



Newsletter of the

BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

Volume 29, No 5

July/August 2009

In This Issue....

- Annual Meeting Plans
- Calendar
- New Trails Tech
- Annual Walk Through
- TN/NC Work Trip Reports
- GA Work Trip Reports
- Corridor K Status
- Land Managers Meeting
- President's Corner
- Help for Rabun Hemlocks
- Web Master Needed
- Next Issue Deadline - Aug 24

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

Calendar

- Aug 8** - GA Maint. - Tom Keene
770-422-4838
- Aug 29** - TN/NC Maint. - Rick
Harris 423-353-6368
- Sept 12** - GA Maint. - Tom Keene
770-422-4838
- Sept 26** - TN/NC Maint. - Rick
Harris 423-353-6368
- Oct 10** - GA Maint. - Tom Keene
770-422-4838
- Oct 24** - TN/NC Maint. - Rick
Harris 423-353-6368
- Nov 6-8** - Annual Meeting!

SAVE THE DATE!

2009 BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

Mark your calendars now for this year's annual meeting. After several years of meeting in Blue Ridge and Cherry Log we will be returning to a retreat style setting for this year's event. The location will be Coker Creek Village in Coker Creek, Tennessee. The dates will be November 6 - November 8 with the meeting and elections to be held Saturday night, November 7. Nestled in the hills of the Cherokee National Forest, **Coker Creek Village** is a short distance from several points of access to the Benton Mackaye Trail, making for good day hiking opportunities. Also, located on Highway 68 between Ducktown and Tellico Plains near the mid-point of the trail, it is centrally located for our members.



Our gracious hosts have worked hard to provide several options for meals and lodging, depending on one's desired length of stay. For those who wish to attend the meeting and dinner only, the cost will be \$10 / person. Overnight options are as follows:

Bunkhouse lodging (not coed)

- Dinner & meeting, Saturday night bunk, & Sunday breakfast \$35
- Friday & Saturday bunk, 3 meals Saturday & Sunday breakfast \$60

For couples desiring a furnished cabin with private bath (rates per person):

- Saturday night meal, Saturday night cabin, Sunday breakfast \$65
- Friday & Saturday cabin, 3 meals Saturday, and Breakfast Sunday \$140

Watch your newsletters for details regarding scheduled hikes, a guest speaker, and how to make your reservation. In the meantime, please save the date as we hope to see and meet as many of you as possible at this event. For our newer members, this is one of the few occasions each year where we get together **without tools** to meet, visit, hike, and eat! We look forward to seeing you there.

David Blount, V.P.

New Tellico Trails Tech: **Greg Kirkland** has been selected for the trails position at the Tellico Ranger District effective in Aug. 09. Trails volunteers are invited to a meet and greet cookout which will be held on Aug. 27th. at 1200 noon at the Tellico District office. Hamburgers, hotdogs and drinks will be provided; please bring your favorite side item or desert if you wish. You can meet Greg (423) 253-8412 and discuss your pet trail project.



Marge Heller & Tom and Jane Keene in Laurel thicket on Section 4 during Walk-thru on June 6

NATIONAL TRAILS DAY BMT WALKTHROUGH A BIG SUCCESS

By Rick Harris & Tom Keene

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association decided at the winter quarter Board of Directors Meeting to utilize the annual walkthrough as the American Hiking Society sponsored 2009 National Trails Day event on June 6. The data obtained from the annual walkthrough aid in planning the trail work for the coming year. All sections in the Georgia part of the BMT and all but 4 sections in the Tennessee/North Carolina part were claimed by members and friends of the BMTA for the walkthrough. The weather was perfect, sunny and not too hot. In total, it is estimated that a total of 56 individuals participated in the event, totaling 312 hours of work plus travel time. Not all walkthroughs were done on June 6 due to various conflicts, but were carried out on alternative dates. Afterwards, the GA hikers retired to the Pink Pig in Cherrylog and the TN/NC hikers ate at the Tellicafe in Tellico Plains.

The walkthrough was mostly performed by pairs of individuals

who hiked their assigned segment of the trail and reported on the status of the trail on a standardized form. The report included information on the signage, the tread and the need for brushing and logging out of the trail. Copies of the reports for each segment are being forwarded to the section maintainers. The TN/NC maintenance director Rick Harris and the GA maintenance director Tom Keene will plan the upcoming year of trail maintenance based on the results of the walkthrough.

The Georgia section had, by common consent, its most successful walkthrough day ever. Not only was every section walked, but several were walked by groups of four. The afternoon event at the Pink Pig was the biggest ever. Many spoke of enjoying glorious patches of blooming mountain laurel and flame azaleas. A rattlesnake and a bear sighting added a bit of spice. The date of the annual walk-through has shifted around in recent years. From the point of view of the Georgia and the TN/NC groups, National Trails Day – or at least early June – is the ideal choice, both from the point of view of the strong participation and for the pleasures of the walk.

A big thank you goes to all those who participated in the walkthrough. A limited number of special T-shirts and hats will be given to some participants and all participants will receive a copy of the new BMT Data Book.



George Owen '09 walk-thru - clearing trees with only his handsaw!

TN/NC Work Trip

June 27-28, 2009

by Rick Harris

Saturday - Rick Harris, Brenda Harris, Butch Horn, Liz Carter, Steve Cartwright and Bob Ruby spent a long, hot, muggy day logging and brushing out the Benton MacKaye Trail Section 16b from Sledrunner Gap to about half 2/3 of the way (1.53 miles) toward Round Top. Due to 4-wheeler traffic past the gap south of Rocky Top, very few logs were across the trail. Most of the work consisted of brushing out with brush cutters. We also cleared the manway from Beaverdam Bald to Sledrunner Gap, the 0.5 mile long access trail to the work site. The blackberry bushes were so thick there was no way to get to our worksite without doing this as well. The road to Beaverdam Bald is currently being reworked by the FS. About half of it was mostly finished, but the other half was very rough and hard to negotiate due to deep ruts and massive overhanging branches. We decided the second day of work should be rescheduled to fall or late summer when we know that the road has been finished. We will need to brush out the remaining ~1 mile of trail to Round Top, log and brush out a short segment over the top of Hazelnut, and paint blazes. Once these tasks are completed, the entire Heart of Darkness will be in perfect condition.

Work Hrs: 30 Total Hrs: 52

Sunday - Rick Harris and Bob Ruby cleared and logged out the 0.3 mile section of the Benton MacKaye Trail Section 17d from Beech Gap to the Unicoi Crest Overlook on the Cherohala Skyway, then brushed out the BMT Section 17c from Whigg Meadow to Mud Gap (it had been previously logged out). With this completed, this puts the entire section from Beech Gap to the top of the Sycamore Creek Trail in perfect condition.

Work Hrs: 14 Total Hrs: 21

Swingblades of Fury '09 Hikers, Horses & Hardhats

By Bill Ross

What began as a cool, pleasant day for many briars, sticker-bushes, small shrubs and—let's admit it—some innocent ferns, ended in a day of death and wasting by the trailside. Those plants unfortunate enough to protrude into the footpath of the BMT, or just too reckless to care if they did, risked and lost all on Saturday, July 18th. These plants, whether ignorant or prideful, were all met by an implacable foe—this year's Hemp Top work trip.

By now you know the story: Each year the BMTA and the Forest Service team up on one Saturday to swingblade the trail from Dally Gap to Double Springs Gap, including a section of the BMT between Spanish Oak Gap and Double Springs. A group on horseback travel to Double Springs and work their way back, while hikers move up the trail from Dally Gap to meet them. This year, the trail from Dally to the Penitentiary Branch Trail turnoff was cleared on the previous weekend by volunteers, leaving less of the BMT to be worked. Consequently, six of the BMTA volunteers worked on Penitentiary Branch Trail, while the main body of Forest Service volunteers tackled the remainder of the BMT. (Interestingly, a quick poll revealed that none of the BMTA workers had ever been down Penitentiary Branch before.)

One of the most difficult tasks for a writer is to find a new way to approach a well-worn topic. How best to thank the Forest Service and its volunteer crew for all the great work they do? The Forest Service volunteers were clearing this trail each year long before the BMTA joined them in the work. (Years ago I maintained part of this section of the BMT. Hiking the trail once shortly after the FS volunteers had done their swingblading I feared that someone had snuck a riding mower into the wilderness area—their work is that good.) Are we just making the job they would do anyway just a little easier? I don't know, but I do know that they deserve our thanks for this year and every year they have been and will be out there on the trails. And let's not forget the great work the Forest Service does each year to organize and outfit this work trip. Thanks to all!

BMTA members participating were: Steve Bayliss, Ralph Heller, T.O. Mitchell, George Owen, Bill Ross, Bob Ruby, and Dick Zelle. If you'd like to become part of the growing legend of the summer swingblade trip, keep an eye on the work trip calendar for next summer; this trip is usually held in July.

Work Hrs: 31

Total Hrs: 47

George Owen clear-cuts 300 acres using nothing but his weed-eater Worktrip on Section Nine, June 13 by Tom Keene

The drought has let up in Georgia, and it's a great year for vegetation growth; but that vegetation met its match on the June 13 Georgia work-trip.

Eight energetic souls, armed with loppers, swing-blades, pruners, and a couple of weed-eaters, got the trail well-cleared between Watson Gap and the South Fork Trail (SFT) intersection.

In fact, George Owen was wielding his weed-eater with such enthusiasm that plants seemed actually to recoil at the sight of him. Darcy Douglas feared that if we did not restrain him, George would denude the entire landscape from Forest Service Road 64 down to the SFT.

As a bonus, George and Del Yoder entertained us at lunch with tales of misplaced patients and other interesting practices at Grady Hospital, where they both worked in earlier days.

Despite -or perhaps because of- all the entertainment we got a lot done. Special thanks to everyone who lent a hand: Mona Street, Bob Ruby, Ralph Heller, Tom Keene, Darcy Douglas, Jim Quail, Delmar Yoder, and George Owen.

Corridor K Project by Betty Petty

Two public meetings were held on July 19 in Ducktown and on July 20 in Benton. Betty Petty, Citizens Resource Team(CRT) member attended both of them. There was also a meeting of the Environmental, Utilities and Business advisory board which Ralph Heller attended as a member of that board and Betty Petty as a CRT observer. Several other Benton MacKaye members attended the Ducktown public meeting and left comments on the project. All options other than the no-build will affect the Benton MacKaye Trail as it currently crosses US 64, but none would affect it as negatively as the Kimsey Mountain route. This route drew the most criticism from a variety of other people with the most serious charge being that it could negatively affect the water supply of the entire Copper Basin. For more information about the project, how it is being conducted and a map of the affected area visit the TDOT website: <http://www.tdot.state.tn.us/corridorK/> Minutes and comments from the meetings are also published on the TDOT web site.

For links to news stories and environmental alternatives being discussed visit the Ways South website: <http://www.corridorK.org/>

DEADLINE for submission of material for the September Newsletter is August 24. In addition to reports on activities and upcoming events, all members are encouraged to submit articles on any subject of interest to the Benton-MacKaye Trail Association or the hiking community in general.



boys axe - 27"

TN/NC Work Trip Reports

by Rick Harris

Monday, July 20, 2009 BMT Sections 16c and 16d

Tazz Reid and Jim Holland logged out all of section 16d and most of section 16c almost to the confluence of Brookshire Creek and the Bald River. Our intent was to ride the right leg along Brookshire Creek about a 1/2 mile and cut two large trees (one big pine and a HUGE locust) that Leslie, Hugh, and I ran into a few weeks ago. Since there were sections of the left leg along Bald River neither of us had not seen, we decided to make the loop. Leslie, Hugh, and I missed the turn off onto the Benton MacKaye from Sugar Mountain road riding it counterclockwise last time. It is very obvious going clockwise, but you have to look behind you to see it going counterclockwise. I still don't see how all three of us rode past it.

We had lunch in one of the feedlots on Beaver Dam Bald Road and after negotiating with the construction equipment people to shut down long enough to let us by, we were doing great, as I knew that there was not much to cut on the way back except the two big trees. Famous last words...the "Blowdown from Hell" was less than a 100 yards above the first big tree. One of the trees was a giant springpole...the root ball end barber chaired twice while we were cutting it...and we were cutting it head high standing on the trees below. Plus it fell right over a small drainage, which gave us no level footing.

After cutting our way through that...I counted at least 12 cuts with a crosscut and some axing...we came to the big locust. We got about 3/4 of the way through the first cut and although we tried to wedge, the locust was so hard and the kerf (cut made by ax or saw) was so small, the wedges kept bouncing out. We got the saw hung and there was no way we were going to chop it out with an axe before dark. Finally we used the boys axe as a wedge and managed to free the saw. It was getting dark, so we decided not to push our luck and come back later for the two trees and several smaller ones between there and the trailhead. I left home Monday morning at 6:30AM and got home a few minutes before 10:00PM...a long day, and one to remember, but you can't complain about being out there on such a beautiful day with cool temperatures, no flies or gnats, in good company and your horses along...in JULY!

Work Hours 24 Total Hours 28

BMT Section 15b, Six Mile Gap to Tate Gap

Saturday, July 25, 2009 - Rick Harris, Brenda Harris and Steve Cartwright logged out this entire 1.8 mile section of 47 trees by chain saw and another 7 or so by pulling them to the side of the trail, for a total of 54 trees. We also blazed the entire section with the BMT diamond blaze. None will get lost for the next few years, thanks to the expert blazing. Tomorrow others go back to brush out this entire section and bring it up to standards. We parked one vehicle along Doc Martin Road at the base of the mountain and drove the other vehicle up to Waucheesi Bald. From there we hiked down to Six Mile Gap to start our work. *Continued*

Section 15 B (continued) The access trail from Waucheesi has numerous logs as well which at some future date we need to clear out of the trail. Doc Martin Road is all but impassible to any vehicles beyond the FS gate at this point.

Work Hours 19.5

Total Hours 25.5

Sunday, July 26, 2009 Rick Harris, James Anderson and Richard Sullivan brushed out this 1.8 mile section today so this section is now up to standard, fully logged and brushed out and with fresh blazes, an amazing improvement from what it was just 2 days ago. Following the work trip, we all enjoyed home made cookies and pop on Richard Sullivan's tailgate. Rain was predicted but never materialized. It was sunny, breezy and fairly cool all day up at the high elevation.

Work Hours 16.5

Total Hours 24

LAND MANAGERS MEETING

with the **Chattahoochee, Cherokee, and Nantahala National Forests**

June 26, 2009

By Liz Carter

Forest Service Attendees:

Cherokee: Katherine Foster, Monte Williams, Doug Bierley, Andy Gaston, Steve Biatowas

Chattahoochee/Oconee NF: David Kirkendall, Andy Baker, Jimmy Gaudry

Tusquettee/Cheoah : Steve Lohr

Benton MacKaye Trail Association

Darcy Douglas, Elizabeth Carter, Jeff Hunter, George Owen, Butch Horn, Ralph Heller, Betty Petty, Eric Eades, Denny Rhodes, Richard Evans

Remarks from Forest Service Representatives

Doug Bierley stated that the FS moving forward on strategic plans and thanks the BMTA for input and assistance. The Cherokee is hiring four Trails Technicians to be in place in August. Doug introduced Katherine Foster, new Tellico District Ranger. New Bulletin boards have been created for trailheads in the Cherokee and will have Plexiglas covering. Carl Deats, chainsaw coordinator, will be setting up classes in the future. David K. from Chatahoochee NF referred to meeting in Blairsville 12/11/08, asked if BMTA had made any progress in developing an Optimal Location Review (OLR) for trail reroute. Steve Lohr, Nantahala/ Tusquettee invited BMTA to look at maintenance needs.

Discussion from BMTA members:

The BMTA expressed thanks for things NF has done to correct the problems with illegal ATV activity. Doug led discussion of "incompatible use" versus "unauthorized use".

Questions raised about special use permitting; thanks to NF for Scoping Notices for NF usage such as the Can Do Soldiers March which was referred to BMTA board. NF will communicate with Ralph Heller. Eric Eades brought up Towee Creek Bridge situation. Said BMTA will relocate trail if necessary. Doug said NF wants to facilitate this project, will look at different solutions. Little Grand Canyon, run-off water from Cherohalla Skyway, is an ongoing problem(NF problem or a NCDOT problem?)(continued on page 5)



President's Corner

by Ralph Heller

Summer is here! For the last several weeks the temperature in Cherrylog, GA has reached into the 90's. This time of year is my least favorite time to go hiking, but relief can still be found. Head for higher elevations or hike along a section of the BMT that travels along or near a major stream or river. We have a good number of such opportunities along our trail. I am proud to announce that our newly revised *Benton MacKaye Trail 2009-2010 Databook* is now available. You should be able to get it from your favorite outfitting/hiking store. It is also available online at www.bmta.org. This compact little gem is great for finding that perfect section to hike to meet your hiking requirements. It has information on the entire trail from Springer Mountain to Davenport Gap in the Smokies. If you want to hike at higher elevations, check the elevation data on the right side of the page. For instance, section 1 Springer Mountain to Three Forks will keep you above 3,000 feet most of the way. If you want to go higher and be near Georgia try Section 11 which takes you up to 4,224 feet on big Frog Mountain. In Tennessee and North Carolina you can reach even greater heights. Section 17 will take you up to 4940 ft. at the gate to Whigg Meadow. In the Smokies you can go above a mile in altitude several places on Section 23, Laurel Gap at 5,600 feet and Mount Sterling, the highest point on the trail at 5,820 ft. Major streams are located at the lowest elevations. By looking for the low elevations in the Databook you can find sections to hike along these streams. In Georgia, the Toccoa River Suspension Bridge in Section 2, Shallowford Bridge in section 5 and Jacks River in Section 10 all give a cool respite. In Tennessee try Section 12 which crosses the Ocoee River or hike section 13, the lowest section of the BMT at 780 Feet above sea level, which joins the John Muir Trail and crosses the Hiawasse River at Reliance. In the Smokies Section 20 follows the Fontana Lake Lakeshore trail which has a number of camp sites near the lake and crosses numerous streams as they flow into the lake.

This year we are finally getting plenty of rain. I hope the drought is finally over. However, the rain has caused rapid vegetation growth along the trail. The trail maintainers are working hard to keep the trail cleared, but sometimes this growth gets ahead of them. Use of the trail helps to trample the growth before it gets out of hand. The more remote areas get less travel and are more difficult to get to for maintenance. So get out there and hike those areas. You are helping to maintain the trail just by hiking it. Let us know of any problems you encounter. And, of course, join us on a work day. We enjoy seeing and getting to know our members on these occasions. Georgia work days are on the second Saturday of each month and Tennessee work days are the fourth Saturday. Check the newsletter or the BMTA web site for detailed information

Land Managers Meeting (Cont. from pg 4) Hemlock situation, woolly A control. Doug explained strategy of "targeted stands", doesn't think other places are being treated. He referred questions to Rusty Ray in Asheville.
Corridor Protection: George Owen asked about acquisition of school property in Monroe County. K. Foster said county is interested in selling but do not know mechanisms for buying it. G. Owen said BMTA will help. Question re: plans for TN side of Alcoa/Tellico. K. Foster said a parcel has been acquired. She will get a map for BMTA.
Trail Signs: BMTA has signs, like those used in GA. Showed example of carsonite trail signs. Can we do in TN? Doug said he thinks so, will support it. Send letter of request to Doug. He said NF now has a roads trail coordinator who is trying to get the signs standardized and avoid a "bunch of signs" at same place.
Ralph Heller said thanks to NF for the Tellico ORV area closing and for cooperation from NF on other trail matters.
Open Agenda Questions re: Outfitters and Guides taking people on Trail? Doug said if commercial, must have a permit. Steve Biatowitz said they are getting maps of where bike/hike trails are located, welcome comments. Asked if BMTA wants to be a direct link on their website (yes).
 Adjourn: 2:50 p.m.

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)

(2nd)

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



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HELP IS HERE FOR RABUN HEMLOCKS!

The Hemlocks in north Georgia are being threatened by a spreading infestation of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA), an invasive insect native to Asia with no local natural predator. Hemlock stands are among the only old growth forests in the east and are of great importance to wildlife, water quality, local economy, and basic quality of life.

The bad news is that if appropriate action is not taken soon, almost all of these magnificent trees will die within the next 10 years. The good news is that SAVE GEORGIA'S HEMLOCKS, a recently formed nonprofit organization, is offering a new program of education and charitable service to help homeowners all across north Georgia manage the health of their Hemlocks against the Woolly Adelgid.

The HEMLOCK HELP FOR HOMEOWNERS program focuses on enhancing public awareness of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid problem and the practical solutions that are available and enabling homeowners to save the Hemlocks on their own property for the lowest possible cost. Designed to operate as a no-cost or low-cost community service, it is available as of July 1 in Rabun County where the infestation began in Georgia and will be deployed across the state on a county-by-county basis wherever the HWA is a serious threat.

Homeowners can call the Hemlock Help Line (706-429-8010) with their Hemlock questions and receive accurate, up-to-date information and advice. For

individuals interested in the do-it-yourself option, the Hemlock Help Line can provide information on borrowing a soil injector (in Rabun County it is available through the UGA Extension Office), advice on purchasing the treatment product economically, and instructions on the treatment procedure. For those who prefer to contract with a licensed professional to treat their trees, the Hemlock Help Line can supply a list of qualified local companies specializing in saving Hemlocks along with their average rate structure.

See their web site at www.savegeorgiashemlocks.org

If you have Hemlocks that may be in danger, SAVE GEORGIA'S HEMLOCKS urges you to call the Hemlock Help Line (706-429-8010). Please don't wait.

Web Development Volunteer Needed

We are looking for someone among our talented members who is able to perform some web development/design work. The person who was doing this work has moved on to other commitments, so this much needed position is now open. At present, we are able to add or modify textual information to our web pages, but we need someone who can modify and enhance our current web page layout. This person would need to have MySQL database, PHP scripting, and HTML authoring experience using CSS.

If you are interested, please notify us by using our web site www.bmta.org and selecting the "Contact" tab. On the "Contact Us" page, fill out the pertinent information lines, indicating your desire to volunteer for this position and your experience. We will get back to you.