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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 41, ISSUE 90

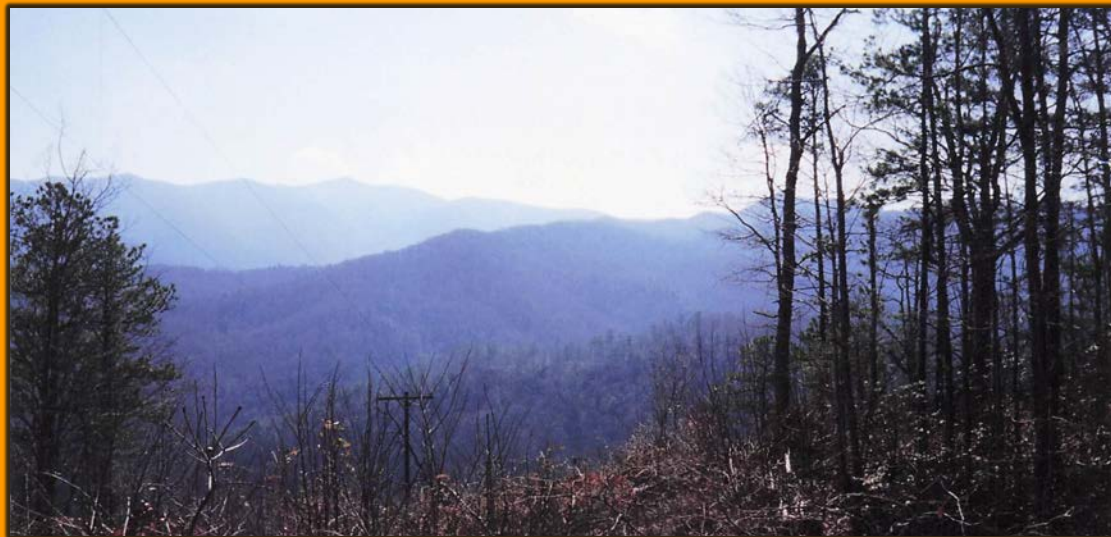
OCTOBER 2024

Deals Gap Part 2

by Marty Dominy

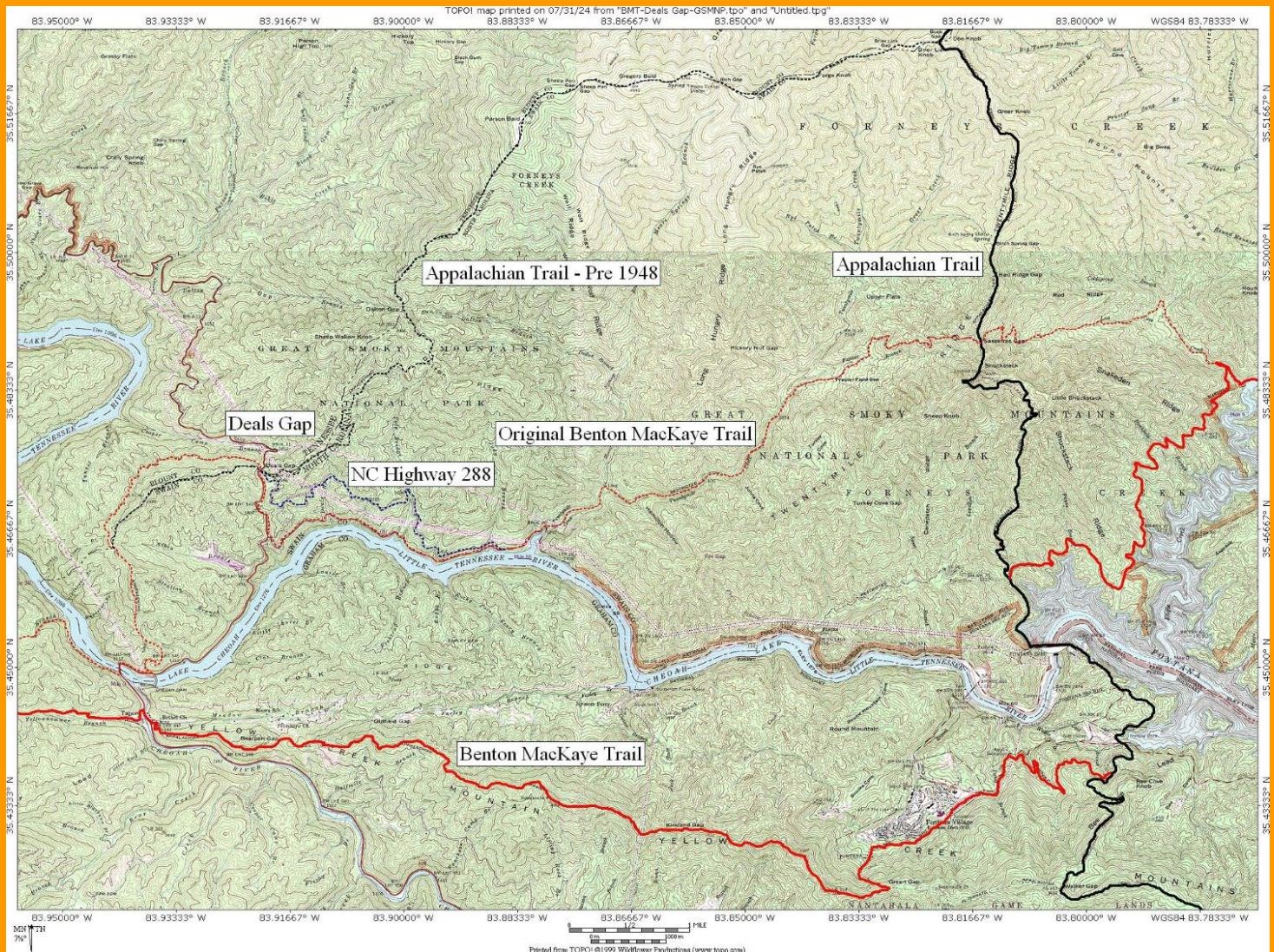
With the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) lying along the northeast side of U. S. Highway 129 and along the northwest side of parts of North Carolina Highway 28, the selection of a portal into the National Park for the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) should have been easy. It was not. The old pre-1948 route of the Appalachian Trail (AT) from Tapoco on the Little Tennessee River to Doe Knob was used as the baseline for planning. There would be a point where the BMT would leave the state line, cross over the AT, and descend into the wilds along the North Carolina side of the park.

Of particular interest within the GSMNP were the bald summits of Parsons Bald and Gregory Bald straddling the Tennessee – North Carolina state line. These mountain-tops held expansive views of the western end of the park. One could look right down the spine of the Smokies all the way to Clingman's Dome. Fontana Lake was in view to the right. Cade's Cove was in view to the left. A panoramic camera view could catch them all in one frame. The existing trail that continued out to Doe Knob would leave the BMT in a situation where co-alignment was necessary with the AT. There was not a direct crossing of the AT at Doe Knob, so a turn south to Sassafras Gap or a continuation east to Spence Field would be required before a side trail leading into North Carolina would be available. Another option to make the long descent of Long Hungry Ridge Trail down to Twentymile Creek was shown on some early plans. But all these options depended on entering the park at Deals Gap.



Continued next page

The National Park Service made known their dislike of a Deals Gap entrance into the park early and often. Based on their experience with vandalism and other unmanageable situations at Davenport Gap on the eastern edge of the park, they predicted Deals Gap would become “Davenport Gap West” if a trailhead were opened there. Of concern in the west end of the park was the problem of poaching, particularly of the bear population. These problems were echoed during an impromptu meeting at park headquarters on May 15, 1992.



If the BMT were to run through the park, the Park Service would insist on a more secure entrance at the Twentymile Ranger Station on Highway 28. Even with the success on the south side of Deals Gap, this would mean walking 0.7 mile along the busy U. S. Highway 129 and 2.8 miles along North Carolina Highway 28. A few Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) members were well versed on the history of the area and did some research into an abandoned highway – North Carolina Highway 288. This predecessor of Highway 28 had run north of the Little Tennessee River from Bryson City to Deals Gap in the era before Fontana Lake was created. In fact, part of the BMT north of Fontana Dam follows part of this roadway, although other parts are now under water. The far western portion at Deals Gap was gated. When BMTA members inquired about the ownership status, the North Carolina Department of Transportation couldn't even find any record of it. Research a little closer to home revealed that the old road was split down the middle with the GSMNP owning one half and the private ownerships on the south side owning the other. The Park Service had no authority to open the roadway to public use and the multiple private owners had no interest in public use of the road as a trail.

Had permission been obtained to use the old road, the BMT could have simply crossed Highway 129 in Deals Gap and been separated from the vehicular traffic all the way to within a half mile of Twentymile Ranger Station.

As it was, the trail followed the increasingly treacherous road walk along Highways 129 and 28 from Deals Gap to Twentymile Creek until the Yellow Creek Mountain relocation was instituted in 2014. A route over Parsons Bald and Gregory Bald was still possible, but not terribly practical, from Twentymile Creek. Using the circuitous 12.1-mile combination of the Wolf Ridge Trail, Gregory Bald Trail, and the Long Hungry Ridge Trail, the trail could have left Twentymile Creek Trail and returned to it 2.6 miles further upstream. Nobody in the BMTA ever proposed this, and it is doubtful if the Park Service would ever have approved it.

With the completion of the BMT from Cheoah Dam to Deals Gap, hikers tolerated the road walk along Highway 129 and Highway 28 to Twentymile Ranger Station. There was very little road shoulder upon which they could seek refuge, but at least the traffic was sparse. This condition did not last long. Beyond the year 2000, motorcycle riders and sports car owners “discovered” Highway 129 and promoted it as a challenging adventure on which to test their rides. Savvy promoters saddled the road with the moniker “Tale of the Dragon”. In no time, the popularity of the highway skyrocketed. While this was good for the handful of businesses in the area, the BMTA had to look at alternatives to Deals Gap.



As early as 2011, there were independent proposals to rehabilitate the Yellow Creek Mountain Trail from Tapoco to its intersection with the AT south of Fontana Village.

The general idea was to promote a well-maintained third trail connected to both the AT and the BMT that could provide an opportunity for a two- or three-day loop hike. The Forest Service was far too involved in other matters to consider it at the time, but with consistent pressure from the BMTA, a proposal to move the BMT onto the Yellow Creek Mountain Trail eventually was approved. This was largely spearheaded by Dick Evans and Ernest Engman, and on May 30, 2014, the BMT was officially relocated to Yellow Creek Mountain, the Fontana Village Trails, and Fontana Dam via the AT.

The first guidebook update after the relocation retained information on the old route in addition to the description for the relocation. However, the old route using Twentymile Trail and Lost Cove Trail as shown on the National Park Service's GSMNP trail map were gone. The gold highlight for the BMT now ran from Fontana Dam to Lakeshore Drive (Road to Nowhere) almost entirely on the Lakeshore Trail.



Today, gems of this trail route reflect the vision and hard work of the BMTA.





2024 Annual Meeting & Hike Fest Banquet

Unicoi State Park and Lodge

November 2, 2024

BMTA Annual Meeting Banquet Menu

Garden Salad with Assorted Condiments and Dressings

Southern Style Cole Slaw

Yeast Rolls and Biscuits with Butter and Preserves

Entrees:

Optional Vegan Plated Meal - Portabella Steak

Lemon-Herb Baked Chicken

Blackened Catfish, with Black Bean & Corn Relish

Cider Brined Pork Loin with Apple Chutney

Roasted Maple Sweet Potatoes

Collard Greens

Mashed Potatoes and Gravy

Dessert:

Pecan Pie or Warm Peach Cobbler

Beverages:

*Coffee (Decaf & Regular) / Iced Tea (Sweet & Unsweet) / *Cash Bar**

\$35

Go to RSVP to pay

Casual Attire

Deadline for Dinner Reservations is October 28, 2024!

You can pay online or by check.

Checks should be made payable to the Benton MacKaye Trail Association and mailed to:

Benton MacKaye Trail Association

PO Box 6

Cherry Log, GA 30522

Be sure to sign up for hikes and register for the Meeting by going to Sign Up!

Featured Speaker

BMTA's Annual Meeting & Hike Fest November 23 2024

Unicoi Lodge — Helen, Georgia

Forest Fun, A Stroll through the Seasons with Suzy



Suzy Downing grew up in rural Spartanburg, South Carolina. She was surrounded by a family that loved gardening and nature.

Downing's grandfather worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps and was one of the first park superintendents at Table Rock State Park. Her father loved the Park so they spent a lot of time either on day trips or camping in the park.

"I'm thankful we were an outdoor family," said Downing.

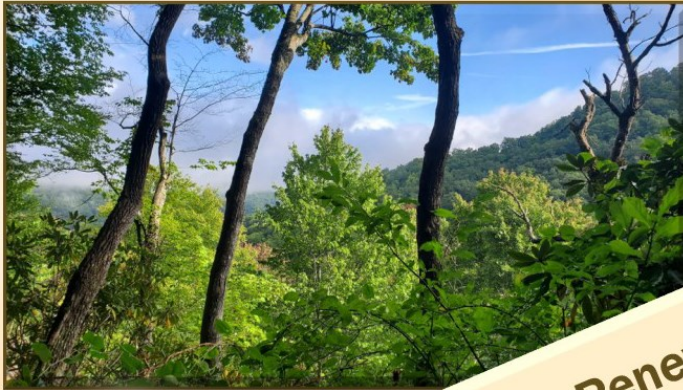
Her aunt who lived next door was always in her yard or garden and loved showing the family bugs, bees, snakes, flowers, birds and more. "We called her "Mother Nature", said Downing. "I always wanted to be like her!"

A member of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association since 2016, Downing is a regular on BMTA's sponsored hikes and is known for her captivating pictures of flora and fauna along the way.

An accomplished amateur photographer, Downing's photos have appeared in the 2015 print edition of the Georgia Wildlife Federation's annual publication as well as in a few of their email newsletters. In addition, her pictures were featured in Charles Seabrook's July 24, 2020, column in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

Downing believes a good day is any day she can step into a forest and feel the joy of nature. Her favorite sections on the BMT include Lost Creek, Section 12e – FS 103 >> FS 173 – trestle for a wildflower hike and Section 4a, Skeenah Gap >> Wilscot Gap for a winter hike.

2024 Membership Drive Starts Today!



Please Join or Renew Today!
Help Us Protect, Preserve and Maintain the BMT.

**Memberships & Donations
provide tools training and
materials for BMTA
Volunteers.**



- ♦ Membership fees & donations are the primary source of funds for preserving & protecting the BMT.
- ♦ For a donation of \$50, \$100, \$250, \$500, you will receive an Individual or Family Membership for 2025

Memberships purchased after October 1 will be good thru December 31, 2025.

[MEMBERSHIP](#)[DONATE](#)[DONATE LAF](#)[PARTNERSHIPS](#)

GA Maintenance on Fall Branch Falls

by Joe Cantwell photos courtesy of Ken Cissna

The monthly Georgia maintenance trip on September 14, tackled Section 6b leading to Fall Branch Falls. The BMTA, at the request of the Forest Service, had rerouted the original trail to protect the stream from siltation. The Falls is an extremely popular destination for locals as well as area visitors. The trail was showing signs of stress, particularly due to the use of short cuts, rather than the designated trail.

To no avail, the Forest Service had previously placed signs asking people to stay on the trail. On this trip, two crews were assigned the task of barricading these trails with downed tree debris. Steve Hayden led Crew One, consisting of David Ensley, Darcy Douglas and Dave Ricker. Kenny and Daphne Martin, Laurie Schatz and Tim and Sage Elmore formed Crew Two. They cut, carried, dragged and piled debris to block six short cuts. This work will be closely monitored to determine if it sends the message to "Stay on the Trail".

Ian Guttridge led the team of Steve Pruett and Gilbert Treadwell to replace two decaying steps leading to the falls. On their way back to the parking area they trimmed multiple trip hazards within the heavily worn trail. Andy Meeks, Will Stanley, Steve Dennison, Joe Cantwell and first time BMT maintainer Stephen Catana (welcome!) regraded 22 water diversions between the Falls and the Stanley Creek Trail intersection. Ed Sullivan led the fifth crew of Art Kolberg and Bob Cowdrick to Section 3a between Hwy 60 and the Wal-lahala Overlook. Their day was occupied with shaping 22 water diversions and removing one tree.

As the Maintenance Director, I am extremely pleased with the results of 20 volunteers, dedicating 119.5 hours on a Saturday, keeping safety as a priority and working to keep the BMT in outstanding condition.



Before



After

Steve Pruett and Gilbert Treadwell relish their hard work!

Hunting Season is Here! Get Out Your Orange!!!

Click on the following websites for more detailed information:

Georgia: [Georgia Hunting & Fishing Seasons & Rules | eRegulations](#)

Tennessee: [Tennessee Deer Season Dates, Regulations and Other Information \(tn.gov\)](#)

North Carolina: [Hunting in North Carolina \(ncwildlife.org\)](#)



Mr Bones wears his orange!
He doesn't want to get shot full of holes!



Clingman's Dome Name Restored to Kuwohi

The U.S. Board of Geographic Names has approved the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians request to restore the mountain's name to its Cherokee name. The name Kuwohi (pronounced koo-WHOA-hee) in Cherokee means "mulberry place".

Kuwohi is the highest point in the Smokies and is a sacred mountain to the Cherokee.

Efforts to restore the Cherokee name began in 2022 by the Eastern Band of the Cherokee members Lavita Hill and Mary Crowe.



View from Kuwohi in April 2023. *NPS Photo*



New for 2025 BMTA PARTNERSHIPS

Beginning October 1, 2024, BMTA will offer Business, Silver, Gold, Platinum and Diamond Partnerships for the 2025 calendar year.

Each Partnership Category has a highly desirable assortment of benefits—here are a few:

- ♦ Logo on BMTA website
- ♦ Logo in *BMTA Newsletter*
- ♦ Logo on BMTA's Tool Trailer
- ♦ Full page ad in *BMTA Newsletter*
- ♦ Project/Event Sponsorship
- ♦ Sponsor Coupons for Trail Maintainers

By providing funds for maintenance projects and training, Partnerships will enable BMTA to keep the BMT safe and open for all to enjoy.

- ♦ Bridges
- ♦ Kiosks
- ♦ Tools and Equipment
- ♦ Trail Signage
- ♦ Volunteer Training
- ♦ Wilderness Summer Crews

For detailed information, individuals as well as business and corporate representatives should go to [Partner](#).

Benton MacKaye Trail Association is an exempt organization as described in Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Employer Identification #58-1428009. Questions about your donation – email [Partnerships](#).

**If you receive a benefit as a result of making a contribution to a qualified organization, you can deduct only the amount of your contribution that is more than the value of the benefit you receive.*



Section 14c Work on Unicoi Gap to Buck Bald Road

Photos courtesy of Greg Trotnic



Steve Dennison and Bill Cox hard at work!



BMTA's 2024 Annual Meeting & Hike Fest

Unicoi State Park & Lodge, Helen, Georgia

October 31 — November 3

For reservations call 800-573-9659.

To receive your discount—Use Code 10280

Mention the Benton MacKaye Trail Association!

**Book Your
Room Today!**



Clean Trail Days & October 19, 2024

*Fall Branch Falls Trailhead
Swinging Bridge Parking Area*

Clean Trails Day

Event staff will acquaint our guests with hiking and maintenance opportunities with BMTA as well as the importance of using Leave No Trace (LNT) principles when hiking or camping.



*If you'd like to volunteer to be a BMTA Ambassador at the event,
Contact Bob Cowdrick, bcowdrick@bmta.org.*

Stop by to say "Hi!" while you enjoy a great fall hike!



BMTA's 2024 Annual Meeting & Hike Fest

Unicoi State Park & Lodge, Helen, Georgia

October 31 — November 3

[Register for the Annual Meeting & Hike Fest &](#)

[Sign Up for Annual Meeting Hikes](#)

On the Trail!



Ralph Collison and his hikers enjoyed perfect weather at Unicoi State Park.



Bob Nelson and Steve Dennison worked an hour removing a wooden sign a hungry bear had almost eaten in its entirety. About half the letters were on the sign in August but the bear ate all the letters and much of the post in the interim. They installed the new sign in about 20 minutes.

The Grandersons Do It Again!!!

From The Grandersons



Elizabeth and Josh Granderson 2024!



The Granderson family in 2015!

Dear friends
 Aug 20, 2024
 We just wanted to let y'all know how much we enjoyed the Benton MacKaye trail during our figure-8 hike this summer. We love how much water we cross on the BMT and the remoteness too. We're grateful to all the folks who maintain Trail #2 (we maintain along the OHT here in Arkansas). Thank you so much!
 Sincerely,
 Elizabeth
 Siloam Springs, AR

You'll do amazing & heroic work keeping 300 miles or so of very wilderness trail open, & a pleasure to walk. It is quite a pleasure to walk, & I do not take the opportunity lightly. Thank you so much (every trail is different from the AT) for the uniqueness of the experience — we're glad it's here. (Still one of my most formative family experiences hiking it 9 years ago w/ our kids! :))
 With Sincere Gratitude,
 Josh & Elizabeth
 Siloam Springs, AR

Kudos to the Grandersons!

**In 2015 they thru hiked the entire BMT with all of their children in tow.
 Now in 2024 Elizabeth and Josh have done the trek again!
 What memories they have to cherish!**

Raffle!

BMTA's Annual Meeting & Hike Fest

Unicoi Lodge — Helen, Georgia

November 2, 2024



Proceeds go to

**BMTA's
Land Acquisition Fund**

Tickets available
at the meeting!

\$10 each or 3 for \$25

7 for \$50

16 for \$100

To see all the great raffle items, go to
Raffle

What Will This Year Bring?!

Past Years' Raffles

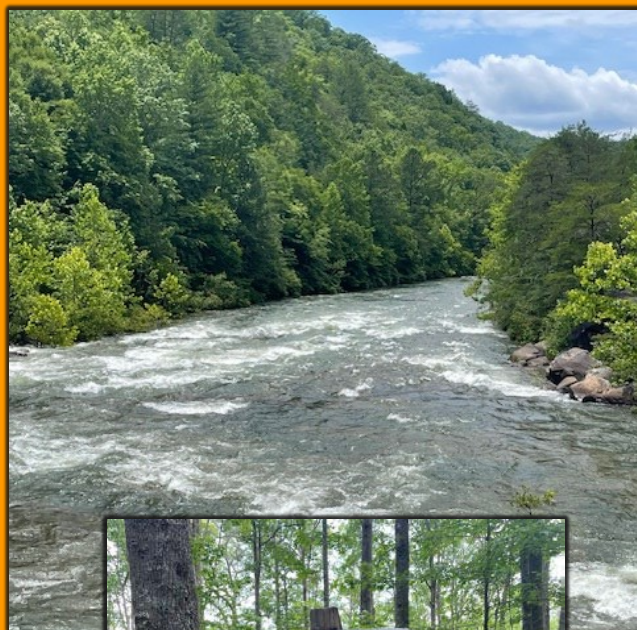


Shop the store!



At the Annual Meeting save shipping.
Take advantage of sale items and deals!

Sometimes You just Have to Take the Trail Available



On September 30, just after tropical storm Helene, we were scheduled to hike Boyd's Gap to Thunder Rock. As a safety precaution the Forest Service had closed all of the gates at Boyd's Gap, Whitewater Center and Thunder Rock. We hiked the Rhododendron Trail to Chestnut Ridge to Bear Paw Loop and back. On our hike, we met several Forest Service employees who were out checking the safety of the area. By the end of our hike all gates were open. Photo courtesy of Ray Laws.

What Amazing Centerpieces Will We Enjoy at the BMTA Awards Banquet? A Look Back at Some from Before!



Upcoming Regional A/B Crosscut Courses

November 20-22, 2024. North Georgia Crosscut Course

The USDA USFS, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) are hosting a crosscut A/B bucking course November 20-22, 2024. There are 20 available spaces.

- ♦ Location: Lumpkin County Library - Classroom session: Wednesday, November 20th, 9 AM - 5 PM.
- ♦ Wildlife Field near Lake Winfield Scott Field Sessions: Thursday November 21st and Friday November 22nd 9 AM - 5 PM.

All participants must have current First Aid and CPR certifications. For more information go [HERE](#).



Congratulations to Renee Theriault on completing her quest to thru hike the BMT!! Well done!!



Proposed Nominees for Next Year's Board of Directors

by Darcy Douglas

Voting takes place November 2, at the Annual Meeting of the Membership. Nominations will also be able to be made from the floor at the meeting on November 2, 2024.

The proposed slate of officers is:

- ♦ President: Bob Cowdrick
- ♦ Vice President: Clare Sullivan
- ♦ Secretary: Jessie Hayden
- ♦ Treasurer: Lydia Burns
- ♦ Georgia Maintenance Director: Joe Cantwell
- ♦ TN/NC Maintenance Director: Patrick Ward
- ♦ Smokies Coordinator: Steve Pruett
- ♦ Membership Director: Steve Hayden
- ♦ Communications Director: Joy Forehand
- ♦ Conservation Director: Barry Allen
- ♦ Hiking Director: Kelly Motter



A Day at Ft. Mountain Can Be Doggone Fun!

Photo courtesy of Ray Laws



Upcoming

by Kelly Motter, Hiking Director

October



October 12 (Saturday) BMTA Monthly Maintenance Trip. Section 3b-c - Wallalah-Licklog Saddle >> Skeenah Gap
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

October 15 (Tuesday) Hiker's favorite! Turtletown Falls. Enjoy this easy out and back 4 miles for two sets of waterfalls. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

October 18 (Friday) BMT Highway 515 to Weaver Creek and return. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy 5 miles mostly along dirt roads with two bridge crossings of Laurel Creek. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

October 19 (Saturday) Clean Trails Day

Contact Bob Cowdric at bcowdric@bmta.org or 678-215-5276.

October 21 (Monday) Whigg Meadow. Easy to mildly moderate 2.6 miles with a 500' climb. We will drive to the Mud Gap Trailhead of the BMT at mile 3.5 on the North Carolina side of the Skyway. We will hike on an old roadbed steadily uphill to the 5000' summit of Whigg Meadow, a large wide open bald with expansive views into the surrounding mountains. We will eat lunch there, then return. Contact Hike leaders Rick and Brenda Harris at rharris@bmta.org or text 513-260-1184 if you plan to attend.



October 26 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip. Sections 13e & 14a – Wildcat Creek >> TN 68.
Contact Steve Dennison at sdennison@bmta.org.

October 28 (Monday) Yonah Preserve in Cleveland. These trails in the Cleveland GA, area are easy to moderate 5 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.



Annual Meeting & Hike Fest October 31 – November 3, 2024!



Continued next page

November

November 8 (Friday) BMT Three Forks to Hickory Flat on AT, along FS road to No Name Bald and back on BMT. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 7 miles. Hoping we'll get some nice fall colors plus Long Creek and Long Creek Falls. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



November 9 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

November 11 (Monday) Trails of Jack Rabbit. Enjoy these easy/moderate 5 miles of trails in NC with views of the lake. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

November 20 (Wednesday) Wagon Train Trail. Out and back for a total of 4 easy miles and fantastic views of Brasstown Bald. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.



November 23 (Saturday) TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

November 29 (Friday) Amadahy Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 5 miles. Good hike for the day after Thanksgiving. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

December

December 6 (Friday) BMT Dally Gap to Jack's River and back. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



December 14 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

December 20 (Friday) Fightingtown Creek #3. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy to moderate 4 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

Mark Your Calendar!

The Len Foote Hike Inn has been reserved for the BMTA on Tuesday, February 25, 2025.

Hikers will need to call the Hike Inn Reservation number and reserve a room in their own name, informing them they are with the BMTA.

Reservations cannot be made online for the BMTA held rooms. Rooms will be half-price.

Reservations must be made by January 25, 2025. After January 24, 2025, unreserved rooms will be available to anyone. There are only 20 rooms at the Len Foote Hike Inn.

- ♦ Total for two people in a room is \$120.75.
- ♦ Total for one person in a room is \$89.13.
- ♦ Phone number to call is 706-344-1547 Mon- Friday 8:30 AM-2:30 PM.



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

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The deadline for the November Newsletter is Thursday, November 7.
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!



BLACK SHEEP RESTAURANT



BRICK BY BRICK CONSULTING
(678) 409-1242



CELEBRATE BLUE RIDGE
CABIN RENTALS



THE HIKE INN -
FONTANA DAM, NC



HIKING 2 HEAL



HISTORIC TAPECO LODGE



THE JUSTIS LAW FIRM LLC



KOREAN ALPINE CLUB
OF GEORGIA



ROD'S ROCKIN ROLLS



SIX FEET UNDER PUB &
FISH HOUSE



STAR MOUNTAIN OUTFITTERS



SUNCOAST OUTDOORS



WILDWOOD MAGIC

