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BMTA Headquarters



Benton MacKaye Trail Association

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MARCH 2023

Update on BMTA's Quest for National Scenic Trail Designation

By Ken Cissna, President

Last year the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) made significant progress toward our goal of having the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) designated as a National Scenic Trail (NST). This article follows on my [April 2021](#) and [June 2022](#) updates regarding our activities and our progress in this endeavor.

To review, briefly: The Board of Directors of BMTA approved this quest at its April 2021 meeting. We formed a Working Group that began our pursuit of NST designation for the BMT. In December of that year, the Board approved hiring Monument Advocacy, a highly regarded and experienced public policy and lobbying firm located in Washington DC.

The NST Working Group (Clare Sullivan, Bob Ruby, Ron Tipton, Joy Forehand, Barry Allen, and I) worked closely with Monument Advocacy throughout 2022. In May 2022, [the Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Act](#), was introduced by Representatives Steve Cohen and Chuck Fleischman, both of Tennessee. Six other members of the House of Representatives—[Republicans and Democrats, from Georgia and Tennessee](#)—signed on as cosponsors.

Unfortunately, 2022 ended without the bill passing. It didn't get a hearing in the House and we were unable to get a bill introduced in the Senate. These things take time—*usually*, more than one year. We will continue working with Monument Advocacy toward the NST designation this year.

As you may know, Congressional timelines are measured in two-year terms—each Congress lasts for two calendar years. The previous Congress, the 117th, ended on January 3 of this year. All bills not passed at the end of any Congress are considered “dead,” and to pass, any such bill would have to be reintroduced in the new Congress, now the 118th.

We have every confidence that Representatives Cohen and Fleischman will again be the lead sponsors and will re-introduce the bill this year. We also believe that Senator Warnock will be willing to take the lead this year in introducing our bill in the Senate.

So, that's where we're at. We are getting a much faster and earlier start this year than last. I will keep you informed about our progress.

When we have a bill introduced, in the House or the Senate (and hopefully in both), we will let you know ***so at that time, you***, the members and friends of the BMTA, can do your part – to contact your Senators and Representative to encourage them to support the 2023 version of the *Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Act*.

Talking Rock Preserve

by Tom Sewell



Betty Ann Archer, Gloria Harmon, Martha Payne, Ray Laws, Carolyn Sewell and Paula Laws contemplate the property values of "Tiny Living!"

Tom and Carolyn Sewell led five hikers on the trails at the Talking Rock Nature Preserve in Jasper, GA.

After a couple of days of heavy rain, everyone was anxious to get out and hike even if it was a windy and chilly day. These trails are multi-use with hikers going the opposite direction of bike riders. We only met one biker but be aware that on weekends, these trails are heavily used by bikers.

We hiked 6.3 miles and found a cabin "4 sale as is" but decided it was too much of a small fixer-upper!



**Your Membership Dues Help Us
Preserve, Protect and Maintain the BMT**

Please Join or Renew Your Membership Now!

MEMBERSHIP

...leave a footpath for generations to follow!

prep·a·ra·tion

by Bob Cowdrick with photos by Judy Norton, David Watkins and Clare Sullivan

prep·a·ra·tion: (noun) the action or process of making ready or being made ready for use or consideration.

Preparation is always the key to any successful project. Each BMTA workday requires good planning and preparation. This was evident with Joe Cantwell's **preparation** for the work we did on Sections 12a, b, and c. Joe meticulously created a list of the projects that needed to be done on each section — complete with drawings of where each blowdown was, its diameter and the milage location. His drawings would make an architect jealous. These proved to be very valuable. Add to that the details of the amount of sidehilling and locations of the lopping that needed to be done, we were able to complete a very impressive day of work!

Judy Norton led her crew of Patrick Ward, Shane Morrison and Nelson Ashbrook to Section 12c cutting out six blowdowns and 20 smaller trees. Judy sure knows how to get members to work on her section. Before departing for the trail, she supplied the entire workday group with cookies, apples and granola bars as a thank you for their help!



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Andy Meeks, Ian Guttridge, Steve Dennison and David Watkins teamed up to work on sidehilling a steep section of 12b. This was a tough stretch for a crew of four but they were able to dig out 1200 feet of trail.



Alyson Martin hard at work.

Steve Hayden and Art Kolberg pitched in and worked on lopping a section of 12b. This was an overgrown area that needed immediate attention.

Dave and Sue Ricker tamed the briars around the powerline on 12b. With so much sunlight they tend to get a little overgrown. They were fortunate to have some incredible vistas while working.

Joe Cantwell convinced Alyson, Madison, Daphne and Kenny Martin to work with him to remove six blowdowns and clean up a root ball blocking the trail. The time they spent will make the trail much more passable.

Clare Sullivan chose Section 12a for her crew of Ed Sullivan and Bob Cowdrick. She lopped out four miles and they cut seven trees with the benefit being that Section 12a is all downhill from Dry Pond Lead.



Madison Martin is dwarfed by a root ball!

Good **preparation** made for a successful day. The stats:

- ◆ 1200 feet of sidehilling
- ◆ 150 volunteer hours
- ◆ 36 blowdowns removed
- ◆ 8 random college students on a 10-mile hike passed by
- ◆ 6 miles of brushing
- ◆ 1 root ball gone
- ◆ 0 injuries

Our next GA maintenance trip will be on Saturday, March 11. Please consider joining us. Watch for information in future email updates and on the website.



Joe Cantwell, Kenny Martin, Alyson Martin and Daphney Martin.



Before and after!

Perseverance Pays Off

by Barry Allen

One of my most enjoyable experiences on the trail was hosting a workday on August 11, 2018, on the Benton MacKaye Trail's (BMT) Sections 10b-c-d (Dally Gap >> Tennessee State Line). A heavy rain and flood had rolled through the Cohuttas the latter part of June. After inspecting and clearing some of the damage, the Forest Service asked the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) to re-open the east side of the Cohuttas.

BMTA's volunteers answered the call as did volunteers from the Back-Country Horsemen. A group of five scouts and two leaders from Signal Mountain, Tennessee, also signed up for the trip. The scouts were remarkable young men, each of whom had the goal of eventually earning the rank of Eagle Scout.

They showed up a bit late because two large trees, felled by a very recent storm, blocked their route. They had nothing more than a hatchet and a handsaw to clear their way. But they never gave up, eventually cutting enough of a path in Forest Service Road 22 to make their way in from Tennessee (the rest of us came from the Georgia side and had chainsaws to help clear a path on the road).



They stayed longer and worked harder than anyone else that day – Tennessee's Senator Hagerty, a former Eagle Scout, can rest assured that there are other young Tennessee Scouts following in his footsteps.

Upon reaching Dally Gap, these young men had no idea where to begin working since everyone, including me, had long since departed for various points on the compass. I was on the trail beyond Penitentiary with no phone reception and no idea of what had happened to my scouts – until I saw a group of five well-conditioned young men and two adults come bobbing up the trail begging for something to do.

They had found me! Perseverance does pay off. While looking for me, they had checked the trail from Dally to the BMT on the Jacks River Trail, then returned to Dally and headed up Hemp Top. They finally found me after covering four and a half miles on two trails. And they finished the day as the last group off the BMT, eating the final hot dogs and the last of the chips. Quite a group of young men. These 15- and 16-year-olds – Jack DiMisa, Conor Kinley, Evan Rackel, Ansel Brasel and Zachery Stong, with scout leaders Thomas Brasel and Steve DiMisa – are welcome on my trail anytime!

Amadahy Trail

by Ralph Collinson



Christy Jelleets, Ralph Collinson, Carolyn Sewell, Betty Archer, Paula Laws and Tom Sewell braved a cold day to enjoy the views of Carters Lake.



You Can Help!

Help raise funds for BMTA's Land Acquisition Fund

If you have old BMTA T-Shirts you don't wear anymore, please consider donating them to be used for a BMTA Fundraising Quilt created from BMTA T-Shirts, bandanas, etc. Whether your shirts are from the Trail Store or are a Maintainer's T-Shirt, it would be a perfect addition for the quilt!



To donate your old T-Shirts, contact [Lydia Burns](#).

The quilt will be an item in the 2023 Annual Meeting Raffle!

Things We Should Carry Carabiner

by Bob Cowdrick

A carabiner is a type of metal connector that is used in a variety of different activities, such as rock climbing, caving and rescue work. They are especially handy for hooking items to a pack. Carabiners typically consist of a D-shaped or oval-shaped metal frame with a spring-loaded gate that can be opened and closed quickly and easily to attach or detach the carabiner to or from a rope or other piece of equipment. They are used to connect ropes to anchors or items to a pack.

Carabiners are made of an aluminum alloy which is lightweight and durable. There are two different types of carabiners:

- ◆ Locking carabiners, that are locked with a screw to prevent the gate from opening accidentally. These typically are used when rock climbing or performing mountain rescues.
- ◆ Non-locking carabiners - the traditional ones that are used for less critical attachments. Hikers use these for bear hangs, clotheslines and hanging gear on packs.

The strength and safety of carabiners depends on the type of gate, construction and materials used, so it's important to choose the appropriate carabiner for the intended use.

The carabiner on my pack is clipped to my trash bag I use for picking up trash on the trail and at trailheads.



Coker Creek Falls

by Clayton Webster

On a picture-perfect winter day, 15 Benton MacKaye Trail Association members hiked the Coker Creek Falls Trail to the Benton MacKaye Trail and back for a total of 6.2 miles. After a near record month of rainfall in January we were expecting the multiple waterfalls on Coker Creek to really be roaring. We were not disappointed. Our Hike Leaders were Ed and Clare Sullivan.



The group on a bridge across Coker Creek that the Benton MacKaye Trail crosses. The bridge was built extra high above the water to prevent it from being washed during a flood stage. Photo by Toby Gaynes.

For the most part the Forest Service Roads to the trailhead were better than I remembered from the last time I was here.

We saw very few actual hikers on the trail, but a good number of Sunday strollers were headed to the waterfalls. Some people, not knowing there was an alternate way, had turned back when they encountered a couple of big blowdowns.

The great thing about the Coker Creek Falls Trail is the trail is very close to the stream where all of the great waterfalls and cascades are located. Later the trail goes much higher up the mountainside with the creek down in a deeper ravine.

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After seeing only a couple of actual hikers on the trail all day, when we got to the end of the Coker Creek Falls Trail where it intersects the Benton MacKaye Trail, we were surprised to see a large group of campers and seven vehicles.

We had planned to eat our lunch here along the riverbank but didn't want to intrude on the campers. They told us to just spread out and make ourselves at home. It turns out that this same group of guys comes to this very spot every year on the first full weekend in February. They come rain, shine, sleet, or snow and this was the 44th year they have done it. It was also the birthday of the guy who started it. He has been there for all 44 years. They had a big sheet cake for him.





After lunch, Clare took us up the road to show us where the Benton MacKaye/John Muir trails go down to the Hiwassee River.

Is There Gold in Coker Creek ?

by Clare Sullivan

Prior to the hike, we learned that Coker Creek and the Tellico River are the best-known areas for gold prospecting in Tennessee. Gold was discovered in Coker Creek in 1831, yet mining didn't begin till 1836. From 1831 – 1854, \$80,000 worth of gold was collected, but this was not enough to attract miners for very long. Gold deposits in Tennessee are found on false bedrocks of hardpan clay. Most of the gold is fine-textured and requires panning. Permits can be obtained from the Tellico Ranger District of the Cherokee National Forest.

As recently as 2018, the Gold Prospectors Association of America sponsored two separate weeks of diggers' expeditions on their leased property along Coker Creek.

Approximately 30 prospectors worked six days a week using the suction dredging method prior to panning. The gold flakes were referred to as "fly poop" or "skeeter's nuts" (Have you ever seen mosquitoes' nuts?).

The real reward was teamwork, dedication, and camaraderie. The gold flakes were shared among the members. All participants left with less than one ounce of gold in a vial.



Trail Tidbits



Patrick Ward presented Bob Cowdrick with a bucket and trash picker-uppers for Bob to obtain his goal for 2023. His goal as stated at the first work trip was "to pick up more trash in 2023!"



Maintainers John Oudin and Steve Dennison found this tree that beavers and woodpeckers had apparently feasted upon near the beaver dam on Benton MacKaye Trail Section 10a. Photo by Steve Dennison.



There was a great turnout for the Unicoi State Park to Helen hike! Photo by Paula Laws



Maintainer John Odin cleaned debris from a fire pit on Section 10b of the Benton MacKaye Trail.

This is part of our Leave No Trace initiative. Photo by Steve Dennison.

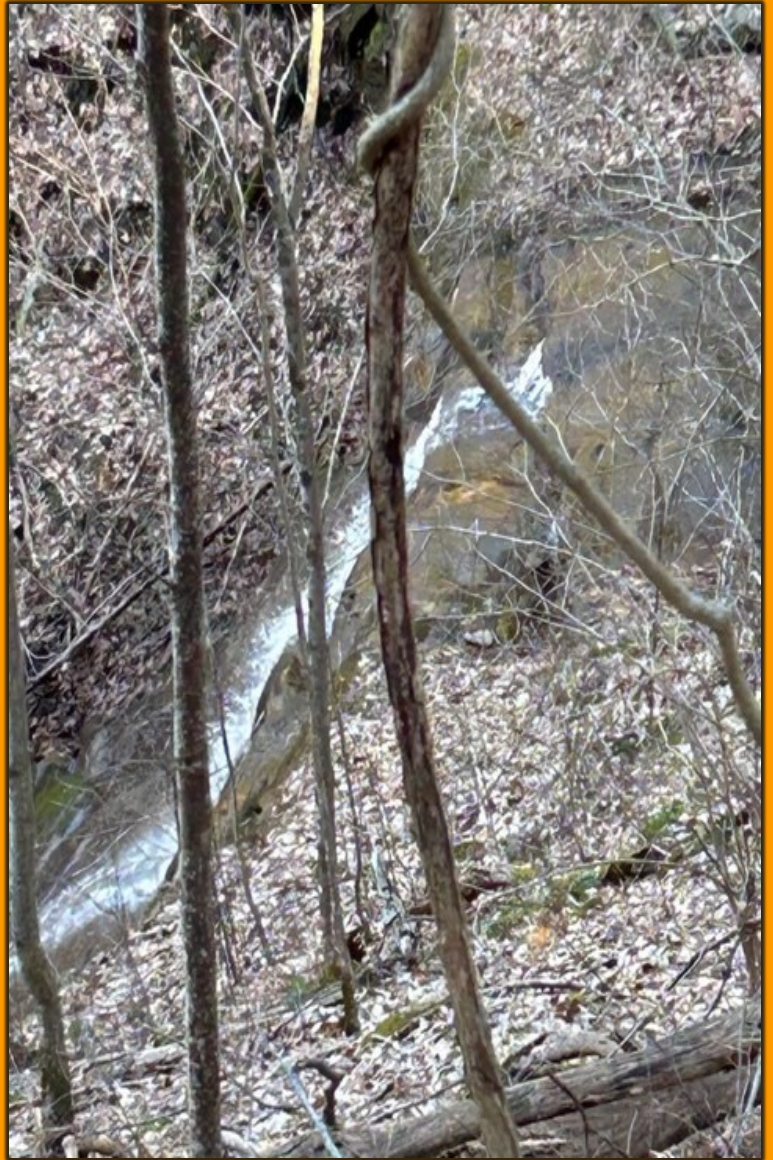
Not a Cloud in the Sky!

by Clare Sullivan with photos by Clare Sullivan, Anne Anderson and Donna Jones

Rain, rain, and more rain caused the loop hike in the Big Frog Wilderness to be rescheduled four times. February 4, 2023, was the perfect day for this strenuous hike up the Yellow Stand Lead Trail #73, across the Grassy Gap Trail #67, and down the Big Creek Trail #68, in the Ocoee District of the Cherokee National Forest. The gorgeous sunny day was perfect for exploring the mountains with many grand views, gushing water and even an unknown waterfall! The Peters Branch Creek crossing was broad and deep. We delighted in scrambling over, under and around blowdowns. Our hikers were Anne Anderson, Kelly Motter, Donna Jones, plus Ed and Clare Sullivan.



Continued next page





Save the Dates!

November 2 - 5, 2023

BMTA Hike Fest and Annual Meeting

Tellico Plains, Tennessee

Hike to Bob Bald, Whigg Meadow, Unicoi Trail and more!

Watch for updates on bmta.org and in emails



Upcoming Hikes and Work Trips

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.

March

March 6 (Monday) BMT- Section 14a from TN 68 to Coker Creek Bridge. Moderate 8.2 miles. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

March 8 (Wednesday) Old Copper Road at the Ocoee Whitewater Center. Moderate 5 miles out and back. hike. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at hikeleaderRC@bmtamail.org.

March 10 (Friday) BMT/AT- Upper two loops on Springer Mountain from Big Stamp Gap. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog)
About 5 moderate miles. See all the sights: Springer Mountain, an AT shelter, the beginning of the BMT, the plaque honoring Benton MacKaye and Owen Vista!
Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org.



March 11 (Saturday) GA Maintenance Trip. Section 3c – Rhodes Mountain. Contact Bob Cowdrick at gamaintdirector@bmtamail.org.

March 13 (Monday) Miller Trek at Brasstown Valley Resort. Moderate/difficult 6.5 miles with elevation change of 1,400' and some rough footing.
Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at hikeleaderKM@bmtamail.org.

March 23 (Thursday) Caney Creek, Ocoee, Tennessee. Hike to the extinct village of Caney Creek. See the remains of the only town in America that never had a horse or car in the village. The village was built by the East Tennessee Power Company and existed from 1912-1941. This village enjoyed concrete sidewalks, city water, telephones, streetlights and a lighted tennis court. The battery-powered town trolley took workers to and from work. Moderate/difficult 6.5 miles.
Contact Hike Leader Clare Sullivan at hikeleaderCS2@bmtamail.org.

March 24 (Friday) Fightingtown Creek. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 3.8 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org



March 25 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact Nelson Ashbrook at tn-ncmaintdirector@bmtamail.org.

April

April 7 (Friday) Flat Creek Loop. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog) Moderate 5.6 miles. Nice loop hike featuring Flat Creek.
Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org.



April 8 (Saturday) GA Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact Bob Cowdrick at gamaintdirector@bmtamail.org.

April 10 (Monday) BMT GA Hwy 60-Wallalah- Licklog-Rhodes Saddle and return. Moderate/strenuous 7.2 miles. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

April 11 (Tuesday) [Project Chimps Trails](#). Moderate 2.5 to 3 miles depending upon how many of the trails we go on. Other: \$2 donation appreciated for each parked car. Contact Hike Leaders Clare Sullivan and Kathy Williams at hikeleaderCS2@bmtamail.org.

April 12 (Wednesday) BMT – From the Craddock Center just immediately north of the Sisson Property in Cherry Log, Georgia. We will cross the highway (carefully), to a gravel road following Laurel Creek to a meadow. Easy/moderate 5 miles with two creek crossings.
Contact Hike Leader Darcy Douglas at hikeleaderDD@bmtamail.org.

April 21 (Friday) BMT - Hudson Gap, out and back. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog.)
Moderate 4 -5 miles. Come out to see spring wildflowers.
Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org.



April 22 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact Nelson Ashbrook at tn-ncmaintdirector@bmtamail.org.

April 24 (Friday) Picken's Nose Overlook on the AT. Moderate 4 miles out and back. Hike begins a short distance from the Standing Indian Campground.
Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at hikeleaderRC@bmtamail.org.

April 26 (Wednesday) Lady Slippers! Mulky Gap. Blairsville. Easy/moderate 1.5 miles. Before embarking on the hike, hikers will go across the road to see a huge garden of thousands of Pink Lady Slippers. The hike itself begins on an old logging road. Trillium, Showy Orcus, Wild Geranium, Wild Iris and Dutchman's Pipe are just a few of the spring beauties to be seen. For the return, we'll switch to the Duncan Ridge Trail where there are Flame Azaleas as well as some super-sized Pink Lady Slippers. Note: this will be the second hike after the 2021 controlled burn. Some of the ladies had returned ... hopefully more will be back this year topped off with the elegant pink blooms. Contact Hike Leaders Joy and Frank Forehand at hikeleaderJF@bmtamail.org.

May

May 3 (Wednesday) Lady Slipper Hike. BMT at Weaver Creek in Blue Ridge. Moderate/strenuous 3.8 miles. This will be a SLOW, LEISURELY hike to enjoy the wildflowers. Initially we'll pass by beautiful mountain laurel groves peppered with flame azaleas. Stop for lunch at the water cutoff beside some of the largest lady slippers on the section. As we stroll back to the trailhead, we'll pass numerous gardens of the pink beauties. Contact Hike Leaders Joy and Frank Forehand at hikeleaderJF@bmtamail.org.

May 5 (Friday) BMT - From Thunder Rock Campground, up Thunder Rock Express Trail, across Chestnut Mountain Trail and down the BMT. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5.2 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org.

May 6 (Saturday) Hike Inn Trail. Moderate 10-miles round-trip to the Hike Inn and back. For a small donation, coffee, tea and dessert are available! We can enjoy sitting on the porch and eating our lunch while looking at the amazing views. Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at hikeleaderKM@bmtamail.org.

May 7 (Sunday) Nottely Dam Trail. Easy/moderate 2.5 miles with excellent views of the lake. Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at hikeleaderKM@bmtamail.org.

May 11 (Thursday) Cohuttas - Dally Gap Hemp Top Trail, joining the BMT at Spanish Oaks, then on to the remains of the old fire tower at Hemp Top Mountain. Moderate 8 miles round-trip with about 1,000 feet of elevation change each way. Contact Hike Leaders Tom and Carolyn Sewell at hikeleaderTS@bmtamail.org.



May 13 (Saturday) GA Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact Bob Cowdrick at gamaintdirector@bmtamail.org.

May 19 (Friday) Amadahy Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 5 miles along the shore of Carters Lake. Lunch at the marine campground. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org.

May 22 (Monday) BMT- Bushy Head to McKenny Gap and return. Moderate/strenuous 8.2 miles. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.



May 27 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact Nelson Ashbrook at tn-ncmaintdirector@bmtamail.org.

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

**The deadline for the April Newsletter is Wednesday, March 29.
Thank you!**