



Newsletter of the

BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

Volume 29, No 1

January 2009

In This Issue....

- Licklog Reroute Complete!
- Georgia Nov/Dec Work Trips
- TN/NC Jan/Feb Work Trips
- February Fun Hike
- President's Corner

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Announcements

!!!Dues are Due !!!

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

Mark Your Calendar! 2009 Walk-through on June 6

The 2009 BMT Walk-through is set for June 6, National Trails Day. So mark your calendar and line up a partner. Details to follow, in the newsletter and on the BMTA website.



Licklog Reroute Completed

By George Owen

IT'S DONE! IT'S OPEN!

The great Wallalah and Licklog mountains reroute scattered in four sections over two miles has been completed and opened on the Georgia worktrip of September 27.

Working on an average of every other month over almost two years on this project, work teams have been digging four big swinging loops of one great switchback each to take out extremely steep and dangerous portions of the climbs up and down Wallalah and Licklog. Over the years hikers have struggled up the old trail route, and we even had reports of some falling on this the steepest portion of the BMT in Georgia. Even one of our maintainers seriously fell. While still the toughest portion of the BMT in the state per mile, it is now much safer and more easily traversed.

The interesting thing is that we completed this last 200-300 yards with only a minimum-sized crew - but what a great working bunch these "Hulk" half-dozen were! Yes, only six worked hard to get it all done, as we completed the clearing and digging on the "big curve" astride the upper northwest slope of Licklog Mountain. We had expected about perhaps a dozen, but we suspect the drastic Atlanta and north Georgia gas shortage had its toll.

Six of us met for breakfast at the Village Restaurant and then drove up to meet Walt Cook who started hiking in from the Skeenah Creek trailhead on GA Highway 60. Unfortunately, after driving up to the trail via the Tanner property, Bill Ross became ill and had to return home. So we were back to six actually working.

For the next several hours we cut and dug rapidly, admittedly a little shallow near and into the great trail curve to complete the work that day. Then shortly after lunch Walt Cook began painting the blazes. By 2 p.m. and shortly afterwards, teams were opening the last uncleared yards at each end of this last section. Walt stayed on about another hour to paint after the rest of us began the hike to the vehicles.

So no longer do hikers have a place on the BMT in Georgia with climbs in places approaching 35% for some yards each (literally, some brief uphill in this area became that steep). Yep, it's a big improvement. (We let the original designer of this route attend this trip; it's time he learned how better trail is made!)

A BIG THANKS goes out to all who helped make this series of relocations possible with hard work over a number of months. I especially now want to thank those who showed up amidst a southern gas crisis to get this final chapter in the great Wallalah-Licklog relo written.

WORKERS: Walt Cook, Eric Eades, Jim Griffin (first time on a GA work trip), Bill Hamrick, Ralph Heller, George Owen

HOURS WORKED: 37

HOURS TRAVELED: 18
(includes those of Bill Ross)

Georgia Worktrips -

Fearless Five Clear Hatley Gap Campsite

By Tom Keene

The board-approved effort to encourage more group use of scenic Section Eight began with the temperature at 15 degrees Fahrenheit. That was the reading at breakfast time **November 22nd**.

Nevertheless, five stalwarts appeared: Darcy Douglas, George Owen, Douglas Kleiber, Bill Hamrick and your scribe. Actually six showed at breakfast. The President-elect put in a cameo appearance at the Waffle King, though he could not work.

No, not Mr. Obama; Ralph Heller.

We drove to Hudson Gap then walked on to Hatley. It warmed nicely and proved a clear, beautiful winter day, perfect for clearing saplings from the old campsite at Hatley Gap. Next step will be to do the same at the site at Halloway Gap which is also overgrown.

Thanks to all who came.

Neither rain nor fog nor sodden leaves could stay these volunteers from their side-hilling

By Tom Keene

Apologies to Herodotus and the U.S. Postal Service for the headline, but the weather looked to be fairly miserable for the December 20 Georgia work trip. It had rained hard overnight, and forecasts called for intermittent rain all day. Still, seven hearty souls appeared for breakfast at the Village Restaurant: Mona Street, Walt Cook, George Owen, Ralph Heller, Bill Hamrick, Doug Kleiber, and yours truly. We drove to Wilscot Gap in a light rain. Walt and Bill were to work in from Wilscot, clearing blowdowns. The rest of us drove in to Ledford Gap to work back toward the sawyers, refreshing side-hilling from the gap up the west side of Tipton Mtn. (Ralph Heller unfortunately had car trouble and could not join us.)

It began to rain heavily as the four of us drove in to Ledford. As I scouted out the work in my big rain parka I met a young through-hiker, Joanna Cahill of Asheville. She was hiking solo, but was well equipped and experienced, having through-hiked the AT. She was headed straight through to Davenport Gap, hoping to average 13 miles a day. Not the easiest of conditions, but she was undaunted - and thanked us for our work on the trail.

Happily the rain let up shortly after Joanna passed by and we set to work. We had fairly constant mist the rest of the day and occasional light showers. We gradually got a bit soggy, but really the weather was never really a problem. On the positive side, the visuals as the fog pushed through Ledford Gap and down the coves were a constant treat. Plus, the ground was damp and easy to work - perfect for side-hill work.

In the end it was a very productive day. Walt and Bill cleared seven or eight blowdowns and then joined us to refresh the side-hilling from Ledford up to the big stone steps on the west end of Tipton Mountain.

Thanks to all who turned out. Herodotus would have been proud.

TN/NC Worktrip -

Saturday, February 28, 2008

WORK LOCATION: BMT Section 12e - White Oak Flats Road (FS 103) near Lost Creek Campground to near Reliance (Total distance about 4.0 miles, but only about 2.7 miles will require maintenance). We will go in from the White Oak Flats Road trail crossing near Lost Creek Campground and log out and cut brush to standards with chain saws and gas-powered brush cutters as far down the trail as possible, hopefully all the way to the point where we meet the forest service road near Reliance, a distance of about 2.7 miles. The first 0.3 miles along White Oak Flats Road and the last mile along FS 173 will not require any work since it follows a roadbed which is kept clear for vehicles. Much of this section is on an old unmaintained roadbed along the banks of Lost Creek which horse riders often help clear out for their use, so we should be able to make it all the way through. We will end our day at the maintained forest service road 173 near Reliance where we will have shuttle cars parked.

MEETING LOCATION: We will meet at the railroad trestle by the canoe livery in Reliance at 8AM and park some cars as far up FS 173 as we can go, then shuttle to the Lost Creek Campground on White Oak Flats Road, arriving there about 9AM. We may be able to have some people meet us at the Lost Creek Campground at 9AM without first going to Reliance. We will work this out once we know who is coming.

LEADER: Rick Harris, 423-253-6358 (home); 513-260-1184 (cell), HarrisRi@aol.com. Please notify Rick in advance of the work trip of your plans to come and what tools you will be bringing.

BRING: Chain saw if chain saw certified. We need gas powered brush cutters as well. Also, loppers and swing blades can be used. Bring gloves, safety glasses and a helmet if you have one. We have a few helmets to loan out. Bring lunch and water.



President's Corner

by Ralph Heller

One of my Christmas gifts this year was the book *The Annals of Upper Georgia Centered in Gilmer County* written by George Gordon Ward. As most of you know, the Benton MacKaye Trail starts in Gilmer County at Springer Mountain. The beginning chapter of this book has a section that describes the hardships of one of the original groups of settlers in Gilmer who moved there from the Asheville area in North Carolina. The trip, which took over thirty days, averaged three miles a day. The route followed crude trails made wide enough to accommodate Conestoga wagons. It went through valleys, hollows, streams, along ridges and up and over gaps. The trip was extremely difficult. What might be called a crude road was, at times, barely visible and only partly blazed as it coursed through thick virgin forest. At some places, evidence of the road would disappear completely due to little use and summer vegetation growth.

Reading this information, I am struck with how similar, yet different, our trail is to what those settlers encountered a century and a half ago. We must maintain the trail and cut back summer growth to make it visible and passable. Blow downs must be cleared. As in the old days, blazes must be placed to mark the trail. We try to keep our blazes properly spaced, refreshed, and unambiguous. As I hike a section of our trail, especially one that follows some old logging road, I am reminded of how those settlers struggled as they traveled to Ellijay. One difference is that we do not have the vast old growth forests, although our forests have recovered immensely from the early twentieth century when they were cut so severely. Yes, there are still some old growth trees left, and our trail has many of them. The old road/trails mostly followed the valleys, whereas the BMTA stays high on or near ridge tops. We do try to avoid steep climbs and route the trail around high peaks, if possible, unless there is something to see from the top. Our trail is a more primitive trail than many are today. It is more like the ones long ago used by the early settlers. As such, it goes through some of the most beautiful, undisturbed, and remote areas in the southern Appalachians. Our 288 mile trail has unique status because it is blessed with seven wilderness areas plus the Smokies, which is managed as a wilderness area. It crosses three more areas under study for wilderness designation. Over 90 percent of our trail is on public land, which means that it is protected from private development. One of our goals is to find ways to protect the sections that go through private property. We will try to firm up agreements with those private landowners to give us protected corridors between the public areas.

If you want to have a real wilderness experience, hike or backpack the BMT. Or, volunteer for a trail maintenance day. I always get excited when I come upon a group of hikers on our trail. Thanksgiving weekend, while hiking the BMT, I met a group of four young men from Georgia Tech on Section 6 near Scroggin Knob. They had learned about the BMT from our web site and thoroughly enjoyed their two-night backpacking trip. After my hike, I saw them walking in the rain on Weaver Creek Road and gave them a ride back to their car which was in the parking lot for the Aska AdventureTrail area. This would have been a seven mile road walk. They were very impressed with our trail, and I was proud of what our organization has accomplished. We of the BMTA should all be very proud!

Save this Date!

The Southeastern Foot Trails Coalition (SEFTC) is planning a conference May 7-10 at Pine Mountain State Resort Park in Pineville, KY. This will be the 5th conference of its kind, and they are always good hikes, educational sessions, and camaraderie. For more information about the conference please contact Dennis Crowley at dennis.crowley@win.net.

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 (1st)

Telephone (2nd)

eMail

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



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TN/NC Worktrip -Saturday, January 24, 2008

WORK LOCATION: BMT Section 12d - McFarland Road (FS 23) to White Oak Flats Road (FS 103) at Lost Creek Campground (Distance 3.9 miles). We will go in from the McFarland Road trail crossing and log out and cut brush to standards with chain saws and gas-powered brush cutters as far down the trail as possible, hopefully all the way to White Oak Flats Road. Much of this section is on an old gated forest service road which will probably need little work, so we should be able to make it all the way through. We will also hope to put in a sign post at a frequently missed right turn in a clearing about half way down this trail.

MEETING LOCATION: We will meet at the entrance to the Lost Creek Campground on White Oak Flats Road at 8AM but will park our shuttle cars where the trail leaves the road about a half mile west of the campground. We will then carpool to the McFarland Road trail crossing. We may be able to have some people meet us at McFarland Road trail crossing at 9AM without first going to Lost Creek. We will work this out once we know who is coming.

LEADER: Rick Harris, 423-253-6358 (home); 513-260-1184 (cell), HarrisRi@aol.com. Please notify Rick in advance of the work trip of your plans to come and what tools you will be bringing.

BRING: Chain saw if chain saw certified. We need gas powered brush cutters as well. Also, loppers and swing blades can be used. Bring gloves, safety glasses and a helmet if you have one. We have a few helmets to loan out. Bring lunch and water.

Buck Bald Fun Hike - Sunday, February 8, 2009

Location: Benton-MacKaye Trail, Section 14 Unicoi Gap to Highway 64. near Coker Creek, TN

Distance: 7 miles

Rating: Moderate

Pace: Moderate

This section of the Benton MacKaye is a gentle walk through Southern woodlands in a very historic area. The early part of this trail is on short sections of the old Unicoi Turnpike. The Unicoi Turnpike followed the traditional trail used by the Cherokees to travel between the lower Cherokee towns and the Overhill towns in TN. We will travel from Doc Rodger's Fields past Unicoi Gap and end our hike at Buck's Bald. This hike will not start until afternoon and will finish in moonlight. This date provides a full moon that rises just before sunset. This Hike is held in conjunction with the Chattanooga Hiking Club. Hike leader is Betty Petty

(423)894-3449 or bjpetty@chattanooga.net

This edition of the BMTA Newsletter, compiled and edited by Betty Petty, is printed on 30% recycled paper.