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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



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President's Column January 2017 by Tom Keene

Announcement: The Blaze of the Month

When I first joined the BMTA in the mid-90's, **George Owen** was fond of declaring "Diamonds are the Hikers Best Friend" -- referring of course to the BMT's diamond shaped blazes. (It was a simpler time!).

I see blazes as an art form, and I feel sure anyone who has painted blazes must agree -- as must any observant hiker. Who has not felt a moment of delight when hiking the BMT and sighting a crisp, luminous blaze ahead?

I was reminded of this small delight during the January Georgia work-trip on **Clare and Ed Sullivan's** section near the Whitewater Center on the Ocoee. Clare, it seems, had recently refreshed the blazes in the area we were working. They looked fantastic!!

Below is a double blaze about half way up the trail from the Ocoee River to FS221. Note how the blaze seems almost to beckon the hiker. And like all truly beautiful things, this blaze is as exemplary up close as from afar. Pulling out my trusty calipers I confirmed the diamonds were exactly 5"x7", per BMT specs. Also, note the scraping of the loose bark to provide a good surface for the blaze, assuring both crisp edges and that it will last for years. Finally, the fact that this blaze was surrounded by others also of very high merit makes it a deserving winner of the first BMTA Blaze of the Month. Congratulations to Clare and Ed!

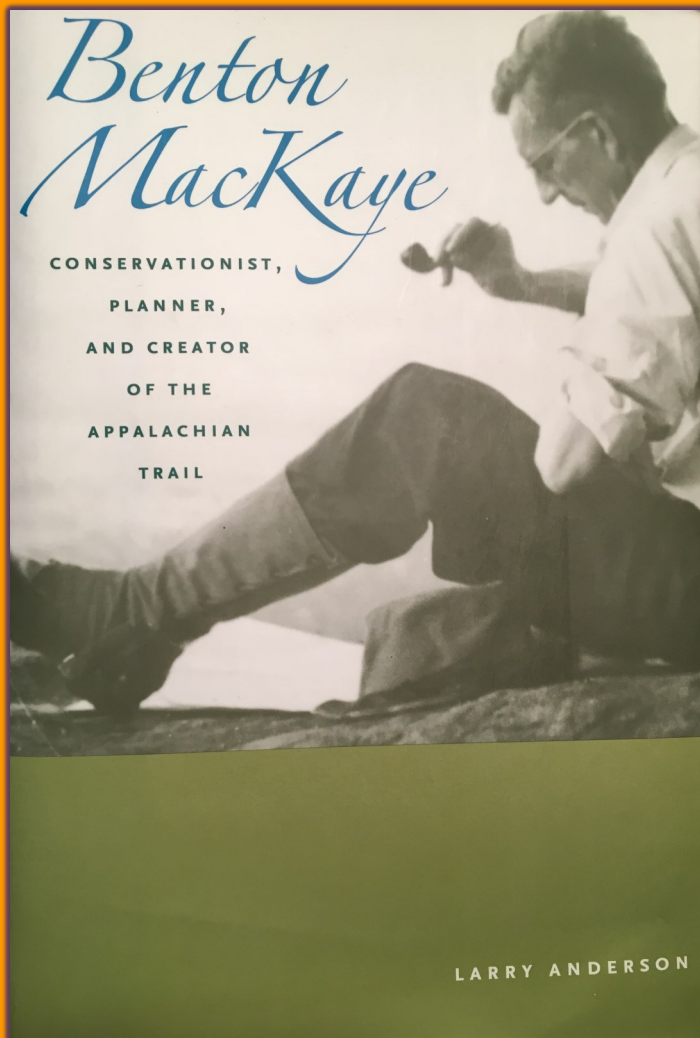


I would like to make the Blaze of the Month a regular feature of this newsletter. But to do so, I need help. Please send your nominations for Blaze of the Month to [tkbmta AT gmail.com](mailto:tkbmta@gmail.com). Nomination messages should include at least two photos of the blaze. Self-nominations are warmly welcome! Photos that record seasonal changes in the forest will get bonus points.

Talk of the Trail – Old and New Friends

Among the pleasures of the BMT monthly work-trip is seeing old friends. Another is working with and getting to know newcomers. We treasure both the old (so to speak) and the new. We were thus delighted to see **Clayton Pannell**, along with his son **Otis Pannell**, on the January work trip on the Sullivans' section. Clayton is one of our founders. It was he who initiated and did much of the work to extend the trail from Georgia into Tennessee and along the TN/NC boundary to the Smokies. It was treat to see both Clayton and Otis again.

Meanwhile, the newcomers on this trip, **Seth Stanley**, and **Sue and Dave Ricker** were not only good company for a day in the woods, but extremely hard workers as well. (Actually I had met Dave, though only briefly, on the December Georgia trip at the Fall Branch.) We look forward to seeing Seth, Sue and Dave on future trips.



Recommended Reading

Who is this guy our trail was named after? Most members will know Benton MacKaye is the individual who first proposed the Appalachian Trail. But MacKaye was far more than that. He was a major figure in the early decades of the conservation/environmental movement. He was the first student in Harvard's forestry program, one of the first employees of the U.S. Forest Service, a key player in the creation of National Forests east of the Mississippi, a co-founder (with Aldo Leopold) and early president of the Wilderness Society. MacKaye was also a very quirky, even odd, character whose employment record was sketchy and who made plenty of enemies as well as friends. Larry Anderson's 2002 biography, published by Johns Hopkins Press, does a super job of capturing all this. The paperback costs \$35, but new and used copies are available on Amazon from \$5-7 plus shipping. I recommend it!

2017 - Membership Renewal Time Extended

by Ralph Heller – Membership Director

It's that time of year, taxes, a new calendar, and new resolutions are made and hopefully kept. If you procrastinated or just plain forgot and have not already renewed your membership in the BMTA, please resolve to do it this month. Memberships are for the calendar year starting in January, so everyone's membership normally ends in December. However we are extending the renewal deadline through February. If you renewed within the past couple of months, your membership is current, and you can ignore this message. Thank you! If you are not sure of your status, contact me (rshbmta AT gmail.com).

Also, I am interested in membership retention. If you plan on not renewing your membership, please contact me at the email address above. I would like to know the reason, so that we can try and make membership the best experience possible.



To renew, go to <http://www.bmta.org/Membership.php> on the website and use PayPal with your credit card ...or... make a copy of the Membership Application Form and send it along with a check to the address at the bottom of the form. Be sure to update any information requested on the form, such as phone number, email, house address, and interests.

Remember, both your membership payment and any donations are tax deductible. The BMTA has no paid staff so all donations go to support the trail. Donations by check may be paid using the printed membership form. To make a donation online, click on the "Donate" button on the [bmta.org](http://www.bmta.org) home page. You can then choose to pay by Pay Pal or by credit/debit card.

Many thanks for your past and continued support. If there is anything you can suggest for

“After the Fire Hike” on the Rough Ridge Trail

By Bob Ruby

A group of us were curious to see the effects of last fall’s major Rough Ridge wildfire in the Cohutta Wilderness. After consulting with the Conasauga Ranger District, I was told that the wildfire never reached the BMT itself, so we decided to do a six mile out-and-back hike on the Rough Ridge Trail which is located on the southern portion of the Cohutta Wilderness. It is an interior trail, accessed by a 0.4 mile walk on the East Cowpen Trail from the Three Forks parking area. The Rough Ridge Trail is a seven mile trail that is rated strenuous due to its final steep drop down to the Jacks River. However we walked a very pleasant slightly rolling three mile section to the start of the steep descent. Although it was January 15, the weather gods favored us with a 65°, mostly-sunny day, as well as some spectacular views.



The trail was in excellent shape with just a few blowdowns that were easy to pass. The wildfire had mainly burned the understory plants and scorched some trees near ground level, but it doesn’t appear to have killed many trees. The burning was largely on the northern and western side of the trail, while the other side was largely unburned. It looks like this ridgeline trail was a key fire break. It will be interesting to return later in the year to see the regrowth.

Participants included BMTA members Bob Brown, Ken Cissna, Debbie Crowder, Fred Greer, Joe Kelly, Kathleen Kelly, Bob Ruby, Clare Sullivan and Ed Sullivan with guests Allison McCullough and Michelle McCullough.





BMT to John Muir Trail along the Hiwassee River

By Tom Sewell

For the first “real” hike of 2017, eight BMTA members and two guests joined Tom Sewell for a hiking adventure on the BMT section from Highway 68 in Tennessee to the junction of the John Muir Trail, which we then followed back to Highway 68 along the Hiwassee River. The 9.5 mile trip took six hours to complete. We were slowed by numerous recent blowdowns from our recent snow event. The BMT section is a moderate four mile hike along the ridge of the Unicoi Mountains.



Ready and full of energy for what lies ahead!

Once we joined the John Muir Trail, we began our adventure. During winter, this hike provides spectacular views from the ridges, the river, and the Etowah to Copperhill train tracks via the historic Hiwassee Loop. After a couple of miles we hiked and navigated the rocks and boulder-strewn trail along the river. The last mile of the John Muir Trail to the highway intersection was a welcomed relief of a flat easy walk in the woods and river marshes!

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Undeterred by blowdowns!!



Happy faces, tired but looking for more!!!

SEFTC Meetup and Facebook Page

By Rick Harris

If you attended the 2017 SEFTC Winter Hike Week in the Smokies the week of January 18-22, you know what a great event it was. We had over 80 hikers signed up with multiple hikes in the Smokies each day. The SEFTC has created a new Meetup page for the SEFTC and are inviting all of you to join our new Meetup page as well as our existing Facebook page. If you join, you will be able to keep up with the plans for the next Winter Hike Week in 2018 and any other events regionally of interest to hikers, backpackers and trail maintainers such as yourselves. We also encourage you to "Like" our Facebook page. At this site we have posted many photos from the 2017 event and we post many other topics of general interest to hikers and trail maintainers as well. You can access our Meetup site and our Facebook site directly from the links below:

Meetup site is <https://www.meetup.com/SEFTC-Southeastern-Foot-Trails-Coalition/>

The Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/131904020249675/>

Our website is www.southeasternfoottrails.org

We look forward to your joining us in January of 2018 for another multi-day hiking event in the Smokies.

BMTA February Work Trip Section 2c

by Barry Allen

- **Where:** Section 2C
- **When:** Saturday, February 11, 2017, 9:00 AM
- **Meet:** Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge at 8:00 AM or Fish Hatchery Road where the pavement ends-Hwy 60 at 9:00 AM.
- **Plan for the Day:** Water Diversion Cleanout and Step repairs/installation at FS 333
- **What to bring:** Minimum 2 liters of water, long pants, boots, gloves and snack or lunch for the day.
- **Contact:** Barry Allen at bmtabarry AT gmail.com or 770-294-7384

Please join us for our February trip as we work Section 2c near the Swinging Bridge. This section of trail needs grade and drainage work on existing crosstie steps on the ascent from the Swinging Bridge. We also need diversion clean-out work and a little saw work to remove a couple of trees in the vicinity of the bridge.

We will be working with Pulaski and trail hoe on tread work and sledge hammer and Pulaski on step repairs. It would also be nice to have a couple of certified sawyers for a modicum of chain saw work. We'll also do a quick inspection of the bridge and repair/replace any treads as needed.

See you then!!



January Work Trip Section 11e Thunder Rock Campground

By Barry Allen

“Ed and I certainly thank you too for all the work accomplished yesterday on Section 11e. This section is enjoyed by many of the campers at Thunder Rock Campground plus several hiking clubs. You helped to make it a safer trail. Be proud. Clare”

What a nice note from section maintainers, Clare and Ed Sullivan, after our January work trip! January’s work party was planned so our folks could finish up some of the work we didn’t get done last November. After two very productive trips, I can say we really made a difference on Section 11e -- with a new set of steps at the crossing of Forest Service 45 and repairs to the existing steps at the Ocoee. We have also done some very nice work to improve the tread in several areas.

After a cold snap during the first week of the month, the second Saturday saw temperatures reaching into the 60’s. We had a great turnout – seventeen members including several first-time volunteers. Among the attendees were Clayton and Otis Pannell, who were instrumental in laying out the route some 20 years ago. I particularly enjoyed the stories told by Clayton and Otis about the challenges of simply laying out the trail. While still in college, Otis remembers helping his dad flag the route. They had to work through a wall of rhododendron in addition to dealing with the challenging change in elevation; much of the flagging was done on hands and knees. The elevation change is dramatic in the step up from the river, so if you haven’t seen it, it is hard to imagine the work that Clayton and Otis put into the trail. Thanks to you both.



Left to Right: Barry's truck, Clare Sullivan, Barry Allen, Sue Ricker, Dave Ricker, Clayton Pannell, Otis Pannell, Darcy Douglas, Paul Baine, Rhonda Shubert, Seth Stanley, Doug Kleiber, Deborah Guhl, Phil Guhl, Ed Sullivan, Steve Bayliss, and some guy in a grey sweatshirt.

While cleaning the existing trail and steps, it became abundantly clear that we need to budget for additional repairs in the coming year or so. (As we removed much of the leaf litter and detritus from the steps, the progress of decay on many of the remaining steps was all too obvious). From a cost standpoint, the annual dues from roughly 25 of our members were utilized to help with these improvements (pressure treated 6x6's, rebar, etc.), so thanks to you all for keeping those annual dues coming in!

6x6's ARE NOT light, and once again, a big part of our challenge was to get to the work site with the stuff we needed for the work. Let me tell you – having seventeen people share the burden is much better than having eight or nine share the burden. So thanks to you all for the work, and as Clare Sullivan said, 'be proud'. This is work many of you will see for years into the future.

Hope to see you all next month, second Saturday in February!



Mountains can sometimes be “High Maintenance”!!

Upcoming Hikes

by Ken Cissna, Hiking Director

BMTA normally schedules a minimum of two hikes per month, one of five to eight miles and moderate difficulty, and one that is shorter and easier. In addition, we have occasional backpacking hikes, hikes that are dog friendly, and more difficult ones that might be called “hardy hikes.” Occasionally we co-sponsor hikes with other organizations. Although more hikes are in Georgia than the other states, you will find hikes in all three BMT states: Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

If you are interested in leading a hike or have a hike you’d like to see us offer with someone else leading, please contact me at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741.

The hikes for the next two months are listed below. More will be forthcoming, so check the Activities Calendar of the website and next month’s newsletter for updates.

February

February 4th Wagon Train Trail Hike - Brasstown Bald to Young Harris

After a short climb from the Brasstown Bald Visitor’s Center, it’s all downhill to Young Harris. We’ll take our time for close looks at anything of interest including the spectacular ice formations on the trailside cliffs (if temperatures cooperate), wonderful views of the Young Harris valley, and the beautiful high elevation yellow birches. Hike is seven miles; normally easy but moderate if the trail is icy and slippery. Well-behaved trail dogs are welcome. As part of this hike is in wilderness, limit is 12. Co-sponsored with Georgia Forest Watch; hike leaders are Sue Harmon of GFW and Ken Cissna of BMTA.

To reserve your spot, please email the GFW office at info AT afw.org or call 706-867-0051. For further information, contact either of the hike leaders, Sue Harmon at suepharmon AT gmail.com or 770-540-3672 or Ken Cissna at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741.

February 7th (Tuesday, 6:30pm) Beginning Backpacking Class

Travis Crouch, AT and BMT section hiker and owner of North Georgia Mountain Outfitters, will conduct a class for beginning backpackers and for anyone who would like a chance to benefit from his considerable experience. He will discuss backpacking techniques, equipment options, and strategies for a safe and enjoyable hiking. In March and April, BMTA will conduct beginning overnight hikes for the “graduates” of the class.

For further information or to register for the class, contact Ken Cissna at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741 or Travis Crouch at travis AT hikenorthgeorgia.com or 706-698-4453.

The class will be conducted at North Georgia Mountain Outfitters, 14244 Hwy 515 N, Suite 1200 Ellijay, GA 30536; 706-698-HIKE(4453), approximately three miles north of Ellijay on highway 515. See <http://www.hikenorthgeorgia.com>.

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February 10th (Friday) BMT Section 14 – TN 68 to Unicoi Gap via Buck Bald

5.6 miles; moderate to strenuous; approximately four hours on the trail. The first 45 minutes is uphill, but your effort will be rewarded with lots of good views, history, and culture. Lunch will be at the Buck Bald picnic area, where you'll have a 360 degree view of the surrounding mountains. Unicoi Gap is near the TN/NC state line and is a site on the historic Unicoi Turnpike National Historic Trail. You'll have a chance to learn more about the Unicoi Turnpike during the hike—it only sounds like it is part of the highway system. Shuttle is involved; the Coker Creek Visitors Center is on the shuttle route.

For further information, contact hike leaders Clare and Ed Sullivan at clare7982 AT gmail.com.

February 23-24 (Thursday–Friday) Amicalola Falls to Len Foote Hike Inn

Once again BMTA members will be able to enjoy the Len Foote Hike Inn—at half price rates! Five miles, moderate difficulty. This is for BMTA members. For reservations, contact the Hiking Director for the BMTA code. Then, go to <http://hike-inn.com/> and click on reservations. Information about the Len Foote Hike Inn is also available at this website. Cost (including tax) is \$70.15 for one person in a room, \$100.63 for two. Includes their superb dinner and breakfast. Space is limited.

For further information, contact the Hiking Director, Ken Cissna at keissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741.

March

March 4th (Friday) Etowa River Trails near Boling Park in Canton

Here is a hidden gem convenient to our Atlanta hikers tucked behind Boling Park in Canton, Georgia—complete with two hilly loops and an easy return along the Etowah River. 7.6 miles with 1139 feet total elevation change. We will snack at the "Haunted Church" and visit the "Satanic Baptismal."

For further information, contact hike leader Howard Baggett at howardeb AT windstream.net.

March 11th (Saturday) Byron Reece to Blood Mt. (rescheduled from January)

Hike to the highest point on the Georgia Appalachian Trail. From the Byron Reece Trail parking lot to the AT, then south to the top of Blood Mountain and return. About five moderately strenuous miles, including over two miles of uphill climbing.

For further information, contact hike leader Mike Pilvinsky mikepilvinsky AT hotmail.com.

March 15th (Wednesday) Upper BMT-AT Loop at Springer Mt.

A relatively short and easy chance to stretch your legs with an early spring hike. Starts and ends at Springer Mt. parking lot. See Springer Mt., the Springer Mt. shelter on the AT, as well as the Benton MacKaye plaque and the Owen Overlook on the BMT.

For further information, contact hike leader George Owen at gowen2 AT tds.net.

March 25-26 (Saturday-Sunday) Beginning Backpack on Amadahy Trail

A chance to put into practice what you learned at the BMTA “Beginning Backpacking Class” (see February 7 above). Hike is only two miles and easy. Camping on the shore of Carter’s Lake.

For further information, contact hike leader Mike Pilvinsky at [mikepilvinsky AT hotmail.com](mailto:mikepilvinsky@hotmail.com).



**Deadline for the February Newsletter is Wednesday February 22, 2017
Thank you!**