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President:	Bob Ruby
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TN/NC M/C:	Ken Jones
Smokies Coord:	Dick Evans
Hiking Director:	Mike Pilvinsky
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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association

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President's Column January 2016 by Bob Ruby

Fall Branch Falls and Towee Creek Reroutes

The Towee Creek reroute is now open and blazed. Thanks to Ken Jones, the Ocoee Ranger District staff and the Tennessee trail workers who put in two days a week during the final push to get it done. See Ken's write-up in this issue for more details. The Fall Branch Falls reroute is almost complete. It is pending final approval by Blue Ridge District Ranger Andy Baker. It will need some fine tuning for the high volume of usage that it gets from visitors walking in to view the falls. Alternatives are also being considered to improve parking capacity at the busy trailhead.

Maintainers' Seminar – January 16

The BMTA Trail Maintainers' Seminar on January 16 was attended by 29 trail workers. Safety procedures were the primary subject of the meeting. These included the Job Hazard Analyses for General Field Work & Trail Maintenance, BMTA procedures for Check-in/Check-out, Tailgate Safety Briefings and the BMTA Emergency Action & Communications Plans. Summaries of the information from these presentations are or shortly will be available on the Maintainers page of the bmta.org website. Jim Holland gave an interesting presentation on "Using Your Cellphone as a Trail Tool." It is available in PDF format at: <http://1drv.ms/1RNW5TY>.

While preparing for the seminar, I discovered a superb Forest Service publication which includes much of the information covered during the seminar. None of us had previously been aware of it. It can be found online as **Welcome to the Forest Service: A Guide for Volunteers**. I strongly recommend all BMTA volunteers review this document.

Help Needed! BMTA Needs Your Active Support in Three Areas!

- **Publicity** Chairs Marcia Lehman and Marge Heller are planning BMTA participation in a series of community events and festivals (like the Blue Ridge Arts in the Park) throughout the year to increase BMTA's visibility. Many of our current members and volunteers were originally introduced to BMTA through these events. M & M really need your help for setup/breakdown and in staffing shifts during the events. Don't miss out on the fun!

- **Hiking** Director Mike Pilvinsky has planned a great series of BMTA fun hikes for 2016. Mike still needs volunteers to lead a few of the hikes. The hikes have also been a fruitful source of new members for BMTA. For those of you who have participated in hikes this is your chance to give back.
- **Maintenance** Directors Barry Allen and Ken Jones can always use help either by adopting a section of the BMT for routine maintenance or by joining on monthly workdays. Trail maintenance is BMTA's primary purpose and activity. We do a great job, but our southern Appalachian forests grow relentlessly, so there is always work to be done to keep the trail in good condition.

Long Distance Hiking

We almost had our first “2400 Miler.” That is 2100 miles on the AT plus 300 miles on the BMT. Christopher Hellier, a previous AT+CDT+PCT “Triple Crown” backpacker, came back to do a SOBO hike of the AT with the intention of adding a NOBO hike of the BMT. He reported being distracted during his hike of the BMT by an ALDHA Winter Ruck at the NOC, so he got a ride and rerouted around part of the TN/NC section of the BMT, hiked the AT from the NOC to Fontana Village and then finished on the BMT across the Smokies. He apologized that his was “Not a True Thru” of the BMT. He said that he hopes to come back to complete what he missed and added ***“I will continue to recommend the BMT as a great hiking trail and the BMTA as a class organization.”***

We can all be proud that the BMT continues to grow its reputation among long distance hikers as one of the best trails in the country. I like to say that *“The BMT is long enough to be a challenge and an accomplishment to complete, but short enough that it can be completed in about 20 days, plus or minus, depending on your speed.”*

Smokies Centennial Challenge-Hike 100

In celebration of the 2016 National Park Service Centennial, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has established the “Smokies Centennial Challenge-Hike 100” program. This program aims to inspire all potential hikers—young and old, new and skilled—to experience and gain a new appreciation and stewardship for their national park. To complete the Hike 100 challenge, participants must hike any 100 miles of maintained trail within the park boundaries between January 1 and December 6, 2016. These miles can include everything from the front country nature trails to the extensive backcountry network of trails. Participants can choose to hike the same trail repeatedly or choose to hike many different trails to accumulate a total of 100 miles. Participants who reach the 100-mile goal will earn a commemorative “Smokies Centennial Challenge - Hike 100” pin and be invited to a park celebration hosted by Superintendent Cassius Cash.

(Note: If you hike the BMT across the Smokies, you will have completed 93 of the 100 miles. If you then hike to the Chestnut Branch Trail (the BMT-AT Connector), up to the AT and back to the Big Creek backcountry parking lot, you will have hiked 99.4 miles. If you park on the south side of Fontana Dam, your BMT hike will be just over 100 miles.)

If you are seriously interested in joining others in hiking the BMT across the Smokies, contact Dick Evans, BMTA Smokies Coordinator, who will be orchestrating plans. Dates and distances are to be determined. Dick can be reached at bmta AT frontier.com

Guides for acronyms
Appalachian Trail
Continental Divide Trail
Pacific Crest Trail
NORth BOund
SOUth BOund

Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association

Nantahala Outdoor Center

Ruck - a large gathering of people

Turtletown Falls, Jan 14, 2016

Story by Mike Pilvinsky, Photos by Mike Pilvinsky and Marcia Lehman



Setting out for the Falls

Fifteen members and one guest gathered on a cold (20 degree) January morning and car pooled to Tennessee for another great BMTA hike. This crisp, clear morning welcomed two new members, Joe and Kathleen Kelly from Jasper, GA. The Kellys had attended their first BMTA hike at Blood Mountain in December and decided to join the association this day.

Traveling to Turtletown Falls is always a bit challenging as the entrance to the Forest Service road is not clearly marked. But the group arrived, and soon set out on the 3.7 mile loop which includes two magnificent water falls.

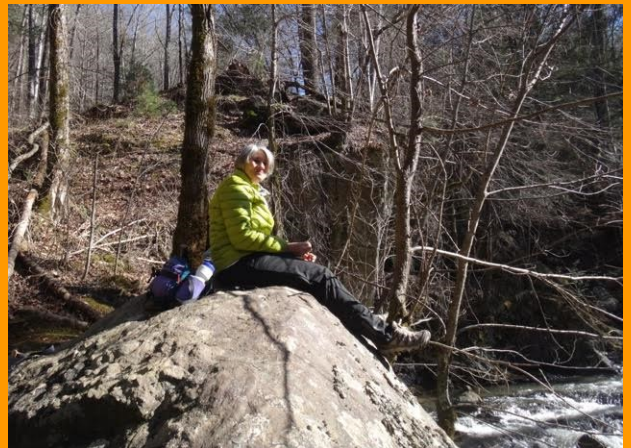


Helen Daniels, Carrie Carrito, Sherry Petraoli, and Marcia Lehman



Eating Lunch by the river: Clayton Webster, Clare Sullivan, Marcia Lehman and Joe Kelly

The high volume of water cascading over the rocks made the view even more memorable than usual. After lunch we climbed uphill on the return leg, and we were rewarded with winter views of the Hiawassee River. As always, Clayton Webster acted as our own personal “Wikipedia”, identifying even the most obscure flora!



Lunch is always better on top of a rock!



From the left: Dawn Jackson from Denver, CO, Joe Kelly, Doug and Evelin Yarns, Kathleen Kelly, Tony, Clayton Webster, Carrie Cirrito, Dee Massingale, Clare Sullivan, Helen Daniels, Tom Sewell, Sherry Petraoli, Debbie Crowder and Marcia Lehman

Springer Mountain Loop Hike

By Travis Crouch

On a frigid Martin Luther King Jr Day, 11 intrepid hikers joined trip leader Travis Crouch to hike the 5 mile Springer Mountain Loop. The thermometer read 18 degrees at the Springer parking lot, so everyone quickly introduced themselves and we got under way to get the blood flowing. The group hiked the loop clockwise, heading north on the AT from the parking lot and then turning right on the BMT. The three stream crossings were icy, but thankfully uneventful. The overlook at Ball Mountain was the site of the first break for the group. This turned out to be a perfect rest stop because one, it was in the sunshine, and two, it was sheltered from the wind. There was pleasant conversation and the obligatory group photo before the group continued the climb up to the AT intersection near the southern terminus of the AT. The stay at the summit of Springer was somewhat brief due to the increased wind chill on the west side of the ridgeline. Everyone made the detour to the Springer Mountain Shelter for some snacks and a look at a typical AT Shelter. The trail from the shelter back to the parking lot had several treacherous patches of ice, but the group remained focused and everyone navigated the slippery sections without incident. **Great job guys!**



“Trail Improvement” Trip January, 2016

By Barry Allen



The weather forecast called for mild temps with a high probability of afternoon rain. But the outlook for rain did nothing to deter our turnout on Saturday, January 9 at Fall Branch. Eighteen members and two guests joined the BMTA for our monthly ‘trail improvement’ day, which began with a bite of breakfast at Big Mommas and a short ride to the parking area for the Falls.

The work trip began with a short moment of silence for Taylor Hamilton, USFS (see December newsletter), and a safety review for our members and guests. After the safety review, we broke into teams, distributed appropriate tools and began the days’ work.

Our goal for the day was to play a game of ‘connect the dots’ on our 0.55 mile re-route at Fall Branch Falls. After 8 monthly work trips, one interim trip of Trout Unlimited volunteers, and three or four days of help from the Youth Conservation Corps, we were finally ready to connect the dig to the access ramp and the Falls.

Continued next page



Former president David Blount working with Darcy Douglas and a team of three volunteers dug the last 100' to the switchback connecting the reroute to the existing trail. At the switchback, Ken Jones (down from Tennessee to help!) worked with Mark Yost, digging the switchback and installing speed breaks made from black locust. Bob Cowdrick and current president Bob Ruby along with former board member Steve Bayliss worked to quarry stone for steps to use along the ramp which connects the switchback to the existing trail. And at various spots along the reroute, Phil Guhl and Michael Bartell led groups to clean up tread from prior work trips. Finally, we also had folks working to block possible shortcuts and direct traffic flow by placing brush in strategic locations. **All in all, we put in 113 work hours on this Saturday, with another 57 hours of travel time as we connected our last dot! Well Done Everyone!!**



Towee Reroute Completed!!!

By Ken Jones

The Towee Creek Reroute of BMT Section 13d and the John Muir National Recreation Trail was completed on January 5th. The completion of work included a final inspection by the Forest Service, blazing the new route, and removing a sign and blazes from the old route. Since beginning new tread construction on November 23, 2015, volunteers and Forest Service employees completed approximately 2650' of new trail. Prior to that date, the Southeast Conservation Corp completed four switchback structures and two retaining wall structures along with interconnecting tread over the past two summers. The total length of the new reroute is 0.97 miles. **I want to thank the volunteers of the BMTA and Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen, as well as Forest Service employees, who made this project a success in a very short time frame!** This reroute is an excellent example of the way work can be accomplished when different user groups work together toward a common goal!

Upcoming Training Opportunities

By Jim Holland

The Wilderness Skills Institute Enrollment is Open. It's All FREE!

Enroll EARLY.....Space Will Be Limited

Here are the dates and class options:

- ◆ **Week One: May 23-27, 2016**
 - Wilderness First Aid and CPR
 - Certification & A/B Crosscut Certification
 - Wilderness Education and Interpretation
 - Bridge Construction
 - Crosscut Saw Restoration and Sharpening

- ◆ **Week Two: May 31-June 3, 2016**
 - Trail Maintenance
 - Field Leadership and Project Management
 - Wilderness Recreation Impact Management

Contact: <http://wildernessskillsinstitute.org/wsi-application/>

FEBRUARY WORK TRIP ANNOUNCEMENT

Section 2c, Bryson Gap to Toccoa River

By Barry Allen

Where: Section 2c

When: Saturday, February 13, 2016, 9:00 AM

Meet: Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge at 8:00 or GA 60 at Little Skeenah Creek, across from FS 313 to the Swinging Bridge, 9:00.

Plan for the Day: Tread work, cleanout of water diversions, and some brush/tree removal from recent rain and wind.

What to bring: minimum two liters of water, long pants, boots, gloves and snack or lunch for the day.

Contact: Barry Allen at [bmtabarry AT gmail.com](mailto:bmtabarry@gmail.com) or 770-294-7384



Please join us for our February trip as we begin a series of work dates intended to show off our trail, month by month. We'll begin with Section 2 in February, and move to Section 3 in March and so on down the line. (Of course, we may be sidetracked with emergencies during the year, but we'll address that as needed).

In February, we will be working from the Swinging Bridge toward Bryson Gap. This area of well used trail needs tread work and water diversion cleanout in a number of places, as well as some new diversions installed. We also will work to remove small trees and brush from under the bridge before they grow larger and become a problem. Our Section Maintainer for 2c, Mark Yost, will join us as Co-Leader and saw man for the day.

Hope to see you there!

It's Time to Renew!!!!

If you are a life member or joined or renewed within the last couple of months, 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 ended 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. Also, please consider adding a tax deductible donation to BMTA. As you know, BMTA has no paid staff, and all donations go to support the trail. Donations via check may be made using the printed membership form. Donations via credit card or PayPal can be made 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 AT usf.edu](mailto:kcissna@usf.edu).

Bob Ruby
President, BMTA

Ken Cissna
Membership Director and Store Manager, BMTA



WOW What Happened?!

By Kathy Williams



Was it the floods?!

Was it the snow?!

Someone scrounging
firewood?!

Where are the beams
to our covered bridge?!

Read next month's newsletter to find out!

Upcoming Hikes

By Mike Pilvinsky Hiking Director

- ◆ **February 4 Hike on Brush Creek Trail:** 6.3 easy miles from Boyd Gap Overlook to Highway 64 in Ocoee, TN. Contact hike leader Evelin Yarns (eyarns AT sprynet.com)
- ◆ **February 24 Len Foote Hike Inn: Overnight hike trip:** Moderate 5 miles. Join the BMTA on our annual winter outing to the beautiful Hike Inn. The Len Foote Hike Inn has been reserved exclusively for BMTA members at one half the normal room rate. Only 20 rooms are available so make your reservations early. Just call 1-800-501-8032. Your rate of \$85.00 + tax includes a room for two, dinner and breakfast. This is considered one of the most enjoyable events of the season! **As an added bonus the moon will be just two days from full!** Sit around the crackling fire, enjoy two great meals, and watch the sunrise from the cozy "Sunrise Room." Contact reservations @Hike-Inn.com. Be sure to include your phone number in your email and they will call you to confirm your reservation. Hikers must check in at the Amicalola Falls SP welcome center by 2pm on the day of the hike. For additional information contact Mike Pilvinsky (mikepilvinsky AT Hotmail.com).

*** Note some of these hikes are considerable driving distances.
Please contribute gas money to your driver when you carpool. Thank You!**

Trail Alerts & Updates

Swinging Bridge Road Closures

The USFS is conducting closures of Forest Service Road 816 off Hwy 60 that leads to the popular swinging bridge over the Toccoa River. The closures are part of a logging operation in the area. For more information, contact the Chattahoochee National Forest in Blue Ridge 706 -745-6928. Although the road is closed during logging operations, the bridge and trails remain open.

Parking Solution for Highway 515/US76 Crossing Location

Hikers on the section of the BMT that crosses Highway 515/US 76 between Ellijay and Blue Ridge, no longer have to park next to the highway or along County Road 158 on the east side of the highway. Julie Jabaley, Executive Director of the Craddock Center, has given permission for hikers to use the parking lot next to the Center which is located on the hill just west of the highway. Look for the Craddock Center sign and take the road up the hill. The trail passes just behind the Center. Backpackers may also park their cars overnight. The facility is open weekdays for hikers to use the restrooms or to get a fresh supply of water.

**The deadline for articles for the February Newsletter is Wednesday Feb 24, 2016
Thanks for your support!!!!**