



Newsletter of the
Benton MacKaye Trail Association, Inc.
Post Office Box 6
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Volume 28, Issue 9 September, 2011

“Leaving a footpath for generations to follow.”

**Benton MacKaye Trail Association Headquarters
opens in Blue Ridge, Georgia.**



On August 19, 2011, the Headquarters Building for the Benton MacKaye Trail Association opened at 344 Appalachian Highway in Blue Ridge, just north of Cherry Log, Georgia. Generously donated by Mr. Joe Sisson of Sisson Log Homes fame, the building was originally built in the late 1800's and moved to its present location. It replaces the old “World Headquarters” building and shed near the Sisson Pavilion in Cherry Log. While there are no plans for a permanent staff there, members will be “sitting on the porch” on long weekends and major Holidays to provide information and assistance to visitors in the area. The building provides a display area and workshop for the BMTA. Many thanks to Joe Sisson and company for their support over the years!

BMT Headquarters Open House, Labor Day weekend.

We'll be sitting on the porch, Saturday, September 3, 10am - 2pm 344 Appalachian Hwy, Blue Ridge, GA. Look for our Trail Info signs on Highway 515. Come by and join us.

T. O. - The Tool Man



Tom (T.O.) Mitchell, long time BMTA member, volunteers his time and talent to keeping our trail tools in great shape. Recently, on his own, he completed moving and organizing the entire tool room to the new BMT Headquarters location. Thanks, Tom, for all you do for the Benton MacKaye Trail!

News from the President

In early August, the BMTA received from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park a proposal to restructure the Backcountry Operations by, in part, making all campsites "Reservation Only", charging a fee for camping, and other changes. Because of the importance of this proposal, I emailed it to the entire BMTA Membership to get feedback about the changes it proposed. Boy, did I get feedback! I really want to thank everyone who responded with thoughts, comments and alternative ideas. In my original note, I said that I would include the BMTA's response in the Newsletter, but it ended up as a four-page letter to the Park Service, given all the elements of the proposal. I forwarded that to the Backcountry Operations Manager and attended the first of the Public Meetings that was held. At that meeting, I spoke to the Chief Park Ranger, Clay Jourdan, for almost an hour, voicing our concerns and proposing alternatives. We went over each element of our letter in detail, and while we probably will not agree on everything, I feel confident that he paid close attention to our thoughts. Basically, we presented the opinion that we did not feel that overcrowding was enough of an issue Park-wide to justify making every campsite reservation only. I told him that, given the responses I had received, that the majority of the overcrowding was along the Appalachian Trail Corridor and a small number of other, well-known sites, and that we felt that addressing those locations would be a better course of action. Part of his response to this was that there just was no money in the budget for increased enforcement, and that the mandatory reservation system was the only way they could raise funds to address those issues, since charging entrance fees is not allowed at the Smokys. I did point out that, given their estimate of some 77,000 visitor nights a year in the backcountry, and using their option of \$4 per person per night, that would only raise

some \$308,000 in additional revenue. Since the reservation system would cost money, and their proposal indicates adding staff to the Backcountry Office, we did not see that the funds would be adequate to hire, equip and operate enough Law Enforcement Personnel in the Backcountry to make any significant difference. He indicated that their plan, given that revenue, was to hire two part-time law enforcement officers for the May-October season, and he felt that even that would make a difference in controlling the situation. I countered with the thought that it would be far less expensive to have "Backcountry Rangers" or "Ridge Runners", folks without the law enforcement training, during the same period and thus be able to have several more or them actually in the backcountry. He actually seemed very interested in this, but the main issue is that to fund them, some sort of camping fee seemed to be the only viable alternative, and that the reservation system would allow them to collect it efficiently.

We did discuss in detail the drawbacks of using the "Recreation.gov" site, especially cancellation and change policies, as well as a number of other specific issues. As I understood it, the NPS really had not done a thorough examination of those issues, so I offered that the BMTA would be very willing to help address those points if NPS went ahead with the "Reservations Only" policy. We also addressed the issue of communications at Twenty Mile Ranger Station where the BMT enters the Park. With no cell coverage there and no public phone, that creates a major obstacle for thru hikers to comply with the policy they are proposing. He did express great willingness to see if we could jointly come up with a workable solution, and we talked about a couple of possible scenarios. Since I have not coordinated these with Ken Jones, the Smokies Maintenance Coordinator, nor the Board, I don't feel comfortable about presenting these to the entire membership yet, but I feel we do have the basis for a workable method. I got the very strong feeling throughout the conversation that the basic feeling is "Hey, we need more funds, and the only way to get them is the Reservations System", so developing a solution is better than hoping that they won't institute the reservations only policy.

We discussed their fee structure in great detail. I did not receive any great objections to the proposed fees, most were along the lines of "Well, I'd rather not have to pay, but a small fee that is used to improve the backcountry is reasonable." Many responders indicated that a fee per trip, rather than per night, would be better to avoid folks trying to go too far to save some money. We discussed the current policy of having to list the entire proposed itinerary on the backcountry permit at the start of the trip, and how that presented problems in case of weather or injury delays, etc. I asked him specifically how many times backcountry hikers are actually fined for being at a "wrong" campsite for a valid reason, and he really would not answer directly, although, probably neither would I if I were in his position. I think that there is a valid law enforcement reason to have the general public feel that they have to keep up with the permit schedule, but I suspect that the number of folks fined for a reasonable delay would be very low, since it is very seldom that backcountry hikers actually see a law enforcement person.

In summary, I think that we did present a number of objections to the proposal that need further study by the NPS before any implementation is done. I'll keep the membership informed as things progress.

See you on the Trail!

Dick Evans

President

Trip Reports

August 21, 2011 - BMT Section 15a - Unicoi Gap to Tate Gap - The section of the trail from Unicoi Gap to Tate Gap has been cleaned up. The trail is in very good shape and should be ok until fall.

Ernie Culpepper - 24 hours

Bruce Baker - 24 Hours

Philip Henry - 24 hours.

Friday, August 12, 2011 - BMT Section 16d - Brookshire Creek to Sugar Mtn - Three workers (Rick Harris, Richard Sullivan, Tom Smith) attacked the brush on the BMT from Sugar Mountain down to the intersection with the Brookshire Creek Trail and three workers (Bill Hodge, Ernie Engman, Matt Engman) worked up from Bald River Trail to the intersection with the BMT. The entire stretch of this section of trail is now completely brushed out. There were no logs on the BMT, but there are a few logs on the lower part of the Brookshire Creek Trail which will have to be taken care of on a future trip. Afterwards, we all ate some of Brenda's home made cookies before returning home. Ernie got stung by several yellow jackets a short ways downstream of the Bald River Crossing. Also, the ride up and back down on the Sugar Mtn Road was quite an adventure. Heavy

machinery had been through recently to cut the trees bordering the road and most of the trees were still in the roadway. We had to drive up and over about a 100 trees and a few we had to cut off the roadway. Volunteer hours were as follows:

Bill Hodge – 10 hours

Ernie Engman – 10.5 hours

Matt Engman – 10.5 hours

Rick Harris – 10 hours

Richard Sullivan – 12.5 hours

Tom Smith – 10 hours

(That's 65.5 hours for that trip alone! Great job!)

Friday, August 5, 2011 - BMT Section 17d - Sycamore Creek - Rick Harris and Ken Jones logged out the lower 2 miles of the trail up to the first switchback, removing about a dozen trees from the trail corridor. Volunteer hours are below:

Ken Jones – 6.5 hours

Rick Harris – 5 hours

Friday, July 29, 2011: Kirkland Creek Trail and BMT Section 15c - Friday two groups of volunteers tackled some annual work on the Kirkland Creek Trail. The work included logging out blowdowns from the trail and brushing out the trail. It was a pretty hot and humid day, but we managed to complete the project. One of the saw crews also logged out the Benton MacKaye Trail from Six-Mile Gap to Sandy Gap.

Because we worked in two-groups I did not capture every name.

Bill Hodge 10 Hours Worked 1 Hour Travel

Ken Jones 10 Hours Worked 1.5 Hours Travel

Bobby Mitchell 10 Hours Worked 1.5 Hours Travel

Jim Holland 10 Hours Worked 2 Hours Travel

Peter Reber 10 Hours Worked 2 Hours Travel

Reggie Jay 6 Hours Worked 3 Hours Travel

Betty Petty 6 Hours Worked 3 Hours Travel

Donald Box 6 Hours Worked 3 Hours Travel

There were two other volunteers whose names I did not catch that each worked 6 hours and had 3 hours travel time.

Other non-volunteer hours;

Stephen Eren 10 hours Worked - No Travel Time

(That is a total of 113 hours for that fantastic job. Many thanks.)

Bridge Work on Section 7b Almost Complete by Ralph Heller

On Saturday August 20, eight BMTA members met at our new headquarters building. The goal was to finish replacement of three foot bridges on the section of the BMT that goes through the Sisson Cherry Log Mountain development, Section 7b. After a long day, all three bridges were completed, except for installing a railing on the 16 foot bridge south of the shelter, to be done later. The bridges were built in three sessions, during the heat of the summer: July 9, August 6 and 20. Two of these dates were not regular scheduled Georgia work trips. A total of 15 different members and two guests devoted a total of 156 man hours to the bridge project. Preparing the sight took the most time.. The most difficult parts of the job were moving 30 bags of 80-pound concrete mix (over two tons), excavating the footings and moving the large structural pieces to their locations. On the first meeting, we excavated and poured the footings for the three bridges. The second session involved pouring the 4 concrete piers for the long metal bridge. On the third Saturday, the 24-foot metal decking for the large bridge near the railroad tracks was moved, by members, assembled, and attached in place. They also cut and assembled the wood framework for the other two bridges. These were moved to their locations, and the wood structure was mounted on the footings. Finally, the decking was installed on both bridges. We still need to remove the old bridge located near the railroad track.

Many thanks to everyone who worked on the bridge project, especially Marty Dominy, who supplied his engineering expertise for the design of the bridges and who supervised the construction on all three weekends. Also, a special thanks to Joe Sisson who supplied all the material for the bridges and the truck to move the material.

Members who worked on the bridges were David Blount, Bill Hamrick, Claire Broadwell, Marty Dominy, Dene

Sheheane(new member), Dwight Kay, Mark Yost, Steve Bayliss, Robert Danziger, Vic Fredlund, Darcy Douglas, Gene Nix, Larry Dumas , Rick Beamish (new member), and Ralph Heller. Guests helping were Conner Bayliss and Max Sheheane.



We want to welcome these new members to the Benton MacKaye Trail Association:

Charles Harper Family	Duluth, GA
Paul & Diane Klein	Blue Ridge, GA
Wayne Sexton	Acworth, GA
Michael Mettee	Atlanta, GA
Neil Kirsten	Sandy Springs, GA
John Smith	Atlanta, GA
Mark Yost	Morganton, GA
Dene Sheheane	Acworth, GA
Robt & Maggie Bickerstaff	Marretta, GA
Bert & Releah Lent	Morganton, GA
Coley & Maryellen Epperson	Canton, GA
Carter, Anntony	Covington, GA
Nix, Walter	Ellijay, GA
McMahon, Pati	Ellijay, GA
Pittman, Carole	Douglasville, GA
Grissom, Kurt	St Petersburg, FL
Gray, William	Ellijay, GA
Jones, Doug & Emily	Ellijay, GA
Save Georgia's Hemlocks	Dahlonega, GA
Michael Pilvinsky	Ellijay, GA
Evan Feltner	Ellijay, GA
Deborah Loper	Ellijay, GA
Kelly Boyce	Tucker, GA
Rick Beamish	Atlanta, GA
David & Sandi Wiggins	Ellijay, GA
Charles & Kay Brown	Sautee Nocochee, GA
Ken Banwart	Blue Ridge, GA

One issue the Board of Directors has addressed in the past is that of Private Landowner Liability. I researched this and sent the following early in the month, and thought the general membership might like the information.

Dick

Sent: Thu, Aug 11, 2011 5:31 am BMTA Board
Subject: Private Landowner Liability issues
Folks, (slightly edited-RGE)

At various times in the past, the issue of Private Landowner Liability has been raised in connection with the BMT. We are very fortunate that the vast majority of the Trail is on public land, but we do have sections where the Trail does pass over private land. As we seek to obtain formal written permissions for these sections, we should be, in general, knowledgeable as to whether the private landowner, by allowing public recreation, is opening legal issues should a member of the public be injured by such recreation.

While researching something totally different, I came across the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program Website and found that they had done this research for us. The main site is <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/recusebrochures/index.htm>.

On it, the site gives links to pdf files for each state regarding the Recreational Limited Liability Law in each state. All three states through which the BMT passes have virtually identical protections for the private landowner. Each is only a two page brochure, so I suggest that each of you download and reach the brochure for your state, as it, at least for me, clears up the liability issue.

Best regards,
Dick

Last Minute Additions

Saturday, August 27, 2011 - BMT Section 16b - Sledrunner Gap to Round Top - Six of us tackled the north end of the Heart of Darkness on this monthly BMTA TN/NC Worktrip. The weather was really nice, breezy and cool at the high elevations. The breezes were courtesy of Hurricane Irene. Four of us entered from Beaverdam Bald and two from Round Top. With brushcutters, swingblades and loppers and one very sharp small lightweight

saw which Richard Sullivan brought, we cleared maybe 8 trees from the trail and the entire distance of overgrown weeds. It was a long day, meeting somewhere in the middle around 3PM, then heading back to our cars. There are still three large trees with walkarounds which will have to be cut out with chainsaw at a later date as well as a few groundhugger tree trunks which we skipped over with the small saw. After the trip, three of us ate dinner at the Tellico Outpost and listened to a great band from Nashville. We were joined by Tom and Kathy Smith as well as Brenda Harris for the dinner and music. Overall, it was a great day. I wish we had had more participation from other workers so we could have gotten the south end as well. We will plan a trip to get the section from Round Top to Sandy Gap some day this coming month.

Richard Sullivan – 14 hours

Lara Wimmer – 11 hours

Kendall Hobson – 8.5 hours

Rick Harris – 9 hours

James Anderson – 11 hours

Gretta Farmer – 9.5 hours

Grand Total – 63 hours!

And one final thing, Author Rick Harris is in the finishing stage of the revised Tennessee/North Carolina Hiking Guide for the Benton MacKaye Trail. This should be out to the public by October, and we will let everyone know when it is available and offer it by mail like we did the Georgia Guide earlier this year.