

TN/NC Benton MacKaye Trail Backpack Trip Oct 24 – Nov 4, 2010

Rick Harris, story and photos

Seven hikers backpacked the Benton MacKaye Trail from Deals Gap just south of the Smokies to the Ocoee River, a distance of 98 miles. The trip was set up so that participants could enter or leave the trip at various points. At one point, there were only two backpackers, but at other times all seven were on the trail. There were two major food resupply points, one at the Tellico River crossing, and the second at Unicoi Gap.

Several days on the trail were perfect fall days with cool crisp mornings and warm afternoons and crystal clear blue skies. Unfortunately, there were also a couple days of steady rain and one day of high winds (the day and night the tornadoes hit areas of Tennessee). The trail was in excellent condition except for several new blowdowns after the big storm.

Saturday night, five group members spent the night at Rick and Brenda Harris's house near Tellico Plains. On Sunday, October 24, we backpacked on a clear fall day from Deals Gap down to the Little T, then into the Joyce Kilmer Wilderness, camping along Slickrock Creek. When we retired to our tents, the skies were full of stars. Starting around 10PM,

rain moved in. On Monday, we made the tough climb to Farr Gap, then along the Fodderstack Trail to the old Crowder Place, where we camped by the old homestead spring. The night was clear but breezy. Tuesday we continued along the Fodderstack Trail to Cold Springs Gap, hiking most of the day with high winds roaring above us and occasional sprinkles. We heard a front was coming through with even higher winds expected overnight, so we camped down the backside east of the gap along a small creek. Indeed, the winds roared all night long and we got quite a bit of rain. We could hear the creek getting louder and louder as the night progressed, but it stayed within its banks. Wednesday we backpacked over to Mud Gap, then to Whigg Meadow. Much of the day we were in the rain. At lunchtime at Mud Gap it rained about a half inch while we hid under tarps draped over the trailhead kiosk. At Whigg Meadow we got word that tornadoes touched down in the Tennessee River Valley. That evening the skies cleared and left us with a beautiful sunset and an equally beautiful sunrise the next morning. The next few days were gorgeous. Thursday we backpacked from Whigg Meadow down the Sycamore Trail to the Tellico River, where we met Brenda Harris, who drove us into Tellico Plains for pizza and beer and also gave



Don, above, swears he was *not* the model for an artistic interpretation of a double blaze, which was *not* carved by any member of our hiking party!

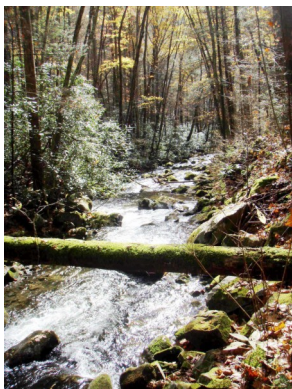
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TN/NC Backpacking Trip, continued



Above: Sycamore Creek. Cool, shimmering creeks and lush plant life are a classic sight in the Southern Appalachians

We were rewarded with great views of the surrounding mountains, the fall foliage, the creeks and waterfalls, and the good company.

us our food resupply boxes. We then returned to our campsite with happy tummies.

Friday we hiked over Sugar Mountain and down to the junction of the Bald River with Brookshire Creek, then up to our campsite along Brookshire Creek near Sledrunner Gap. Saturday we hiked through the "Heart of Darkness" to Sandy Gap, where we met up with Boy Scout Troop 116 from Coker Creek which had just backpacked up the Kirkland Creek Trail to Sandy Gap. They camped with us, then they followed along with us up to Six Mile Gap and on to Waucheesi Bald, where the Scouts' cars were waiting for them. We continued on down to Unicoi Gap and again met Brenda who took us out for pizza and gave us our resupply boxes.

Monday we backpacked down the Unicoi Mountain Trail to Coker Creek, then camped at Loss Creek along the edge of the Hiwassee River. Tuesday we crossed the Hiwassee at Reliance, ate ice cream at the Webb Bros Store, then backpacked up Lost Creek, camping near the Lost Creek Campground. There were several hunters camped in the campground and their dogs howled much of the night at the moon. Wednesday we made the long hard uphill trek up over Kimsey Mountain and partway down the Drypond Lead Trail to its junction with the Rock Creek Trail. The trail near the powerlines close to Kimsey Highway for a stretch of about a mile looked as though a tornado had come through, with trees everywhere across the trail. It took quite a long time to work our way through this wreckage. On the positive side, there is now a new vista which was not there just a few days before! This is a section of trail which was whistle-clean just a month before. Most likely the damage was done with the high winds we experienced a few days before. Wednesday night it rained all night long. The next morning we hiked the two miles to the Ocoee River, where Brenda picked us up.

Though we had more than our share of rain and high winds, the beautiful clear crisp fall days more than made up for the bad days. We were rewarded with great views of the surrounding mountains, the fall foliage, the creeks and waterfalls, and the good company. We all thoroughly enjoyed our 98-mile trek.

Joining us on this backpack trip were Rick Harris, Ernie Engman, Regina Reiter, CB Genrich, Don Norton, Walter "Tipi" Wehner, and Brock Birdsong.

We are planning a backpack of the Georgia section for the fall of 2011. We may hike the Smokies section in the fall of 2012. Stay tuned!



Left: We have long suspected that Regina could walk on water!

Right: At Deal's Gap, left to right, CB Genrich, Don Norton, Brock Birdsong, Rick Harris, Regina Reiter



President's Column**My Side of the Campfire**

It seems appropriate that we start the electronic newsletter as we enter our 31st year. When our founding fathers and mothers started actively thinking about a primitive wilderness hiking trail from Springer Mountain to Davenport Gap, many things were very different from today. Environmental Assessments, Optimum Location Reviews, written contracts between the government and private groups, IRS rules and myriad other items have changed since thirty years ago. What has not changed is the goal of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, summed up in our motto, "Leaving a footpath for generations to follow." Because of the foresight of lots of people, we are able to enjoy a nearly 300 mile-long wilderness trail, and because of the work being done now, our grandchildren will have the same opportunity. Most of us cannot afford to leave our offspring a trust fund, but through the Benton MacKaye Trail, we can leave them something more valuable. To do that, we must, and will, continue our emphasis on maintaining the pathway that makes up the trail. A primitive trail is not an unmaintained trail, but rather one where participants can enjoy a natural experience, with challenges and rewards.

Earlier this year, Hiking Director Pam Sullivan and I were interviewed on Georgia Educational Television about the Trail, and I was asked what made me proudest. I replied that I was proud that I could take my grandson hiking on this type of trail, but what made me proudest was knowing that, because of the work of many people through many years, he will be able to take his grandson for the same adventure. We have to allow for changes in the way we go about leaving this magnificent accomplishment to the future.

The electronic newsletter is one such thing. In the past, it has required absolutely Herculean efforts to get a timely issue distributed. The realities of using a printed medium meant that often 4-5 weeks lapsed between sending the final copy to the printer, and having the issue arrive in mailboxes. Using electronic distribution brings that lead time to a knowable and manageable time frame.

In the future, you will receive an email the last week of each month, giving the upcoming activities for the next three months, to allow you to plan. Ninety days out, not all details of every activity will be known, but by our publicizing the date and a general description, you can better decide what sounds interesting. As the date gets closer, later emails will give meeting time, place and other details. In addition, each monthly activities list email will have a link for the newest issue of the electronic newsletter, so that you may download and read it at your convenience, and even print it out if you desire. The whole idea is to get information to the members sooner.

We are interested in your thoughts and comments. Go to www.bmta.org and click on "Contact Us." That page is the one contact point for getting information to the Board Member responsible, so any changes in contact information, can all go to that link.

I want to reassure everyone that we do not trade, swap, sell or otherwise distribute any personal information outside the Association. Also, for those of you who used Paypal to renew or join, please note that we do not get your credit card number for those transactions; that stays with Paypal.

Your Board of Directors hopes that these changes will take advantage of newer methods of operating while not compromising our goal of maintaining the trail. The Benton MacKaye Trail Association is fortunate to have a great team! Thanks for helping out!

Til next campfire, remember to sit on the upwind side!

Dick



The whole idea is to get information to the members sooner. We are very interested in your thoughts and comments.

November GA Maintenance Trip Works on Sisson Western Cove

George Owen

The weather was perfect, somewhat cool and radiantly sunny. There was fall color aplenty remaining to elicit “oohs” and “aahs” from us at lunch, along with a few photographs.

Ten people showed up for the Georgia November 13 work trip on the western portion of the BMT on the Sisson Cherry Log property.

The day began for most of us with breakfast at the Ellijay Waffle House. Then we drove to the day's work site via the “Sisson backdoor road” off Lucius Road. Our duty was to improve the westernmost two-thirds mile of the BMT on the Sisson property down to Boardtown Road.

We initiated work on the high eastern uphill portion of the property's western ridge, widening and making the sidehill there more obvious. Later in the morning, we started work on improvements to the long western downhill to Boardtown Road. This would include re-sidehilling, constructing several waterbars, and small tree removal.

Early afternoon Ralph Artigliere arrived after a meeting elsewhere and gave our efforts new energy. The presence of his vehicle on Boardtown Road available for shuttling meant that we did not have to tromp back up the long hill to our vehicles parked up top.

The weather was perfect, somewhat cool and radiantly sunny. There was fall color aplenty remaining to elicit “oohs” and “aahs” from us at lunch, along with a few photographs. We also welcomed two children friends of Darcy's, Jacinda and Kaya Wheatley, who did their part in keeping us entertained (and Darcy concerned for their welfare).

With this work trip I (George) bid you farewell as your Maintenance Director and return, following the annual meeting and election, to my long-time post as Construction Director. Edwin Dale comes aboard as your new Georgia Maintenance Director.

My great appreciation and thanks go out to all of you who came out on Georgia second Saturday maintenance trips this past year, and to those many who faithfully maintain sections here in the Peach State.

ATTENDEES: Ralph Artigliere, Wes Clonts, Walt Cook, Darcy Douglas, Ralph Heller, George Owen, Mona Street, Curt Voogt, Jacinda Wheatley, Kaya Wheatley

HOURS MAINTENANCE: 49.5

HOURS TRAVEL: 36

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Jacks River Fall Color Hike Lives up to Its Name

Tom Keene, story and photos

A sunny, crisp fall day greeted the hikers for the 2nd Annual Jack River Fall Color Hike on Saturday, October 16.

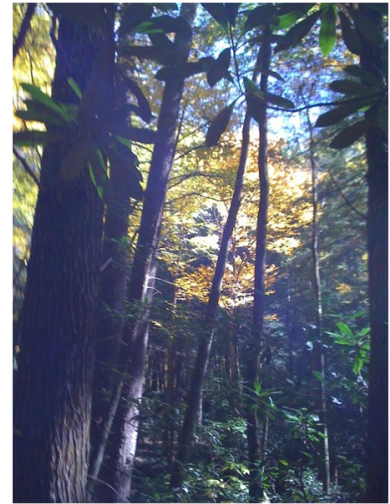
Our hike, all in the Cohutta Wilderness, took us from Dally Gap to Spanish Oak Gap then down the BMT to the Jacks River Trail, which we followed down to the river.

The color was not yet at its peak but on the high ridge near Spanish Oak we saw sourwoods and red maples in fine form, while down along the creek on the JRT what caught the eye was the flashes of sun on the yellow poplars amidst the hemlocks and rhododendron.

One of the prettiest views of the day came as we approached the Jacks and a gap in the trees permitted us to see the ridge beyond the river, with just touches of fall color.

Soon thereafter we were having our lunch by the river and counting ourselves lucky to be able to enjoy such a fine day in the woods.

Why not join us next year? We plan to do it again the third week of October.



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Top: Yellow poplars set off by deep green hemlocks and rhododendrons

Middle: Pictured from left: Bob Danzinger, Hannah Reinke, Rosemary Willmot, Connie Reinke, Jane Keene, Ann Horner, Paula Fredlund, Vic Fredlund, Ruth Nale, Hank Baudet

Left: View of ridgeline as we approached the Jacks River

Leaving a Footpath for Others to Follow

**BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL
ASSOCIATION**

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We're on the Web!
www.bmta.org



Photo by Tom Keene

November TN/NC Bonus Work Trip

Ken Jones

Rick Harris reported some wind damage on this section of the BMT extending about 1/2 mile both north and south from Deep Gap on Kimsey Highway. Rick has a monthly work trip scheduled for November 20 to tackle these problems. Bill and I thought that we would lessen the load for the work trip by logging out north from Deep Gap on November 12 with the chainsaws. That way Rick's work trip can concentrate on logging out to the south with crosscut saws through the Wilderness Study Area. Straight line winds had

brought down a number of pine trees and there was a lot of small stuff to throw out of the trail. We also took some extra time to get some leaners down to keep the trail clear for the future. We logged out the entire portion of this section from Deep Gap to the Kimsey Highway crossing.

Work party consisted of Ken Jones and Bill Hodge. Travel hours: 4.5. Work hours: 5.