



Points of Interest

Go directly to the page by clicking on the title.

- [Four Seasons](#)
- [Save The Date](#)
- [The Pink Pig](#)
- [GA Feb Work Trip](#)
- [Smoky Mountains](#)
- [Roads Receive Damage](#)
- [Deal At Dyer](#)
- [TN/NC Maintainers](#)
- [Tourism Day](#)
- [Appalachian Trail Kick-Off](#)
- [March Hike Info](#)
- [BMTA New Members](#)

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Suspension Bridge over the Toccoa River:
By Ralph Heller



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FEBRUARY 23, 2013

Four Seasons on the Benton MacKaye Trail.. Reflections on Mileposts on the Trail...

Regina Reiter, BMTA member and member of the BMTA Thru-Hiker Committee, has recently completed her fourth thru-hike of the BMT--one in each season of the year. Regina has also thru-hiked the AT and the PCT. She runs an organization called **Forgiveness Walks** which encourages women to improve their psyches by long-distance hiking and also works seasonally as a ridge runner on the AT in Virginia.

Regina has agreed to provide our readers with a variety of articles for the next few issues pertaining to her adventures and her activities. We are honored to have her share with us and look forward to her next article. Thank you Regina.....



Regina Reiter

Links: Photos, Journals, Reflections, Slide-shows

<http://www.trailjournals.com/mssnglnk>
Pictures galore in many trail journals

<http://forgivenesswalks.com/newsletter-archives/>
Words for Winter Walking series

<http://forgivenesswalks.com/benton-mackaye-trail/> First Winter Walk and Spring Walk slide shows

<http://forgivenesswalks.com/benton-mackaye-trail-winter-thru-hike/> Second Winter Walk slide show

BMT SOBO - June, 2009; October, 2009; January, 2013
BMT NOBO- April, 2010
BMT Davenport Gap to Beech Gap, January, 2010

"Stream" Mile 119...Four Seasons On The BMT

It's milepost 119 from the northern terminus of the Benton MacKaye Trail.

The six men in the BMTA Fall Backpack Trip party keep their pace stepping over the two small streams there. They keep chatting as their feet land firmly on the flat triangle of earth between the streams. In just seconds, they're stepping up the steep bank and heading south on the trail, bound for the night's camp at Cold Spring Gap.



"But wait!" I call. "This was my Winter Camp! I thought I could have DIED here!"

No one heard me as I alone halted at this unremarkable spot. The Fall foliage and dark Earth blended pleasantly with the gently rushing streams with no fanfare. My mind was rushing though as I relived the memory of my first winter walk. I had camped here two years earlier as snow fell, choosing a site with a water source and a surprise phone signal.

The snow fell through the night and morning revealed a world of white. Wrapped up in my sleeping bag, peeking out under the edges of my tarp, I questioned my preparedness to go on alone in this deep snow, past the Cherochala Skyway into "The Heart of Darkness", the ominous name for the remote 10-mile section of the BMT along the North Carolina/Tennessee state line.

Delighted with the beauty of the snowy woods, I was satisfied with the plan I had been able to make with Brenda Harris, a BMT friend who lived nearby, to pick me up at Beech Gap, about 4 miles south, the next morning. "You'll have to wait until they open up the road," she had said.

I was fine. I had water, plenty of food and fuel, two sleeping bags, my dependable tarp – and a cellphone signal. "I can enjoy 24 hours in a snowy wonderland," I thought. I stayed put, only venturing out for a walk in mid-afternoon.

Darkness descending outside mirrored my growing inner darkness, however, and I worried for my safety. My phone charge dwindled and the game of calling Leslie in Atlanta to connect with Brenda 10 miles away from me wasn't so amusing anymore. I was cold.

I shivered uncontrollably, a warning sign of hypothermia. I could still think clearly though. “Get warm. You WILL be ok.” I told myself firmly. I patted my body with my hands. I ate more food. I rearranged my sleeping bags, putting my summer quilt inside my down bag, covering my head with a double layer of insulation.

I recited a litany of gratitude for all the people in my wonderful, fulfilling life. 20 minutes later, body heat flowed to my head, my arms, and my feet and, with relief, I slept well. I woke up to a crystal blue sky and a superlative day for walking in Nature. The untouched path of ankle deep snow inspired a magically spiritual interlude of nourishing solitude. Sparkling glints of sunlit snow contrasted with luminescent blue shadows as I shuffled my way to Beech Gap and Brenda’s infectious cheer, topped off with hot tea from the thermos she had brought.

I spent a luxurious night at the Harris’s, still brightened with Christmas lights, and before I knew it, I was on a Greyhound bound for Atlanta, my Winter Walk ended. I was warm and safe, but only superficially relieved that I had left the trail.

The following Spring, with the forest floor carpeted with green seedlings instead of snow, I approached that site from the south on my Spring Walk. I was curious to get a new perspective on the tiny patch I had briefly inhabited for two nights during the previous Winter.

To my surprise, someone stood there at the stream. That was my introduction to “Tipi Walter”, a frequent visitor to this Citico Creek Wilderness. I had heard about him from Brenda Harris, but had not met him before. For many years, Tipi Walter has camped out for weeks at a time in the wilderness around Tellico Plains, TN. We had both heard of each other!

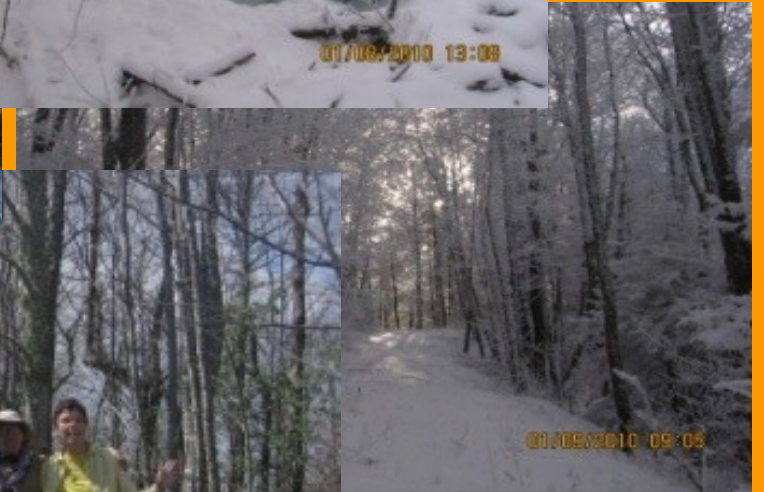
We took a photo of ourselves, then we chatted comfortably on the Spring trail, in our shorts and single shirt layers. We discovered that we had both been camping on that same stream drainage on that same frigid night a few months earlier. He had been huddled in his tent atop Bob Bald, almost 1,000 feet higher, straight up from my camp while I had been shivering below next to the stream.

“It was cold! I couldn’t find my hat!” he remembered.

Now, it was Spring, and the fresh bursting greenness welcomed us both to this landmark of adventure that we had shared unawares.

A place known only as “Stream” in the BMT Thru-Hikers Guide had become a 4-Seasons landmark for me!





"Stream Mile" 119... Four Seasons On The BMT

Deep Creek Crossing... Four Seasons On The BMT

It's October, 2009. I'm standing on the north side of Deep Creek in the Smokies. "It's not good to be here alone", I thought. "It's not safe here. I shouldn't be doing this by myself. I should turn back. Is there another way?"

I'm at mile 44, three miles shy of the half way point in the Smokies section of the Benton MacKaye Trail I'm looking at my map, tracing a possible alternate route around the swollen torrent that is Deep Creek. I'm considering scooting across the tipped log that's interrupted by perpendicular poles. That's what the bridge had become.

"What a surprise!" Last June, on my first BMT traverse, this had been a simple walk across a log bridge. Now, crossing this big creek required a strategic decision.

Go back. Find a trail detour. Scoot on the log. Ford the creek. These were the choices I saw. I studied the water, judging the depth and the evaluating the current. My choice: "Ford the stream."

Half way across the thigh-deep span, my balance wavered in the current. "Just keep standing up, hold steady, take a step," I instructed myself with each step. "No wavering. No questioning. Steady in the current. Next step now." I stayed up.

Two hours later, atop Noland Divide, the half way mark through the Smokies section, I celebrated my successful crossing and my gratitude for getting to sit on the big log on the ridge again.



A couple of months later, on the last day of 2009, I reached the Deep Creek Bridge for my third time. This time I was ready. This time, I had gear. For weeks before my Winter Walk, I had researched options for a safe, warm, and dry fording of Deep Creek, in case the bridge was still unsafe to cross.

I stepped into the icy water, instantly satisfied with the lightweight, waterproof waders I had crafted at home. Even better than the waders keeping my legs warm and dry was the support and assurance of a hiking buddy. I was not alone. My husband, John, who had specifically chosen to come with me to assure my safe crossing of Deep Creek, donned his own yellow waders and we crossed together.

“That was fun! Let’s do it again!” In contrast to the tenuous ford in my Fall Walk, this time we crossed upstream where the wider channel subdued the current and decreased the depth. In addition, a fallen tree had provided a handrail that extended almost half way out into the creek. Wading in the creek this time was straightforward and entertaining. We made camp on the south side, and celebrated the New Year with that most anticipated challenge overcome!

My Spring crossing of Deep Creek was simple, even though I was alone again. Although the bridge was still out, I chose that same crossing and waded easily, lingering a while on the north shore to reflect on the beauty and significance of this landmark on my only northbound crossing of Deep Creek.

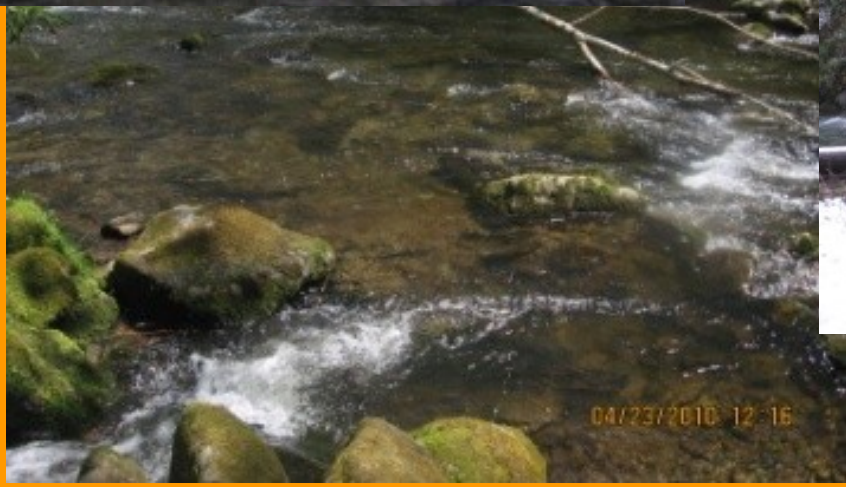
It wasn’t my last, though! It took a second attempt at a Winter thru-hike in January, 2013 to accomplish my goal of thru-hiking the Benton MacKaye Trail in all four seasons, bringing me to the bank of Deep Creek for my fifth time.

Once again I was prepared with waders to ford the creek, even though I had read a report of the bridge replacement. Even though it was late in the afternoon and we had already walked nine miles, we kept walking to the bridge. I had to see it!

As in my life, a new bridge now spans the swift and uncertain waters. For Deep Creek, the new bridge is a long and massive log, hewn flat and sporting a sturdy handrail.

For me, there’s a trusted hiking partner and a community of friends, mentors, and colleagues supporting me as I cross the uncertain waters of doubts, unknown obstacles, and setbacks as I walk into my dream of living from my heart, exploring the world of business and sharing my hiking and coaching expertise with others.

The Deep Creek Bridge, Mile 44 on the Benton MacKaye Trail is a powerful landmark in my four seasons on the Trail.



Deep Creek Crossing... Four Seasons On The BMT

Save The Date...April 13

Blue Ridge Trail Town Celerbration...

The BMTA is working closely with the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce and this year's 16th Annual Blue Ridge Mountain Adventure Race. You'll find our booth and display at the Finish Line - Mercier Orchards - where we will have a ceremony naming Blue Ridge as an official BMTA/SEFTC Trail Town. In addition to food and music throughout the day, other trail organizations will be represented and there will be two BMTA led hikes plus cross-cut sawing demonstrations by our trail maintainers. Details to follow in next month's Newsletter. **Please plan to attend and show your support for Blue Ridge and the BMTA!**



The Pink Pig... A Family Tradition...



By Marge Heller

The newly-renovated PINK PIG, and long time friend of the BMTA, was originally built in Cherry Log, Georgia around 1950 as a country store and grist mill.

In 1967, the Holloway family purchased the structure.

Pit-cooked BBQ with Bud's special sauce, homemade Brunswick Stew slow-cooked in a cast iron pot, and Garlic Salad (my personal best) makes this restaurant a favorite of the BMTA. Often, after 2nd Saturday work trips, you will find our Trail Maintainers eating at the PINK PIG. It's also a gathering place following some of our group hikes.

Founded by Bud Holloway, the tradition has been passed to his granddaughter, Samantha. "This place was my grandfather's dream. Now this is my dream and his legacy."

Check it out soon! When you're there, look for information on the BMTA and pick up a copy of the BMTA Georgia Trail Guide - available for purchase.



824 Cherry Log St., Cherry
Log GA 30522
(706) 276-3311

Hours: Thursday - Sunday

GA February Work-trip

Knicks and Dips added to Section Six

By Tom Keene

Thirteen hardy souls turned out on a cold day for the February 9 Georgia work-trip. It was black ice weather. Luckily there were no problems driving to the Weaver Creek trailhead. Barry Allen, fresh from his Co-Trails training, handled the safety talk, and did a great job. Still we were all glad to get moving to the worksite to shake off the chill.

We worked between the trailhead and Scroggin Knob putting in knicks and dips to divert water from the steadily climbing trail. Ralph Heller and George Owen helped greatly by flagging the work earlier in the week. Mark Yost and Gilbert Treadwell had likewise cleared several blowdowns a few days before. So it was all about digging those water diversions -- not exactly light work, but it kept us warm. Happily the day warmed up as well. We had an excellent, hard working group. Altogether we logged 63 work hours, and worked ourselves out of a job by 2:00 pm. Newcomers Clare Sullivan, Ed Sullivan and Robert Lewellen were especially welcome and excellent workers. Others among the Hardy Thirteen can be seen in the accompanying photo taken as we used the truly fine Lunch Log right on top of Scroggin Knob.



Left to Right: Margaret Meadows, Barry Allen, Bob Ruby, Ernest Arvesen, The Shadow aka Mark Yost, Ralph Heller, George Owen, Doug Kleiber (back), Clare Sullivan, Ed Sullivan, Robert Lewellan. Almost in the picture, lower left, Debbie Tuten. (Sorry, Debbie!)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park...

Reservation Only...



Effective February 13, 2013, all back country campsites in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are Reservation Only and require a fee to be paid. You can no longer get a Back Country Permit at the various trailheads-you must get the reservation before you start your trip. The main way to do this is to go to "www.smokiespermits.nps.gov". You can also go to the Back Country Information Office at the Sugarlands Visitors Center during normal business hours and get a permit in that manner. You would not be able to call and make a reservation as before.

When you go to the website, you are presented with a choice of making a back country camping reservation or making an AT Thru Hike reservation. The AT Thru Hike Reservation is ONLY for hikes on the AT, not the BMT or the Mountains to Sea Trail. Essentially, that choice gives you a 30 day window to start your AT Thru Hike and 8 days to complete it. The back country reservation system requires you to enter an exact itinerary by date and campsite for any other trip in the back country.

Dick Evans...

To get a permit, there will be three ways:

1. Go online at the website mentioned in my earlier email. This requires a credit or debit card, plus access to a printer.
2. Go to the Sugarlands Visitors Center and get one there. At this point, they hope to be able to take cash or checks.
3. They will be able to take a reservation over the phone PROVIDED that the caller has a Credit or Debit Card. They will then either, mail, email or fax the Permit to the applicant. The hiker must have a copy of the permit in their possession, not just the Reservation Number. (Just like a concert ticket.)

There is no discount or reduced fee for holders of the various Federal Recreational Passes, nor any age-related discounts, despite those programs in the Front Country Campsites.

They are considering for future years adding some type of walk-in service at other Visitor Centers.

Great Smoky Mountains News Release... Park Roads Suffer Flood Damage...



Great Smoky Mountains News Release

Release Date: Immediate

Contact: Dana Soehn, Dana_Soehn@nps.gov

Phone number: [865-436-1207](tel:865-436-1207)

Date: February 7, 2013

Park Roads Suffer Flood Damage



Great Smoky Mountains National Park suffered significant damage to park roads and trails following a flood event last week resulting in the temporary closure of sections of gravel roads within several popular areas. Closed areas include Greenbrier Road past the Greenbrier Ranger Station, Cataloochee Road past the Palmer Chapel, and Parson's Branch Road.

During the rain event on January 30th, the Park received over 4 inches of rain in 24 hours resulting in flooding of streams throughout the park which were already swollen from higher than normal precipitation throughout January. Average rainfall during January across the Park averages 5-7 inches of rain, but the Park received 14-17 inches of rain this January.

The gravel roads in Greenbrier, Cataloochee, and Parson's Branch were washed out exposing underlying rock and culverts. Park crews are assessing the damage and estimate that repairs will be completed by the end of March. In addition to replacing culverts, roads will need to be graveled and re-graded.

High waters also destroyed the pedestrian bridge across Walker Camp Prong along the popular Chimney Tops Trail. The 70-foot long pedestrian bridge, originally built in the late 1950s, will have to be entirely replaced to allow trail access. Trail crews are assessing bridge replacement options and do not yet have a date estimate for completion.

For more information about road closures, please visit the Park's website at www.nps.gov/grsm and or call the Park's Road and Weather Information Line at [865-436-1200](tel:865-436-1200).

Dana Soehn
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Management Assistant/Public Affairs
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738
[865-436-1207](tel:865-436-1207) (office)
[865-712-4928](tel:865-712-4928) (cell)

Closing The Deal At Dyer... See History Made...March 9



BMTA members

See history made! Have a story to tell your grandchildren! With one more work-trip we can finish off the Dyer Gap reroute -- down to painting the blazes.

The main digging is already done. Now we have to touch up some rough spots from our hurried work in December and January, connect the two ends to the existing trail, and, last but not least, paint those blazes.

Trip details below.

First-time volunteers are most welcome. For what to expect, bring, wear, etc. check here:
<http://www.bmta.org/pdfs/WorktripsWhatToExpect-revSep2011.pdf>

Hope you can join us!

BMTA-GA Worktrip, March 9 – We will finish the reroute between Flattop Mountain and Dyer Gap. The danger of black ice should be mostly past by mid-March, but if the weather turns dangerous, don't hesitate to call Friday night, or even Saturday during the breakfast hour, to see if we have shifted work to a site closer to Blue Ridge. In any event, we will meet at the Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge at 8:00am. Assuming we work at Dyer Gap, we will aim to meet at the trailhead at Dyer Gap at 9:20am. The trip leaders are Tom Keene (cell) 770-548-4935; and Barry Allen.

--

Tom Keene
Georgia Maintenance Director
Benton MacKaye Trail



TN/NC Maintainers Staying Busy... Repairing The Lost Creek Area...

By Ernie Engman

TN/NC Maintainers are working this month repairing the trail on Lost Creek which has been undercut and partially collapsed from recent flooding. The task will be to build about 140' of trail further from the bank which is where what is left of the current trail is still collapsing into Lost Creek due to the creek undercutting the bank.



The Maintainers are planning to meet at the trail head on FS 103... aka Lost Creek Road at approximately 9:00 am on 23 February. The walk to the maintenance point is about 1.9 miles from the Trail Head, is mostly flat walking and passes through the area I like to refer to as the "Lost Creek George" which is beautiful. Maintenance and walking time should be between 4-5 hours.

BMTA Represented at Tourism Day...

By Marge Heller

BMTA Board Members Ralph and Marge Heller were invited by the Gilmer Chamber of Commerce to attend Tourism Day in downtown Atlanta on Tuesday, January 29, 2013. Gilmer County was well represented on the House Floor. Pictured are the Heller's (back row) along with several Chamber members and Speaker of the House, David Ralston (R-7).



Great Appalachian Trail Kick-Off ... Set For March 8-10

By Marge Heller

The Annual Great Appalachian Trail Kick-Off at Amicalola Falls Lodge is set for Friday evening, March 8 through Sunday, March 10. The free event includes an interesting program of speakers. The BMTA will be represented along with numerous outdoor vendors and authors in the Oak Room in the Lodge. Parking fee of \$5 applies.



March Hike Information

By Ralph Heller – Hiking Director

The March hike on Sat. March 16 will take place on Section 8a (Bushy Head Gap to Hudson Gap). The in and out hike distance is 5.2 miles, and includes about a 500 ft. elevation gain out to Hudson Gap. There are no long steep grades. This is classified as an easy to moderate hike. If you would like to check out part of the longest BMT section in Georgia without a road crossing, this is the hike for you. All of Section 8 from Bushy Head



Gap to Dyer Gap is 12.4 miles but we are only going part of the way. There should be some good views with leaves off the trees. Hike leaders are Vic and Paula Fredlund. To sign up for this hike and get information about the meeting place and time, contact Vic at (239) 292-6933 or email [bmtahiker AT brmemc.net](mailto:bmtahiker@brmemc.net). If the hike is called off due to weather or otherwise, we will notify you. We are sorry, but no dogs are allowed. If you have general questions about our hikes, feel free to contact me. Ph: 770-235-9760

BMTA Welcomes New Members...

Jane Watkins	Ellijay, GA	Jan
Garrett Pellingell	Fort Lauderdale, FL	Jan
Nancy Sauls	Ellijay, GA	Jan
Boe Rudder	Chattanooga, TN	Jan
Joanne Mitchell	Sweetwater, TN	Feb
David Patrick	Talking Rock, GA	Feb
Julie Raming	Talking Rock, GA	Feb