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## BMTA Officers 2014-2015

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**BMTA Headquarters**

# Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 32, ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 28, 2015

## BMTA President's Column - Bob Ruby

### A Grand Year for the BMT ...

This has been the BMT's most productive year for trail improvements since the Grand Opening in 2005. I'll recap them going southbound (SOBO in thru-hiker terminology), because that is the sequence in which the improvements have occurred:



- The reroute onto the Yellowcreek Mountain Trail was completed in May 2014. This reroute reduced the BMT's longest roadwalk from 3.8 miles to ½ mile, including elimination of the dangerous walk on the Tail of the Dragon. It also routed the BMT through Fontana Village, a convenient resupply point and importantly providing access to internet printing for the campsite reservations required by the new backcountry system in the Smokies. The BMT now enters the Smokies by crossing Fontana Dam, along with the A.T. which generously allowed us to share its "Fontana Hilton" shelter. Under the leadership of Dick Evans and Ernie (SGT Rock) Engman and with cooperation from the Cheoah Ranger District and NPS, the Yellowcreek reroute was completed in record time with trail work assistance from the Sierra Club, American Hiking Society and numerous BMTA volunteers.
- This month BMTA is announcing a major reroute providing a more direct route through the heart of the Slickrock Wilderness. It includes scenic highlights such as Stratton Bald and The Hangover. Equally importantly it avoids crossing Slickrock Creek which could be dangerous during high water conditions. This was the original route requested by BMTA, but the Forest Service earlier preferred the old route via Farr Gap. An added benefit for the new route materialized when the new, hiker-friendly, owners of the Historic Tapoco Lodge gave permission to cross

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their property. The new route emerges onto US 129 directly across the road from the trailhead for the Yellowcreek Mountain Trail, thus eliminating even the last ½ mile of roadwalk on this section. Leadership for this project was again provided by Dick Evans and Ernie Engman with support from the Cheoah Ranger District. No new trail building was required to open this reroute, but maintenance of the existing wilderness trails will be required to bring them up to BMTA standards. New wilderness style signs will be needed to indicate the route of the BMT, but we are very thankful to a generous, anonymous donor who through Ernie Engman provided funding for the new signs.

- The Towee Creek reroute is underway and, when completed, it will eliminate an occasionally dangerous crossing of Towee Creek on the John Muir section of the BMT near Hiwassee, TN. Two cribbed switchbacks were built last fall on a steep hillside above the Hiwassee by two Forest Service led youth groups. There are two more switchbacks to be built by BMTA and the Forest Service. Regular TN/NC workdays are on the fourth Saturday of each month, but we are scheduling some ad hoc workdays to complete as much work as possible before the spring roosting season for the Indiana Bat, an endangered species. Any help you can provide will be appreciated.

Leadership for this project has been Rick Harris, Ken Jones and Ernie Engman, combined with major support from the Ocoee Ranger District.

- The Fall Branch Falls reroute is designed to provide a sustainable trail replacing the current heavily used, fall-line trail to the Falls. Fall Branch Falls is a scenic destination above Stanley Creek Road that is a primary hike recommendation by the Fannin Chamber of Commerce. Work started on this relo in February and will continue for several months. Regular workdays in Georgia are on the second Saturday of each month, and a second date is planned on March 21 with Trout Unlimited and Young Harris college volunteers. Again any help you can provide will be much appreciated.

Leadership on this project has been Barry Allen, George Owen and Ralph Heller with support by the Blue Ridge Ranger District.

Taken together these relocations have resulted in only a mile or so change to the total length of the BMT, but they make a significant change in the safety, useability and beauty of the trail. Thanks to all who have contributed their time and energy to this exceptional year on the BMT.

Bob

## It's Time To Renew ...

If you are a Life Member or joined (or renewed) in the last month or two, you can ignore this message. Your membership is current. Thank you.

The rest of you: It is time to renew. As you know, memberships in BMTA are for an entire calendar year, so everyone's membership ends on December 31. You can pay via PayPal using your credit card or send a check to the BMTA. Either way, you start by clicking here: <http://www.bmta.org/Membership.php>

Your membership is tax deductible. Please also consider adding a tax deductible donation to BMTA. Donations via check may be made using the printed membership form or via credit card or PayPal by clicking the Donate button on the [bmta.org](http://www.bmta.org) home page. Thanks for your support!

If you have any questions about your membership, please contact Ken Cissna, Membership Director, at [kcissna@usf.edu](mailto:kcissna@usf.edu). Thank you for your support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association.

Bob Ruby  
President, BMTA

Ken Cissna  
Membership Director and Store Manager, BMTA

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

### **Friday March 6 – Blood Mountain Length: 4.6 miles – moderate/strenuous Hike**

Description: Blood Mountain is the highest point on the Appalachian Trail in Georgia and is the most hiked section of the AT in GA. This is the time of year when thru hikers start their journey, so there will probably be some of them on the trail. The view from the top of Blood Mountain is spectacular in several directions.

To register for the hike and get meeting time and location, contact Hike leader Larry Dumas, email ldumas AT [tds.net](mailto:tds.net) or call 706-455-6235. Larry has thru-hiked the AT.

### **Wednesday March 18 Cartecay River Loop hike Length 3.4 mile**

Description: Easy Trek hike along the Cartecay River off Highway 52 just a few miles east of Ellijay. Good scenic hike for new hikers.

For more information and to register for the hike and get meeting time and location, contact Hike Leader Ralph Heller, email rshbmta AT Gmail.com or call 770-235-9760.

**April 12-16 – Spring Hike Week at Fontana Village Numerous hikes offered during the week.  
Check [www.fontanavillage.com/events/](http://www.fontanavillage.com/events/) for updated information**

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

**April 17, 2015 - Grassy Mountain fire Tower, Songbird Loop and Lake Conasauga Loop Trail**

**Length: approx. 6 miles – moderate**

Hike Description: A good tour of the remote Lake Conasauga area adjacent to the southern boundary of the Cohutta wilderness. Afterward, have a picnic at the Lake Conasauga Pavilion.

To register for the hike and get meeting time and location, contact Hike Leader Mike Pilvinsky, email oldsoldier AT [gmail.com](mailto:oldsoldier@gmail.com) or phone (706)889-5254.

**Friday May 1 – Lady Slipper Hike**

**Length: 6.2 miles – moderate/difficult Hike**

Description: This hike starts at the Fall Branch Falls trailhead and finishes at the trail head on Weaver Creek Road. The first half is mostly uphill and the last half is all downhill. That time of year there should be a large lady slipper display for several miles on the second half of the hike. Also there should be many wild azaleas in bloom.

To register for the hike and get meeting time and location contact Hike Leader Joy Forehand, jwfbrga AT [gmail.com](mailto:jwfbrga@gmail.com) or call 706-946-0336

**Wednesday May 13 – Hike to Toccoa River Suspension Bridge**

**Length: 3.5 miles – moderate - car shuttle involved**

Description: Hike from GA highway 60 over Tooni Mountain to 260 foot pedestrian suspension bridge.

More information will be posted in next newsletter and on web site at a later time. Stay tuned!

# Hike to the Hike Inn

By Ralph Heller – Hiking Director

On Monday February 23, ten dauntless hikers went to Hike Inn on a BMTA sponsored overnight stay. The weather reports for Monday and Tuesday had been changing daily and included the possibilities of rain, freezing rain, rain/snow mix, or no precipitation at all. As it turned out, we had a nice sunny day on Monday which gave way to beautiful long-range views. We were lucky. The previous day the trail was still covered with ice from the storm several days earlier, and was very treacherous to walk on. This according to the Mountain High Hikers we passed, who were on the way down from the night before. For us, all that ice had melted, except for one short bad section about a mile from the inn. We were disappointed we did not get a



Picture by Ken Cissna

better turnout for this event, but attribute that to the dicey weather predictions. As usual, we were treated to a great meal that evening and a hearty breakfast in the morning. After the evening meal, we saw an interesting presentation on gold mining in the Dahlonega area given by Shana Garrett the Education Manager at the Hike Inn.

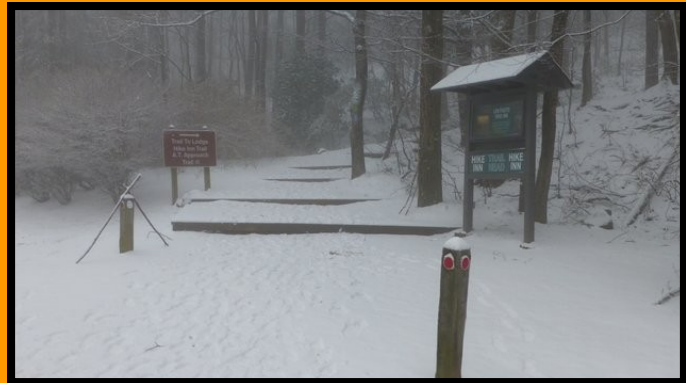
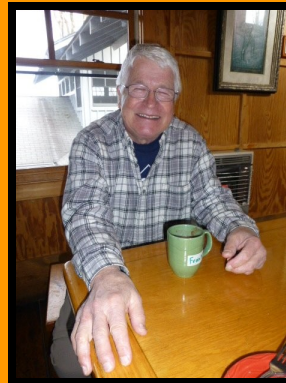
During the night we had a 3-inch powdery snowfall which made for a beautiful hike out. Attending the hike were Ralph and Marge Heller, Ken Cissna, Paul and Cindy Shumpert, Frank Forehand, Marcia Lehman (new member), Patti O'Dell (new member), and Luther and Mary Elder guests. A

great hike was had by all.

An interesting side note. Marge recorded 27,854 steps round trip on her Jawbone fitness tracking device.



Picture by Marge Heller



Pictures by Marge Heller



## BMTA Members also AT Thru Hikers

By Marge Heller

BMTA members, Paul & Cindy Shumpert of Rome, GA and their guests, Luther & Mary Elder joined us at the February hike to the Hike Inn. Until now, I have personally known 3 members who have hiked the entire AT. Make that number now 7.

Paul & Cindy, retired family practice physicians who volunteer their time in West Africa at a church sponsored medical clinic, started their AT journey in 2004. Close to the end of reaching Mt. Katahdin, broken bones, for Cindy, on two different occasions changed the completion date to 2006. Along the trail, they met the Elder's and then connected with them once again at the northern terminus. Now long time friends and hiking companions they plan to make a second AT trip together in March of 2016. The Shumpert's have also hiked about three quarters of the BMT.





# Georgia Work Trip Report, February 2015

Barry Allen

WOW, what a great day!! Valentine's Day 2015 dawned clear and cold – just a perfect day for starting a reroute at Fall Branch Falls. Twenty-six turned out to be the temperature as we started digging new trail a little after 9:00 AM, and it was also the number of volunteers that turned out to help on this popular section of trail! That's right, twenty-six volunteers showed up to work on Saturday morning, February 14: twenty-one members, four guests and one Forest Service employee.



As with all reroutes, the job is primarily digging. But we did run a saw team on this Saturday morning, led by Robert Collins and Mark Yost, to finish clearing the path of the new route. One week earlier, Robert Collins, Gilbert Treadwell, and two of our Mountain High Hiker friends, Michael O'Brien and Clyde Burnsworth, worked to clear brush, trees and blowdowns from over 0.3 mile of new trail. By clearing the path a week earlier, our group of volunteers on this Saturday was able to focus on the task of digging. And Robert and Mark were able to finish clearing trees and brush well away from the main group.

Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> was planned as an abbreviated work trip, allowing people time to enjoy Valentine's Day. Shortly after noon, we sat down as a group, enjoyed lunch and sent people on their way. I'd like to send a special thanks to George Owen, Darcy Douglas and Robert Collins for working two consecutive weekends at Fall Branch Falls. Thanks to guests Joy Lipham, Shirley Smith, Ron Brown, Don Kenny, and, of course, Taylor Hamilton from the USFS.

*A final word on Fall Branch Falls:* this is not your typical Benton MacKaye trail. It is heavily used by tourists, day-trippers, hikers, families, groups, etc. Tread-way at Fall Branch is being dug at twice the width of the normal path; the digging takes longer and is much more exacting. But when finished, we will have a section of trail that will be sustainable for many, many years. We'll be working at Fall Branch for the next several trips. Hope to see you all there to enjoy our new section of trail!

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# Georgia Work Trip Report, February 2015



## Georgia ...March Work-Trip Announcement

Please join us on Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup> as we work our second trip on Fall Branch Falls. We made a good dent in this tough re-route in February, but we'll need a few more trips to finish the job!! Meet for breakfast at 8:00 at the Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge. Or meet us in the parking area for Fall Branch Falls at 9:00. A call or e-mail to let us know you are coming is most welcome (it helps us plan for the right tools and safety equipment), but is certainly not required. Trip leader for the day is Barry Allen (770-294-7384) or [barry.w.allen@att.net](mailto:barry.w.allen@att.net)

**First-timers are most welcome! For what to expect, what to wear, what to bring, go to <http://www.bmta.org/pdfs/WorktripsWhatToExpect-revSep2011.pdf>**

WEATHER POSTPONEMENT: If weather forces a change of plans, the trip will NOT be cancelled in most cases. Instead we will simply postpone the trip for one week. Because of the changeable nature of North Georgia weather we wait as long as possible before postponing. Usually the decision is made early Friday evening and circulated immediately by email.

On Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup> we are hosting a second March work event for Fall Branch Falls! **Some of our Trout Unlimited friends and a few students from Young Harris College** have graciously volunteered to help on the reroute. We would enjoy having a number of our regulars join us for this second March Work day! So double your March fun if you have the energy and help the Benton MacKaye Trail Association host Trout Unlimited and Young Harris College at Fall Branch Falls. Meeting will be at the parking area for Fall Branch, 9:00. Trip leader is Barry Allen, 770-294-7384.

## TN/NC ... Work-Trip Announcement

**2/28 Saturday - 3/1 Sunday - BMTA TN/NC Work Trip - Towee Creek Reroute**

*The BMTA TN/NC Work Trip for this Sat and Sun Feb 28-Mar 1 on the Towee Creek Reroute has been cancelled and will be rescheduled for Mar 28-29. Sorry for the inconvenience, but the road is still covered with nearly a foot of snow and the trail would be dangerous to work on with the steep sideslope and all the snow.*

**Rick Harris**

## Section Maintainer's Corner ...

### MAINTAINERS CORNER:

BY TOM KEENE

#### **Now is the Time:**

**To clean out and improve your water diversions!**

#### ***Why now?***

Do a great job of clearing the leaves, silt and other debris from your water diversions now and they will be good until the leaves begin to fall in October.

#### ***Tools for the job:***

A firerake or McLeod (or your home garden rake – but not a leaf-rake); plus loppers or pruners.

#### ***Cleaning techniques to bear in mind:***

Don't just clear the diversion itself, clear out a generous exit path for the run-off water and the debris it carries. Otherwise the silt and debris will soon back up and cause the diversion to fail.

#### ***Make your water diversions self-cleaning:***

Older waterbars and other diversions are sometimes almost at a right angle to the direction of the trail. That means the water must almost stop to make a hard right (or left) turn off the trail. When the water stops the silt and debris settles and soon clogs things up. The solution – reduce the angle the water is deflected, if possible, to 45 degrees or even less. That way the runoff water will keep moving and carry the silt and debris along with it. Also remember the importance of a generous exit path for that runoff.

#### ***While you are at it:***

Be sure to note any big blowdowns or missing signs and report them to your Maintenance Director (Barry Allen, Springer to Hwy. 64; Tracy Sheffield, Hwy. 64 to the Smokies). Locate the problem as precisely as you can, either by GPS or description topography.

## Reroute News ... or "Mabel, them North Carolina folks are at it agin!"

### By Dick Evans

The route for any trail is a much more complex thing to determine than most folks would guess. While it is easy to draw a line on a map and say, "Let's put a Trail here," the reality is much different. Land ownership and usage issues, access, topography and other factors combine to make seemingly simple issues quite complex, involving at times many different "stakeholder" groups, with different goals and guidelines. This was certainly the situation when the Benton MacKaye Trail was first being laid out. While the route within Georgia to the Ocoee River was fairly straightforward, beyond there was fraught with issues. Planners knew they wanted to get to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, but there were very few ways this could be done. In addition, the GSMNP Policy of no new trail miles, in place since 1985, added difficulties to this process. While GSMNP folks were very helpful in the process, it became obvious in late 2013 that we had to either accept the 3.5 mile road walk from Deals Gap to Twentymile Ranger Station for many years, or find another route.

In December 2014 and January 2015, Ernie Engman and I scouted the old Yellow Creek Mountain Trail on the south side of the Little Tennessee River drainage on land owned by the Forest Service, and found that, although unmaintained for years, it could be cleared and provide a great path to the Park. In addition, the Forest Service had kept the route on their active trail list, so no detailed environmental assessment was needed. As readers know, the Yellow Creek Reroute was approved and cleared within an astounding seven months last year, providing hikers a safe and beautiful route between the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness and the National Park.

Likewise, the route chosen through the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness was first requested to go over Stratton Bald, Haeo, past the Hangover, one of the premier viewpoints in the southern Appalachians, and down to Big Fat Gap and hence out at Slickrock Creek Trailhead. However, the final route was to follow Fodderstack Ridge north from the Cherohala to Farr Gap, then down to cross Slickrock Creek and out. While normally this crossing does not present a problem, there are times when the water rises and becomes too high to cross safely. Avoiding this crossing involves a lengthy detour and has presented the Graham County Search and Rescue Team with a number of cases of hikers stranded on the Tennessee Side of the Creek. Even Rick Harris, longtime Tennessee/North Carolina Maintenance Director for the BMTA, expressed his concern for hiker safety due to this route, although deep in designated Wilderness as it is, there were no options to make this crossing safer. Our BMT Trail Guide for TN/NC, the BMT Data Book and Ernie Engman's BMT Thru Hikers Guide all included bypass directions in an attempt to provide a safe alternative to this in cases of high water, but they required an early decision miles before the creek was reached.

Many of you know that the Nantahala National Forest is involved in the process of reviewing and altering the forest management plan for their territory, and as part of this

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## Reroute News ... or "Mabel, them North Carolina folks are at it agin!"

process to examine existing trails and determine if they need alterations. During one of the "breakout" sessions of these meeting, USFS Officials from the Cheoah Ranger District expressed their concern about that crossing after the Graham County Search and Rescue folks pointed out the number of "rescues" they have made at that area. BMTA Past President Dick Evans, present at that meeting, was asked about rerouting that section of trail. Being nothing if not an opportunist, Dick pointed out that the originally proposed route bypassed this crossing and indeed was a much more scenic route following the eastern crest of the wilderness, and opined that such a reroute would in great likelihood be warmly received by the BMTA. It was decided at the meeting that Dick would present this issue to the BMTA, and the Cheoah District would approach the Tellico Plains Ranger District with this proposal since several miles of the old route were in their management.

One concern by the BMTA was that we had a great relationship with the Tellico Plains District (as we do with all the Forest Service Districts thru which the Trail passes) and we did not want to jeopardize that by a reroute, but the proposed routing was indeed a far better one than the current one. It did turn out that the Tellico Plains District had a similar concern with this crossing, and heartily endorsed the proposal as making a great safety improvement for hikers in the area. Quick approval by the BMTA followed, and confirmation was given to the Cheoah District about this new route. During this process, almost at the optimum time, the Historic Tapoco Lodge, a great Bed and Breakfast bordering the Slickrock Wilderness, changed hands. The new ownership was very interested in hikers and active vacationers, and they wanted to reopen the old trail from Yellowhammer Gap, on the edge of the Wilderness, down through their property. This nicely added to the new BMT reroute, by allowing the Trail to pass right by a great "stop-off" point for hikers, and shortened the road walk on Route 129 to less than one hundred yards. Quick coordination between the BMTA and the Tapoco Lodge, greatly assisted by the Cheoah Ranger District, resulted in a volunteer trip to clear that route from the Yellowhammer Gap to the Lodge.

The end result is that, effective February 27, 2015, the Benton MacKaye Trail now follows the eastern crest of the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness, then down to the Tapoco Lodge, then out their gate and a short road walk, regaining the trail at the James Burchfield Trailhead on Meadowbranch Road, the starting point of the Yellow Creek Reroute. New signs are in the process of being ordered to properly mark this new route, and the new editions of the **BMT Data Book**, **BMT Trail Guide for the Tennessee/North Carolina Section** and the **BMT Thru Hiker's Guide**, will reflect the route described. While this new route will provide additional "opportunities" for wilderness maintenance, the scenic beauty of this new route, access to the Tapoco Lodge and shortening of the road walk, combine to make this a great hike. Come try it!