



Newsletter of the

# BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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Crossing Stanley Creek: (left to right) Linda Voogt, Gerrit Voogt, Jane Keene, Jim Quail, Darcy Douglas. (story Page 3) Photo by T.Keene

## 2009 WALK-THROUGH ON National Trails Day June 6, 2009 Sign up NOW

National Trails Day is a day to do something for the hiking trails you love. Participating in the 2009 BMTA Walk-through is a great way to contribute. It will also provide a great chance for participants to get in their first good hike of the summer!

Walk-through coordinators are the BMT maintenance directors: Tom Keene for the GA sections of the trail, and Rick Harris for TN/NC sections. No walk-through activity is planned for the Smokies sections; the National Park Service maintains the trails in the Smokies.

The walk-through coordinators will assign a pair of hikers (for safety) to walk every section of the trail and to note the trail's condition, including any maintenance needs. Those who do not want to walk can join us for breakfast and help as shuttle drivers.

About 4:00 PM many of the participants in Georgia will converge at the Pink Pig to share results and their tales of high adventure. Hikers in Tennessee and North Carolina will meet at the Tellicafe in Tellico Plains at 5PM (across Bank Street from Hardee's and the BP station). Written reports will go to Tom and Rick, so they can plan future work-trips. The reports can be submitted online - or by good old snail mail.

**ACT NOW** to participate in the June 6 walk-through. Grab a partner, then for TN/NC contact Rick Harris (423-253-6358 (home); 513-260-1184 (cell)) or [harrisrl@aol.com](mailto:harrisrl@aol.com). For GA contact Tom Keene (770-422-4838, or [tkeene@kennesaw.edu](mailto:tkeene@kennesaw.edu)). Indicate a section you prefer to walk, or just volunteer "as needed." (Maintainers may NOT walk their own sections.) If you cannot walk on June 6, but would like to help up to a week before or after that date, let us know. We will work with you.

Several breakfast meeting places will be used depending on the location you walk. For details, ask Rick or Tom when you contact them. Join us!

## GA Work Trip Report April. 11, 2009

by George Owen

Finally the improvements to the Benton MacKaye Trail's Wallalah-Licklog portion of section 3 in Georgia were implemented Saturday, April 11 by seven in attendance. This replaced the planned March Georgia work trip that was canceled due to bad weather.

Six showed up at the breakfast spot of the Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge at 8:00 a.m. Michael Cowart, a student at North Georgia College & State University (NGCSU), joined us at the Little Skeenah Creek Hwy. 60 crossing. We then made the journey, partly with four-wheel drive, to our secret access point authorized off private property to just below the Wallalah final climb.

It was an overcast, chilly day, and we worked in mist as we finally arrived in the "giant poplar" area of the lower Licklog switchback and began the significant widening of the relocation begun there last year. We were socked in with clouds and dropping temperatures as we completed work here and additional sidehill widening back down toward Licklog Gap.

When our work here was completed in early afternoon, we then headed back to the relocation on the north side of Wallalah Mountain where several improvements were also made. Except for Michael, who had to leave at 1:00 p.m. but who worked through our lunch break, we were heading out toward the vehicles by 3:00 p.m. (The Sullivans wanted to know: Yes, we walked over two miles from our vehicles to the switchback at the Licklog big poplar, or almost 4.5 miles round-trip.)

Incidentally, there is still work to be done improving the relocation on the west flank of Wallalah Mountain, including improved steps at the turn of the long switchback and some bridging of a short spring/summer wet area. This we are saving for a near-future work trip. We much enjoyed getting to know Michael Cowart from NGCSU. He had joined us as part of a class project approved by his professor, and his youthful, steady trail work was certainly appreciated by us old-timers.

**ATTENDEES:** Michael Cowart, Darcy Douglas, Ralph Heller, Doug Kleiber, George Owen, Pam Sullivan, Richard Sullivan

**WORK HOURS: 40.5 TRAVEL HOURS: 14.5**

## BMT GROWS ALMOST A MILE IN GEORGIA

By George Owen

A glutton for punishment, this reporter finally wheeled both ways the 2008 relocation over Wallalah and Licklog mountains later afternoon Easter, April 12, only a day after leading a work crew over this same area – long acknowledged as the toughest section of the Benton MacKaye Trail in Georgia.

The outcome? This section, number 3 between GA Hwy. 60 (Little Skeenah Creek) and Skeenah Gap, formerly 5.6 miles, **has now grown by 0.73 mile to 6.3 miles**. And it feels like it, although the climbs up and down over Wallalah and Licklog are much easier!

Some interesting figures: (1) The climb from highway 60 to where the ridgeline is finally reached on old roadbed above the Tanner property is EXACTLY 5,280 feet, a perfect mile. That's how much we save by our work shortcut through the Tanner farm (two miles round-trip walking). (2) The summit of Wallalah is 1.93 miles from Hwy. 60. (3) It's just within a few feet of being two miles exactly between Wallalah and Licklog summits.

One commonly asked question is this (I was just asked it again by someone in mid-April): Does the trail still go by the wonderful overlook near Wallalah's summit with views back some twenty miles to the BMT's southern terminus?. The answer is YES! – our relocations on Wallalah purposely preserved that great view. It is now 1.6 mile from Hwy. 60 instead of 1.4 mile, that first relocation on the west side of Wallalah making the difference there.

Overall the four relocations that we put in over one-and-a-half years with four long sidehills, each with a switchback – two each on Wallalah and Licklog – have greatly increased the safety and ease of crossing this section. Another benefit is increased erosion control.

Coming out Sunday atop Wallalah while measuring the relocation, I met a young lady hiking north with full backpack aiming toward camping atop Licklog. She was from Belgium, is currently employed in Seattle, and had two weeks off to hike the BMT from Springer northward. She appeared in great shape, had good equipment, and seemed to know what she was doing. We wish her a fine trip into Tennessee.

The significant changes in section 3 mileage were reported to Bob Ruby April 13 in time to make the final deadline for the new databook he is putting together.

Now come and hike our much-improved and 0.73-mile-longer section over Wallalah and Licklog!

*With the relocation data reported by George Owen and Ken Jones, the BMT total length is now 288.2 miles, not including the 9 miles of the approach trail to Springer. – Bob Ruby*

## Spring Flowers Fun-Hike Stanley Creek and Falls Branch

By Tom Keene

**April 18, 2009** - The first annual Spring Flowers fun-hike along Stanley Creek and the Falls Branch was a treat for all concerned. Two knee-deep crossings of Stanley Creek and lunch beside the Falls Branch falls were special treats. All the recent rain meant that both streams were looking – and sounding – marvelous.

Linda and Gerrit Voogt, Darcy Douglas, Jim Quail, plus Jane and Tom Keene made up our happy party. The water was cold for the creek crossings, but no one fell in and the bright sunshine soon warmed us up. Ask anyone involved, the walk down along Stanley Creek is as pretty as any you will find in North Georgia – especially on a perfect mid-April day.

We hope to do it again next year. Join us!

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## New Information at Thunder Rock

by George Owen

A whopping **BIG THANKS** goes out to Steve Biatowas - or whoever did it - for the wonderful new postings on the information board at the back of the Thunder Rock Campground where the trail enters the woods. It's wonderful. Please let the staff at Ocoee RD & Supervisor's Office that it is much appreciated. I think it will be very helpful to BMT hikers. (I saw it today, Mon., March 9, '09 for the first time.)

And here's why: Previous to this there was either no or little mention of the BMT on that bulletin board, and the materials up there weren't that great. Now what a change! You have also properly clarified the relation between the BMT and Thunder Rock Trails, and indicated where in "going on" beyond the Thunder Rock Trail the BMT was headed. Thanks, thanks, thanks! The other material about safety and other items are also needed improvements, and the info board with your colors is just much more eye-catching. Well done!

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**March 7-8, 2009** the BMTA was represented at the Backpacking Clinic held and sponsored by Amicalola Falls State Park. Manning the complimentary booth on Saturday were Bob Ruby and Tom Mitchell. Ralph Heller helped out in the morning and Denny Rhodes was there in the afternoon. Sunday, Denny and Ralph worked the booth again. Both days Marge Heller gave able assistance, using her years of experience in advertising and convention booth sales. A total of 55 Brochures were taken or handed out.



Colin Carter beside Big Poplar

## The BMT's Big Poplar

by George Owen

Two Forest Service professionals from the Blue Ridge District (Blairsville) viewed and subsequently measured this tree. It is certainly one of the biggest yellow (tulip) poplars on the Chattahoochee National Forest. However, no one claimed that it was second or third largest, and I don't believe it is. This tree stands at a little over 14 feet circumference as officially measured by the Forest Service at chest high above ground on the uphill side (the official way to do it; it was measured in my presence). The record yellow poplar on the Chattahoochee stands at over 18 feet circumference. It's located on a trail in the Cooper Creek Scenic Area in a cove with several other poplars only slightly smaller, about the size of the one on our trail. In addition, there is another great yellow poplar toward Lake Conasauga that I believe is quite large. We do believe, however, that our trail's tree is the largest yellow poplar on the BMT in GA.

This tree is found right beside the trail approximately a half-mile north of the gap between Wallalah and Licklog Mountains, just below the first switchback in the relocated trail north of said gap.

## Great Smoky Mountains National Park

By Dick Evans

The Benton MacKaye Trail stretches nearly one hundred miles through the National Park, giving hikers a chance to see some of the least-visited areas of America's most-visited park. It enters at Twentymile (NEVER 20 Mile!) Ranger Station in the southwestern part and for the first half stays on the southern edge, following old highways and logging paths. It is this section, from Twentymile to the tunnel at the end of the "Road to Nowhere" which is, I believe, the longest stretch of trail in the southeastern United States between public road crossings, almost 37 miles between trailheads. In addition, the section from Hazel Creek (Proctor) to the Lower Forney Campsite is the longest uninterrupted section of trail in the Southeast, just over 22 miles with no trail junctions or intersections. East of the tunnel, the trail climbs up Noland Creek, joins the Mountains-to-sea Trail for a short distance, then descends into the Smokemont section of the park. Avoiding the Smokemont Campsite, the trail then follows Chasteen and Enloe Creeks before ascending Hyatt Ridge. It then dips into Round Bottom on Straight Fork Road, before ascending to Laurel Gap and Balsam High Top, then four miles of easy, high-altitude hiking before the final push up Mount Sterling (5,820 feet), then descending into Big Creek and Davenport Gap on the northeastern corner of the park.

All camping in the park is regulated. You must camp at a designated campsite, and you must have in your possession a completed Backcountry Camping Permit, available at all major trailheads for free. In addition, certain of the campsites (and all shelters) require reservations, available at the Backcountry Reservations Office, 865-436-1231. Phones are manned 8 AM until 6 PM daily. For past visitors to the park, you should be aware that the list of campsites requiring reservations does change somewhat. For 2009, the biggest changes to affect the trail are that the Campsite at Lost Cove (#90) and Proctor (#86) now require reservations. In addition, campsites may be closed due to bear problems or hazardous trees, etc. If you are coming a distance, we suggest calling the number above to make sure you have current information to avoid an unpleasant encounter with park officials and disruption of your trip.

The BMTA, as part of our agreement with the park, is responsible for cleaning campsites along the Lakeshore Trail section of the trail. Typically done in April and September, this cleanup is sometimes done by a hike through, as this spring, or by boat, if the water level is adequate. The BMTA and the NPS have a written agreement that at some point in the future, the Trail will be rerouted to eliminate the road walk from Deals Gap to Twentymile by following, in principle, the original Appalachian Trail over Dalton Ridge and Dalton Gap into Campsite 95 on the Wolf Ridge Trail. Since this reroute would entail a full environmental assessment as required by the NEPA regulations, projected start date is unknown. The newsletter will have full details when our part of this project is to start.

## Personal Protective Equipment

Safety First with Proper Safety Gear

by Ken Jones

The most important job that any of us have when we go out to work on the trail is to stay safe. Our goal should always be to return home at the end of the day in the same shape that we started the day, only a little more tired from a job well done. The very first step in accomplishing that goal is to begin our work with the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The basic PPE for routine trail maintenance is hardhat, safety glasses, work gloves, and non-skid boots. More complex trail work using power equipment such as chainsaws and brush cutters requires additional PPE. The BMTA will be purchasing additional hardhats and safety glasses so that you will be able to obtain the needed safety gear to work on your section or participate in monthly work trips. This additional safety gear will be available for check-out in the tool storage sheds for Georgia and Tennessee. Please contact your Maintenance Director to coordinate your safety equipment needs.

## TN/NC Work Trip Reports

by Rick Harris

**Sunday, March 29, 2009** - Eight BMTA members worked on Benton MacKaye Trail Section 16a from Sandy Gap to Round Top. We brushed out the entire 3.5 mile section except for about a half mile over the top of Hazelnut. We logged out the trail from Sandy Gap to most of the way up Hazelnut. We will have to go back soon to finish off the little bit of brushing out and about a mile of logging out from Hazelnut to Round Top. The day was chilly and windy. We saw a few snow flakes but no heavy precipitation. Afterwards, we went to Liz Carter and Butch Horn's home on Appalachia Lake for a great dinner of wine, lasagna, salad and a wonderful dessert provided by Pam Sullivan. It was a very successful day of trail work. We accomplished in one day most of what we had planned to accomplish in two days. The Saturday trip was cancelled due to heavy rains and raging winds.

Participants were Richard Harris, Butch Horn, Liz Carter, George Owen, Eric Eades, Pam & Richard Sullivan, and Bob Ruby.

**WORK HRS: 56 TRAVEL HRS: 21.5 TOTAL: 77.5**

**January 24, 2009** - Eight volunteers worked on section 12d of the BMT today. It started out cloudy with sprinkles, but the weather quickly cleared and the day remained sunny till the end. Rick Harris and Ken Jones completely logged out the trail from McFarland Road to White Oak Flats Road at Lost Creek Campground, clearing 12 large logs and several smaller logs with chainsaw. The others used gas-powered brushcutters to clear the trail of smaller stuff. Volunteers included Rick Harris, Ken Jones, George Owen, Tom Keene, Steve Biatowas, Jim Lumpkin, Josh Noe and Marty Dominy, Thanks to Bill Lundin who scouted out the work to be done the week before, the trip was efficient and successful.

**TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS: 79 hours.**



## President's Corner

by Ralph Heller

We are fast approaching one of my favorite times of year to be out on our trail. This is the time when the weather starts to warm and the wild flowers put on a show. April and May are the months when most of the wild flowers are in bloom. Many of these flowers get their start before the trees leaf out and then fade as the canopy develops and the sun can no longer penetrate the forest leaves. And, since the new foliage is just getting established, we still get our spectacular vistas, many of which will disappear as the canopy thickens.

This is the time of year to see our many varieties of trillium in bloom. Masses of crested dwarf iris put on a show. First, serviceberry and then dogwood display their white blossoms. The list goes on and on. We live in one of the most botanically diverse areas of the country. The Benton MacKaye Trail crosses elevations as low as 800 feet above sea level as it crosses the Hiwassee River to as high as 5842 feet on Mt. Sterling in the Smokies. With such a range in altitudes, not only do we have an undulating range of climate zones, we also have an extended spring season, as we climb in altitude. For instance, flowers that are peaking in April at lower altitudes may be peaking in May higher up. The different climate zones also contribute to the variety of wild flowers.

A well kept secret is the spectacular display of pink lady's slippers along the trail in section 6, which is between Shallowford Bridge and Weaver Creek. Large numbers of these beautiful ground orchids can be seen going north just past Rocky Mountain from about the middle of April through May 10. In fact section 6 is recommended in the book *Hiking the Benton MacKaye Trail*, for its good spring wildflower display. See page 155 of this book, which is an excellent source of information about the BMT in Georgia. We hope to see you hiking on the trail this spring. Better yet, sign up for one of the maintenance work trips. Remember, the second Saturday of each month a maintenance work trip is scheduled for the Georgia section and the fourth Saturday there is a work trip for Tennessee/North Carolina. Check the web site [www.bmta.org](http://www.bmta.org) for specific information on these scheduled events. Don't forget the walk-through scheduled for June 6, National Trails Day.

**BMTA Membership/Donation Form**

Please enter this Benton MacKaye Trail Assn membership/renewal:

Individual, 1 Yr. \$20     Family, 1 Yr. \$30     Student/Retired, 1 Yr. \$15

Corporate, 1 Yr. \$50     Life Membership \$400

Name(s) .....

Address .....

City .....

State .....

Zip .....

Telephone(s) (1st) .....

Telephone(s) (2nd) .....

eMail .....

Do not call

Please send me the e-Newsletter

Please don't list my contact info in the annual membership roster.

It's OK to share my contact info with sister trail organizations.

Interested in helping with:  Trail Work     Fun Hikes     Mgmt/Officer

Administrative     Newsletter     Adopting a Section of Trail

I wish to make a tax-deductible donation in the amount of \$ .....

Gift Membership given by: name .....

address/phone .....

Mail to: Benton MacKaye Trail Assn ♦ PO Box 53271 ♦ Atlanta, GA 30355-1271

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING - April 3

Minutes by Margaret Meadows - abstracted by the Editor

There were 16 board members present for this meeting at the Cherry Log Pavillion. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved, the Treasurer's report was submitted and approved. The Corridor Protection Committee reported on the discussions about trail relocation in troublesome areas but nothing has been finalized yet. There were discussions about having a presence at various hiking festivals and events. There is now a tool shed at the Tellico Ranger Station and Ken Jones passed out keys to various trail maintainers. Motion to advertise for new web master in the newsletter was made and passed. Other discussions were on the Smokies 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the rewrite of the Data Book, and maintenance in the Smokies. Motions to purchase a GPS for club use and to aid in the creation of a Guidebook for the Tennessee portion of the trail were made and passed. Eric Eades will coordinate an effort to assist the Forest Service with the Woolly-adelgid problem as he is certified in three states as a pest control expert. Liz Burlingame will assist Eric with record and rounding up volunteers by phone. Dates were set for future work trips, the annual walk-thru, future board meetings and Bob Ruby asked for more volunteers to lead hikes.



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## Forest Lands Under Assault

*Editorial by Betty Petty*

Our National Forests are facing unprecedented challenges due to our energy resource problems. These problems spring both from the traditional energy companies and the new 'renewable' energy companies. Two recent items have come to my attention which illustrate the problems. Those who recognize the invaluable services provided by our forests, both from the recreation aspects and the necessary-to-life functions such as carbon sink and water purifier need to be alert to these challenges. The first is similar to the State of Tennessee's fight for the integrity of the Cumberland Trail State Park and the second is an alert concerning all the windy high mountain ridges near major population centers.

### Lawsuit Filed Against Forest Service

On March 27, Catalyst Energy, Inc., a suburban Pittsburgh energy company, filed claims in a federal lawsuit that the US Forest Service is illegally refusing to allow the company to drill for gas and oil in the Allegheny National Forest (PA) where the company owns mineral rights. Catalyst Energy, Inc., stated the Forest Service is requiring the company to obtain a notice to proceed, but is not issuing the notice. Catalyst also stated the notice is unauthorized and that the Forest Service's refusal to issue the notice is depriving them of their rights to access their minerals.

### Forest Service Denies Wind Turbine Permit

On April 2, the Forest Supervisor of the *(continued)*

George Washington National Forest denied an application from FreedomWorks LLC, Harper's Ferry, WV, to install three data collection towers atop Great North Mountain to collect data prior to a proposed 131 wind turbines on 500 permanently cleared acres of mountaintop. There would be an additional 19 miles of road cut into the forest for access to the site. This wind farm would provide power to the DC area about 100 miles away. The proposal was denied because of noncompliance with the existing forest plan. This denial is expected to be challenged.

## Upcoming TN/NC/GA Work Trip May 23-24

BMT Section 16b - Sledrunner Gap to Roundtop. . We will log and brush out this 2.7 mile section over this two day combined TN/GA worktrip. We will spend the night at Rick and Brenda Harris's home just off the Cherohala Skyway, just a few miles from Beaverdam Bald, the access point for Sledrunner Gap. Supper and breakfast will be provided. When we run out of beds, we will use sleeping bags on their floor. So bring a sleeping bag and pad, just in case.

**MEETING LOCATION:** The Tellico Ranger Station about 9AM on both Saturday and Sunday.

**LEADER:** Rick Harris, 423-253-6358 (home); 513-260-1184 (cell), HarrisRi@aol.com.

**BRING:** Chain saw if chain saw certified, gas powered brush cutters, loppers and swing blades can be used if you so choose. Bring gloves, safety glasses and a helmet if you have them. Bring lunch and water.