



Points of Interest

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Suspension Bridge over the Toccoa River:
 By Ralph Heller



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Great Smoky Mountains National Park Announces Implementation of Backcountry Changes

By Molly Schroer
 Public Affairs Office
 Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Great Smoky Mountains National Park officials announced today that changes to its current backcountry reservation and permitting process will take effect on February 13, 2013. As reported last March, the National Park Service approved the Park’s proposal to begin collecting fees for use of the Park’s backcountry campsites and shelters. The changes include a \$4 per person, per night fee for backcountry camping. The fee will be used to provide increased customer service for backcountry trip planning, reservations, permits and the backcountry experience.

A park-specific reservation and permit system, to which users will have 24/7 access, will allow backcountry campers to make reservations and obtain permits online from anywhere internet access is available. Reservations may be made at any time up to 30 days in advance, allowing maximum flexibility for those making last minute plans. Backcountry users will no longer be required to call the Backcountry Office to obtain reservations. Reservation and permit requests will also be accepted in person at the Backcountry Office, which is located at the Sugarlands Visitor Center.

Backcountry Office hours will be expanded with additional staff available to provide trip planning assistance both over the phone and in person. In addition, the Park will expand its backcountry Ranger presence to better protect park resources through enforcement of food-storage and other regulations and improved visitor education regarding Leave-No-Trace principles.

For more information about the changes, please visit the Park’s website at www.nps.gov/grsm and follow the Management link on the left side of the page or call the Park’s Public Information Office at [865-436-1207](tel:865-436-1207). For general backcountry information or backcountry reservations, call the Backcountry Office at [865-436-1297](tel:865-436-1297). On February 13, backcountry reservations and permits will be available at www.smokiespermits.nps.gov.

Newfound Gap Road Closed Due to Landslide ...

Great Smoky Mountains National Park has closed Newfound Gap Road (U.S. 441) due to a landslide which undercut the road near mile marker 22 between Collins Creeks and Webb Overlook at 9:40 am. The slide is estimated to be a 200 foot section of road extending 1000 foot down slope, but the full extent of the damage is not yet known. The closure is expected to be in effect for an extended period of time.

The park is evaluating the remainder of the roadway, but anticipates Newfound Gap Road will be opened to visitors from the Gatlinburg Entrance in Tennessee to Newfound Gap Parking lot as soon as it is possible. The road will be open to Smokemont on the North Carolina side.

Park staff are working with the Department of Federal Highway's Construction and Geotechnical Services to evaluate the slide damage and to begin planning for repairs. Additional details will be released as the condition assessments are analyzed.

As of midnight, Tuesday, January 15, the park received 8.56 inches of rain measured at Cherokee, 7.4 inches at Newfound Gap and 6.86 inches at LeConte. Rivers and streams have been running fast and high since Sunday when the rains began. There are currently multiple temporary road closures throughout the park due to high water.

For the most current road closure reports, please call [865-436-1200 x 631](tel:865-436-1200) or follow Smokies-RoadsNPS on Twitter.



***The BMT is still intact and the slide is not impacting
the trail or hikers.***

Presidents Message – *Walk With Me a Moment.....*

2013 has started off at a busy pace for the BMTA and all indications are it will continue to be so. The Board of Directors held their first meeting of 2013 on January 5th. A budget for the year was passed, a calendar for the association activities was largely completed, and we spent the remainder of the morning on old and new business. Funding approved last year to improve signage of the trail in Tennessee was never spent due to delays in design and content approval. The funding is still approved and a matching amount was approved for improving



trail signage in Georgia. A proposal was made to reduce the size of the board of directors and discussion was continued to the next meeting. Any such change, if endorsed by the board, will require a change in the bylaws by a vote of the membership. A discussion of the pros and cons of competitive events being held on or adjacent to the BMT was spurred by the number of permit applications which have already been submitted to the Forest Service for 2013. The Board is working on a response to the scoping notice for 4 such events proposed for the Blue Ridge District of the Chattahoochee / Oconee National Forest.

The weather this time of year makes it easy to seek out activities indoors and shun the wind, rain, and cold temperatures outside. The rewards are great, however, for those who venture out. Deep blue skies often accompany cold, dry weather. The views from the high ridges of the trails are unencumbered by summer's rich foliage. Bugs and bees are absent and poison ivy, oak, and sumac are dormant. For those seeking solitude on the trail, winter can almost guarantee it. If you do hike and camp in the winter, please do so safely. Always carry extra water and snacks. Dress in layers and bring along at least one more layer than you anticipate needing for the days weather forecast. Be sure to bring along rain gear for the unexpected. Let someone know your planned itinerary and when you expect to return.

I encourage each of you to get out and enjoy the season. Between the two monthly work trips, the fun hikes, and the upcoming publicity events, there is something for everyone. For a complete listing of the upcoming activities of the Association, please see the activities page on our web site.

David Blount

President, BMTA

Leaving a Footpath for Generations to Follow ...

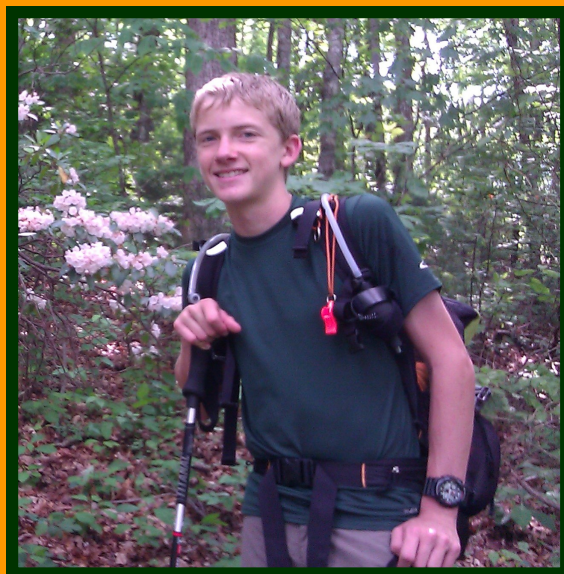
By Connor Bayliss

Personal recap: I am a soccer player and hiker, and I am interested in architecture. I am a high school sophomore at the Paideia School in Atlanta. My father, Stephen Bayliss, first introduced me to backpacking when I was 7 and to the BMTA when I was 9.

Not many people my age have camped in near-wilderness after nine miles of hiking with a 25-pound backpack. Even fewer have had the opportunity to cut out the very paths which they tread upon. But I have, thanks to the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. At this point, I have gone on six or seven group trail maintenance days on the BMT, and four maintenance trips with my father on his adopted section of the trail, section 8e from Holloway Gap to Fowler Mountain. These trail work experiences, while physically hard, have been great fun and have provided a new perspective on the amount of work required to complete such seemingly simple objectives as diverting rainwater away from the trail.

The private work trips with my father are very enjoyable. We get to hike out four miles to the starting point (the campsite at Holloway Gap), then work our way up the two miles of our adopted section, clearing weeds and brush with our slingblades. Afterwards, we get to hike back to the campsite, surveying our work. There's a unique satisfaction that one derives from hiking a newly cleared section of trail, especially when it is the result of your own labors. I am fortunate that I get to experience that, and to gain a fuller appreciation of all the hard work that goes into leaving a footpath for generations to follow.

Not only have these work days given new perspectives on the trail, but they build character and provide a chance to meet wonderful and hardworking new people. I even got First Aid and CPR training! I know that as long as I am fascinated with the great outdoors, I will continue to give back to the trails that I enjoy. Thanks, BMTA!



(Connor is the son of Board Member Steve Bayliss and his wife Kelly.)

New Board Member...

Darcy Douglas... Vice President

Darcy Douglas is not new to the Board. She has served in one capacity or another since 1985, with the exception of 4 years. Since her first contact with the BMTA, through then President Edwin Dale, she has adopted the trail as her own, and taken responsibility for it in many ways. She has a number of other life interests other than trails, including music, sewing, water sports, Alaska, technology, reading, and baking. Her career paths were in music and special education. She has likely the only pink pack on the Benton MacKaye so is fairly easy to spot!



New Board Member...

Steve Bayliss... State Representative for Georgia

Steve Bayliss has been a member of the BMTA for about six years. He enjoys hiking and backpacking on the BMT with his wife Kelly, his son Connor (age 15), his daughter Gracelyn (age 11), and their dog Opie. During the week Steve is an immigration attorney in Decatur, Georgia, handling business and family immigration for university faculty and other professionals. He looks forward to the monthly BMT workdays, and working on his lovely section of the trail, Section 8e from Halloway gap to Fowler Mountain (come visit it sometime!). His favorite dish at the Pink Pig? The garlic salad, hands down.



New Board Member...

Margaret Evans... Treasurer

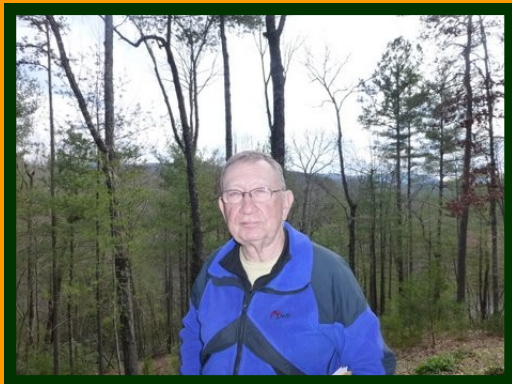
Margaret Evans has been a hiker all her life, enjoying the outdoors. Trained as an accountant, she spent her career as a civilian employee of the U.S. Navy running various food service facilities at a number of bases including, Orlando, Chicago, Iceland, Japan and Pearl Harbor. Retired in the mountains of Western North Carolina, Margaret is an avid gardener, seamstress and crocheter. She enjoys making clothes for the grand kids and others.. Frequently seen crocheting at meetings, she has mastered the art of multi-tasking. Margaret and Dick (BMTA's Immediate Past President) were married in 1985 and have one son, Jason, a Captain in the U.S. Army Signal Corps., currently serving a tour in the Middle East. Their daughter-in-law Karyn is a Certified Personal Trainer and they are proud grandparents of three: ages 11, 7 and "almost" 6.



New Board Member...

George Owen... Conservation Chair

One of our founding members, George, in the mid 1980's, served two years as the third President of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. Since then he has served the BMTA in various capacities, including many years, between 1980 - 2011, as the Construction Director in GA, laying out and supervising construction of most the BMT in GA. George is currently President of the Southeastern Foot Trails Coalition (SEFTC) and has served on the board of 3 different trail clubs. As a long-time member of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, George laid out the Duncan Ridge Trail (over thirty miles) and supervised its construction. For eight years, he has been a professional hiking guide for a few weeks every summer in Switzerland. George has also led several out-of-state trail tours including Yosemite Nat'l Park and Mt. Rogers in VA. George was born and raised in Florida and graduated from Stetson before moving to Georgia and completing a M.Div. at Emory and a M.A. at Scarritt College and Vanderbilt. He has two sons and four grandchildren. We are very lucky to have George, with his many contributions, having helped to make the BMT what it is today.



First Hike of 2013...

By **Ralph Heller**

Hiking Director

We had eighteen hikers turn out for our January 19th Hike. In spite of the protracted rainy spell we had experienced most of the week, Saturday turned out to be a perfect day for hiking. The hike took place in Section 7b and part of 7c of the Sisson Cherry Log Mountain development. Mona Street was our Hike Leader. Jerry and Sara Bland were sweeps. We started just beyond the covered bridge where the trail parallels the railroad track. Because of the recent heavy rains the stream in the cove, just as you turn away from the railroad had a really nice flow, and the



shoals just up stream of the first foot bridge had become a very picturesque waterfall. The hike continued up past Cherry Lake with the little chapel and then we stopped to check out the BMT shelter. After the shelter



we hiked up over the ridge to Tipton Gap, and walked the new road partially up Patterson where we intercepted the trail and hiked back to our starting point by the railroad tracks, a little over 4.5 miles in and out. Several of our hikers told me they had not been on this section of our trail before and liked it so much that they were planning to return there with friends for day hikes. Our first hike of the year turned out to be a resounding success!

Hiking Members and Guests included: Roy Bennett, Jerry & Sara Bland, Ralph & Marge Heller, Linda Hinson, Frank & Nancy Hosler, Andy Livingston & Peggy Caldwell, Ron & Jane Olds, Walt Polk, Clare Sullivan, Mona Street, Kim Tatman, Clayton Webster, and Mark Yost.

Welcome to first time Hikers: Frank, Andy, Peggy, Clare and Kim!



BMTA February Hike...by Ralph Heller

February Hike

Weather permitting, the February 16th hike will take place in Tennessee near the Ocoee Whitewater Center from Forest Service Road 221 to the Ocoee River. It should be an easy 3-mile hike, mostly downhill or flat. If some folks are interested in hiking a little farther, we might continue for another mile (two miles round trip) on the Rhododendron Trail. The hike leader will be our very own George Owen, one of the original BMT founders, who is a wealth of information about the BMT and other trails in the Southeast as well as many



trails in other parts of the country. It will be a great chance to pick his brain about great places to hike. To sign up for the hike and for information on meeting place and time, contact Ralph Heller Phone 770-235-9760 or email [rshbmta at gmail.com](mailto:rshbmta@gmail.com).

Georgia Work-trip Report For January...

Dyer Gap Reroute Nearly Complete

by Tom Keene

Another fine turnout, another good day for side-hilling and the reroute between Flattop Mountain and Dyer Gap is nearly complete.

January 12th was unseasonably warm, topping out at almost 70 degrees, but a light mist in the morning and a steady breeze all day made it a great day for digging. Among our 14 excellent workers was old friend Eric Eades up from Brunswick and back in good

health after major surgery. Eric claims he is so deprived of mountains in Brunswick that his ears pop every time he drives over a speed-bump!

Others in the hard-working crew: Mark Yost, Walt Cook, Kyle Atkins, Ralph Heller, Larry LaPierre, Bill Hamrick, Larry Dumas, Steve Davis, Connor Bayliss, Steve Bayliss, Hank Baudet, George Owen, and your humble scribe.

By the end of the day we had completed clearing and side-hilling virtually the entire reroute between Dyer Gap and Flattop Mountain. Besides a little touch up of the side-hilling here and there, all that remains is finishing the last 30 feet down to the road at Dyer, and painting blazes!

Thanks to all who helped!



Trail Town Plans For Blue Ridge Georgia...by Ralph Heller

Trail Town plans are progressing well. The Blue Ridge City Council and Fannin County Chamber are very enthusiastic about Blue Ridge becoming a BMTA/SEFTC sponsored Trail Town. Our plan is to have the Trail Town dedication ceremony on Saturday, April 13th. I have approached the Chamber of Commerce, and they have agreed to combine the 2013 Blue Ridge Adventure Race Day with the initial BMT Trail Town Celebration.

The Blue Ridge Trail Town event will be held at the finish line for the annual Adventure Race, which will be at Mercier Orchard this year. The Adventure Race has a number of Blue Ridge and Fannin County business sponsors. So far, there will be no expense for us, but we will include money in the publicity budget to cover having a banner made and unforeseen expenses.

I think this will be a good time of the year for the Trail Town celebration, as it is near the beginning of the hiking season and has the potential of attracting a large number of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Our ribbon cutting ceremony will be held sometime during the day. We plan to invite some prominent members of the community to participate in the ceremony with a few speeches.

Some of the different trail groups have been contacted, including Trout Unlimited with their Trout Adventure Trail and North Georgia Back Country Horsemen; both said they would like to participate. We hope to get representatives from the mountain biking community, the Forest Service, possibly someone representing Co-Trails, and other groups as well. Save Georgia's Hemlocks will also participate. There is space for participants to set up booths, and Mercier will have a food service setup. The Chamber is providing a band for music that day. Some of the local business sponsors will have booths as well. We are working on a program to entertain visitors to this event during the day until the Adventure Racers start arriving at the finish line in the afternoon.



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The City Administrator for Blue Ridge is working with a sign maker and the DOT to get information on getting signs made and permission for installation. Since he has worked with these entities before, he is the best person for this task. He has agreed that the city will install signs on select city boundary roads that are not under state or federal jurisdiction. We are going to be contributing to the cost of making the signs.



I have several members who have agreed to be part of a Trail Town Committee. They are George Owen, Richard Harris, Marge Heller, Joy Forehand & Ralph Artigliere. Joy is a new member who lives in Fannin County and is very interested in participating in BMTA activities. Any BMTA members who have any suggestions about the Trail Town program please contact me. If you would like to help out the day of the event (April 13) we could always use a few more folks. Ph: 770-235-9760

So mark April 13 on your calendars and plan to attend our first Trail Town celebration! Invite your friends and neighbors. More information to follow in February's Newsletter.

The Happy Thru-Hiker...by Joanna Swanson



I thru hiked the Benton MacKaye Trail in November! I tried to call you approximately 40 times to say hi, but never did I get cell reception where I needed it. I was so optimistic about cell reception and so, so misguided in that optimism.

So, the Benton MacKaye Trail is freakin' *fantastic*! It was even better (for me) because of the Wilderness Skills Institute. Remember when we all introduced ourselves and told what our favorite wilderness area is? I hadn't even heard of a lot of the wilderness areas that were mentioned. The BMT took me through most of the unfamiliar names. It was like solving a mystery that had been lurking in my mind since May.

My friend and I postponed our trip a few days due to Sandy and transportation issues. Even so, there was a LOT of snow on top of Mount Sterling, and it was still coming down. We experienced rain, sleet, snow, *and* hail on Day 1, no joke. We made it to the shelter, though, and had a very pleasant first night. The northern Smokies were so fun, because we would descend into spring and take off 3 layers of clothes and then we'd ascend back into winter and have to bundle up again. We didn't see anyone until Smokemont. Everyone else had more sense.

The second half of the Smokies was much calmer but less alone. We saw one bear and maybe 5 hikers (it was a weekend). We slept at the Hike Inn and were really excited to be free from the constraints of the park.

The burned section was in pretty good shape and looks to be healing fast. Slickrock was a little chilly in mid-November but calm. Fodderstack was probably our best day of all. We watched the sunset from Cold Spring Gap. Whigg Meadow had lots of tents on it when we went by. We only saw 2 people between The Hike Inn and Green Cove, and they were hunters sitting on the side of the trail relaxing. We spent a night at Green Cove, which was a ridiculous experience that made my heart happy. The woman there asked me to help her. "Zip up mah britches! Zip up mah britches!" she said.

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Then all of a sudden we were at the halfway point, which our guidebook claims has no view, but it does in November!

We spent Thanksgiving on the John Muir Trail, hiking into and out of Reliance, and camping on top of a beautiful mountain about 7 miles north of Ducktown. I cannot remember the name of the mountain and my guidebook is far away. It starts with a B, I think, and it's an old homestead on top of the mountain with a field and an orchard just a few feet off the trail. The stars were amazing, and it was a site to truly be thankful for. We spent Black Friday eating in Ducktown while it poured. Excellent timing.

And then we climbed forever in biting cold weather and camped on the TN-GA border. We had our closest encounter with a boar (we heard boars on average 3/5 nights) when I swear it was standing on top of our tent. That was exciting!

Georgia happened, and suddenly we were on Springer and it was December 1. After our first day in the crazy precipitation mix, we hiked a total of 2 hours in the rain . . . and that was just sprinkles. That just doesn't happen. I attract rain.

The BMT was the perfect adventure, and my hiking buddy's first experience in long-distance backpacking. It didn't scare her away! **Thank you for all you do!** You rock!

Jo

PS. I'm trying to be the first person to hike the Great Eastern Trail. I'm completely delusional, but at least I am happy about it. I leave in a week: www.gethiking.net

An Email Received and Submitted by Bill Hodge -

***Director of the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards
a program of The Wilderness Society***

Time To Renew...by Vic Fredlund



BMTA memberships, other than Life Memberships, run concurrently with the calendar year and we now ask everyone who has not yet renewed for 2013 to do so as soon as possible. After we added the capability of joining or renewing through Pay Pal, it has become the favorite method for most members. If you would prefer to pay by check or money order you can download and print a renewal form from the BMTA website. Since we now have the electronic Newsletter, our Administrative Expenses are truly minimal so virtually all membership fees go towards the maintenance of our Trail – and isn't that the reason we all joined the BMTA. If you're not sure if you've renewed for 2013, just click on the "contact us" button on the BMTA Homepage, fill in the inquiry form and we'll check and get back to you.

Thanks

Vic Fredlund, BMTA Membership Director

Recent Members

Kyle Jones	Canton, GA
Keith Eck	Buford, GA
Jin B Kim	Duluth, GA
Janet O'Quinn	Mineral, VA
John Kennedy	Kennesaw, GA
Jamie Slafkosky	Marietta, GA
Hubert Blanchard	Marietta, GA
Sean Blanton	Atlanta, GA
Bob Pelletier	Atlanta, GA
Bradford Goodridge	Duluth, GA
Robert Lewellen	Atlanta, GA
Ron & Jane Olds	Morganton, GA