Benton MacKaye Trail in Tennessee.

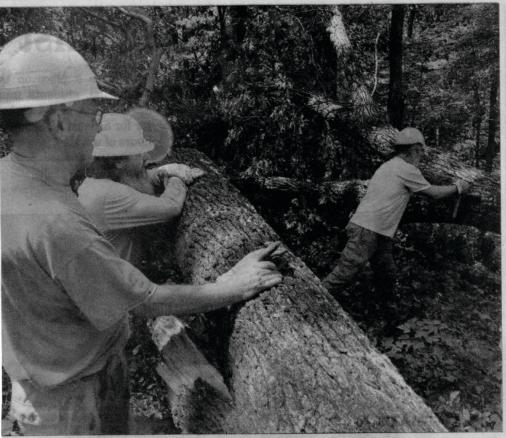


PHOTO BY-RALPH VAN PELT Ken Jones, Art Kolberg and David Blount work to remove downed trees on a section of the

BMTA attends to damage caused by May storm

BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

A May storm wreaked havoc on the Benton MacKave Trail (BMT) in Georgia and Tennessee. Tennessee sections 12a-b were "obliterated."

The majority of this 6.7 miles of trail is in wilderness where no mechanized equipment (including chain saws) is allowed. Volunteers rely on crosscut saws and, if the trunk of the tree is on the ground, they must use handsaws to make the final cuts to ground level.

The rest of the trail fared better, but blowdowns and tread damage were prevalent. Crews were able to move quickly to take out

a slew of scattered blowdowns blocking Georgia Section 1a (Springer Mountain-Big Stamp Gap).

Tennessee, but the majority of the 36 trail workers on the main work trip, as well as those who went out individually to make the trees accessible to the sawyers to take out, were from Gilmer and Fannin County.

Fortunately the 20 trees down on Springer Mountain did not present the removal problems the section in Tennessee did.

ty when a major storm hits. Hikers should not attempt to navigate a trail that has sustained significant dam-

Still, there always are a under, around or through the blockages, but it is far from a guarantee of a safe or successful trek.

Nevertheless, those hikers can be an asset for developing plans for reopening the trail. By providing GPS coordinates with pictures of what they encounter, they help Benton the storm, BMTA volun-MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) volunteers determine the extent and complexity of the damage.

The treetops were so numerous and so massive the trunks weren't visible. to clear the trail.

The first crew's foray to do maintenance was anything but encouraging. Removing blowdowns and The main damage was in large limbs as they went, they made it only 100 vards, not a positive preview of what was to come.

Thirty-six volunteers, including 21 certified sawyers, were on hand for the final push to clear the trail on the June work trip. The pace was agonizingly slow. In some areas, the distance between trees was only a step or two.

As soon as the trail work-Safety is a high priori- ers removed one blowdown, they would take a step or two and they were at the next tree to take out. Many of the large limbs blocking age - getting lost or in- the trail were up to 30" in jured is a very real possibil- circumference, as large as a blowdown.

The final count was few intrepid hikers who re- 48 trees on Sections 12afuse to be deterred. The ini- b. Other obstacles includtial prep work for clearing ed huge root balls (a tree's the trail does help these roots come out of the ground hikers find their way over, leaving a large, gaping hole where the trail once was), and 20" to 48" blowdowns had fallen on top of up to 15' high root balls!

The all-volunteer crews put in 362.5 hours to make Sections 12a-b once again safe and open for all to en-

During the month since teers have removed more than 200 blowdowns from the BMT. The average number of trees removed from the trail per month is 23-

If you would like to learn let alone accessible. Crews more about the Benton had to open pathways to MacKaye Trail and/or trail the trunks before the saw- maintenance, contact Joy yers could begin the work Forehand at jforehand@ bmta.org.