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BMTA Headquarters



Benton MacKaye Trail Association

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President's Column

Mountain Bikes in Wilderness Areas?

Important, but Not Simple

We had barely settled into the new year when **Bob Ruby** passed along an email from the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) entitled "UPDATE on how clubs and communities can oppose H.R. 1349 – Legislation to Amend the Wilderness Act." The email was basically a call from the parent ATC in Harpers Ferry, VA urging all AT supporters to contact their Members of Congress and oppose the bill, "which attempts to amend the Wilderness Act to allow mountain bikes and other forms of mechanized transport in wilderness areas." The message indicated that the bill could come up for a vote on the House floor almost any time.

It has long been the firm and consistent policy of the BMTA Board of Directors to decline to take a position, as an organization, on any public or political issue that does not directly involve the trail, or have the clear potential to do so. But H.R. 1349 clearly does have the potential to impact our trail as it would clear the way for Forest Service officials to permit mountain bikes in officially designated Wilderness Areas. As Bob noted, "The BMT passes through the Cohutta, Big Frog, Little Frog, Citico Creek and Joyce Kilmer/Slickrock Designated Wilderness Areas. In addition the BMT passes through the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area and the Smoky Mountains National Park both of which are managed as wilderness. In fact, almost 50% of the BMT is in areas 'managed as wilderness.' "

There's more. It's not just the geography of our trail; it's the history of it too. The BMTA, the Wilderness movement and the Wilderness Act of 1964, which H.R. 1349 proposes to alter, have a long and special relationship. After all, **Benton MacKaye**, after whom our trail is named, was also a founding member, in 1935, of the Wilderness Society. Moreover, when the BMTA was itself established in 1980, our founders were acting largely because they believed the AT had become so busy and popular that its users no longer enjoyed the truly natural and solitary hiking experience those founders thought so appealing. The first president of the BMTA, **Randy Snodgrass**, was in fact the Southeast Regional Director of the Wilderness Society. One of those founders, **George Owen**, is of course still active on the BMTA Board. George reminds us roughly four times a year (which is to say at every board meeting he attends...!) that **the reason for the BMT's existence, historically, is precisely to provide such a solitary, restorative backcountry experience.**

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This history was much in mind as I circulated the ATC advocacy materials to the board for comment. Several board members quickly supported the ATC's "Contact your Congressman" approach. But then things got more complicated. **Barry Allen** offered a lengthy comment that I think caught everyone's eye. Here are some excerpts; the full text is linked below:

Barry Allen to the BMTA board, Jan. 14, 2018 (excerpts)

*In 1964, the Wilderness Act included 9 million acres of federally designated Wilderness Lands. Today, there are over 100 million acres of Wilderness Lands. **And any new wilderness designations get screaming opposition from the biking community because it immediately takes areas that were once open to bikes and eliminates these areas altogether. And honestly, I don't blame them for opposing new wilderness areas.** If I were a biker, I would oppose any new Wilderness designation as well. One of the common arguments we all make is that there are plenty of areas bikers can go outside of Wilderness Lands. Well, there are about 100 million acres of fewer opportunities for bikers than there were just 50 years ago.*

I personally feel that within the 100 million acres of Wilderness Lands, there are probably acres that could be re-opened to bikes – particularly in areas of the arid southwest, mid-west or west where public usage is very light and bikes cause no discernible damage. (Section omitted here. TK) But I don't want to approve a pig-in-a-poke with a generic bill – which could impact areas such as the Southern Appalachians (where rainfall is commonly more than 50 inches per year) much more than the arid desert southwest. So I would oppose HR 1349 – but probably for different reasons than many of you.

I just think these are public lands and we need to be able to compromise with other users when a valid argument comes along, especially if it is accompanied by the appropriate land use recommendations and impact studies.

Several board members responded to Barry's thoughts, **Rick Harris** among them. Rick included links to several articles of the controversy from *Outside* online magazine. The first of these quoted Michael Carroll, a senior director of the today's Wilderness Society to the effect that H.R 1349 was about a lot more than mountain bikes in Wilderness Areas. The bill was, Carroll suggested, "...yet another piece of legislation in a broader agenda to roll back protections on federal public lands and the environment. There's no other way to look at it."

A second *Outside* article sought to find common ground on the issue – and was modestly titled "An Eminently Reasonable Approach to MTB vs. Wilderness"! I found both *Outside* articles, despite their vastly different tone, highly informative and thought-provoking. In addition Rick provided a link to a blog entry on bikes in Wilderness from **Bill Hodge**, former BMTA Board member and current Executive Director of SAWS - the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards. Both of the *Outside* articles and Bill's interesting blog are included in the list of links below.

The more I read through these articles and comments, the more it seemed to me the discussion was something I wanted to share beyond our board. In addition to exploring the specific issue of bikes in Wilderness Areas, the exchanges provide a useful window on the complexities surrounding the multiple claims on our public lands, on the Forest Service's difficult role as manager of those lands, and on the mixed views on the benefits of Wilderness protection, even on our board. I hope you find the discussion as informative as I did.

Finally, I want to stress I do not mean that reading the information linked below should be a substitute for action. On the contrary, once you have read up on the subject a bit, **the BMTA Board asks that you let your elected Congressional Representative know of your feelings about continued protection against mountain bikes and other wheeled vehicles in Wilderness Areas.**

When you do, we encourage you to take a look at the documents below from the ATC. Whether you agree with the position the ATC recommends or not, these documents provide useful information on how to be an effective advocate. Especially useful is the list of Congressmen from AT states (including, obviously, GA, TN, & NC) and contact information for their individual legislative assistants.

Happy reading – and writing!

H.R. 1349 Reading List – items listed in the order mentioned above:

ATC description of the [content of H.R. 1349](#)

[ATC position statement on HR 1349](#) and suggestions for effective advocacy

ATC [list of Contacts](#) for Congressmen and their Legislative Assistants

Barry Allen's Jan. 14 [note to the BMTA board](#) (entire text)

Outside, Christopher Solomon [“Five Lies Being Used to Get Mountain Bikes in Wilderness”](#)

Outside, Marc Peruzzi, [“An Eminently Reasonable Take on MTB v. Wilderness”](#)

Bill Hodges blog – [“Keeping It Wild – The Mountain Bike Divide”](#)



Coker Creek Falls and BMT Section 14 Hike

by Clare Sullivan

Will we hike? Will we not? These were the calls and emails prior to our hike. Our first planned hike was cancelled due to a 90% chance of rain. The second scheduled hike was iffy due to single digit temperatures, snow and ice. After checking out FS Road 22 to the Falls we decided our vehicles would be successful. It was a 19 degree morning with snow all around when nine members and three guests shuttled from “The Pig” and Coker Creek Welcome Center to the trailhead at Coker Creek Falls parking lot.



Right to left:

Temperature 19 degrees! Rick Harris, Brenda Harris, Ed Sullivan, Linda Kryssing, Joe Kelly, Andy Meeks, Betty Sammis, Sue Robinson (face covered), Karleen Ferguson and Mary MacEachron. Missing was Darcy Douglas. Photo courtesy of Clare Sullivan.

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We hiked from the beautiful frozen series of seven stair-step cascading waterfalls to the John Muir Trail/BMT junction at the bridge, three miles away. As we hiked, the temperature increased to a lovely 42 degrees.



One of the seven frozen Coker Creek Cascading Falls.



Bridge over Coker Creek just before it flows into the Hiwassee River.

Lunch was at the long wooden trail bridge in a campsite at the edge of Coker Creek.

We began to shed our layers, crossed the creek and headed up the ridge over a gap where the BMT intersects with the Unicoi Mountain Trail.

There was a gentle ascent for two miles to the ridge.



Beautiful views of the Hiwassee River and Starr Mountain could be seen from the ridgeline.

Darcy Douglas shared her Christmas chocolates with all who needed a little boost at our rest stops. Thank you Darcy!

The trail then descended a mile to the Hwy 68 parking lot. It was a refreshing BMT first hike of 7.5 miles for 2018.

We were glad to welcome new member, Andy Meeks. Hope Andy joins us for more hikes and maintenance trips!

Temperature 42 degrees, walking the ridgeline on Unicoi Mountain, Section 14 BMT.



A stunning view of Starr Mountain from Unicoi Mountain (BMT Section 14).

TIME IS RUNNING OUT!!!

by Darcy Douglas



Dues are Due!!

If you haven't renewed your dues for 2018, please do so now. In the not too distant future, those who haven't renewed will no longer be receiving communications from the club, such as the newsletter and emails with timely information that won't wait for the newsletter. More importantly, to have the privilege of maintaining your own section of trail, you need to have a current membership. So you see, it's in your best interest, especially at our low rates compared to some other groups, to just send in those dues! You can do this with PayPal on the BMTA.org website, or send a check with your written form, also accessed at bmta.org.

If you aren't sure you've renewed, or just have questions, please call me at 404-431-3614 or email me at [bmtadarcy AT yahoo.com](mailto:bmtadarcy@yahoo.com).

Park and Hike?

Photo by Mike Pilvinsky



How not to park your car on a Forest Service Road 58 enroute to Three Forks. Found by Mike Pilvinsky, Ken Cissna and Gilbert Treadwell.

January Work Trip

By Barry Allen with photos courtesy of Clare Sullivan

Pulitzer prize-winner Edward Albee was once quoted as saying “dashed hopes and good intentions – good, better, best, bested.” As I was struggling to finish Fall Branch Falls, for whatever reason, this long forgotten quote came to mind. After all, I had good intentions of finishing Fall Branch Falls in December.....but my hopes were dashed by Mother Nature as she saw fit to drop eight inches of snow on most of North Georgia. By January my intentions were resolute: we were going to finish Fall Branch Falls come hell or high water. Two years and nine months was long enough to fool around with any half-mile section of trail – no matter how hard. Good, better, best and bested! The weather worked out, the volunteers turned out, the plan seemed to pan out and lunch at the Pink Pig was not to be bested.

On this morning, we had two big jobs to finish before we could call the re-route done. The first job was to complete the steps down to the old trail from the new trail. Everyone helped carry 6x6 timbers up to the falls (another hardship!). Then Ed Sullivan, Mark Yost, Daina Plitkins, Dara Denning, Dave Ricker and Mike Kovitch took on the task of finishing step construction. The team did an exceptional job working timbers through a hard switchback and up the last few feet of embankment. The final count is 38 steps over two years, most involving sledge-hammer, rock bar and pick ax. Mike Kovitch, Dave Ricker, Mark Yost and a few others put in many hours over these years to get the steps to where they are today. Thanks to you all! You did a great job!



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The second big job for the day was to finish digging new tread connecting the parking area with the new trail. We intentionally left off 70-80 feet of trail nearest the parking area until the steps were completed at the other end. Phil and Debra Guhl, Russ Johnson, Bob Ruby, Sue Ricker, Darcy Douglas, Steven Pruett, Charlie Cleneay, and Ben Yaun took on this task, wrapping up the new trail by early afternoon. ***It looks great!*** Thanks guys! And by the way, Russ, Darcy and Debra put together a chain-saw team and removed several trees from the trail later in the day. Darcy even returned a week later to blaze the new trail. **What a woman!**



With the two big tasks manned, we next turned to additional work that had been planned last December. George Owen hiked well past the Falls, marking water diversions for a third team to clean or install. The water diversion team was led by Ken Cissna and was ‘manned’ by Clare Sullivan, Dave West, Dale Clark, Jeff DePaola, and Frank Forehand. They left some fine looking water diversions for everyone to admire. Thanks team!

The portion of the day not to be bested was, of course, the *END* of the day. Rather than a dedication or a ribbon cutting, we retired to the Pink Pig for some cobbler. Twenty-plus volunteers showed up to partake in some fine dining out of the wind and cold. BBQ, ice tea and, yes, dessert, ended the day and the long suffering re-route at Fall Branch Falls! One Thousand Seven Hundred and Fourteen hours of BMTA volunteer work – not including Forest Service time or Youth Conservation Corps time. Over 2500 hours -- if we tally everything -- to build a half mile of trail.

Wow! I think the Peace Corps used to say, “the toughest job you’ll ever love.” Isn’t that the truth.

THANKS TO YOU ALL!!



FEBRUARY WORK TRIP ANNOUNCEMENT

by Barry Allen

- ◆ **Where:** Section 7, Sisson Property, private lands
- ◆ **When:** Saturday, February 10, 2018, 9:00 AM
- ◆ **Meet:** The Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge at 8:00 or the Craddock Center Parking area (drive before Joanne Sisson just off 515).
- ◆ **Plan for the Day:** General work date to include tree removal, water diversion work, and installation of vertical 6x6's with blazes to mark confusing areas of the trail.
- ◆ **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](mailto:bmtabarry@gmail.com) or 770-294-7384

Since there is some level of uncertainty on whether there will be a government shutdown on February 8, we will schedule our February work day on the private lands of Section 7. (Typically, work is not allowed in the National Forest while the government is on shutdown.)

For February 10, we'll need at least one saw crew to remove trees from a couple of locations on Section 7. We also plan to install vertical 6x6's marked with white diamonds to help with several confusing areas on the Sisson Property. To fill out the day, we will clean water diversions and try to correct the tread in some heavily eroded areas.

As always, please call or e-mail me with your attendance so I can better plan the work and the tools!



Section 7 decorated in snow!

Last Chance for Half Price!

By Ken Cissna Hiking Director

Last reminder: It is now past time to sign up for one of the best hikes you're likely to do this year: An overnight trip to the Len Foote Hike Inn. You get two great days of hiking, wonderful meals, hot showers, and best of all, it's **half price**.

Members of the BMTA can enjoy a *half price* winter outing to the **beautiful Len Foote Hike Inn**, Georgia's **extraordinary backcountry lodge**. Our dates this year are February 27-28. The hike is 5.1 miles of moderate difficulty. This opportunity is exclusively for BMTA members. You may invite a guest as long as he or she stays in your room (two bunkbeds per room). Only 20 rooms are available so make your reservation *now*.

For reservations, contact the Hiking Director to get the BMTA code. Then, go to <http://hike-inn.com/reservations/>. Cost (including tax) is about \$70 for one person in a room and \$100 for two sharing a room. Their superb dinner and breakfast are included in the price. The hot showers are wonderful and the rooms are heated.

For information about the Len Foote Hike Inn, go to <http://hike-inn.com/>. Space is limited.

For further information about our hike, including the half price code, contact the Hiking Director, Ken Cissna, by email at [kcissna AT usf.edu](mailto:kcissna@usf.edu) or by calling 706-636-1741.



Amicalola Falls, where the hike begins.

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 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 couple of months are listed below. Many people love winter hiking best of all, with cooler weather and long distance views. More hikes will be forthcoming, so check the Activities Calendar of the website and next month’s newsletter for updates. Enjoy.

February, 2018

February 6 (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 safe and enjoyable hiking. Later in the Spring, BMTA will conduct one or more 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>.

February 7 (Wednesday) BMT Kimsey Highway from Dry Gap to Thunder Rock Campground.

5.7 miles, moderate, mostly downhill. Long shuttle. Possibility of doing a “key exchange” if enough sign up. Spectacular hike mostly along a ridge. Kimsey “Highway” is a historic Indian Trail.

Contact Hike Leader Tim Holby 828-361-4205.

February 17 (Saturday) Wagon Train Trail – Brasstown Bald. Co-sponsored with Georgia Forest Watch

5 miles, easy-moderate. 2 miles of gentle downhill to the overlook and back, plus up to the tower if we’re feeling like that. Besides the views, we’ll be hoping for the spectacular ice formations on the trailside cliffs (if temperatures cooperate).

Contact hike leaders Sue Harmon of GFW suepharmon AT gmail.com or 770-540-3672 or Ken Cissna of BMTA at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741.

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February 27-28 (Tuesday-Wednesday) Overnight trip to Hike Inn.

5.1 miles, moderate each day. BMTA members only.

For more details, contact hike leader Ken Cissna at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741 as well as the article on page in this newsletter.

March, 2018**March 3-4 (Saturday and Sunday) Beginning Backpack Hike on Amadahy Trail.**

2 miles easy each day. Camping on the shore of Carter's Lake. A chance to put into practice what you learned at the BMTA Beginning Backpacking class in February.

Contact hike leader Mike Pilvinsky at mikepilvinsky AT hotmail.com.

March 24 (Saturday) Boling Park/Etowah River.

5-7 miles, moderate. This will be mostly different trails than we enjoyed last year.

Contact hike leader Howard Baggett at howardeb AT windstream.net.

March 30 (Friday) Green Mountain Trail in Aska System Trails.

4 miles, easy, with moderate elevation gain and loss. Good views of Lake Blue Ridge. Short shuttle.

For further information, contact hike leader Hank Baudet at 706-946-4318 or Geezer95 AT gmail.com.

April, 2018**April 7 (Saturday) BMT Section 4a from Skeenah Gap to Payne Gap and back.**

4.4 miles, moderate. An opportunity to hike with the section's trail maintainer and amateur geologist (trail name "Rockman") as you identify trees, flowers, birds, and rocks

Contact Gilbert Treadwell at gilcraft AT etcmail.com or 404-660-4551

April 16 (Monday) Goforth Creek Trail.

3 miles, easy. In and out. Leisurely hike along a scenic creek.

Contact Hike Leader Hank Baudet at geezer95 AT gmail.com or 706-946-4318



The March Newsletter Deadline is February 28, 2018 — Thank you!!