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**BMTA Headquarters**

# Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 31, ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 22, 2014

## Betty Petty Memorial Hike/Work Trip

On Saturday, March 15, 2014, we will have a work trip and hike on the section of the Benton MacKaye Trail which was maintained by Betty Petty. Betty, one of our past President's among other positions, was killed in December of 2013 when a semi crossed the median on I-75, quite near her home in Ooltewah, Tennessee.

As in past visits to the woods to honor very special members of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association who have passed on to the Great Forest in the Sky, we will work and hike for a while, and when on a suitable part of the trail, will pause for a moment of silence, then will share memories of Betty from those present.



Betty's family will be invited, and an after-trail meal will be held if any family members would like to join us for that instead, in Tellico Plains.

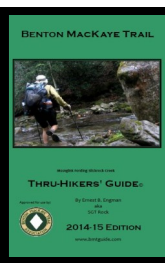
Betty's 2.4 mile section of trail is in Tennessee, between Sugar Mtn. Rd and Tellico River Road (FS210), so we will have a group meeting in Blue Ridge, Georgia about 7:00 a.m. to carpool, as well as meeting places in Tellico Plains at later times, likely 8:30 and 9:45 respectively. There are places to park at the trailhead so that should not be a problem. Please bring plenty of water, a lunch, and raingear along with work gloves if you will choose to participate in that part of the day.

Please contact Darcy Douglas at [bmtadarcy@yahoo.com](mailto:bmtadarcy@yahoo.com) or leave a message at 404-497-0818 so I can contact you with final details.

## News On The Street

### AT Thru Hiking Kick Off Party

The word is out that there is an AT thru hiking season Kick Off Party at the Mountain Crossing at Walasi-Yi at Neels Gap on [March 1](#). BMTA member Scott Barker and his sons (Barker Brothers) will be playing bluegrass. There will be a group hike to Blood Mountain, s'mores station, hiking/backpacking tutorials, raffles and door prizes. Also, there will be equipment vendors displaying and explaining their products. For more information contact Mountain Crossings at 706-745-6095.



The New 2014-2015 Thru Hiker Guide to the Benton MacKaye Trail is now in stock at the BMTA Store. If you pre-ordered, I'm mailing it [today](#). If not, get yours now.

Go to : <http://www.bmta.org/Store-Guides.html> and select the Thru Hiker Guide. You can get your maps and sectional guides at the same time. This includes the new Yellow Creek Re-route. Sgt. Rock says, "Buy it Now! That is an Order."

## 2014 Annual Meeting for BMTA

Please plan to join us the weekend of October 17-19 at Coker Creek, Tennessee, for our Annual Meeting, hikes, workshops, good food, and fellowship with fellow members and friends. The Guest Speaker remains a surprise for now, but the dates and location are not, so please mark your calendars and check this spot for updates! Contact will be Darcy Douglas, Vice President



# January Work Report – Tennessee

Saturday January 25<sup>th</sup> was a cold, gray day as 7 volunteers turned out to remove blow-downs from Section 12a. Meeting at Thunder Rock Campground, we shuttled to high ground on the Kimsey Highway so we could work our way down mountain. As most of the work was in or on the edge of the Little Frog Wilderness, cross-cut saws were the required tools. Fortunately the trip was a joint SAWS / BMTA work trip and Leader Bill Hodge put out the call for experienced sawyers. His call was heard as SAWS volunteers came from as far away as Charlotte and Boone, North Carolina and from Johnson City, Tennessee. USFS Technician Drew from the Ocoee/Hiawassee District also gave up a Saturday to work with us. With so many experienced hands, the work day was much like a clinic on the proper use of 2-man saws.



The sun broke through the clouds for about 10 minutes total during the course of the work and 4 mile hike. Despite temperatures that barely rose above freezing, we were able to remain relatively comfortable after hiking past the high point on the Dry Pond Lead Trail and moving into the lee side of the ridge as we began the trek down to US 64 and the Ocoee River. A total of 10 trees were removed from the trail and one was left due to an overhead hazard. It seemed likely we would be the only souls out on the trail on such a day but we encountered 2 runners and 2 day hikers during the afternoon.

Thanks to all who showed up to clear this section and a big shout-out to Laura Hodge and Rebekah Champion who assisted with the shuttle making it possible for all to head home from Thunder Rock at the end of the work day. All work was in the Ocoee/Hiawassee District and the work and travel hours were as follow:

Bill Hodge (SAWS Staff) - 4 hours travel, 7.5 hours worked  
Scotty Bowman - 4 hours travel, 7.5 hours worked  
David Blount - 5 hours travel, 7.5 hours worked  
James Anderson - 4 hours travel, 7.5 hours worked  
Zack Bumgardner - 5 hours travel, 7.5 hours worked  
James Lautzenheiser - 5 hours travel, 7.5 hours worked



## February 8th ...Georgia Work Trip ... Hudson Gap to McKenny

Submitted by Barry Allen

Something just wasn't right. It isn't often that we hearty souls of the BMTA cancel a work trip, but when it happens three out of four months, then questions must be asked. A government shutdown, thunderstorms in January.....I mean, there must be something dark and very sinister plotting to keep us out of the woods. Was something being hidden from prying eyes in the secluded forest between Hudson and McKenny Gaps?

Ok, Ok, enough of the conspiracy theories. Sometimes stuff just happens, right? And February was our chance to get right back out there for some much anticipated trail work. But before the main party was scheduled to work in February, we needed some early reconnaissance of the route. Tom Keene and Larry Dumas were just the men for the job. Slipping into the woods on a Sunday afternoon in January, Larry and Tom cleared the way by removing "some very tricky" blow downs on the planned work route. Without these two intrepid saw men, our work in February would have been much more difficult. So thanks for clearing the way, men.



Ernie Arvesen and Tom Keene

And that brings us to a little country store in Cherry Log, on the second Saturday of February. A hearty band of eight came together in the early morning light (temperature in the mid 30's) and drove a slow, winding path up FS 793, carefully picking a way through snow, ice and mud along the narrow road. At the end of the three mile ride, we listened to a brief, but thorough safety talk given by new crew leader, Mark Yost, and then hiked the 1.6 miles to McKenny Gap. This day, we worked in reverse – starting at the end and ending at the beginning. We installed a new sign at McKenny Gap, handsomely made by Ralph Heller, and then worked hard on water diversions, side-hilling, cleaning campsites, and trimming vines and limbs, steadily making our way back to Hudson Gap. The day ended a little before 3:00, temperature in the mid 50's, with a total of 46 man (and woman) hours worked on a 1.6 mile section of the BMT. A job well done by all! Thanks Phil and Debra, Frank, Ernest, David, Mark, and of course, Tom. I couldn't have had a better group to share a day in the woods.....



L to R: Barry Allen, Frank Forehand, Ernest Arvesen, Phil Guhl, Debra Guhl. Standing, David Blount, Mark Yost. Tom Keene behind the camera.



## Hike On Brush Creek Trail By Ralph Heller

On [Saturday](#) Feb. 15 we had 6 folks hike on the Brush Creek Trail which is part of the Tanasi Trail System in the area of the Ocoee Whitewater Center in Tennessee. We probably would have had more people, but since the hike was only a couple of days after the snow storm and more snow was predicted for the night before, we had a low turnout. However, the roads were clear and the weather was almost perfect, a little cool to start out, but invigorating as we began to hike. Although the trail was 7 miles long, the hike was easy. We started at Boyd Gap Overlook and the path was mostly a gentle downhill trek. There was some snow left on [sun](#) sheltered sections, but the tread itself was mostly clear of snow, ice or mud. And there were lots of open areas for great views of the snowcapped Big Frog Wilderness and Mountain to the south and of Number 3 Lake which the trail skirted on the north side. We finished at the trail head parking on Highway 64. Everyone agreed that this was a great outing and a nice candidate for future hikes. Afterwards, we stopped by Blue Jeans Restaurant in Blue Ridge for ridiculously large and tasty Greek salads and pasta.



L to R: Nancy Sauls, Frank Forehand, Joy Forehand, David Wiggins, Mike Pilvinsky  
(photo by Ralph Heller)

## Upcoming Hikes By Ralph Heller

### Upcoming Hikes ...by Ralph Heller – Hiking Director

#### **March 12-13: Hike Inn Overnight Trip**

(Members Only): \$86.25 per room for two or \$61.53 for single occupancy; Includes dinner and breakfast. There are still a few rooms available - don't delay. Reserve room by calling 1-800-581-8032; then contact Ralph Heller - rshbmta AT [gmail.com](mailto:rshbmta@gmail.com) or 770-235-9760. You will be contacted to receive info on meeting time and location for the group hike to the Inn.

#### **March 15: Betty Petty Work Trip and Fun Hike**

Detailed information on this hike is located on page 1 of this newsletter

#### **May 2-4: Hiking and Car Camping weekend**

At Rainbow Springs - (private campground with no charge to camp) with GATC and BMTA Board Member Bob Ruby. Near headwaters of Nantahala River off RT. 64. Stay overnight or come for the day and choose from several hikes. To pre-register and for more information contact Bob - bmtabob AT [gmail.com](mailto:bmtabob@gmail.com) or 404-252-8888.





## Spreading The Word ...

Ralph Heller, Hiking Director, and his wife Marge recently finished a two week trip to the Caribbean. One of the Islands included St. John where they took a short, guided Eco Hike to the beach near Caneel Bay.



This hike, of course, gave Ralph the opportunity to help spread the word on the BMT by wearing his trail maintainer's shirt! **Go Ralph !**



## Newsletter Deadlines And Publication Dates

The BMTA Newsletter is published the last Saturday of each month. The deadline for article submissions is the Wednesday before publication.

## Biennial Conference for All Hikers

Coming this September 18-21 (Thursday-Sunday)

### Biennial Conference for All Hikers

Sponsored by

### Southeastern Foot Trails Coalition

At

Blairsville, GA New Conference Center

And

Nearby Vogel State Park

- All in the North GA Mountains, near both NC and TN -  
Workshops aplenty, both new and previous favorites

**Saturday** Banquet Speaker: Ron Tipton,  
New Executive Director of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy

- Wonderful, beautiful hikes to nearby mountaintop vistas and  
waterfalls –  
(Nearby Appalachian Trail and Benton MacKaye Trail featured)

Details of registration, local housing facilities (inns, cottages, camping), and  
costs/fees coming your way later March



# "Appalachian Trail Kickoff"

## "Appalachian Trail Kickoff"

Amicalola Falls State Park, Dawsonville GA  
Friday [March 7](#) - Sunday [March 9](#)

Are you an aspiring 2014 Appalachian Trail "thru-hiker" - or have you just DREAMED of hiking this world famous scenic trail ? Come to the "ATKO" (Appalachian Trail Kick-off) and try to increase your odds of getting from HERE all the way to Mt. Katahdin , Maine ! (2,185.9 miles / 14 states north of nearby Springer Mountain ... the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail)

This annual event has been held at *Amicalola Falls State Park* for the last 13 years - where "AT" experts, authors, vendors, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, hiking clubs / organizations and "newbie" and veteran hikers alike - ALL congregate in one place - at one time - to meet, greet, educate and give the north-bound "thru-hiking" class of 2014 the send off of a lifetime !

The BMTA will be there with our Display and, on Saturday morning, [March 8th](#) at 9a.m., Board Member Bob Ruby will give a slide presentation and talk. Come see us!!



# Yellow Creek Re-Route ...

## Yellow Creek Re-Route



Due to the scope of this reroute project, we have established a separate page on the Website, which will be frequently updated with current

<http://www.bmta.org/YellowCreekReroute.html>

status as this effort progresses. Also, several work trips are listed on the Activities Calendar.

*We need your help! Join us on any (or all) of these trips for this major reroute of the trail.*



Yellow Creek Re-Route



Yellow Creek Re-Route



Yellow Creek Re-Route



Yellow Creek Re-Route



# Yellow Creek Mountain Trail Reroute Information Sheet

## Background and History

When the Benton MacKaye Trail was first proposed in the early 1980's, there was not a clear route for the Trail between the Hiwassee River Crossing in Ocoee, TN., and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Park Officials were enthusiastic about the Trail traversing the Park, but refrained from trail designation until a firm route to the Park was approved. A letter of support for the Trail, dated in 1985, indicated that final trail route would be determined, but that "no new trail" mileage would be needed or approved, in part due to the NPS Backcountry Management Plan, finished that same year, that stated that due to lack of funds for existing trail maintenance, adding more trail would be poor use of resources.

Some twelve years later, negotiations with the US Forest Service in Tennessee and North Carolina led to a final trail route thru the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness, exiting at Slickrock Trailhead on Route 129 by Cheoah Dam. Subsequently, Tapoco (Alcoa) agreed in 1997 to a five mile section of new trail thru their lands to the Tn/NC State Line, following a portion of the original Appalachian Trail, abandoned in 1948 when the AT was routed over Fontana Dam. At the time, NPS Regulations required hikers to get Backcountry Camping Permits from a registration site, the closest being located at the Twentymile Ranger Station, requiring a 3.5 mile road walk from Deals Gap to the Ranger Station. At the time, there was not enough traffic on Route 129 to present a significant safety issue for hikers in that area.

In 2004, the NPS and the BMTA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (General Agreement) covering the Trail within the Park. This MOU agreed, in part, to study the possibility of using the original AT from Deals Gap north to Dalton Gap and then connecting to existing Park trail system at Campsite 95. At the same time, the Park was involved in environmental studies related to the North Shore Road issue, dating from 1943. It was understood by all that any final route for the BMT might be affected by any settlement of that issue.

Construction continued on other portions of the Trail, and a Trail Completion Ceremony was held on [July 16<sup>th</sup>](#), 2005, indicating that in large measure, the final route of the Trail outside of the Park was finalized and built. Attention turned to the Park connection issue, resulting in an exploratory trip by Dick Evans, Ken Jones and George Owen of the BMTA, and two officials of the NPS to evaluate the "Old AT Route" as stated in the MOU. The evaluation resulted in the opinion that, due to environmental considerations on that route, more than four miles of new Trail would have to be constructed, with an additional three miles of trail to be rehabilitated. The general feeling at that time was that, given the remoteness of the location and scarcity of trail builders in close proximity, any attempt to build this route would be beyond the capabilities of both the NPS and the BMTA.

The BMTA continued ongoing explorations in the general area to attempt to find a non-road route to reach the Park, without infringing on the route of the existing AT over Fontana Dam. A complication was added when Tapoco (Alcoa) made a corporate decision to sell some real estate and related assets. Although very supportive, Alcoa did ask the BMTA to cease any route exploration to avoid any issues with potential buyers. In early 2012, it was announced that Brookfield Renewables was going to purchase the lands involved. Once that was completed, discussions with Brookfield indicated that it was going to transfer a major portion of land to the Tennessee Nature Conservancy, but again, the BMTA was asked to not take any actions regarding possible Trail routes until TNC took possession. Subsequently, in late 2013, the BMTA was given clearance and enthusiastic support to examine possible alternate routes in the newly acquired lands, destined to be transferred to the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency within a couple of years. However, a series of explorations in the area resulted in the determination that any trail reroute in that area would be as difficult, and probably not as desirable, as the "Old AT Route" within the Park, and would still involve three miles of new trail in the Park. Extensive discussions with Park Officials throughout this entire period indicated that they were very opposed to any new trail in that area, and that any evaluation of such route would probably be a decade or more in the future.

*Continued On Next Page*

At the same time, virtually everyone familiar with the area was becoming increasingly concerned about the safety of hikers on the 3.5 mile road walk from Deals Gap to Twentymile Ranger Station, in particular the mile-long section on Route 129. Indeed, it was felt by many in the BMTA that most thru-hikers simply avoided that section, getting transportation from Slickrock Trailhead to Twentymile. An additional issue arose in February of 2013 when the NPS mandated reservations for all campsites in the Park, necessitating thru-hikers to find some place to get on line and make those reservations. While that removed the necessity of hikers going thru a registration point, it did require that campers print out and carry a copy of their reservation, something that obviously created a major issue for thru-hikers.

In mid-January, 2014, the BMTA was informed that the Backcountry Operations Specialist, our main contact at the Park, would be leaving for a new position in early February, and it was felt that a replacement for that position might be a prolonged issue, and that the “corporate memory” would take a while to replace and have the replacement become familiar with the issues and history of the project. At the same time, several experienced BMTA folks felt that any attempt to build a new trail on any route in the Deals Gap area would be a several year project even if a quick approval were given, something very unlikely. With those facts, the BMTA approached the Cheoah Ranger District about the possibility of rerouting the BMT over the Yellow Creek Mountain Trail. This would allow thru-hikers to use it to get to Fontana Village, obtain their required permits (as well as resupply, showers, meals, etc.). However, this would necessitate having the NPS change the route of the BMT within the Park, as reaching Twentymile Ranger Station from Fontana Village is another near impossibility by trail. Park officials were very enthusiastic about agreeing to have the BMT start at the Lakeshore Trailhead and follow Lakeshore Trail to Lost Cove, joining the existing BMT within the Park. A new MOU was drafted, approved and signed in record time in late January, 2014.

### **Overview of Reroute**

With the new reroute, north-bound thru-hikers will leave the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness at Slickrock Trailhead, and then turn south for a one-half mile roadwalk along Route 129. In this section, passing the Cheoah Dam and Tapoco Lodge, the road is not curvy and sight distances are good. In addition, parts have sidewalks, and there is ample room for hikers to get off the road to make way for traffic. It is not thought to be a dangerous section to walk. Hikers then turn east and cross Route 129, taking Meadow Branch Road a few feet to the start of the Yellow Creek Mountain Trail.

Hikers would then follow the YCMT easterly along the ridge some nearly nine miles to Green Gap and then down into Fontana Village, where facilities for obtaining camping permits are available at the Fontana Lodge, open 24/7/365. Hikers could then take the Fontana Shuttle directly to the trailhead across the Dam, or follow a signed path to intersect the AT near the Fontana Marina, and follow that thru the Dam area to the trailhead. Appalachian Trail Conservancy officials have been briefed on this plan and fully support it, so the short “co-location” would not present an issue. Hikers would then follow the Lakeshore Trail some five miles to meet the existing BMT in the Lost Cove area, and continue their hike.



## Construction Plans

Section 1 – from Meadow Branch Road to Old Field Gap Road will be cleared on a BMTA Work Trip on [April 15<sup>th</sup>](#).

Section 2A – from Old Field Gap Road east to the FS 251C Junction will be cleared by a Sierra Club Work Trip [March 31](#) thru [April 4](#).

Section 2B – from FS 251C Junction to the Power Line Crossing will be cleared by BMTA Work Trips on [April 26](#) and [May 24](#).

Section 3 – from the Power Line Crossing to Fontana Village will be cleared by the American Hiking Society Volunteer Vacation [May 5](#) thru [May 9](#).

Late May – BMTA work trips to remove old signs on former route and install new trail signs.

[May 31](#) – Trail Opening Ceremony.

Cheoah District has allowed the use of FS 251 on a temporary basis if necessary.

**Thru-hikers prior to [May 31](#) should use the existing route. After that date, they should follow the posted signs for the new route.**

These work trips will need a good participation by BMTA members. Contact Dick Evans ([bmta@frontier.com](mailto:bmta@frontier.com)) or 828-479-2503 to attend. Dates and areas may change according to work, so coordination is necessary.

## A Personal Note

This project is the culmination of nearly nine years of effort by many BMTA folks, as well as NPS, TNC, USFS and others. I want to personally thank all those who volunteered their time (and sweat) low-crawling thru rhododendron thickets, fighting Yellowjackets and snow, deadfalls, BRIARS, interminable map recons, meetings, etc. You all lived up to the motto:

***“Leaving a footpath for generations to follow.”***

See you on the Trail.  
Dick Evans

Web Site : [www.bmta.org](http://www.bmta.org)  
Email : [President@BMTA.org](mailto:President@BMTA.org)



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