocky Mountain, and again ran ridges all the way out to Scroggin Knob.

During this several hour trek we ran into several other hikers, and enjoyed greeting them. Finally we were out on Scroggin Knob with our final view of Lake Blue Ridge. From this point we began the 800-foot elevation drop to our waiting vehicles. Some returned to Blue Ridge, and our leader dropped the drivers back to the other cars near the falls. The hike ended for all between 3:00 and 4:00. The big annual meeting with dinner, business, speaker, and entertainment was just ahead at 6:00.

My thanks goes out to Denny Rhodes for serving as sweep on this trip.

MEMBERS: Coty Dowling, John Dowling, Richard Harris, Margaret Meadows, George Owen, Denny Rhodes, Mona Street, Debbie Tuten

GUESTS: Ned Dobner, Lois Rhodes

Annual Meeting Hike to Indian Rock



Standing, left to right: Susie Cone(M), Roger Partee(G), Ann Wimberley(G), Neil Wimberley(G), Ken Jones(M), David Blount(M), Mary Bogue(G), Ron Bogue(G), Linda Blount(M); seated, left to right: Jane Keene(M), Shirley Banks(M), Claire Broadwell(M). Photo by Tom Keene

Sugar Mountain Work Trip

BMT Sections 16d & 16e Maintenance - 10/27/08

by Ken Jones

We had a large crew to work on the Benton MacKaye Trail sections on both sides of Sugar Mountain Monday. Six of us drove in the gated Sugar Mountain Road to intersect the BMT, while two others started brush out work from the Fish Hatchery. At the top of the mountain, four of us hiked about a mile down toward the Bald River to work on a short ¼ mile side hill section of the trail. We worked to improve the two switchbacks, removed some of the berm from the tread, and dug about a half dozen water turnouts.

After completing that work, we hiked back to the vehicles and started down toward the Fish hatchery with some people joining the brush out crew. Two of the crew worked on logging out to the River Road, clearing 11 trees, with one of these being difficult and time-consuming very near the road. We also sawed one tree off the Sugar Mountain Wildlife Road driving in, and chopped 1 tree off the Wilderness Study Area (WSA) Trail Section 16d. I estimate that the brush out crew completed over 1 mile of trail down from the top, and the remaining portion to the River Road was completed this past summer. There is one large tree (~30" diameter) down just a few hundred yards inside the WSA on Section 16d that will require a lot of crosscut work in the future to completely clear it from the trail. Someone has already notched it out so that horses and hikers can easily get over it.

Workers were myself, Tass Reid, Jim Holland, Bobby Mitchel, Rick Harris, Bill Geiszler, Betty Petty and Ralph Van Pelt.

Work Hours: 40

Travel Hours: 30.5



**Maintainer
of the
Year, Rick
Harris,
with the
"Golden
Pulaski"**

BMT (TN) Unicoi Gap to Childers Creek Backpack, November 1-2

Reported by: Bob Ruby

Photos by: Jason Bone

The weekend weather was glorious with not a cloud in the sky, highs around 70°, lows around 30° and fall colors near their peak! Our BMTA/GATC group backpacked nineteen miles on the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) in Tennessee from Unicoi Gap to Childers Creek on the Hiwassee River.

Co-leader Sandi Still couldn't join us, because she had to stay home to get her heater repaired. With only five of us left, we were able to stuff everyone and packs into one car for the 45-minute shuttles before and after the hike.

Our hike started at Unicoi Gap on the TN/NC border. From there we had six miles of gently rolling terrain followed by a three-mile, gradual descent to the intersection with the John Muir Trail (JMT), a National Recreation Trail. The BMT follows the JMT west along the north side of the Hiwassee River.

Shortly after crossing TN-68 we had our excitement for the trip - a copperhead on the trail that three of us almost stepped on. It was so well camouflaged that even after spotting it, we could barely see it. Can you see it in the photo?



The first day we covered ten miles and camped at an ideal campsite by Loss Creek.

The second day broke clear and cold, but it quickly warmed. We soon found ourselves 300' above the river, looking down on a spectacular view of "The Narrows," a section of the Hiwassee Gorge which has rock walls scoured to a depth of about 30' by peak water flows.

Most of the second day found us near the Hiwassee River, frequently hiking alongside it, with the exception of a 300' climb and descent over a ridge and down to Towee Creek on a newly relocated section of the BMT/JMT. At the Towee Creek picnic area, Mandy had to stop hiking the trail due to blisters. This was her first long backpack, but we hope not her last.

Jason went ahead on part road, part trail and brought the car back to pick her up. The rest of us continued on the trail, near and beside the river, to our destination at Childers Creek.



After shuttling back to Unicoi Gap, we headed south to Copperhill, TN, where we celebrated with a great Mexican meal at El Rio restaurant.

With this backpack, I completed my section hikes of the BMT from Springer Mountain to Davenport Gap. For those who have hiked only the BMT in Georgia, I can report that it gets even better in TN, NC and the Smokies. Compared to the AT, it is a primitive trail, and rarely did I encounter more than one other hiking party on a day. In the words of the New York Times, it is "Appalachia's Other Trail."

BMTA Member: Bob Ruby

GATC Members: Jason & Mandy Bone, Jimmy Camp, Mike McCown

Sugar Mountain Work Trip

BMT Sections 16d & 16e Maintenance - 10/27/08

by Ken Jones

We had a stunningly beautiful fall day to work on Sycamore Creek Trail, with leaves near peak colors. Pam and Kent Mathews had once again done an outstanding job of lining up their friends to brush out the trail. Their consistent maintenance of the trail twice each year has started paying dividends in less work for the crews and better conditions throughout the year.

They divided the work group into two crews, with one starting on each end of the six-mile long trail. By about 2 pm we met in the middle of the trail, having completed sling blade and lopper work to put the trail in excellent condition again. We cleared 3 small trees from the trail, leaving 2 larger trees at about 1.5 miles down from the top of the trail. These trees are easy to pass through, so we will leave them until next spring when they may very well be joined by some others.

Workers were myself, Kent & Pam Mathews, Heath Hawkins, Wallace Graham, Preston Hawkins, Charlie & Chris Shields, Todd & Zack Duncan, Greg & Dalton Keck, Deborah Lively, Devin Gray, Jonathan Johnson and Brandon Morris.

Work Hours: 88

Travel Hours: 56.5

The Big Creek Falls Singers

At the October Georgia Work-trip
By Tom Keene

A fine crowd of fourteen turned out for the October Georgia work-trip. We met at the Three Forks trailhead, then spent the morning refreshing side-hilling trail-south on co-leader David Maddox' well-maintained section. For lunch we walked to the beautiful Long Creek Falls. Following the bucolic lunch some called it off for the day; others continued north and refreshed water diversions on the upslope to the helicopter clearing and on the north side of Owen Gap. The work persisted until after 4:00 pm. We got a lot done and had a beautiful day in the woods.

And the Big Creek Falls Singers? It turned out the trip fell on the birthday of yours truly. Sarah Keene apparently slipped this piece of classified information to Darcy Douglas, who went into stealth choir leader mode. The result was a surprise, high-quality rendition of "Happy Birthday" during lunch at the falls. It was a nice treat in a beautiful place by special friends – and much appreciated.

Many thanks to all the singer-workers: Mary and Ron Bogue, David Blount, Doug Kleiber, David Maddox, Bill Hamrick, Mona Street, Walt Cook, Darcy Douglas, T. O. Mitchell, Mike Christison, Bill Ross, Sarah Keene, and Tom Keene.

Jacks River Fall-Color Hike in Sparkling Sunshine

by Tom Keene

The October fun hikers to the Jacks River got lucky on the weather. It was cloudy overnight but the morning cleared to a sunny, slightly blustery, fall day. Perfect for our hike.

The nine hikers who appeared at Dally Gap were all fit and eager so we hiked in the long way, going up the Hemptop Trail to Spanish Oak Gap then taking the BMT south along the ridge and down to the Jack River Trail. The air and the light on the ridge were glorious. "I'm getting a hiking high," someone shouted.

We continued down the small cove to the JRT intersection and then took the easy stroll down to the river. We broke for lunch on the rocks. After lunch Bill Ross went fly-fishing. Others donned their Texas, forded the river and continued down the JRT for half a mile, long enough to pass a couple of riverside campsites - one of which gave us the Georgia-Vanderbilt half-time score! Then it was all back to Dally Gap.

It was a sweet day-hike; agreed we should consider making it a regular event. Our lucky party included Doug and Evelin Yarns, Marshall and Patty Smitherman, Tom and Jane Keene, Mike Curley, Curt Voogt, and the aforementioned fly-fisherman, Bill Ross.



President's Corner

by Ralph Heller

As your new president, I'm excited about the prospects for the BMTA in 2009. Our new board is an excellent team of qualified and enthusiastic individuals ready to serve our organization this next year.

As a result of the recent bylaw revisions, there is a new board position. As Hiking Director, Bob Ruby, will be coordinating pleasure hikes and backpacking trips. Check the newsletter and the BMTA website for dates and times of these events.

This past year has seen major accomplishments! The reroutes of Wallalah/Licklog, Section 3, in Georgia, and of the BMT/John Muir section above the Hiwassee River, in Tennessee, were completed. Both of these reroutes eliminated problems on the trail and made for a better hiking experience for everyone using the BMT. Thanks go out to our hard working trail maintenance crews in Georgia and Tennessee. We addressed several environmental/conservation issues in 2008. Through our Conservation Director, Denny Rhodes, we responded to, among others, the proposed Brawley Mountain Project which calls for major timber cuts to establish a Golden-Winged Warbler habitat; the Corridor K Proposal for extension of a four-lane highway through pristine mountain land in western North Carolina near Robbinsville; and the Swain County Settlement concerning the Lakeshore Trail, a section of the BMT in the Smokies. We will continue to keep our eyes and ears open and respond to all matters which could affect areas on or near the BMT.

Our organization has matured. In 2005, we completed one of our primary goals to complete the trail from Springer Mountain to Davenport Gap. Since that goal has been reached, our focus has changed. We now must maintain our entire trail to good standards. One of the biggest challenges is to maintain the BMT in the remote sections between Tennessee and North Carolina and also in the Smokies. The GSMNP has its own trail maintenance personnel, and we are not allowed to do trail work there. However, we do need to help clean up campsites along the Lakeshore section of the BMT in the Smokies. These campsites are best accessed from Fontana Lake, with the use of a boat.

In 2009, I would like to increase our membership by at least 10 percent. We will accomplish this goal by spreading the word about the BMTA in the form of local publicity and participating in events. As examples, the BMTA could have a booth at the September Wildlife Festival in Blue Ridge and get involved with local hiking and camping stores. Specifically, we need to attract new members living in North Carolina and Tennessee who live closer to the trail and can adopt a section to maintain. Also, I'd like to see some of our younger members participating in the trail maintenance work days. Any suggestions to make that happen would be welcome. The economy, including fuel prices, could affect member participation in outings. All options, including carpooling to trail maintenance locations, are being considered. The Board is open to all suggestions, as well as questions, from our members.