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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



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Preservation on Top of the Park

by Bob Cowdrick

After 5.1 miles, 4250 feet of elevation gain, 39 switchbacks, one bear, one mountain goat and a few grouse later...

I topped out at the Mt. Brown Fire Tower Lookout!

The tower is situated on the western side of Glacier National Park in Montana, and overlooks the boundary of the park and the Flathead National Forest – the park is known for its stunning landscapes, diverse wildlife and pristine wilderness.

Volunteering at the Mt. Brown Lookout Restoration Project in this past August was a fantastic way to contribute to the preservation and maintenance of this beautiful structure.

The project involved the restoration and maintenance of this historic fire lookout located on top of Mt. Brown. The project was organized by the Northwest Montana Fire Lookout Association and the National Park Service.

As a volunteer, I worked alongside two other Montana natives (Chuck and Mike) for a week, repairing and maintaining the lookout tower. We cleaned, painted outside siding, replaced broken windows, removed rotten catwalk deck boards and updated the interior.

The Mt. Brown Lookout was built in 1929. It was constructed primarily for fire detection purposes. The tower provided for the early detection of wildfires and enabled park rangers to quickly respond.

This lookout tower is a classic example of the fire lookout structures built during that era. It features a wooden cab perched on a tall tower, providing an elevated vantage point for lookout personnel to spot smoke or any signs of fire.



During the fire season, the lookout was staffed by dedicated individuals who lived and worked in the tower. They played a crucial role in the early detection of fires and communication with fire management teams. Lookout personnel used various tools, including an alidade and Osborne Fire Finder, to pinpoint the location of fires. This tower was manned until 1971. Today aerial patrols replace some lookouts while other towers serve overnight guests as rental cabins.

Many lookout towers, including Mt. Brown Lookout, have been preserved and restored as historic structures. They serve as reminders of the park's history and the early efforts to protect its natural resources. Restoration efforts often involve maintenance and renovation to keep the structures in good condition.

One of the benefits of volunteering is meeting and educating park visitors about the importance of preserving historic structures. We had visitors from Montana, Michigan, Colorado, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Wyoming join us after their arduous hike up to the tower.

Consider volunteering with these historic preservation projects as a way to contribute to protect and maintain these beautiful structures.

Look into these organizations to see what they projects they are working on:

- ◆ The NW Montana Lookout Association (<https://www.nwmt-ffla.org/>)
- ◆ The National Park Service (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/volunteer/index.htm>)
- ◆ The HistoriCorps projects (<https://historicorps.org>).

On-the-job training provided. New friendships guaranteed. Sound rewarding? Let's talk!

Slingshot Hiking Wilscot, Ledford and Payne Gaps

by Steve Dennison

What is slingshot hiking?

- ◆ Ideally the hikers meet at a location where the trail runs in both directions.
- ◆ Hikers can go three miles max in either direction. Do a round trip of 12 miles or do two miles either direction for a total of eight round trip miles.
- ◆ Major trail obstructions like snow, ice, large blowdowns could unravel a planned one directional hike but reversing course the other way can salvage the hike.
- ◆ Having a vehicle in the middle can allow for dropping off jackets or replenishing water, food or other items.
- ◆ Very cold or challenging trails can be experienced for shorter distances. In case of an emergency, a rescue effort may be faster and easier.



Steve Dennison, Jan Jeffcoat, Roy Garrett, Bob Cowdrick and Kelly Motter slingshot hiking.

- ◆ Driving long distances to a trail encountering complications like a bear cub stuck high up in a tree could still have a good outcome by reversing course without sticking around for mama bear.



Your Dues and Donations Will Make These 2024 Trail Projects Possible

Big Stamp Gap Drainage Improvements	\$1,000
Brookshire Creek Bridge	\$1,500
Loss Creek Bridge	\$1,500
Suspension Bridge Steps	\$1,000
Tools and Equipment	\$1,500
Trail Signs	\$1,500
Unicoi Reroute	\$5,000
Volunteer Training	\$3,000
Wilderness Maintenance Summer Crew	\$10,000
TOTAL	\$26,000

Help us to "...leave a footpath for generations to follow"

[Membership](#)

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Happy to be in the forest hiking from Thunder Rock to Bear Paws Loop and back along the Ocoee River. Photo courtesy of Ray Laws.



Brrrrr say the rhododendrons!!!!

Rainy Maintenance Trip

by Joe Cantwell

The BMTA Maintenance Trip on December 9, 2023, was interrupted by heavy rains while gathering at Thunder Rock Campground. The plan was to focus the efforts of 22 volunteers over Sections 12a through 12d. The overriding concern for individual safety resulted in discretion winning out over valor. Therefore, a majority of the work was cancelled for a future trip.

Barry Allen led a chainsaw crew of Patrick Ward, Shane Morrison, Art Kolberg, and Dara Denning to cut two blowdown areas on Section 12c. One included a 36-inch hemlock suspended over the trail.



Crawl under or leap over?!



No more crawling or leaping!

With a break in the rain, Darcy Douglas, and Patti Barrows lopped and brushed out a mile-long section. An additional crew of Steve Dennison, Bill Cox, Dwayne Bordelon, Greg Trotnic leap-frogged ahead and brushed a second mile in heavy rhododendrons.

The Martin family, Kenny, Daphne and Madison, used weed eaters and loppers to open the trail under the Deep Gap powerline. They then continued north on Section 12b.



The final results of the day were eight trees removed, 16,900 feet of trail brushed, 22 BMTA members putting in 133 hours on a soggy Saturday. Well done!!

Blue Ridge and Conasauga District Staff Recognized for Their Work

Forest Service News Release

At the 2023 Regional Forester's Honor Awards Ceremony, USDA Forest Service celebrated individuals who promoted the lasting economic, ecological and social vitality that comes from nature.

The ceremony was held in Atlanta on December 14, 2023. This year's theme for recognition was "Assess. Transform. Achieve. Showcasing our Best."

For support of the [Southern Region Recreation Fee Program](#), the Recreation management staff on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, including the Conasauga District's Karen Larsen and Blue Ridge District's Towdy Tipton and John Stephens, were recognized for creating and enhancing systems and processes that provide for safe, positive, productive work environments and outstanding customer service.

Congratulations for the well-deserved recognition!

Learn more about these awards at: www.fs.usda.gov/r8.

A Visit to the New Amicalola Falls Visitor Center

by Kathy Williams

I finally found a day when I could head to Amicalola Falls and check out the new Visitor Center – known for the starting point for the Approach Trail that many hikers use to access the southern terminus of either the Appalachian Trail or the Benton MacKaye Trail. At the entrance was a notification regarding ongoing renovations from the steps to the reflection pond. This renovation does not impact the Approach Trail. I found the redesigned parking to be expanded and a section set aside for buses and RVs. The exterior of the Center was attractive and inviting. The new bathrooms feature stainless steel toilets, sinks and trash cans to ensure durability and sustainability. It was exciting to see the new look and well thought-out design. Well done!!!



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An EV charging station is now available.



The plaque commemorating the Appalachian Trail is featured at the entrance with attractive new brick floor and wall.



Inside is a stunning entrance with a center counter.



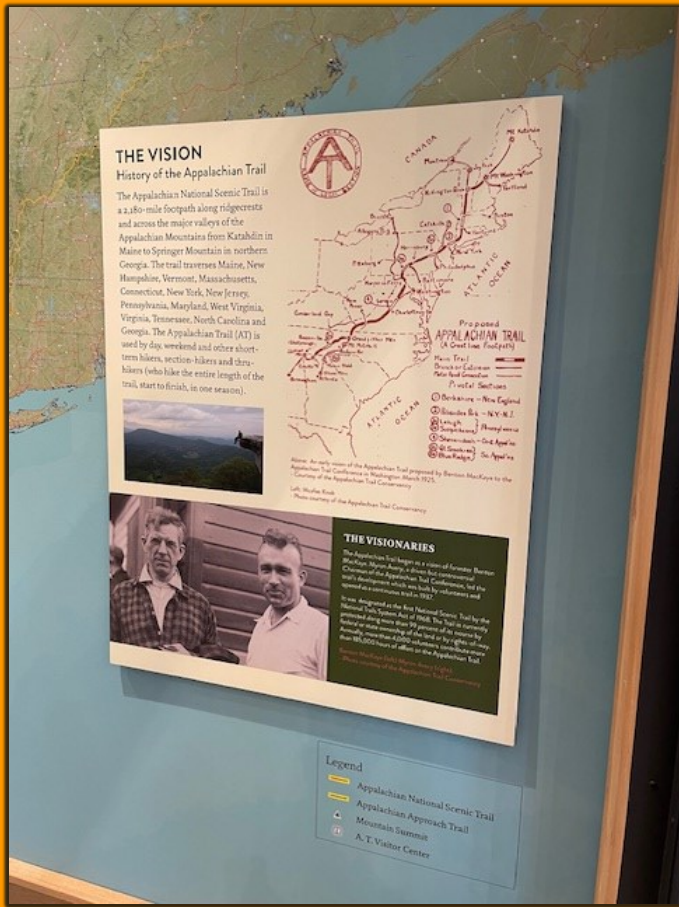
The GATC's presentation features a topographical map of the AT in Georgia. It is interactive and visually appealing!



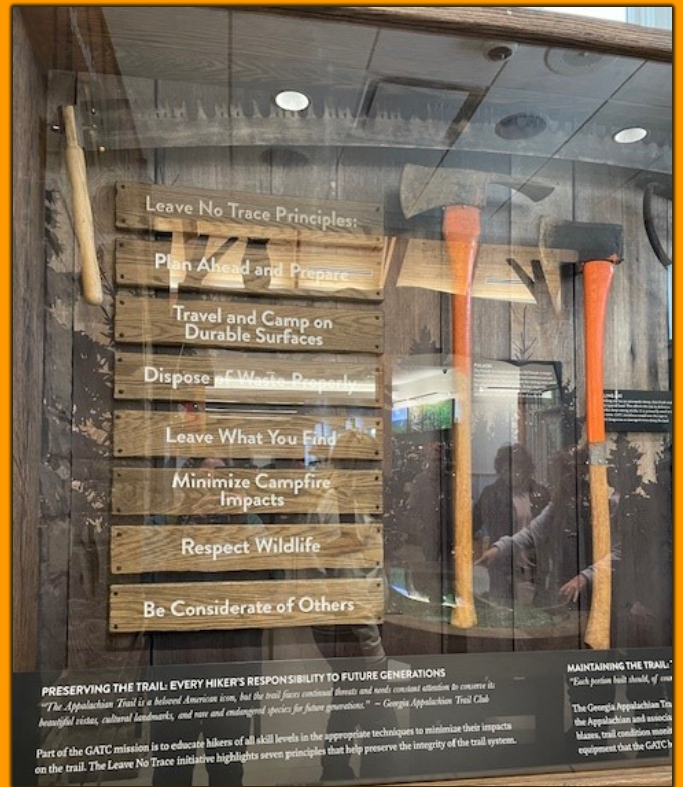
This moonshine still is not a replica! It is the real thing!



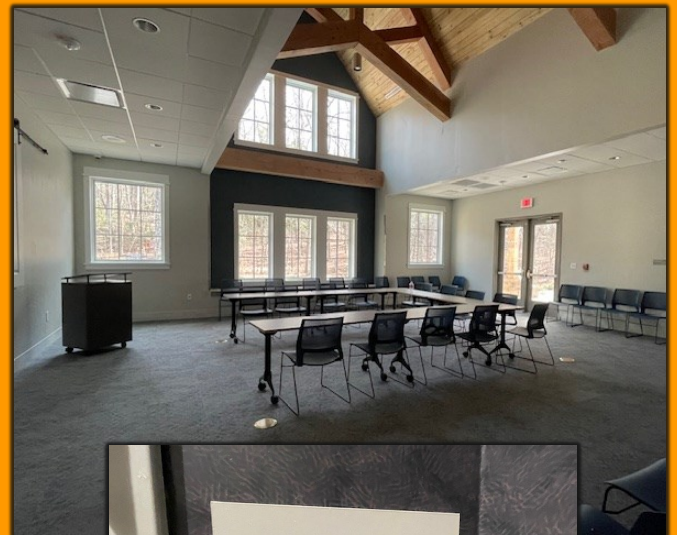
One of the best features at the Center were the educational displays.



The Vision! Preserving the history lesson!



The Principals of Leave No Trace coupled with trail tools.



A sign for a the meeting room, The Arch Room, is worded in Braille.



One of my favorite places, The Len Foote Hike Inn, has an appealing and informative display!

I loved the falls café! Hot beverages and sandwiches as well as grab and go! After my hike I indulged with an Earl Grey Tea and a muffin.



The café seating area adjoins the merchandizing part of the Center. Good planning, with the use of movable shelving, allows for future innovation.



Hatchet throwing and archery are available.



The playground has some new interesting features.



The patio area as been attractively repaved. It is one of the best places for a photo op!
The Arch is inviting you to "Take a hike!"



The hike never disappoints! Stunning views! The forest and falls are calling you!

Condolences

Condolences are due for the family and friends of Don Converse, the most recent Past President of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club. Don was an excellent trail builder, an excellent President and made a real difference. He passed away December 13, 2023, and will be missed.

Condolences are due for the family of BMTA Hike Leader Howard Baggett and his wife Gail who unexpectedly lost their son Jeff after he experienced a brain aneurysm December 15, 2023. Now well into his 80's, Howard has continued to hike and work on trails – he and Jeff enjoyed a hike a few days before Jeff's passing.



Condolences also are due for the family of BMTA Section Maintainer Ralph Van Pelt whose son Nicholas was shot and killed in Minot, North Dakota, on Christmas Eve. A suspect was taken into custody at the scene. Nicholas served as a Ward County Sheriff's deputy until May 2023 when he began serving full-time as a Master Sergeant with the 219th Security Forces Squadron. Like his father, Nicholas was an outdoors enthusiast enjoying hunting, fishing and trapping in North Dakota. He is survived by his parents and three children. The funeral will be in Ringgold, Georgia, January 12, 2024.

We encourage everyone who knew Don and/or know Howard or Ralph to reach out to offer support to their families.

Thinking Florida Outdoors in Winter Away From the Crowds? Then Read This!

by George Owen

Plan or wish to visit the Florida outdoors soon? Want to consider Florida forests and waters for your future, or just interested in knowing more about the state?

Both Florida and New York State are virtually tied for possessing the most public lands to wander over in the East percentage-wise - about 33% each. Forget Miami, the crowded beaches and Disney World. This winter, a course is being offered on what is often tagged "the real Florida" - millions of acres of wonderful outdoors away from the cities and crowds.

Our own George Owen, one of the original BMTA founders and still a very active member and hike leader, is offering a short course at the Institute for Continuing Learning (ICL) at Young Harris College in North Georgia for two hours every Monday afternoon from January 22 to February 12. The course is "Hiking and the Outdoors in Northern Florida," with information centered on the Sunshine State from Ocala/Gainesville north to the Georgia line and westward into the state's upper Gulf panhandle. George provides plenty of handouts in the course. He is a Florida native - grew up and attended college there (Stetson University) and taught courses in Florida outdoors and exploration. If you are ever planning a trip to Florida and wish to learn more about Florida's outdoors and its thousands of miles of trails, this class is for you.

Every winter, George sponsors and guides a weeklong trip to northern Florida. You will be staying at Wakulla Springs State Park and Gainesville while exploring trails daily. These hikes are leisurely with nights at great, highly-rated indoor facilities. Take this course to be eligible for future trips - there are a few openings left for this year's tour.

For information/registration, go to the [Institute for Continuing Learning](#) at Young Harris or contact George Owen at 706-374-4716.



George Owen leading a recent hike in the Cohuttas.

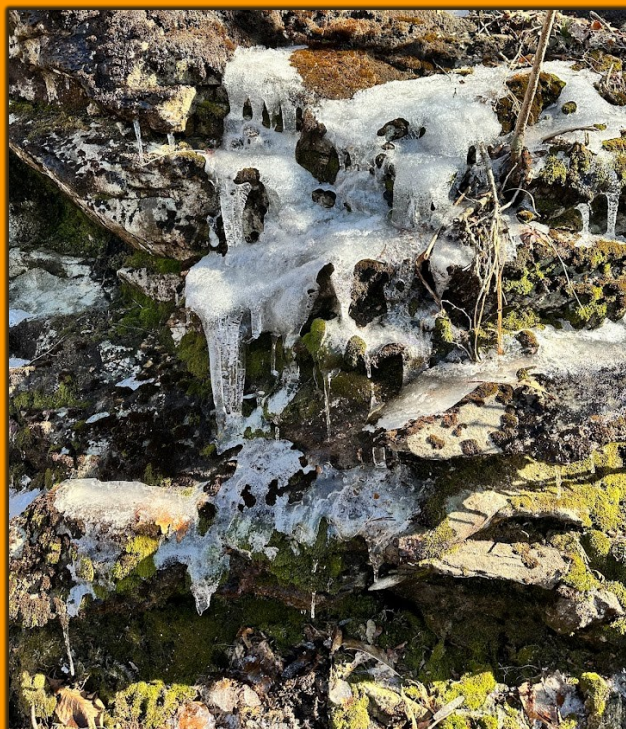
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

by Mike Pilvinsky with photos courtesy of Kelly Wentworth

What better way to start the new year than a hike in beautiful, clear, crisp air on the BMT? Leading this hike on New Year's Day has become a tradition for me and this year might have been the best. Ken Cissna, Gilbert Treadwell, Jane Harrison, Kelly Motter, Kelly Wentworth and Sam Sly joined me on this annual trek. We hiked from Big Stamp Gap to the southern terminus of the BMT, then went on to the southern terminus of the AT and had lunch at the Springer Mountain Shelter. Afterward, we hiked north on the AT and then turned on to the BMT for a pleasant walk back to our trailhead. The morning temperature was below freezing with gusty winds but by noon as we walked at lower elevations the bright sunlight and calm breeze made for a gorgeous afternoon.



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First Day Hike at Vogel State Park

by Kathy Williams

Having wanted to hike the Bear Hair Gap Trail at Vogel State Park, I jumped at the chance to go as part of the Parks program throughout the country for a free guided hike on January 1. We had the new naturalist at Vogel State Park as our guide. I found the trail to be well-maintained but several water crossings required careful foot placement. Poles really helped. The view of Lake Trahlyta, named for Princess Trahlyta of the Eastern Band of the Cherokees, was well worth our climb! After our trek we were rewarded with a *Hiking Since Day 1* sticker.



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.

January

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. Sections 11d, 12 a, 12b.
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. Section 15.
Contact Nelson Ashbrook at bmtatn-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 19 (Monday) BMT Hemp Top Trail to Double Springs Gap and return. Moderately/strenuous 11.8 miles. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at bmtahikeleadersd@bmta.org.



February 24 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA

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

March

March 4 (Monday) Hike the Rock Creek Trail in Cherokee National Forest, Tennessee.

Begin at Hwy 64 at Thunder Rock Trail Parking and hike across the Ocoee and up the BMT 2.2 miles to the Rock Creek Trail. Hike 5.6 miles on the Rock Creek Trail. Total mileage will be 7.8. The climbs and descents are moderate. Rating for the entire hike is strenuous. There are a few minor creek crossings, one could be fairly deep. We will shuttle from the other end of the Rock Creek Trail on Hwy 64, a very easy shuttle. Contact Hike Leaders Clare Sullivan and Judy Price at bmtahikeleaders2@bmta.org.

March 5 (Tuesday) Brush Creek Loop. Moderate/easy 7 miles.

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

March 8 (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 bmtahikeleaderkc@bmta.org.



March 9 (Saturday) GA Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact Joe Cantwell at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

March 10 (Sunday) Byron Reece to Blood Mountain and return. Moderate/strenuous 4 + miles round-trip up to the top of Blood Mountain for absolutely beautiful views. We'll take this hike slow and easy so that all can enjoy it. Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at bmtahikeleaderkm@bmta.org.

March 12 (Tuesday) Tour of Project Chimps along with a Lunch Launch! We will be using their extra-large mounted sling shots to shoot their cabbage, peppers, lettuce etc., into the air into their habitat area. Following the Chimps lunch (and ours), we will hike the 4-mile trail at Project Chimps. \$25.00 donation to Project Chimps (cash/check) minimum.
Contact Hike Leaders Clare Sullivan and Kathy Williams at bmtahikeleaderscs2@bmta.org.

March 18 (Monday) Hike to the remains of Caney Creek Village, Tennessee, in the Cherokee National Forest. Begin at 1,604 feet elevation and hike down to 840 feet elevation to see the remains of Caney Creek Village, then hike back up. This village existed from 1912-1941. It had electricity, indoor plumbing, mass transit, a lighted tennis court and a hotel. It's known as the only community in America that never had a vehicle or horse in the community. The remains are visible because the concrete foundations were made of the same grade of concrete as the dams on the Ocoee. Members of the community built the flume along the Ocoee. Moderate 6 miles. Contact Hike Leaders Clare Sullivan and Ed Sullivan at bmtahikeleaderscs2@bmta.org.

March 22 (Friday). Fightingtown Creek #2. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog) Easy/moderate 3.8 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at bmtahikeleaderkc@bmta.org.



March 23 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact Nelson Ashbrook at bmatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

March 24 (Sunday) Standing Indian Mountain. Moderate/strenuous 5 miles round trip. Fantastic views at the top of Standing Indian. Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at bmtahikeleaderkm@bmta.org.

March 26 (Tuesday) Quartz Loop and BMT to Thunder Rock. Easy/moderate 5 plus miles.
Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at bmtahikeleaderrc@bmta.org.

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

The deadline for the February Newsletter is Wednesday, January 31. Thank you!

Welcome BMTA Corporate Members!

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association is grateful for the help and support provided by our Corporate Members. When you visit one of these businesses, please identify yourself as a BMTA member and be sure to thank them for their support!



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