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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



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President's Column

“Not all who wander are lost.” Henry David Thoreau

Mr. Thoreau was a very quotable essayist/philosopher. But he forgot to add that some who wander, **ARE** lost, or at least not exactly sure where they are.

I have worked and hiked every mile of trail on the Benton MacKaye EXCEPT for the Smoky Mountains and the last 25 miles leading into the Smokies. When one of these sections of trail appears on the monthly work list, I make every attempt to attend. In April, when a section in the Slickrock Wilderness was identified as needing a work trip, I jumped on the opportunity. Then two miles into a six mile effort, I somehow got off the main trail – leading two other hapless BMTA members along in my footsteps. The three of us spent a very memorable afternoon hiking a big loop along the Stratton Bald Trail, the Haoe Lead Trail, the Slickrock Creek Trail and the Big Fat Trail until we emerged from the wilderness at Big Fat Gap just before dark.

For those unfamiliar with the BMT in the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Creek Wilderness area, the BMT uses parts of several wilderness trails to navigate a route from Stratton Bald to Yellowhammer Gap and then on to the Tapoco Lodge area. Unfortunately, the Slickrock Creek Trail and the Big Fat Trail are not among the trails used on the BMT. *At least until I made use of them for an afternoon of wandering.* The most memorable days spent in the woods are always when things don't go according to plan. In retrospect, these experiences are a source of great memories, even though many people would not voluntarily repeat the experience. Been there, done that.

In wilderness areas trail conditions can be more than bad. They can be discouraging, even disheartening, to those who are unprepared. When our small group took the Slickrock Creek Trail by mistake, we were rewarded with views and trail-side plant life the like of which I have never seen on other sections of trail. The high elevation mosses and lichens provided a dense and continuous border to a narrow, rocky trail, giving it the appearance of a path through an underwater reef of sponge corals. Unfortunately, as the Slickrock Creek Trail steadily descended into very remote wilderness, tree removal was almost non-existent. In one especially bad area, we spent well over an hour picking a way through just over a quarter-mile of trail. This area is especially hard to reach and even harder to work. With volunteers at a premium in the area, I doubt this trail will improve in the near term. While the Slickrock Creek Trail is not part of the BMT, it offers parallels to our trail when dealing with the planning of maintenance in remote areas.

Continued next page

The overall issue is that problems must be worked or they just get worse. No one will long make a trail a destination point if the better part of a hike is spent crawling over, under and around deadfall. One three mile section of the Slickrock Creek Trail took our group over five hours to navigate. While I don't believe any area of the BMT has this type of work backlog, I know some of our wilderness areas have come close in the past. To handle specific areas such as the top of Big Frog Mountain and the Joyce Kilmer/Slickrock Creek Wilderness, we need to plan one or two annual overnight work events. Long term, I would love to make occasional overnight trips a fun and productive part of our trail work routine; eventually I want to help out on other wilderness trails, like the Slickrock Creek trail, that adjoin the BMT. (We currently have one overnight trip planned for 2019 -- working Big Frog Mountain from Double Spring Gap).

As you finish the Presidents' Column this month, please take a couple of thoughts with you on the trail: First and most importantly, remember to be prepared for things you don't expect while hiking any trail – especially a trail in wilderness. Absolute minimum preparation includes map, water filter, first aid kit, a bit of extra food and matches. In my case, a map didn't keep us from taking a wrong trail, but it helped navigate adjoining trails to get to an eventual destination. Second, attitude is everything. In cases where a hike or a work trip has turned into a longer ordeal than planned, I have always been blessed with companions who have maintained a positive outlook. This makes all the difference.

Till next month, enjoy your time on the trail. And join us on a work day, outreach event or hike as we strive to make the BMT the finest mid distance hiking trail in the nation.

Tennessee Work Trip

by John Zardis

Thanks to all of the 15 folks that came out for our Tennessee work trip on Saturday, April 27. We cleared Sections 18a, 18b, 18c and 18d in our group trip and we had a planning hike on Section 14a to repair tread damage with Gray Buckles of the FS.

It was a very long day with most of us not off the trail until after 4 pm with a long ride home still ahead. Once again the BMTA volunteers performed above and beyond.

In an attempt to cover seven miles of the BMT as well as 1.4 miles of the Wolf Laurel Trail (a feeder trail to the BMT), we broke up into three groups. This was probably a bit too ambitious, but we did log out all sections of trails, none of which have full time maintainers. We also brushed out about four miles of the trail. About five of the miles are in wilderness so it was crosscut and hand saws as well as sling blades for two of the groups. We saw about 20 people enjoying the trail during the day, a lot of them at Bob Bald or heading to the Hangover so it was very gratifying to see that all the hard work was being utilized by the general public. So once again, thanks to everyone for a long hard day of work.

Our next planned work day is May 25 on Section 19c. This section of the BMT is located in northern Tennessee near the Fontana Lodge in North Carolina – about an hour and 45 minute drive from the Home Depot in Blue Ridge. It is a section of trail that many folks haven't been on yet so hopefully we can entice a large group again because there are about 19 trees down over 4.8 miles of trail. For some of our folks coming in from a long distance, this is a nice opportunity for a long weekend near, or in, the Smokies.

I'll send out more details as we make the final plans for the trip. Keep May 25 open on your calendar if you want to pitch in!

March 23 Tennessee Work Trip

by John Zardis

We had a great day on Section 12c and about one mile of 12b. We did both corrective and preventive work on the trail. Section 12c was the worst section in the Tennessee portion of the BMT with a major blowdown on the Piney Creek that was stacked seven trees high and there were several very poor sections of tread.

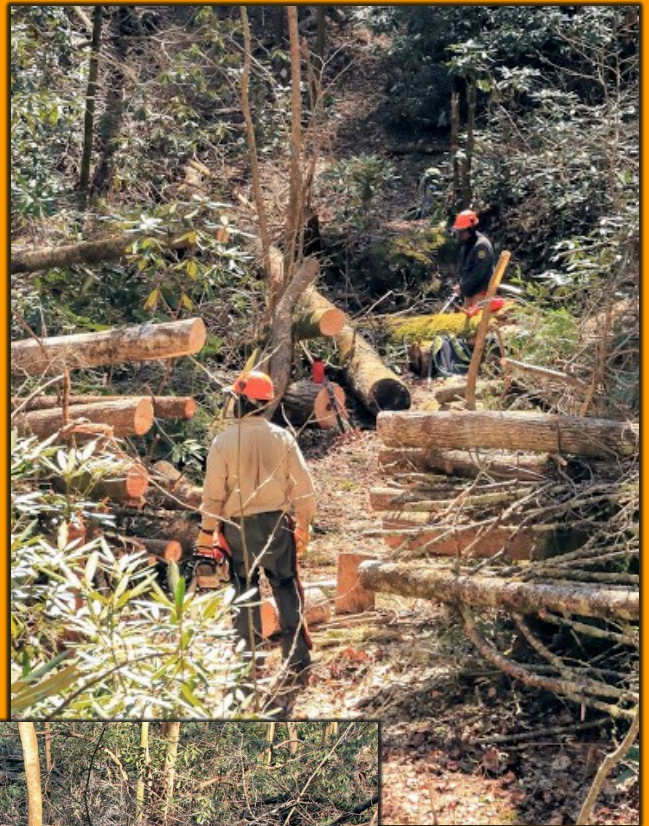
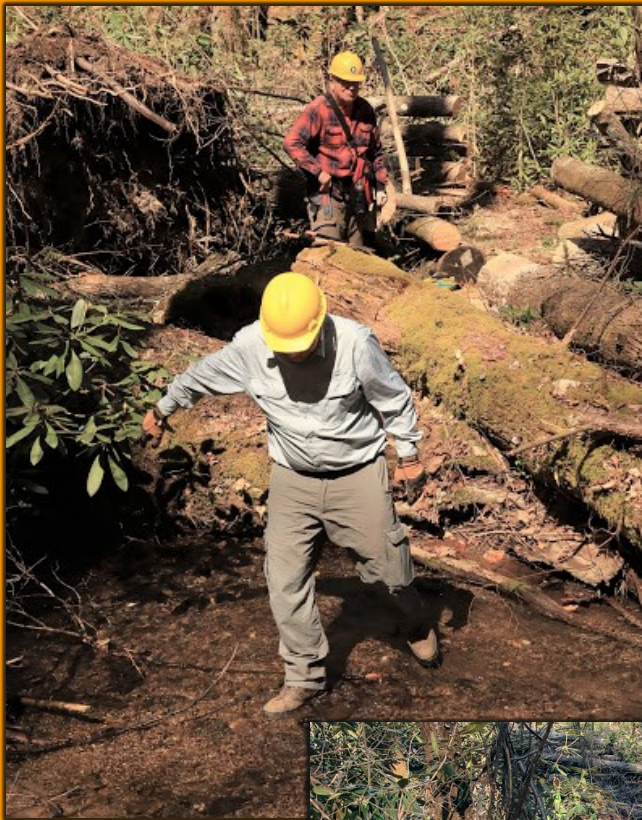
We were able to clear the entire trail of logs, including up to the power lines on 12b, brush out all of 12c and did significant tread improvements on 12c. On the preventive side we removed many smaller trees that had encroached on our corridor.

Thanks very much to the 21 people participating, including first timer Russ Ivey, who got right into the dirt along with Barry Allen, Ken Cissna, Rob Herman, Mike Kovitch, Tom Sewell, Phyllis and Ken Jones, James Anderson, Ed Sullivan, Ben Yaun, Sue and Dave Ricker, Frank Forehand, Boe Rudder, David Watkins, Brenda and Richard Harris, Ralph Van Pelt and Zoe Zardis.

Beer and burgers at the Flip Flop were a perfect way to end a very productive and pretty day on the trail!



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A SPECIAL INVITE TO YOU

by George Owen

Wilderness Wildlife Week, May 7-11; Fun, Learning, Hikes in the Smokies!

Every year now for over a quarter century thousands have gathered in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, for the annual Wilderness Wildlife Week. Many of these are hikers from the three main trail clubs here in the mountains of Northern Georgia and surrounding areas. You are now invited to become part of this great event at the Pigeon Forge LeConte Center, May 7-11 (Tuesday-Saturday) or any part thereof.

For the first time this May there are two workshops with a Benton MacKaye Trail Association connection. Ron Tipton, long-time BMTA member and immediate past executive director of the National Appalachian Trail Conservancy, will present a program on opening day, May 7, entitled "The Appalachian Trail: Today & Tomorrow," from 3-4 p.m. This is followed by BMTAer George Owen's program in the same room, 4:30-5:30, entitled "Benton MacKaye Trail: the Smokies' 93-Mile Trail - What and Where Is It?" This is the first time at Wilderness Wildlife Week a program has been presented on the BMT. Both programs are in the LeConte Center, the Pigeon Forge's huge new conference and convention center.

Following opening day, there are hikes as well as workshops and programs every day - hikes in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. These are listed in some detail in the long schedule on the website (access information below). Each hike is free, with two guides and they are provided with free bus transportation to and from trailheads. Several hikes of varying difficulty from easy to strenuous are available daily. Signups for hikes occur later each afternoon in advance of each hike - be sure to read the instructions about that on the website.

BMTAers are especially invited to some hikes our own George Owen is leading - to Charlie's Bunion on the Appalachian Trail (Wednesday) with Ron Tipton as co-leader - and to hikes other days that have Ron's wife Rita as co-leader. BMTAer Tom Sewell will also be helping with these hikes.

Your only cost for this 29th great annual event is your lodging, meals and travel to and from Pigeon Forge.

Now, to access further detailed information on this week simply look under "Search" go to "Wilderness Wildlife Week - 2019" or www.mypigeonforge.com/event/wilderness-wildlife-week - click on the item below the opening picture saying "view and download 2019 Wilderness Wildlife Program Guide" and find the basic information you need, including workshops, programs, hikes - full schedule details. NOTE: Hikes are listed under "Excursions."

So come and join in on this wonderful annual event with people from around America - attend all or part of it. Also many of us from the BMTA and sister hiking clubs in our area often enjoy going out to evening dinner in small groups after hikes or programs.

If you need more information on Wilderness Wildlife Week, feel free to contact either of these two BMTAers who have been involved there for years: George Owen or Darcy Douglas.

Celebrate National Trails Day 2019 Vogel State Park, Pavilion #2 June 1, 2019

Please select from the three events below that take place between 9 am and noon to participate in. Meet your group in the parking lot beside the lake.

Note: Luncheon attendees – please bring a covered dish to share.

- 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Trail work on the Bear Hair Trail**
Lawson Herron and Dayton Miller – Leaders
- 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. **Sawyer Contest and Search and Rescue Demonstration**
Robert Collins – Sawing Contest Leader
Ken Hughey – Search and Rescue Leader
- 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Family Friendly Hike**
George Owen – Leader
- 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. **Covered Dish Luncheon and Program**
Welcome to Vogel
Jack Becker – Vogel State Park Manager
Recognition of Groups – Bill Bryant**
AT Thru-hiker Short stories – Brent Binion
Door Prize Drawings
- 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. **Club – Specific Meetings as Needed**
GATC Prospective Member Orientation
- 1:30 p.m. – Closing **Enjoy the Outdoors!**

Thanks to participating hiking clubs and Joe Boone and Dayton Miller for organizing National Trails Day 2019 and to Melanie Spamer for organizing the luncheon. **Special recognition to Andy Baker, USFS District Ranger BRRD; Jay Dement GATC President; Barry Allen, BMTA President; Evelyn Yarns MHH President; and Bill Hodge, SAWS. Thank you to the members of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC), the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA), Mountain High Hikers (MHH), and Georgia Forest Watch (GFW).



Make Your Reservations Now for BMTA's 2019 Annual Meeting at Fontana Village in North Carolina November 1 -3

Nestled in the majestic mountains of North Carolina, Fontana Village is the perfect venue for BMTA's 2019 Annual Meeting ... access to the BMT is just across the parking lot from the lodge and access is also close to many of the cabins.

Lots of great hikes are on the docket ... the Halloween Cemetery Hike, Yellow Creek Ridge, Bear Pen Gap with even a boat ride and hike to mention a few! See [page 9](#) for details.

BMTAers will gather in the Bears Den for the traditional Friday Evening Social featuring complimentary hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar.

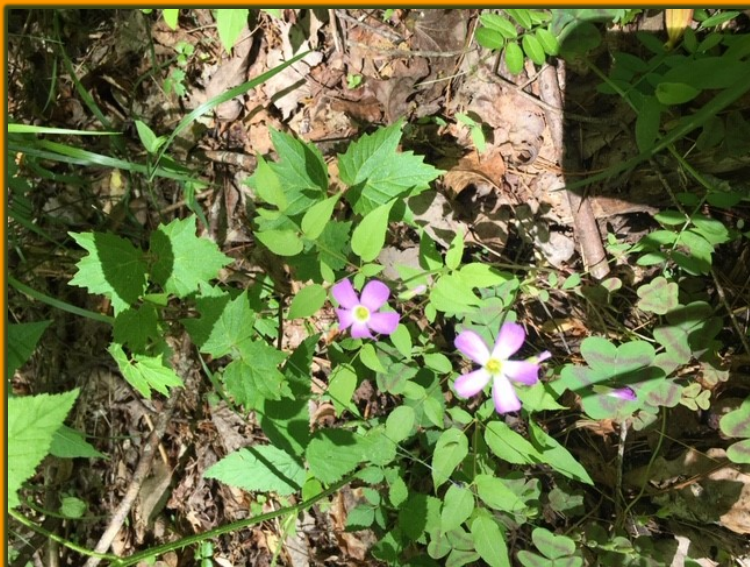
The Annual Meeting and Awards Banquet will be held Saturday evening in the Carolina Room. Events will include the election of Directors and, of course, the Annual Awards presentations ... the 30 Hour T-Shirts, the new 100 Hour Club Jackets as well as the prestigious Maintainer of the Year and Volunteer of the Year awards.

Wehrloom Honey, the Fontana Dam Visitor's Center and Yellow Branch Cheese & Pottery are a few of the non-hiking activities available.

Plan to come early and stay late! Hikes begin Thursday, October 31 and run through Sunday, November 3. Make your reservations now!

Call Fontana Village at 828-498-2211. To receive your discount, mention the Benton MacKaye Trail Association.

If you need additional information / have any questions, please contact Joy Forehand, jwfbgra@gmail.com.



BMTA's 2019 Annual Meeting Nov. 1 – 3
Fontana Village Lodge, North Carolina
 Watch for more details in future BMTA Newsletters!

Hike the BMT

- Halloween Hike
- Bear Pen Gap
- Yellow Creek Falls

Non Hiking Tours

- Fontana Dam Visitor's Center
- Wehrloom Honey
- Yellow Branch Cheese & Pottery



COME EARLY / STAY LATE
SPECIAL RATE APPLIES TO YOUR ENTIRE STAY!
 Lodge Rooms, Cabins and Campsites



Friday Nite Social

- Complimentary Hors d'Oeuvres
- Cash Bar

BMTA's Annual Meeting

- Awards Banquet
- Featured Speaker
- And More!



For reservations call **828-498-2211**.
 To receive your discount -
Mention the Benton MacKaye Trail Association!



Hikes are planned for Oct 31 — Nov 3. Exact dates & times to be announced.

Halloween Hike

5 Miles / Easy

Halloween Cemetery Hike. Visit two old cemeteries in the National Park. Easy gravel road walk with views.

Nichols Cove

6 Miles / Moderate

Follow the BMT from Old Field Gap Road thru Nichols Cove to Tapoco Lodge.

Boat Trip & Hike

5 Miles / Moderate

Take Fontana Ferry to North Shore of lake. Visit old cemeteries and hike over Welch Ridge to Proctor, then boat back.

Bear Pen Gap

2 Miles / Moderate

Old Field Gap Road to Tapoco Lodge. Lunch at the Lodge, then Depart for home. Or additional hike after lunch.

Hangover Hike

5.2 Miles / Strenuous

Hike from Big Fat Gap to the Hangover, spectacular view.

Yellow Creek Ridge

8 Miles / Strenuous

Follow the BMT from Old Field Gap Road over the Yellow Creek Ridge to Fontana Village.

Yellow Creek Falls

3/4 Miles / Easy

Hike to Yellow Creek Falls and back.

Marina Stroll

3 Miles / Easy

Follow the BMT from Fontana Village to the AT and the Fontana Marina.

Twenty Mile

3.2 Miles / Easy

Hike in the National Park up Twenty Mile Creek, etc. Many variations Possible.

Twenty Mile Loop

7.6 Miles / Moderate

Loop Trail with 1,200 foot elevation gain (and loss).



For reservations call 828-498-2211.
To receive your discount
Mention the Benton MacKaye Trail Association!

April Membership Report

by Darcy Douglas

During March (and they are still pouring in as I write this) I've processed nearly 100 memberships, some new, some renewals. It's been exciting! The good news is that very soon we will have an email system not tied to the website so that everyone will get their notifications, as well as the newsletter. It's been challenging to have our website block more and more addresses the last few years. Our membership is on a calendar year, so memberships expire at the end of December. It is good to have so many renewals this time! Thank you!!!! **We also have a new Corporate member!** The owner of both **Hiwassee Whitewater Center** and **Flip Flop Burgers**, found in Reliance, Tennessee, right beside the Benton MacKaye Trail, has joined us!

His websites are: <https://www.hiwasseewhitewater.com/> and <https://www.flipflopburgers.com/>.

They have a presence on Facebook, also. Welcome, Flip Flop Burgers and Hiwassee Whitewater Center!!!

Other Corporate members who have renewed so far include:

- **Tapoco Lodge** of Robbinsville, North Carolina
- **Blue Jeans Pizza and Pasta Factory** of Blue Ridge, Georgia
- **Starr Mountain Outfitters** of Etowah, Tennessee

We hope you will use the services of all of these members – they are actually all pretty awesome!!! Please remember your dues go toward trail maintenance and the equipment used to maintain the trail, so this is a worthy cause! We can't do it without the manpower, but we can't do it without the funds, either! THANK YOU FOR YOUR MEMBERSHIP!!!!

Cartecay Loop Trail

by Ken Cissna



Mike Pilvinsky (left) and Paul Knowles (right) keeping Darcy Douglas upright—or is it the other way around?

Four of us defied the previous day's forecast and committed to at least staying open to hiking on Monday, April 8th, still weather permitting, of course. By 7am, the forecast moved the rain and storms to afternoon so we were on the Cartecay Loop Trail as soon as we could be sure the turkey hunters had cleared out. The weather was mostly cloudy but the sun peaked through several times and the rain held off until the last ten minutes (and was pretty much over before I could get my rain jacket on).

The weather scared off some, but BMTA members Mike Pilvinsky and Darcy Douglas, along with guest Paul Knowles, joined hike leader Ken Cissna for this four-mile easy to moderate trail, which is mostly within sight or sound of the Cartecay River.

April Blazing Report

by Darcy Douglas

It's been a bit over a year now that we have had one group of trained individuals providing the blazing for the Benton MacKaye Trail. The purpose of this change from many individuals painting is that the blazes are more consistent. We have seen varieties of size, shape, color, frequency and more over the years. This can be quite confusing for the unfamiliar hiker, especially the novice hiker. In addition, it looks quite unprofessional. Having just a few skilled and knowledgeable people do this task has added a great deal of quality to the blazing on the trail. The special few were advised NOT to do it all this first year as that would result in all needing refreshing at the same time. This would leave them with nothing to do in the interim years. This why there are still places needing improvement. It's part of the plan!

Most of the Blaze Crew have adopted sections of trail, perhaps one you maintain! Others prefer to work on sections as I receive reports of need.

There are temperature and other weather issues with painting which meant we didn't get much done during the winter months, but things have picked back up. **Boe Rudder** is now part of our team. **Harry and Betty Ann Archer** will be by the time you are reading this. Welcome to all three of you!

If you attended the annual meeting last November, you might have noticed the new hats for the blaze team - these are a special and hard-working group of people, and they deserve this reward!

If YOU wish to consider being part of the Blaze Crew of the BMTA, please contact me and we can discuss what is involved!

BLAZE CREW MEMBERS AS OF TODAY: Boe Rudder, Clare Sullivan, Kim Murrell, David Lawrence, Janice Lawrence, Cheryl Kacher, Ken Cissna, Cynthia Tehan, Ellie Doughty, Judy Wade, Jason Murrell, Keith Mertz and Janie Hitchcock.

DeSoto Falls Viewing Platform Re-Opened!

by Ben Yaun

In 2017 Hurricane Irma destroyed the famous DeSoto Falls viewing platform along Frogtown Creek in Lumpkin County, Georgia. The damaged deck was removed in the spring of 2018 and the trail remained open without the deck.

Thanks to emergency funding from the Park Service, the deck rebuilding project was planned in the fall of 2018. Implementation began March 4, 2019, by the Forest Service in partnership with the U.S. Army Rangers from Camp Merrill, Mountain High Hikers, Benton MacKaye Trail Association, Georgia Appalachian Trail Club and other partners. Experts from Camp Merrill set up a rope suspension system to transport 8,000 pounds of lumber from the trailhead, across the creek, down a half mile of trail and up to the base of the waterfall. Nearly 20 volunteers worked together to move all the materials to the project site accomplishing an enormous amount of work in a short time.

Battling cold weather and lots of rain, construction began later that week. The substructure was complete in three days, the deck was laid the next week and handrails and structural bracing were finished on March 18.

This is a very popular area for weekend forest visitors and while there is still a lot of work to do on the trail, the recreation area provides a high quality opportunity to visit these waterfalls.

BMTA at the Ocovassee Outdoor Festival

by Ben Yaun

If you ever wanted to get first-hand information or advice from hiking, biking, camping, kayaking and canoeing experts about where to go hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, backpacking, camping, kayaking – or – just curious about identifying a certain wildflowers or edible plants . . .

This year's 6th Annual Ocovassee Outdoor Festival, held April 6 at Hiwassee State Park in Delano, Tennessee, was the place you wanted to be.

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) participated in this year's event and had the opportunity to experience the many wonderful volunteers who were on hand to help attendees of this year's Ocovassee Outdoor Festival.

The festival is designed to get outdoor enthusiasts geared up for spring and excited about exploring the great outdoors including the BMT.

The BMTA was on hand with our traveling *"Event Tent"* and BMTA volunteers shared information with attendees about our organization and membership opportunities with the **BMTA**.

The result – BMTA gained two new members and several signed up as interested in Trail Maintenance and Hiking!

Special Thanks to:

*Jeff DePaola
Ruth Pannell
Mason Boring / SAWS
Clayton Pannell
Ben Yaun*



Good Bye Tax Season, Hello Hemp Top

by Tom Sewell



Tom Sewell, Carolyn Sewell, Fritz Gilbert, Evelyn Yarns, Gilbert Treadwell and Mike Pilvinsky.

On April 15th, Tom Sewell and five other hikers celebrated the end of tax filing season by “Taking a Hike.”

We began the day at Dally Gap on the Hemp Top Trail and headed to Spanish Oaks where we joined the BMT and continued to the old site of the fire tower atop Hemp Top Mountain.

“Taking a Hike” left us with lasting impressions of spectacular views, coupled with wind and chill on a beautiful sunny day. Even the drive along USFS 22 from Watson Gap to Dally Gap offered us incredible vistas of the eastern side of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Big Frog, Rough Creek and Benton MacKaye Trails

by Ken Cissna

We’d had this hike scheduled in January of this year, but we’d had so much rain that Rough Creek was probably too high to cross so Tom Sewell led a different hike in the area. We put it back on the schedule for April 22nd. After meeting at the old Piggly Wiggly in Ducktown, dropping cars at Thunder Rock Campground and driving to the Big Frog Trailhead on FS 221, we began the hike traveling southbound on the Big Frog Trail. Fortunately, on this day, we didn’t have to climb Big Frog Mountain! Rather we turned onto the Rough Creek Trail and took it down to the BMT. The Rough Creek Trail had a lot of small and not so small blowdowns and could use a good quality maintenance day. Then we took the BMT back toward the north and down to the Campground. We were all either hiking in water hiking shoes or brought water shoes to change into so we had no troubles with the three stream crossings. Two large blowdowns that I’d reported to Ed and Clare Sullivan after the pre-hike only a week earlier (they are the maintainers of the last portion of the BMT that we were on) had **already been removed!** That BMTA maintenance is the best! Today’s hikers were all members, though some haven’t done too much hiking with us.



Dee Schondelmayre, Amy Cass, Jan Hitt, Evelin and Doug Yarns, Tom Sewell, and Andy Meeks.

A Bit of BMT History

by Dick Evans



If you hike the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) near Tapoco Lodge in North Carolina you will encounter the James F. Burchfield Trailhead. Who was James Burchfield and why was this trailhead named after him?

In 1921, when Benton MacKaye wrote his seminal treatise postulating an Appalachian Trail (AT) it captured the imagination of the public. Although some of his thoughts, like the "Townless Highway" and the "Highwayless Town" took some time to appear, his call for a hiking trail in the wilderness energized many folks to create such a trail. Even in the remote western end of North Carolina folks took up the banner and started building trails. As early as 1935, a section of trail, known as the Yellow Creek Mountain Trail (YCMT) was built to be designated as the AT.

The trail followed the ridge west to the only crossing of the Little Tennessee River in the area, the Cheoah Bridge, near the Cheoah Dam, then turned north into the area of the newly designated Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP). Fontana Dam had not yet been built so many of the small towns along the river still used a ferry to cross the river.

Due to World War II Fontana Dam was built in the early 1940's with a road across the top of the dam that was closed to the public. Not many people had any time to hike during the war. In 1947 the general route of the AT was under review since many sections were deemed too steep or difficult for most hikers and the YCMT was designated as one of those sections.

After consultation with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) the AT was rerouted to cross over Fontana Dam for access to the GSMNP and the remaining section of the YCMT was "demoted" to "just another trail." However, the story does not end there. Earl Schaffer, the first AT thru hiker, during his hike missed the new turn to Fontana Dam at what is now called Walker Gap and continued on the YCMT westward to what is now called Bear Pen Gap. Hearing vehicles in the valley below, he followed an old road to the Jenkins Store on Meadow Branch Road. Knowing he was supposed to cross a dam he asked where the dam was. He was unaware that most of the folks in the valley worked at the Cheoah Dam. That was the dam they thought he was referring to so they gave him directions to the Cheoah Bridge. He followed that route then crossed into the GSMNP and continued on. The story goes that he did not realize his mistake until after he completed his hike. When he repeated his hike several years later he finally found the correct routing in that area and did not repeat his mistake.

For many years usage of the trail and trail maintenance were fairly spotty. Later, a local fellow, Jim Burchfield, was hired by the US Forest Service to work as what would today be called a Trails Technician, the start of a 35 year career with that agency. As he worked his way through the various trails in the district, he fell in love with the mountains and later often said that God "had called him to be a caretaker of the mountains." He loved the views from the YCMT and within the Forest Service advocated that it not be "decommissioned" during various periodic reviews of trail usage.

During the 1970's, acting as Scoutmaster for the local Boy Scout Troop, he and "his boys" maintained the trail. Several sections of steps they constructed with locust logs can still be seen under accumulations of leaves and debris. Many of "his boys" went on to work with Alcoa and other groups in the area assisting in various work trips along the trail.

Continued next page

In 2003, future BMTA President Dick Evans was looking for a project after his retirement and joined the BMTA. He contacted Dr. Walt Cook, then BMT Director of Construction, about the location of the BMT in the Graham County area. Walt indicated that the BMT crossed Slickrock Creek in the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness then crossed the Cheoah Bridge following the Tennessee/North Carolina State line to Deals Gap. The route continued as a road walk south on Route 129 to Route 28, then eastward to enter the GSMNP at Twenty Mile Ranger Station. Walt added that this road walk was "less than ideal" but due to the remoteness of the area it was the best they could come up with at the time. He asked Dick to see if there was a better route. Thus began a nine year reroute of the BMT. Heavy traffic on the Route 129 Section of the roadwalk combined with no pedestrian area, created a big potential problem for hikers. About that time Dick made contact with Ernie Engman and together they took on the project of getting a better route for the trail in that area. Several years of exploratory hikes followed with BMTA luminaries such as Ken Jones, Rick Harris and many others making bushwhacking trips to try to find a better route. In December of 2013, Dick and Ernie set out to follow what was a line on the map from the Tapoco Lodge up Yellow Creek Ridge. They could not find anyone with knowledge of that trail and did not know what to expect other than heavy brush. After several hours of hard hiking they realized that the route they were following was actually a trail that just lacked maintenance. Returning with a blizzard about to hit, they felt this was a possible alternate to the existing route. In addition and a big consideration, was that the GSMNP was in the initial steps of implementing a mandatory camping permit system. This could create a huge problem for BMT hikers since few thru hikers could accurately predict exactly what days they might be in the GSMNP at the start of their hike. Fontana Village was in the process of establishing a kiosk to provide AT thru hikers with a location to get their permits that could be used by BMT hikers as well. Due to technological reasons Tapoco Lodge was unable to get Internet (at that time) and thus was unable to provide such a service.



In conversations with District Ranger Lauren Stull at Cheoah District, Dick learned that the YMCT did not need a NEPA Review since it had been kept on the formal list of trails due to Jim Burchfield's efforts. Her exact quote was, "Dick, if that route works (for the BMT), we need no approval, just start maintaining that trail."

Thirty-five groups and more than 80 folks toiled during a three month period to re-open the YCMT. The American Hiking Society called it, "the most important reroute in the country." Twenty-nine folks earned a hat by donating at least 40 hours to the effort. One was reserved and on July 11, 2014, it was presented to Jim Burchfield at the dedication of the trailhead named for him. Due to federal regulations, this designation had to be on private property. However, Alcoa, which owned the land across from Tapoco Lodge, graciously agreed, assisted by the fact that two of Jim's "boys" were at the time property managers for that fine company. Many other local folks who had been members of his Scout Troop attended the ceremony.

If Jim had not persisted in his efforts to keep the YCMT it is doubtful we could have gotten a NEPA approval for this route. His persistence eliminated a three mile road walk and preserved an historic, beautiful hike. Jim passed away at the end of March but is memorialized by the trailhead dedicated to him and his efforts. As a final point to wrap up the story, Jim's middle name was: "**Forester.**"

Trout Fest

by the Publicity Committee

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association's booth and inter-active crosscut was a popular stop at the Fourth Annual Trout Fest held April 27, 2019, in Blue Ridge.

People already familiar with the trail had numerous questions about where else they could go to access another section of such a wonderfully secluded and virtually private trail. Others not familiar with the BMT, learned about the trail's beginnings on Springer Mountain, the Swinging Bridge over the Toccoa River, the Brawley Fire Tower as well as BMTA hikes that are open to the public.

Everyone was amazed to learn what has been accomplished on our twice monthly work trips ... 25 trees taken out on one, 74 water diversions installed on another and much, much more.

BMTA's Inter-active Crosscut was a big hit with attendees attracting preschoolers, senior citizens, Blue Ridge Police Officers and even an Alabama bachelor party group ... for a grand total of 60 participants in the Crosscut!

Topping off the festivities, Smokey the Bear and Dairy Queen's Cone stopped by the booth to say "Hi".

Our thanks go out to our great team of booth volunteers: Ben Yaun, Jeff DePaola, Larry Dumas, Frank Forehand, Ralph Heller, Jane and Tom Keene, Mike Kovitch and Cary Page! Special thanks to BMTA's sawyers, Robert Collins and Bob Cowdrick who conducted the inter-active crosscut!



Georgia April Work Report

by Phil Guhl

April 13, 2019, the Saturday before tax day and guess how many folks came out to work the trail.... 29!!!!!! I cannot tell you the joy one feels when he/she gets up early, shows up at a worksite, then works alongside committed and passionate people such as these people! I am flabbergasted as I see the masses gather in preparation to sweat together in a unified manner to bring about beauty, preservation, exquisite presentation, wonderful...whatever, these individuals once again worked hard for the benefit of others. Thereby fulfilling our mantra, "...leaving a footpath for generations to follow."

All of the teams accomplished quite a bit and *everyone got off the trail safely*. Thank you for your service.

They logged, dug diversions, lopped back brush and replaced steps. *AND* when it was all done, they gorged themselves on the fruits of Sue Ricker's and Debra Guhl's labor. It was a great day in the woods.

The day started at The Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge. From there we headed to Skeenah Gap trailhead. One team was going to head up Rhodes Mountain, a second towards Payne Gap and a third team planned to saw out some blowdowns near Payne Gap. The Job Hazard Analysis and Safety Debriefing took place and all set out for their objectives.



Team Rhodes worked Section 3c replacing steps at the switchback: Barry "The Machine" Allen (lead), Shane Morrison, Patrick "Patman" Ward, Helen Ward, Taylor Oakley, Brian "Paul Bunyan" Trinkle, Bob Cowdrick and Dave Ricker.

This team transported/carried eight 4' long pressure treated 6x6s up the side of Rhodes Mountain from Skeenah Gap and then rebuilt the steps at the switchback. They used a modified wheelbarrow with two people pulling and one pushing. The members swapped out roles as fatigue set in; however, the wheelbarrow maintained a steady pace of two MPH on the ascent.

In addition to this, they toted digging tools, a sledge and rebar. They rested well that night. To aid in making the second trip up the mountain, Brian Trinkle shouldered one of the 6x6s and carried it up by himself. What are these people made of?? I must have set a solid example, huh? <cough, cough>



Team Payne worked Section 4a: Ben Yaun, Mike "Photoman" Kovitch, Butch Watson, Cary Page, Larry Dumas, David Watkins, Dale Clark, Frank Forehand, Tom Sewell, Carolyn Sewell, Russ Ivey, Ken Cissna, Steve Pruett, David Lankford, Janice Lankford and Phil Guhl (lead).

Team Payne worked from Skeenah Gap to Payne Gap de-berming a lengthy section of the trail and cleaning/installing 34 water diversions. Additionally, handsaw and lopper work was done to clear the path for hikers. Between tossing dirt and cutting a hole in the woods, these folks made the trail much better. Erosion control and safety for those enjoying a trek on the trail is the name of the game!

The Saw Crew was comprised of Gilbert Treadwell (sawyer), George Owen and Mike Pilvinsky.

I felt the saw crew had it easy. They were to only cut out a handful of trees, but wanted to be shuttled up near their objective. I felt this was unfair to the other teams, so I dropped them off a couple of miles away from where they intended to work (actually this was a mistake on my behalf), but after blazing through the woods, scurrying through many challenging thickets of Mountain Laurel, and climbing several strenuous hills...they found the trail, despite all of my efforts! Were their attitudes flailing at this point? Not at all! They got the job done and were jovial afterwards. These are the kind of people that make our association a great one to work with.



Team Lean Cuisine featured Sue Ricker and Debra Guhl.

Once again....what can be said? Despite Team Rhodes' cardio challenge, Team Payne's ability to throw dirt and clear brush or the Saw Crew's venture into the unknown, Sue and Debra knocked it out of the park and were successful in replenishing all of the burnt calories. These two never disappoint and continue to amaze all who were in attendance.

Upcoming Georgia Maintenance Events

by Phil Guhl

I want to ensure you have the opportunity to mark your calendars, so you don't inadvertently forget to set your alarm and hate yourself for not getting up on time to participate in some wonderful maintenance events...

- ♦ **May 10, 2019, Friday:** AT&T Community Day on the Benton MacKaye. This is the 5th Annual AT&T Community Day on the BMT. AT&T pays its employees to volunteer one day each year to lend a hand for a qualifying 501(c)3 organization...and we qualify! Hats off to the desk surfers, of which I am one, for leaving the comfort of the controlled environment of the office and spending the day helping maintain the trail we love. We will be working on Section 5. The day will start out at 8:00 AM at the Iron Bridge Café & General Store on Aska Road in Blue Ridge.
- ♦ **May 11, 2019, Saturday:** This is our regularly schedule maintenance work trip.....mark your calendars for the next three years, i.e., the second Saturday of every month. We will work a separate part of Section 5 as we continue our tour of Georgia. Come one, come all! We will start, again, at 8:00 AM at the Iron Bridge Café & General Store on Aska Road in Blue Ridge. I can't get enough of those Biscuits and Sausage Gravy...whew! I can taste them now!
- ♦ **May 25 and 26, 2019, Saturday and Sunday:** Rock Armoring Clinic. This is a training/working session on how to 'armor' a trail. Armoring is a technique used to make the trail more durable when used by bicycles and such. The BMT shares the tread with some horse and bike trails. Thus, this is a great opportunity to learn about the method and means to protect the trail. If you have an interest in participating in this clinic please let me know. FYI- the only downsides I can think of is this does conflict with the Tennessee Work Trip and with our festival booth at Arts in the Park in Blue Ridge.
- ♦ **June 1, 2019, Saturday: National Trails Day.** Get there a bit early to ensure you get a parking spot. Gathering place is at Pavilion #2 at Vogel State Park. The maintenance trip on Bear Hair Gap Trail, plus the Crosscut Sawing Contest will start at 9:00 AM. There is a full day of festivities. I look forward to you representing the BMTA and having a great time!
- ♦ **June 8, 2019, Saturday:** This would normally be the Georgia Work Trip, but due to National Trails Day the previous Saturday, I will give you a note from the head office to take it easy today. BUT should you be so inclined...we will be doing two things at Fall Branch Falls, Section 6b. First, we have the parts for two benches cut and ready to be installed. All we lack is carrying those pieces up, digging the holes and assembling them. Barry Allen will lead this effort. Second, we have been and most likely will continue doing some digging on future trips (water diversions, knicks, and side-hilling). To this end I will conduct a short workshop for those people who would like to learn more about properly digging water diversions. The plan is for me to dig a water diversion with instruction and then each participant will dig a diversion and receive feedback. In either case this will be a short, but productive and informational day.

Amazon Smile Benefits BMTA

If you are going to make purchases from Amazon please use this address: BMTA's unique link is <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/58-1428009>. If you do so, Amazon will direct a small share of your purchases to BMTA. A convenient way to do this is to click on the link and then bookmark that page on your toolbar or wherever you keep hiking links. **Thank you!**

Ascent of Mt. LeConte

by Ken Cissna

Twelve BMTA members and one guest were scheduled to stay at the Lodge at Mt. LeConte Thursday April 18th. Unfortunately, Tammie Smith, and George Owen and his son Bill weren't able to make it. The other ten of us — Rick and Brenda Harris, Phil and Debra Guhl, Mike Pilvinsky and his son Marc, Darcy Douglas, Gilbert Treadwell, guest Susan Childs, and yours truly — pressed on. We had a three-bedroom cabin that held us all nicely.

We met at Zoder's Motel in Gatlinburg the afternoon before the BIG CLIMB where we spent the night. After complimentary wine and cheese at Zoder's, we moved down the street for dinner at Smoky Mountain Trout House. Thursday morning, we split into two groups: Rick, Brenda, Phil, Debra and Darcy dropped a car at the Alum Cave parking lot and then drove to the parking lot at Newfound Gap where they walked a couple of miles of the Appalachian Trail before turning onto the Boulevard Trail for most of the trip to the Lodge. Mike, Marc, Gilbert, Susan and Ken drove to Alum Cave and walked up from there. The weather was gorgeous for the hike up the mountain. One of the highlights of this trip was getting to see the llamas packed and start their journey down the mountain. The llamas take the laundry to town and return it three days a week. Due to the weather, they cancelled the normal Wednesday and Friday trips and made just a single one on Thursday.

Unfortunately, the llamas weren't the only ones that knew it wouldn't be so nice to walk down Friday. The rain started in the middle of the night, complicating things when we needed to stumble through the dark to the privies. Although we all wore our rain suits for the walk down, I doubt they made much difference as we had to walk through multiple waterfalls and swollen streams caused by the flash flooding on Mt. LeConte. We were all soaked at the bottom.

But, hey, a good time was had by all.



About to eat—but missing Rick and Susan. Food's never better than after you've climbed Mt. LeConte.



Mike and Marc watching the llamas get loaded up for the trip down the mountain.



Flood waters on the way down.



A good view of the rock and cables that we had to climb up—and in the storm, down.



Not even Alum Cave offered much protection in the storm.

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@usf.edu or 706-636-1741.

The hikes for the next couple of months are listed below. We’re well into spring now with crisp mornings, warm afternoons and beautiful wild flowers emerging almost everywhere. And summer is on the way, with opportunities for “water hikes.” More hikes will be forthcoming, so check the Activities Calendar of the website and next month’s newsletter for updates. Enjoy.

May

May 13 (Monday) Lost Creek Section of BMT. **DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE** (adult humans may bring a leashed dog).

6.5 miles, easy. Beautiful walk along Big Lost Creek. One stream crossing will probably get your feet wet so come prepared. Lunch along the creek bank.

Contact hike leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@usf.edu.

May 18 (Saturday) AT-BMT Springer Mountain Upper Loop.

This moderate loop trek of 4.6 miles at a moderate pace includes 1.2 miles on the Appalachian Trail and 3.4 on the Benton MacKaye Trail featuring the southern terminus of both trails and two great vistas from atop bluffs on the way, one on each trail. Only about 0.8 mile of the trip's initial start up Springer Mountain has much climb (of a few hundred feet elevation change) and it's not all that steep. This is a favorite Georgia loop trail of many hikers. The leader will share some history of the two trails in this area along the way.

Contact hike leader George Owen evenings between 7-11 p.m. at 706-374-4716.

May 24 (Friday) Pinnacle Knob in Rabun County – out and back on Bartram Trail.

8.5 miles, moderately strenuous. We will begin at Warwoman Dell, east of Clayton and pass two beautiful waterfalls, Becky Branch and Martin Creek Falls, traveling through lots of rhododendron and mountain laurel thickets along the way. We’ll take the side trail to Pinnacle Knob for lunch. Hoping to see some blooms.

Contact hike leader Clayton Webster at webs4740@bellsouth.net or 404-633-8955.

May 25 (Saturday) BMT: Three Forks to the Swinging Bridge over the Toccoa River.

This 8.7 mile hike is equal in difficulty from either direction (~500’ elevation change). To reduce shuttle time, we are going to do it as a “key exchange.” Details will be available once prospective hikers and drivers indicate interest.

Contact hike leader Tom Sewell: SewellTom@yahoo.com or text to 706-669-6406

June

June 1 (Saturday) National Trails Day. Vogel State Park. See article on [page six](#).

June 7 (Friday) Amadahy Trail. **DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE** (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). 5 miles, easy to moderate along the shore of Carter's Lake. Lunch at the marine campground.

Contact hike leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@usf.edu

June 9 (Sunday) BMT: Wilscot Gap to Shallowford Bridge.

This 7.6-mile trek is not the easiest Benton MacKaye Trail section in Georgia, but it is pretty typical of the trail in the peach state. While rated moderately strenuous, this particular trek has the advantage that the leader is getting older (81), slower and loves little rests on the uphill (or anywhere else he can have them)! The trip begins with the longest, hardest uphill of 1.3 miles with just under 700-ft. elevation climb. We will take that in a slow and modest speed, to top off on Tipton Mountain (3,147'). Lunch will be at the fire tower on Brawley Mountain (3,027'). We will end the hike walking alongside the tumbling Toccoa River for a half mile to our waiting vehicles at Shallowford Bridge. Shuttle involved.

Contact hike leader George Owen evenings between 7-11 p.m. at 706-374-4716.

June 15 (Saturday) BMT from FS 221 to Thunder Rock Campground and back to the picnic tables on the Rhododendron Trail.

4.9 mile, easy; 98% downhill. We will include watching the water arrive at the Ocoee Whitewater Center before we hike. The rhododendrons should be in full bloom and the patch of wild raspberries, too.

Contact Clare Sullivan at clare7982@gmail.com.

June 22 (Saturday) BMT (Section 4) Skeenah Gap to Wilscot Gap.

5.3 mile, moderate. Includes discussion of the rocks, trees, plants and birds we find along the trail. Short shuttle.

Contact hike leader Gilbert Treadwell at gilcraft@etcmail.com or by text to 404-660-4551

June 24 (Monday) Turtletown Creek Falls.

4 miles, moderate. Two beautiful falls in one short hike.

Contact hike leader Howard Baggett at Howardeb@windstream.net.

July

July 4 (Thursday) Holiday Special. Stay tuned for further information.

July 12 (Friday) Pine Log Creek.

5 miles, moderate (one steep 400' climb). See beautiful lake at old rock quarry with lots of fish.

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

July 14 (Sunday) Gahuti Trail.

8.1 miles, moderate to strenuous. Explore the Fort Mountain State Park back country including gorgeous overlook vistas and the cascades of a remote waterfall. State parking pass or \$5 parking fee required.

Contact hike leader Larry Dumas at ledumas@hotmail.com

July 20 (Saturday) BMT Mud Gap to Whigg Meadow (FAMILY AND DOG FRIENDLY HIKE—adult humans may bring children and one leashed dog).

3.2 miles, easy (500' elevation change). From Mud Gap along the Cherohala Skyway in North Carolina, we will walk on the Benton MacKaye Trail uphill to Whigg Meadow at 5000 feet with 360-degree views of the surrounding Tennessee and North Carolina mountains. Shortly after leaving Mud Gap we will leave North Carolina for Tennessee. In addition we will have a short detour to see the grave of an unknown person who was killed by the Kirkland Bushwackers during the Civil War (Google "Kirkland Bushwackers" before your trip for an interesting history lesson for all). The trail is rocky in some places so we'll take it slow and easy. Bring a sack lunch to picnic at the meadow and plenty of water.

Contact hike leader Larry Van Dyke at BMTAHiker@gmail.com.

July 22 (Monday) Emery Creek in the Cohuttas.

5 miles, moderate. The trail itself is fairly easy, but 26 stream crossings (a number up to your ankles and two to your knees), a bunch of downed trees that have to be traversed (over, under, and around) and a section of potentially slippery rocks toward the beginning and again at the end make it more difficult than it otherwise would be. Holly and Emery Creeks, two lovely waterfalls, and a nice trail make it worth the trouble.

Contact hike leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@usf.edu or 813-310-6084.



**The deadline for the June Newsletter is Wednesday May 29.
Thank you!**