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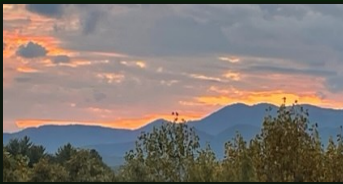
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BMTA Officers 2023-2024

President:	Bob Cowdrick
Vice President:	Clare Sullivan
Secretary:	Jessie Hayden
Treasurer:	Lydia Burns
GA M/D:	Joe Cantwell
TN/NC M/D:	Nelson Ashbrook
Smokies Coord:	David Watkins
Hiking Director:	Kelly Motter
Membership:	Frank Forehand
Communications:	Joy Forehand
Conservation:	Patrick Ward
Past President:	Ken Cissna
Store:	Sue Ricker
Newsletter:	Kathy Williams
State Rep GA:	Darcy Douglas
State Rep TN/NC:	James Anderson



BMTA Headquarters



Proud to be a Part of This Family

President's Column by Bob Cowdrick

One of the things I love about the BMTA family are the interactions I get to have with members. During our trail workdays, I get to hear about their recent travels, family gatherings, their dreams and their big plans for the next year. It is a special treat to get to know more members every chance I get.

I've been immensely proud of the work the BMTA is doing. As members, we have shared hikes together, performed trail maintenance, attended festivals, sponsored Clean Trails Days and cleaned many campsites along the 288 miles of trail. Our impact is great, but more about that in the next *Newsletter!*

I feel lucky to have been a BMTA member for many years. Four years ago, I was fortunate to be the GA State Representative. The past three years I have been the GA Maintenance Director. Now I am very honored to be the BMTA President.

Goals have always been part of my life. Goals help me keep focused on the task. When I was five, I wanted to be a fireman. As soon as I was in college, my goal was to graduate. Once I became a father, I wanted to have the best for my family as possible. For the BMTA my goals are simple:

- ◆ **Financial Sustainability**
Ensure the organization's long-term financial stability by maintaining a responsible budget and seeking diverse revenue streams.
- ◆ **Member Engagement**
Encourage active member involvement in trail maintenance, hikes, festivals and leadership roles.
- ◆ **Trail Preservation**
Focus on accessibility and sustainability of the trail while advocating for the adoption of the BMT as a National Scenic Trail.
- ◆ **Community Engagement**
Engage with local communities and stakeholders to build support for the organization.
- ◆ **Safety and Education**
Promote safety awareness among members with training, education, best practices and responsible behavior on the trails.

My vision for the future of the BMTA is bright. Be patient with me as I try my best to lead the organization in 2024.

With Gratitude,
Bob



Make It a Benton MacKaye Christmas with a Gift from the BMTA Trail Store



Shop the [Trail Store](#) Now!



Snoopy and Woodstock shopped for guidebooks and a BMTA cap!

Blazing News

by Darcy Douglas

Two blazers, new for 2023, earned the coveted Blaze Team Hat for 30 hours of volunteer work spent blazing in one year. These two ladies also did other maintenance in addition to marking our trail for hikers. That is a LOT of work!!! Please congratulate **Laurie Schatz and Daphne Martin** for all their efforts when you see them on the trail!

Two other ladies just joined the Blaze Team on November 9. Penny Strickland and Nancy Dennison have gone through the training and are ready to go! Both of these names should ring a bell...Penny is a big BMTA hiker and Nancy's husband Steve earned the Trail Worker of the Year Award this year!!! If you are going out to blaze and need a partner, please give them a call!!

I have been asked a number of times for a picture of my outfit or of folks training or blazing. Well, if you have ever SEEN my blazing clothes, or me out there, you would know why I will not touch my phone to take a picture or anything else. The ladies noticed paint on my face yesterday. I noticed paint on both hands, despite the gloves, or perhaps because of the gloves, and there was definitely paint other places than the tree or the jar or brush. So, no pictures unless someone else wants to come take them with clean hands. Care to join us on a trip?

We always welcome new blazers. It is fun, you go at your own pace while you enjoy the views, flora and fauna. The on-the-ground training takes about three hours. When we part, you are ready to go. Some prefer having their own "section" just as maintainers do. They go there often enough to know what needs to be done and when. Others are more "on call" and will paint in places needing it that aren't adopted. It's your choice. If you are interested, or would like a refresher, please contact me!

Current Blaze Team Members:

Clare Sullivan, Gilbert Treadwell, Ken Cissna, Nancy Dennison, Kelly Motter, Penny Strickland, Blake Godfrey, Bobby Fuller, Judy Norton, Judy Wade, Keith Mertz, Daphne Martin, Laurie Schatz, David Watkins, Betty Ann Archer, Cary Page and Anne Anderson.



We will always have a need for our Blazers!



2024 Membership Drive Join or Renew Now!

Support the Trail You Love

- ◆ Membership fees & donations are the primary source of funds for preserving, protecting and maintaining the BMT.
- ◆ Become a Member by Donation — For a donation of \$50, \$100, \$250, \$500, you will receive an Individual, Family Membership or Corporate Membership for 2024.
- ◆ Donate to BMTA's Land Acquisition Fund (LAF) so we will be ready to act when a parcel that would be valuable for the trail corridor comes on the market.

[Membership](#)

[Donate](#)

[Donate to LAF](#)

Memberships purchased between October 1 and December 31, 2023 will be good thru December 31, 2024.



The Grinch bought his friend Frosty a membership to the BMTA for Christmas!!

Fortunate

by Bob Cowdrick with photos courtesy of Daphne Martin

Under the threat of rain, our crews were very **fortunate** to be able to work on the BMT today while celebrating Veterans Day. Originally known as Armistice Day, Veterans Day was declared a national holiday to celebrate the end of WWI.

I asked each of the trail workers if they were **fortunate** enough to have a national holiday declared, what would it be? They responded with: homelessness, abuse, trash on the trail, Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's, division in the US, social discourse, Hemlock Aphids, hunger, cancer, political correctness, drug abuse and the Middle East conflict. Unfortunately, these problems may take some time to solve, but we are all hoping for more national holidays when we do end these.

We were very **fortunate** to have three crews working today on Sections 11c, 11d and 11e. David Watkins joined us to give some insight into our new BMTA Safety Committee and requested feedback from us on safety suggestions and recommendations.

Chuck Clarke, Byron Coker, Ken Cissna, Art Kolberg and Mike Pivinsky hitched a ride to the top of FS221 and worked north on Section 11e removing some trees obstacles, lopping and brushing. **Fortunately**, there were no major problems on Section 11e.

Johnny Emberson with Bill Cox, Steve Dennison, Steve Hayden, Debbie Hayes, Shane Morrison, Dara Denning and Bob Nelson thru hiked Section 11d and brushed out Section 11c. Johnny is the maintainer on Sections 11c and 11d and is **fortunate** to have his two areas now in excellent shape.

Darcy Douglas, Daphne Martin, Madison Martin, Kenny Martin, Laurie Schatz and Bob Cowdrick came behind Johnny's Section 11c crew and made some significant progress on cleaning up Section 11d. They were **fortunate** to have the most level section to hike.



Continued next page



Fortunately, Patty Masters was able to meet us at Thunder Rock Campground with an outstanding lunch and social after the workday. It is always great to have her join our maintenance trips and we enjoy her treats!

The numbers are impressive...

- ◆ 145 volunteer hours
- ◆ 28 miles hiked
- ◆ 20 members participated
- ◆ 2 different kinds of cookies eaten
- ◆ 1 belated birthday celebrated
- ◆ 1 new member attended
- ◆ 0 injuries

Please consider joining us on our December 9 maintenance trip. We will be working on Sections 12a-b-c-d.

This is a **Joint GA / TN/NC Maintenance Trip**. It will be the **only trip** for all states for December.
Sections 12a-b-c-d - US 64 >> White Oak Flats, FS 103

Contact Joe Cantwell at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

Ralph Van Pelt

by Joy Forehand

Ralph Van Pelt grew up in Chattooga County, GA ... near the Alabama line.

“It was a rural part of the county and as a teenager, I spent a lot of time behind my parents’ home,” said Van Pelt. “I’d have a single barrel shotgun and pocket full of shells. When my mother was ready for me to come in, she’d honk the car horn.”

A history buff at heart, Van Pelt entered Berry College as a history major but for his final year, he switched to Law and applied to Law School.

“My house is stacked up with history books,” said Van Pelt. “I’m interested in the human condition. I’ve read a lot about people who tend to turn up in the courts ... like sociopaths. I’ve represented, known and dealt with a lot of them.”



Van Pelt graduated from the University of Georgia Law School in 1980. His first job was with a title company. However, he also did defense work – just four months out of law school, he was appointed as second chair to help defend a murder case. By 1981, Van Pelt was an Assistant District Attorney.

“Back then, there were very few assistant district attorneys/prosecutors in Georgia,” Van Pelt said.

At a very young age for an assistant district attorney, Van Pelt prosecuted Judith Ann Neelley for the murder of Lisa Ann Millican as well as Avery Brock and Tony West for the murders of Charles Scudder and Joseph Odom (also known as The Corpsewood Murders).

Van Pelt went on to spend eight years as a district attorney before being elected to the bench in 1996.

Twenty-six years later, Van Pelt resigned from his position as a North Georgia Superior Court Judge. Unlike most retiring judges, Van Pelt did not take Senior Judge status. He currently is a practicing attorney in the law firm of Patty and Young in Ringgold, Georgia, a firm he was a member of from 1983-1988.



Though a judge by profession, Van Pelt's love for the outdoors never waned.

After a divorce in 1992, he was looking for something to do. As he reflected back on what he'd done as a youth, hiking was an easy choice. Van Pelt started out hiking on the Chickamauga Battlefield, Pigeon Mountain and on Lookout Mountain.

"I did a fair bit of hiking with the Chattanooga Hiking Club (CHC). I set out to do the 900 in the Smokies – spent a lot of time in Smokies, Joyce Kilmer, Citico, Big Frog and the Chattahoochee National Forest– especially the Wilderness Areas," said Van Pelt.

He was maintenance director and went on to become president of the CHC. Van Pelt was there for the massive cleanup project undertaken by the CHC after Hurricane Opal trashed Big Frog.

As he looked at the trails in the area, the BMT appealed more than the others and he soon joined the BMTA. He considers Rick Harris and Ken Jones as well as former BMTA President, Betty Petty, his mentors for trail maintenance.

A native of Madisonville, Tennessee, Petty was quite fond of the area in the vicinity of the Tellico fish hatchery – as was Van Pelt. When the BMT's Section 16e was routed through the area, Van Pelt and Petty were among the volunteers who dug the trail.

Of course, the section became a "must have" for Betty Petty to maintain.

Unfortunately, Petty was killed in an auto accident in December 2014. By then, Van Pelt was ready for a section of his own to maintain. He loved the peaceful solitude of the climb from the road up to Sugar Mountain.

"There's nothing really unusual about the section – it's a walk through the woods. But I felt taking this section would be a way to honor Betty's memory," said Van Pelt. "I want to do more to improve it – add a switchback in one spot. My hope is to get a few things accomplished next year. Then I can dedicate myself to being outdoors more."



Plan for the Unexpected!

by Bob Cowdrick

On each Benton MacKaye Trail Maintenance Trip, we gather around to review the work that will be done, discuss job hazards and reinforce safety protocols. Suggestions and recommendations from every crew member are solicited. Contingency plans are in place.

This is an organized and safety-oriented approach. Planning for the unexpected is critical - especially in outdoor work where variables can change rapidly. Mistakes can be costly. We focus on minimizing risks. Always plan for the unexpected!



Water Crossings!



Wildfires!



Humongous Trees!



Slithery Things!



Bears!

TN/NC BMTA Maintenance Trip

by Rick Harris with photos courtesy of Clare Sullivan and Bob Cowdrick

Eighteen maintainers came from some fairly distant homes to join us for the maintenance trip on the Brookshire Creek Trail. Marty Dominy gets the prize for driving up from the Macon area, a four-hour drive one way. Several others came from as far away as Atlanta and north Georgia. It was an effort we appreciate.

Some of us met at the Cherochala Skyway Visitor Center and carpooled to Campsite 11 on Bald River Road. The drive, on mostly gravel USFS roads, takes almost an hour. The Georgia folks came in from the Murphy side and met at the Big Cove Campground. The SAWS crew of two (Scotty Bowman and Rebekah Morrison) worked the upper third of the trail from Sledrunner Gap. The Georgia Crew (Joe Cantwell, Bob Cowdrick, Carol Nufer, Marty Dominy, Steve Hayden and David Blount) brushed and logged out the middle third of the trail. The Tennessee crew came in from Campsite 11 on Bald River Road. Rick and Brenda Harris, Steve Bayliss and Robert Alwood logged out the lower third of the trail with crosscut saws. A large crew of loppers/snippers brushed out the lower section as well (Clare and Ed Sullivan, Sandra Fenton, Ralph Van Pelt, Madison and Daphne Martin).



Continued next page

There were three significant creek/river crossings we had to negotiate. Some folks did not do too well. Joe Cantwell took a dunking into the creek closest to Campsite 11 and Marty Dominy almost did the same. At the Bald River crossing, a few folks walked across the river on an old rotten log. All made it safely, but things looked tenuous a time or two, especially for Carol Nufer and Bob Cowdrick!

Thankfully, though wet in places, we all made it back safely, and enjoyed snacks and drinks before returning home. All maintainers on this trip now have a new BMTA Maintainer sticker to affix to the back windows on their vehicles.



A New “Facelift Sans Botox”

Photos courtesy of David Blount and Darcy Douglas

- ◆ This was a team effort managed by David Blount, who also did repairs.
- ◆ The trailer was generously donated by Travis Crouch.
- ◆ Barry Allen devoted his time and labor to removing the old vendor decals.
- ◆ Nelson Ashbrook transported the trailer for the “Facelift.”
- ◆ Bud Hodge at Proline Racing designed the decal, layout, surface prep and helped with application.
- ◆ Zach Jones, owner of Z7 Graphics, contributed by creating the art files pro bono.

Thank you!!!!



David Blount with the finished product!



Before!



After!

Into the Woods



The forest decorates for the Holidays.

Fred Elias, Ralph Collison, Paula Laws and Kelly Ducham hiking Boyd's Gap to Thunder Rock Campground. Photo by Ray Laws.



Leaving fall to embrace winter.

Got That Root Ball!

by Gilbert Treadwell

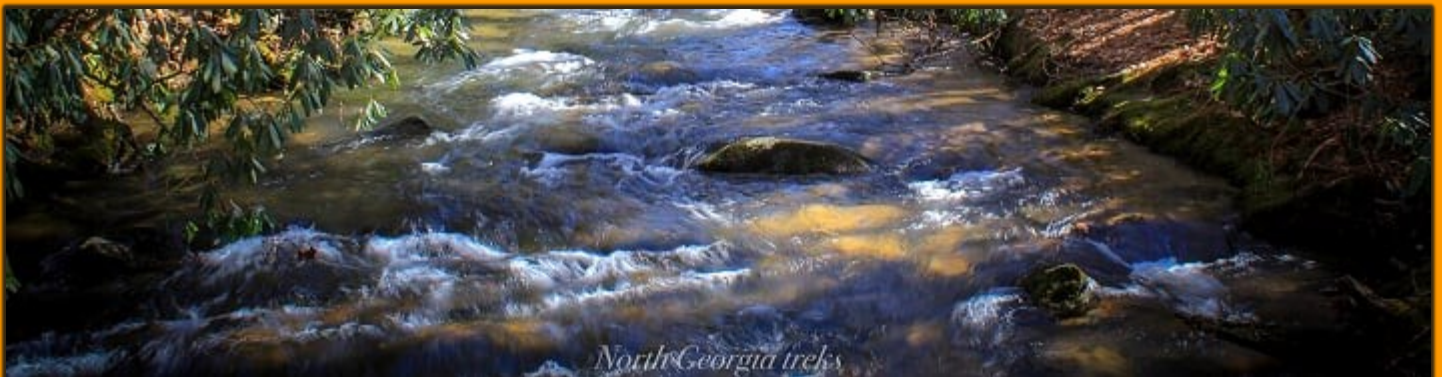
Mike Pilvinsky, Art Kolberg and I set out on November 14 to get a giant root ball off the trail one mile south of Three Forks. It was unreported until Mike and I encountered it on a November 10 scout of Sections 1b and 1c. Hikers had created a walk-around. My 16" chainsaw could not quite complete the job, so Art and Ken Cissna and I returned on November 16 with my 20" saw. We cut the trunk free from the root ball, cleared the footpath and trashed the walk around. Got it!!!



The task at hand.



Got It!



North Georgia treks

Upcoming Hikes and Maintenance Trips

by Kelly Motter, Hiking Director

Guidelines for Our Hikes

COVID-19 Concerns - If you believe you are in a high-risk group, please evaluate whether going on this hike is worth the potential risk.

December

December 8 (Friday) Wilscot Gap GA 60 to Ledford Gap and return then slingshot from Wilscot Gap to Payne Gap. Moderately strenuous 11 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at bmtahikeleadersd@bmta.org.



December 9 (Saturday) Joint GA / TN/NC Maintenance Trip This is the only trip for all states for December.

Sections 12a-b-c-d - US 64 >> White Oak Flats, FS 103.

Contact Joe Cantwell at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

December 11 (Monday) Unicoi State Park to Helen and return. This is a 5.5 to 6-mile moderate hike to enjoy the wonderful town of Helen. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at bmtahikeleaderrc@bmta.org.

December 18 (Monday) Rhododendron Trail to Chestnut Mountain Trail to Bear Paw Loop and return. This is a 5-mile moderate hike in the Ocoee area.

Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at bmtahikeleaderrc@bmta.org.

January

January 1 (Monday) Upper Springer Mountain Loop. This 5-mile loop provides visits to the southern terminus of both the Appalachian and Benton MacKaye trails. Two lovely vistas add to a great start for the new year! Contact Hike Leader Mike Pilvinsky at bmtahikeleadermp@bmta.org.

January 8 (Monday) BMT GA 60 to Skeenah Gap and return. Strenuous 11.2 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at bmtahikeleadersd@bmta.org.

January 9 (Tuesday) Trails of Jack Rabbit. Easy/moderate 2.5 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at bmtahikeleaderrc@bmta.org.



January 13 (Saturday) GA Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact Joe Cantwell at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

January 14 (Sunday) BMT Weaver Creek to Stanley Gap Trail and return. Moderate/strenuous 4.6 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at bmtahikeleaderkm@bmta.org.

January 19 (Friday) BMT Three Forks to No Name Gap and back. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 4.7 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at bmtahikeleaderkc@bmta.org.

January 21 (Sunday) Trails of Nottley Lake. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy 2.6 miles with beautiful views of the lake and dam.

Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at bmtahikeleaderkm@bmta.org.

January 22 (Monday) BMT Watson Gap to Dally Gap and return. Moderate 8.2 miles with some steep portions and water crossings.

Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at bmtahikeleadersd@bmta.org.



January 27 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip

Contact Nelson Ashbrook at bmatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

January 29 (Monday) Fightingtown Creek #1. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate/easy 3.8 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at bmtahikeleaderkc@bmta.org.

February

February 5 (Monday) Two Loops of BMT/AT from Three Forks Southbound. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 5 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at bmtahikeleaderkc@bmta.org.



February 10 (Saturday) GA Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact Joe Cantwell at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

February 11 (Sunday) Woody to Gooch Gap on the AT and return. Moderate 7.2 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at bmtahikeleaderkm@bmta.org.

February 12 (Monday) BMT TN 68 Unicoi Mountain Trail to Coker Creek bridge and return. Moderately strenuous 8 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at bmtahikeleadersd@bmta.org.

February 16 (Friday) Talking Rock. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 5 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at bmtahikeleaderkc@bmta.org.

February 18 (Sunday) Unicoi Gap to Indian Grave Gap on the AT and return on the Rocky Mountain Trail. Moderately strenuous 5.5 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at bmtahikeleaderkm@bmta.org.



February 24 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip
Contact Nelson Ashbrook at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

February 26 BMT Hemp Top Trail to Double Springs Gap and return. Moderately/strenuous 11.8 miles.
Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at bmtahikeleadersd@bmta.org.

To access our website calendar, go [HERE](#).



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The deadline for the January Newsletter is Wednesday, January 3. Thank you!