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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 38, ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 2021

An Unexpected Passion Results in an Unexpected Award!

by Shane Morrison



Shane, learning the skills and finding a passion!

I vividly remember my first BMTA Work Trip. It was four years ago -- a workday set up by Phil Guhl through our employer AT&T. A member of the BMTA, Phil had worked out an arrangement with the company such that we would be paid for our normal eight-hour workday while volunteering for the BMTA, a nonprofit organization. What a great chance to get out of the office and get paid, I thought!

I wasn't sure what to expect, but was really excited about being outdoors while getting paid! We caravanned to our destination at the viewing stands -- better known as "the amphitheater" on Section 5. I was impressed with the arsenal of tools as well as the professionalism of Phil and Maintenance Director, Barry Allen, as they explained everything in detail. Our day was to consist of sidehilling and cleaning water diversions. That day I learned something ... sidehilling is hard work! However, we completed our assigned tasks, proud of all we had accomplished. Unexpectedly, I was hooked.

Now I look forward to the second Saturday of each month's Georgia work trips. There are many reasons I enjoy the work trips, but mostly it's the camaraderie. The workers are a great collection of personalities, skill sets and backgrounds. I have worked and hiked on a majority of sections on the BMT in Georgia and have performed, not mastered, most of the tasks associated with trail maintenance. I have to say that clearing trees off the trail, especially with crosscut saws, is my favorite task. There is a kind of art to it. You have to "read" how the weight is distributed on the downed tree to ensure you make the proper cuts at the proper spots to avoid binding or damaging your saw.

I have some great memories from those trips. I'll never forget Barry rolling out this wheelbarrow with straps attached to the front of it. Next thing I know fellow BMTA member Patrick Ward and I are harnessed up like horses and encouraged to pull the wheelbarrow full of 8 x 8's up a steep hill to replace rotted steps -- to make the trail safer for hikers. Luckily, we were not the only horses to volunteer that day!

On a February 2020 overnight trip we were to clear trees off the trail around Thunder Rock Campground in Tennessee. Since this is wilderness, we had to utilize crosscut saws. Friday was cold but went well as we cut out nearly 30 trees. Saturday morning we awoke to snow falling and it was accumulating fast. We still pushed forward and removed over 30 trees in 4-6" of snow.



I always have such a great time on our work trips that I really never thought about it as volunteerism and how important that is. That changed in 2018 when I learned my employer has a portal that allows you to log your volunteer hours. I then discovered they will grant you money based on the hours you volunteered. That money can be directed to the nonprofit of your choice. Consequently, I've directed a few thousand dollars to BMTA.

I encourage you to check with your employer, or any other companies you buy goods or services from to see if they have similar programs, including volunteering. Your volunteer hours and contributions do matter!

In 2019 I logged 118 hours into the AT&T volunteer portal. Early in 2020 I received an email saying my name had been submitted for a Presidential Award. I thought, cool. I guess the president of my division will be sending me a note and maybe a gift card. The award arrived in December 2020. What I found was very, very unexpected. It was not a congratulatory note from the president of my division at AT&T. It was a letter, certificate and lapel pin from the President of the United States! It was the "President's Volunteer Service Award." I was shocked and humbled. So many more members of the BMTA put in a lot more hours than I do and deserve recognition. I don't volunteer with the BMTA to get awards, it's just fun for me!

So picture me on a stage now accepting this award. Here is what I would say: "This award truly belongs to all the members of the BMTA who work tirelessly to run a non-profit organization dedicated to the Benton MacKaye Trail. There is not a more dedicated or better group of people on the planet. They are preserving and passing on to future generations what I consider to be the best trail in Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina. Everyone's volunteer hours matter and they can have a huge impact. It's not the award that matters. It's the reward, which is preserving a small treasure that winds through the mountains of Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina – the Benton MacKaye Trail."

If you are reading this and have not volunteered with the BMTA, please consider doing so. You may find an unexpected passion!

To let the BMTA know where you would like to volunteer I recommend you complete the [Volunteer Form](#) on the BMTA website.

Maintenance in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park

by Barry Allen

As part of an ongoing conversation related to improvements on the BMT, several members of the Association recently had a conference call with Christine Hoyer of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

Historically, the BMTA has been restricted to campsite maintenance and cleanup at a number of sites accessible by boat along the Lakeshore Trail/BMT. While we had hoped to assemble small teams to maintain a few sections of trail, the Park Service has asked that initially we limit our maintenance to the following tasks:

- 1) Maintenance of 14 additional campsites not accessible by boat. The Park has asked that we (BMTA) find volunteers to clean these sites during the year. Typically, this would be hike in/hike out work, potentially involving overnights on the trail.
- 2) Inspection of the trail by knowledgeable hikers, noting problems with tread, seasonal plant growth or with areas in need of water diversion work.

Interested volunteers should be able to perform both campsite clean-up and trail inspections during trips. Items noted on trail inspections will be submitted to the Park Service for follow-up work.

Work on the BMT within the Park is typically performed by seasonal employees or GSMNP Volunteers. The Park has expressed a willingness to help with supervision of BMTA volunteers should we wish to bring a group to the Park for maintenance. More on this during the year.....

Please contact me at bmtabarry@gmail.com if you have an interest in helping maintain the trail within the GSMNP. Your information will be passed to Christine Hoyer who will be responsible for contacting new volunteers for orientation and training.

Please note that the BMTA does not have a Volunteer Agreement in place with the Park Service. BMTA members who volunteer in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park will need to undergo training and orientation with Park Service employees before performing any work.



Toonowee and the Swinging Bridge

by Steve Dennison

Six members, and guest Vickie Yunker, completed the eight-mile round trip from GA 60 over Toonowee Mountain to the Swinging Bridge. The Toccoa River sparkled and the crisp, winter air was invigorating as we basked in stunning long-distance views.



The Swinging Bridge - one of the BMT's iconic destinations.
Photo by Susan Paul



View from the top of Toonowee Mountain.
Photo by Steve Dennison

BMT/AT Loop on Springer Mountain

by Mike Pilvinsky



The plan was to celebrate New Year's Day with an iconic hike to the southern terminus of both the BMT and the AT. Unfortunately, Mother Nature preferred to bestow upon us over an inch of rain and an entire day of less than ideal hiking weather. While disappointed, we merely postponed the hike for 24 hours and were rewarded with a day of perfect hiking weather.

Beginning at Big Stamp Gap, nine of us set out on the loop. Six hiked clockwise while three dogs, accompanied their humans, set out counter-clockwise. Along the way we encountered a BMTA icon, George Owen, who explained to us how he discovered (in the 1980s,) what is now called Owen Vista. Further along the trail both George Owen and Darcy Douglas told us how the trail, which was originally the AT, became the current BMT. It was really great hiking with history makers.

After visiting the beginning of the AT, we headed downhill where we encountered 30 or more hikers coming up from the parking lot. Then, it was lunch at Cross Trails and back to Big Stamp Gap for a celebratory toast to a better new year!



Join or Renew Your BMTA Membership Today!
Leave a footpath for generations to follow.

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Hemp Top to Jack's River via BMT

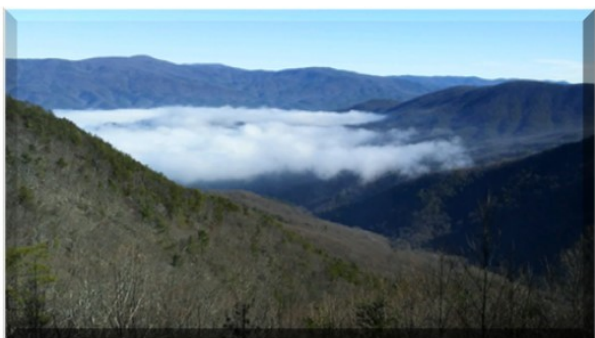
by Carolyn Sewell



Eight hikers ventured out on a sunny day to explore the beautiful Cohutta Wilderness. The hike began at Dally Gap hiking up to the intersection of the BMT at Spanish Oak Gap, then down to the Jack's River Trail.

We walked past the confluence of Bear Creek and Jacks River to one of the campsites that we all decided would be a great summer cookout site (complete with a sandy beach!).

Even though we had a few challenging blowdowns to negotiate, a good time was had by all!



Spend the Night Under the Stars Fort Mountain State Park

March 1—3, 2021

Day Hikers Are Welcome on the Daily Hikes

BMTA is sponsoring an overnight camping opportunity at Fort Mountain State Park. Several BMTAers already are planning to camp along the lake campground Monday, Tuesday and possibly Wednesday nights (weather permitting).

Tuesday's hike will be the Gahuti Backcountry Trail, an 8.2-mile *strenuous* hike. You'll travel around the edge of the park, passing below the summits of both Cohutta and Fort mountains. Along the way you'll enjoy many scenic views not visible during the summer months — including the panoramic Cool Springs Overlook.

Wednesday's trek will be on the Four Trails Loop, a very pleasant 5-mile moderate loop hike. Your stroll will take you on sections of the Gahuti Trail, Gold Mine Creek Trail, Lake Trail and Big Rock Nature Trail. Hiking poles are highly recommended for the short, but tricky, Gold Mine Trail as well as sections of the Big Rock Trail.

Please join us as day hikers for either or both of these hikes ... or ... join us in the campground and hike on both days.

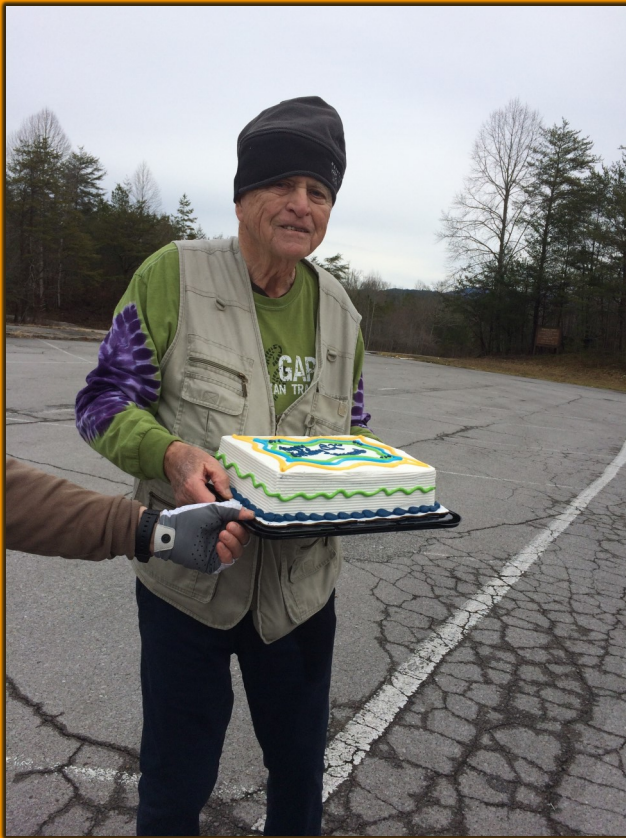
*Both cabins and primitive camping also are available at Fort Mountain.

Sign up for these hikes by **February 28!** The hike leader will not be available online after that evening.

Contact Hike Leader Mike Pilvinsky hikeleaderMP@bmtaemail.org Go [HERE](#) to sign up online.

Celebrate!! Howard 's 82nd Birthday Hike!

by Howard Baggett



At Brushy Creek Loop 14 hikers divided into two groups with Howard Baggett leading a group clockwise and Tom Sewell leading a group counterclockwise. The weatherman gave us a perfect winter hike on an excellent trail along the Ocoee Lake. "Indomitable Howard" especially enjoyed everyone joining him for his 82nd birthday hike and challenged all to return again next year!

Long Branch Loop

by Martha Fowler

Twelve hikers braved a cold morning to hike the Long Branch Loop off Aska Road. We also hiked a one-mile extension to the Green Mountain Trail and back for a total of four miles. It was so cold (high 20's) ice fog had formed on the tree branches - a beautiful sight!

Hikers included Martha Fowler (hike leader), Jane Harrison, Bruce Rosenblum, Emily Matthews, Howard Baggett, Penny Strickland, Sue Ford, Tom Sewell, Carolyn Sewell, Jan Minor, Richard Minor and Linda Kumfert.



Ice crystals sparkled on the tree branches!



We took a rest at the remains of an old home place along the trail.

ATTENTION TRAIL WORKERS

HOURS REPORTS SHOULD BE EMAILED TO bmtahours@bmtamail.org

The bmtahours@bmtamail.org email address automatically goes to:

GA Maintenance Director	Bob Cowdrick	Data Entry	Cindy Ward
TN/NC Maintenance Director	Rick Harris	Data Entry	Patrick Ward
Blaze Team Leader	Darcy Douglas	Maintenance Database	Joy Forehand

Reporting forms can be found on BMTA's Documents & Form's website under Maintenance Forms:

<https://bmtamail.org/>

The data entry is now being done by Cindy and Patrick Ward.

When reporting hours, please do not send reports to personal email addresses!

New Year Starts with New Sign Installations

by George Owen



HEY, MOM, WHERE'S THE CAR?
No longer do people wonder which way back to parking when returning from the Toccoa River Swinging Bridge. Phil Guhl and Mark Yost finish installation.

Four people and four new BMT signposts came together Friday, January 29. Result: Now three key BMT trailheads are well marked to ensure hikers go in the right direction.

That chilly Friday morning Debra and Phil Guhl, Mark Yost and George Owen met at 9:00 AM. at the Little Skeenah Creek trailhead parking on GA 60 to begin the sign installations at three locations. Thanks to talent and unfrozen soft dirt at all trailheads, the entire work was finished before noon.

Work began after a three-plus-mile drive to the Toccoa River 268-foot suspension bridge parking lot where the first sign was installed.

Driving to the BMT's Weaver Creek trailhead, we dug and installed a large sign marking the distance from there to Scroggin Knob and other points beyond. Finally we hurried many additional miles to Bushy Head Gap. Here two signs were installed. One is at the road crossing informing hikers heading north the direction the trailheads from there. Our final sign installed just off the road in the woods tells trekkers the distance to some key points miles away, including the intersection with the Pinhoti Trail to Alabama.



Just before noon we were back at our vehicles and homeward bound. In less than three hours, four signs at three locations each and many miles apart had been installed. How did it get done so quickly and easily? Well...that's because this was a super, super Signs Committee Crew! In preparation, Ralph Heller and George Owen met on the previous Friday to fasten the signs to the posts. Ralph has developed the fine art of putting these signs securely on the posts to prevent easy vandalism. Others are being taught Ralph's fine art of sign near-invincibility.

Continued next page

The only dumb thing in this whole process was...well...to the one with whom logically you might expect it to happen. Rushing early on the morning of the sign installations, George Owen hurriedly rounded the back end of his big ol' Chevy Silverado truck and one of the sign posts sticking out the back hit him squarely in the upper forehead. He was knocked flat on the ground with a near concussion! And it was flat on gravel! He said a few choice words, got up a little dizzy and carried a nice frontal hairline sore bump for days. An ice pack became his daily friend. Really dumb, but the only accident in this current signs' venture.

Another interesting thing: At Bushy Head Gap, a group of BMTA Hikers had preceded us from that trailhead for an in-and-out hike. Imagine their surprise on return to the gap to discover two big signs that weren't there several hours earlier.



The Signs Committee has just negotiated with the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club for new signs where the Appalachian Trail and Benton MacKaye Trail intersect on either side of Three Forks. This includes a large sign marking the crossing of the two trails together on Forest Service Road 58.

We will also be seeking approval from the U.S. Forest Service for the one sign right on the road side marking that crossing. Other signs are also being drafted for consideration by our co-chairs of the Signs Committee, Ralph Heller and George Owen.

Three new members have just recently been added to the BMTA Signs Committee, bringing our total to eight.

Members now are: Bob Cowdrick, Debra Guhl, Ralph Heller, George Owen, David Ricker, Sue Ricker, Gilbert Treadwell and Mark Yost.

WHAT THE....! WHERE DID THAT SIGN COME FROM?

Forest Winter Magic



BMTA Corporate Members

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 **Time to Renew!**
Use this link to Renew Now:
[Membership](#)

BMTA Member Wins First Place Woman!



Cheeseburger Paradise!



Winner!

BMTA member Liberty Murray was the first woman finisher in the Fierce Dragon 40 miler and seventh overall.

An avid hiker, marathoner and endurance athlete she challenged herself to a winter race.

With iced trails and cutting winds she completed the course in 12 hours and 21 minutes. She gave part of the credit to munching on a cheeseburger at the halfway point! Way to go Liberty!



Save the Dates!

November 12-14, 2021

BMTA Hike Fest and Annual Meeting

Unicoi Lodge - Helen, GA

For reservations call (800) 573-9659.

To receive your discount -

Mention the Benton MacKaye Trail Association!

Four Seasons Hike – Winter BMT from Bushy Head Gap to Hudson Gap

by Ken Cissna

Ten people and two dogs started at Bushy Head Gap northbound on the BMT. We had a cool start, but it warmed up and the sun came out. If you've hiked there, you know that there are usually two or three local dogs that join you for the hike. They run ahead, behind and roam around the woods, but always find their way back to the group. Not this time. We had FIVE dogs join us. Too many. I believe I've seen all of them there before—I guess this is the first time I've seen them all at once. They were friendly as usual, but five is just too many. Next quarter, I'm going to do the Spring hike by driving to Hudson Gap and walking from there.



The hike was excellent. We were able to use Peak Finder to find mountains we knew on both sides of the trail. Highlights included finding Cold and Rich Mountains, which I can see from my back porch in Cherry Log. Also located was Green Mountain, where another of our number lives, as well as the area where the BMT runs between Fall Branch Falls and Weaver Creek.

We spread out for lunch at the turnaround point at Hudson Gap. Upon hiking back we found TWO beautiful new signs had been installed by the BMTA sign crew of Debra and Phil Guhl, George Owen and Mark Yost.

Hikers were all members: Steve Mullen, Susan Paul, Mike Pilvinsky, Dave and Sue Ricker (on their first BMTA hike), Carolyn and Tom Sewell, Penny Strickland, Suzanne Zuckerman (photographer for the day) and hike leader Ken Cissna.



Upcoming Hikes and Work Trips

by Tom Sewell, Hiking Director

Guidelines for Our Hikes

- ◆ Only hikes that do not require shuttles are allowed under the auspices of BMTA.
- ◆ All hikers must drive to the meeting place and trailhead in their own cars -- no carpooling except among family members.
- ◆ Any potential hiker who is feeling ill, has traveled within the past 14 days to a location with a significant number of cases of the novel corona virus (COVID-19), or has been exposed within the past 14 days to a person who has been confirmed as or is even suspected of having COVID-19 must not come on a hike.
- ◆ All hikes are limited to a maximum of 10 participants—hike leaders may impose even lower limits.

Before, during, and after a hike, participants must maintain an appropriate distance from one another (an absolute minimum of six feet—but 10 or 15 or 20 is much better).

February



February 13 (Saturday) GA Work Trip Sections 1a,b,c — Springer Mountain >> Three Forks. Brushing, Lopping, Tread Improvement, Water Bar Cleanout. For more information contact Bob Cowdrick GAMaintDirector@bmtamail.org.

February 14 (Sunday) Valentines Day Hike: Discover a lost heart on Fort Mountain. Moderate 5 miles. Portions of the Gahuti Trail, Lake Loop and Overlook/Tower Trails. Hike leader Carolyn Sewell. For more information contact hikeleaderCS@bmtamail.org.

February 15 (Monday) BMT from Three Forks to No Name Bald and back. Dog friendly hike (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 4.3 miles. Mostly following Long Creek. Largely uphill going and reverse returning. Approximately 700' of elevation change each way. We'll include a side trip to Long Creek Falls. Hike leader Ken Cissna. For more information contact hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org.

February 19 (Friday) Yonah Mountain and return for a total of 5 miles. 1,700' gain as you literally "climb a mountain." This shark fin-shaped mountain has a trail that is a combination of moderate with some steep and rocky sections. Excellent views but expect some icy spots in winter. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

February 22 (Monday) Fort Mountain State Park: Gahuti Trail. Moderate to strenuous 7.7 miles. State Park Pass required. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

February 24 (Wednesday) BMT Dial Road to Bradley Mountain and return. Moderate 5.3 miles round trip with 1,100' elevation change each way. Some great views atop Brawley Mountain. Hike leader Tom Sewell. For more information contact hikeleaderTS@bmtamail.org.



February 27 (Saturday) TN Work Trip Section 12e. Areas near Lost Creek CG. Trail repair, refresh blazes, logout and brushout. For more information contact Steve Cartwright scdcmc@comcast.net.

March

March 1 (Monday) Duncan Ridge Trail from Mulky Gap to Sarvis Gap and return. Moderate to strenuous 8 miles. Excellent winter views. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

March 1, 2 and 3 Overnight. NOTE: Several of us will be camping at Fort Mountain State Park along the lake campground Monday, Tuesday and possibly Wednesday nights, weather permitting. You are welcome to join us as day hikers for either or both of the hikes bellow. Or, join us in the campground and hike on both days. This is your choice. **Please sign up for these hikes by February 28** since the hike leader will not be available online after that evening.

March 2 (Tuesday) Gahuti Backcountry Trail at Fort Mountain State Park. Strenuous 8.2 miles. This trail travels around the edge of the park and passes below the summits of both Cohutta and Fort Mountains down to the lake and back to Cool Springs Overlook. The distance and elevation changes make this hike strenuous. Along the way you will see many views which are not visible during the summer months. Hike leader Mike Pilvinsky. For more information contact hikeleaderMP@bmtamail.org.

March 3 (Wednesday) Loop hike at Fort Mountain State Park. Moderate 5 miles. You will walk on parts of the Gahuti Trail, Gold Mine Creek Trail, Lake Trail and Big Rock Nature Trail. Hiking poles are recommended for the short but tricky Gold Mine Trail and parts of the Big Rock Trail. Hike leader Mike Pilvinsky. For more information contact hikeleaderMP@bmtamail.org.

March 5 (Friday) Laurel Ridge Trail. Easy 4 mile loop with 470' elevation change. Hike starts along the Chattahoochee River and ends with nice views of Lake Lanier and the Buford Dam. Hike leader Howard Baggett. For more information contact hikeleaderHB@bmtamail.org.

March 5 (Friday) Benton MacKaye, Hemp Top and Jacks River Trails. We will start hiking from Watson Gap, enter the Cohutta Wilderness on the BMT, then use the Hemp Top and Jack's River Trails to complete a circle and return over a 2.6 repeat of the BMT to Watson Gap. Moderately strenuous 8.3 miles. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

March 10 (Wednesday) Thunder Rock Express to Chestnut Mountain Trail to BMT down to Thunder Rock Campground. Moderate 6.5 miles. Hike leader Evelin Yarns. For more information contact hikeleaderEY@bmtamail.org.

March 12 (Friday) BMT from GA Hwy 60 and FS 816 to Licklog Mountain and return. Strenuous 7.9 miles. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.



March 13 (Saturday) GA Work Trip Sections 2b,c,d – Big Stamp Gap >> GA 60 and 3a,b,c -- GA 60 > Skeenah Gap. Logout, brushout and tread repair. For more information contact Bob Cowdrick GAMaintDirector@bmtamail.org.

March 17 (Wednesday) Caney Creek Historical Community. Moderate 7 miles. Hike to the abandoned historical community of Caney Creek on the Ocoee River (one large creek crossing). See lots of artifacts. This tiny town had mass transit, bathtubs, electric street lights, concrete sidewalks, a tennis court, hotel, telephones, school and a church, but no stores. It existed from 1918-1941. No automobiles ever travelled there. For more information Google Caney Creek, TN. Be prepared for an hour's drive on FS Rd 221 in the Cherokee National Forest. Hike leader Clare Sullivan. For more information contact hikeleaderCS2@bmtamail.org.

March 24 (Wednesday) Cartecay Track Trails in Ellijay. Moderate 5.5 miles will include a couple miles of newly developed trail along the Cartecay River. Two shallow creek crossings. Great river views and even a visit to the archery range featuring local and exotic wildlife decoys. Hike leader Carolyn Sewell. For more information contact hikeleaderCS@bmtamail.org.



March 27 (Saturday) TN Work Trip Section 13c. JMT Big Bend to Towee Creek. Trail on narrow and dangerous steep side slope needs to be re-dug. Steep rock climbdown needs steps blasted, cemented or wood steps constructed. For more information contact Boe Rudder boe.r.rudder@gmail.com.

April

April 2 (Friday) Sawnee. Cumming, Georgia. Moderate 5 mile loop with an 860' elevation gain. This is a newer and less used section of the Preserve. Hike Leader Howard Baggett. For more information contact hikeleaderHB@bmtamail.org.



April 10 (Saturday) GA Work Trip Sections 4a,b. Skeenah Gap > Wilscot Gap. Logout, brushout and tread repair. For more information contact Bob Cowdrick GAMaintDirector@bmtamail.org.

April 16 (Friday) Deep Gap to Fall Branch Falls on the Stanley Gap and Benton MacKaye Trails. Strenuous 10.4 mile round trip with 1,200 foot elevation change in both directions. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

April 19 (Monday) Dicks Creek Gap north to Plum Orchard Gap in and out on the AT. Moderately strenuous 8+ miles with some steep climbs. Trail travels up Dick's Creek Gap 2675', Cowart Gap 2920', Buzard Knob 3760' and Plum Orchard Gap 3090'. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.



April 24 (Saturday) TN Work Trip Sections 15b,c. Tate Gap to Sandy Gap. Logout, brushout and refresh blazes. For more information contact Rick Parks Rickafur1@gmail.com.

**The deadline for the March Newsletter is Wednesday, March 3.
Thanks!**