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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



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MARCH 2025

Family-Friendly Hikes on the Benton MacKaye Trail

by Bob Cowdrick

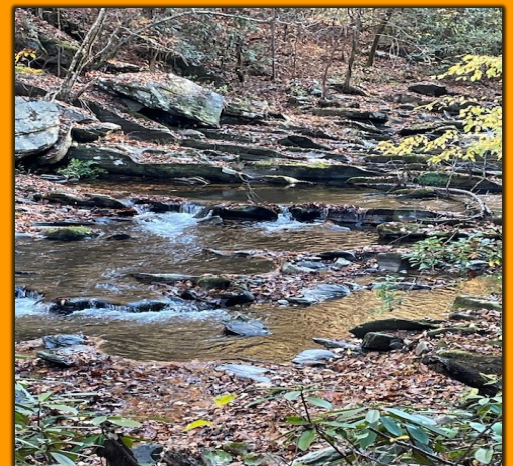
Spring officially begins on March 20th! With warmer temperatures on the way, why not consider a family-friendly hike on the Benton MacKaye Trail? There are plenty of wonderful sections to explore with spouses, children, grandchildren, friends, dogs and neighbors. Whether you're looking for a short stroll or a longer trek, here are some excellent options:

Lost Creek Trail

- **Distance:** 5.4 miles round trip
- **Difficulty Rating:** Easy
- **Benton MacKaye Trail Section 12e**

Highlights:

This scenic trail follows Lost Creek through a beautiful, forested area with gentle terrain, making it perfect for families. The creek provides a lovely backdrop, and kids will enjoy spotting small wildlife and skipping stones.



Long Creek Falls Trail

- **Distance:** 2.1 miles round trip
- **Difficulty Rating:** Easy
- **Benton MacKaye Trail Sections 2a and 2b**

Highlights:

One of the most popular waterfalls along the Benton MacKaye Trail, Long Creek Falls is a great destination for families. This relatively short hike leads to a breathtaking cascade, perfect for a picnic and photo opportunities.



Continued next page

Hiwassee River Trail

- **Distance:** 4.3 miles one way
- **Difficulty Rating:** Easy
- **Benton MacKaye Trail Sections 13b and 13c**

Highlights:

Following the Hiwassee River, this peaceful trail offers gorgeous river views and opportunities for fishing or wading. Families can enjoy a relaxing walk with multiple spots to rest and take in the natural beauty.

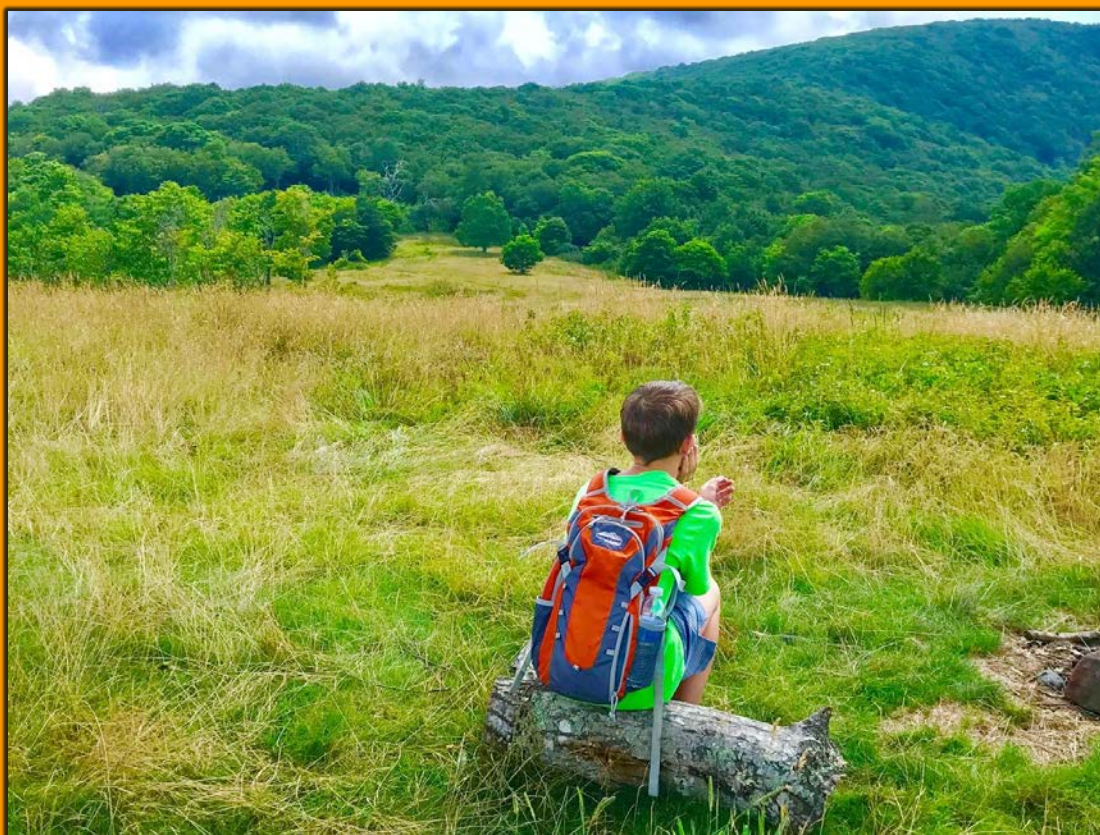


Whigg Meadow Trail

- **Distance:** 3.2 miles round trip
- **Difficulty Rating:** Intermediate
- **Benton MacKaye Trail Section 17c**

Highlights:

This hike offers a slightly more challenging experience with a rewarding view. At the top, Whigg Meadow provides a stunning panoramic vista, making it a great spot to rest, have lunch and let kids run free in the open meadow.

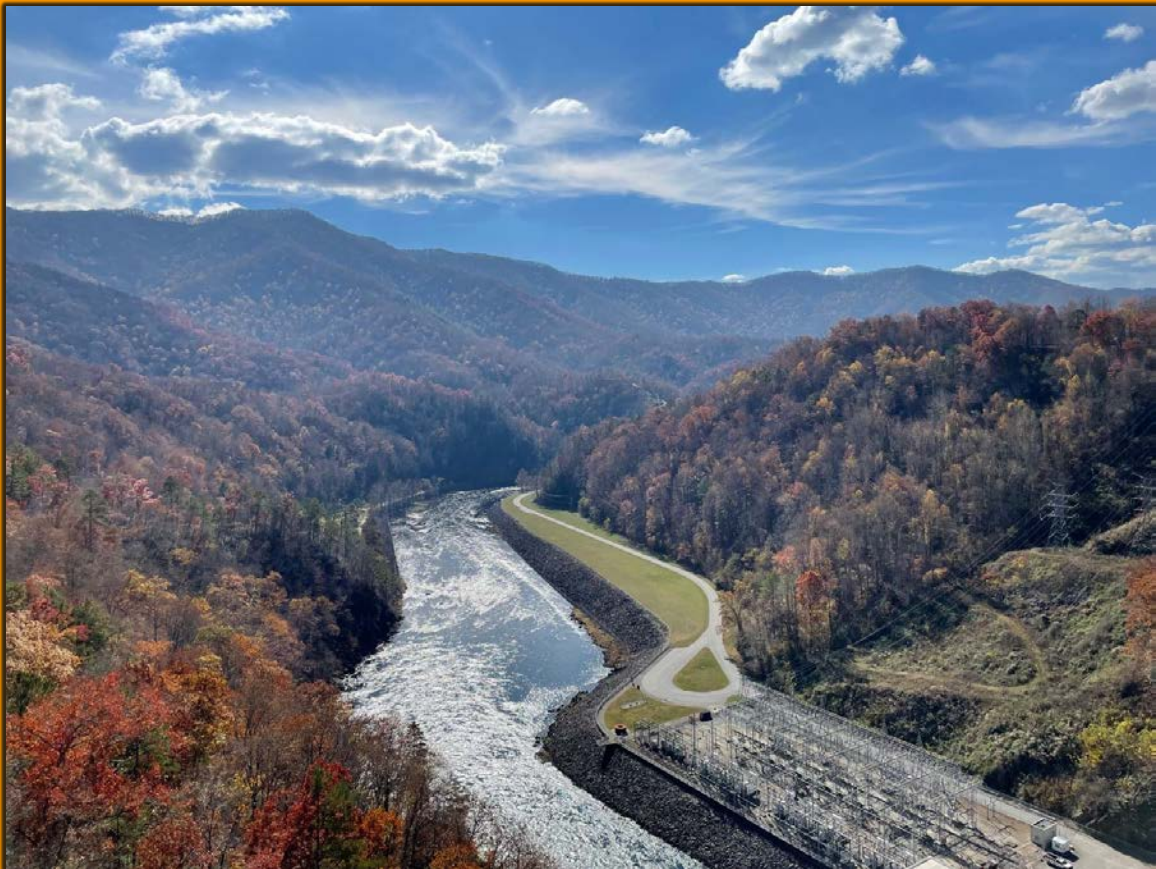


Fontana Dam - Lakeshore Trail

- **Distance:** Hiker's choice
- **Difficulty Rating:** Easy to Intermediate
- **Benton MacKaye Trail Sections 19e, 20 and 21a**

Highlights:

Starting at the impressive Fontana Dam, this hike allows for flexible distances and stunning views of Fontana Lake. It's a great option for families who want to explore at their own pace.



Tips for a Successful Family Hike

- **Pack the essentials:** The BMTA Trail Guides provide additional details, including driving directions to trailheads, points of interest along the trail, and trail descriptions. Bring along the **10 essentials**, including water, snacks, bug spray, sunscreen and a first aid kit.
- **Dress for the weather:** Spring can bring unexpected weather changes, so layers are recommended.
- **Have a plan:** Identify rest stops along the way and have contingency plans—one family member might not want to hike as far.
- **Encourage exploration:** Let children engage with nature by looking for wildlife, identifying plants, and skipping stones in creeks.
- **Leave No Trace:** Carry small trash bags to help keep the trail clean and preserve its beauty for others.

Enjoy the adventure and make some great memories on the Benton MacKaye Trail!

Three Forks

by Ken Cissna with photos courtesy of Ray Laws

It was a chilly morning (but not like those subfreezing days we had two weeks earlier!) when seven hikers gathered to walk the two lower loops formed by the intersections of the BMT and AT. Gretchen Addicks, Kathy Gushwa, Gloria Harmon, Mary Hurd, Paula Laws, Ray Laws, Penny Strickland and I started southbound from Three Forks and headed up the AT. We were accompanied by hiker dogs Erin Harmon and Artie Cissna. Before we could scarcely begin, we encountered our first AT thru hiker heading north. He said this was his second time – he'd done an AT thru hike a few years earlier. By the time we reached our lunch spot at the first BMT/AT intersection near the Springer Mountain parking lot, we had met four other thru hikers with their sights set on Katahdin. The day warmed up nicely and everyone was removing layers as we went along. After lunch, we took the BMT northbound back to our cars.



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New Venue in Bryson City, NC BMTA's 2025 Annual Meeting & Hike Fest



4 Days of Great New Hikes

- ◆ Noland Creek Trail
- ◆ Deep Creek Three Falls Loop
- ◆ Mouse Branch Loop

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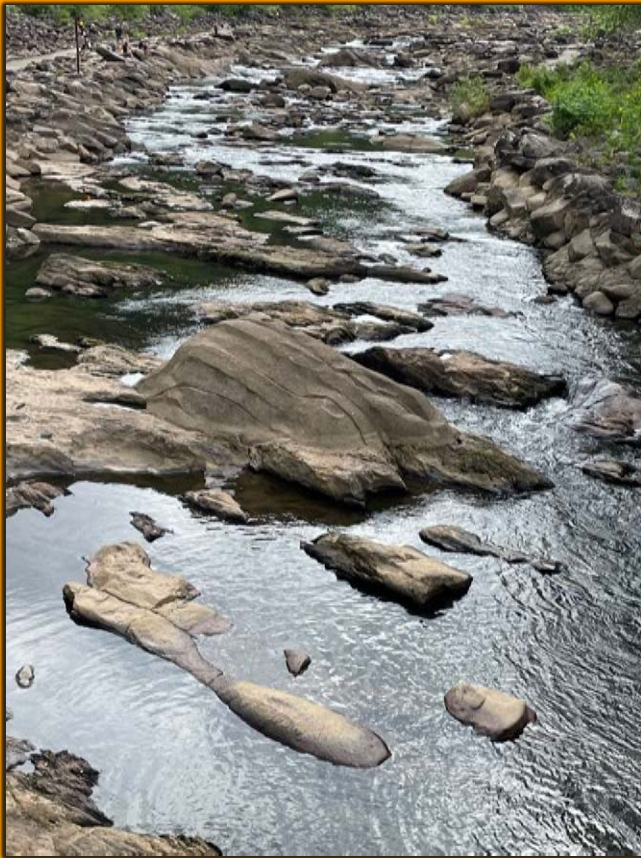
Be sure to mention BMTA!



Ocoee Whitewater Center Reimagined

by Clare Sullivan

The Ocoee Whitewater Center (OWC) was destroyed by fire April 26, 2022. The riverbed below the center was the site for the 1996 Olympic Canoe Slalom Competition. After the Olympics, the twisting course became a favorite for canoeists and kayakers from throughout the United States and beyond. The surrounding area is popular with hikers, mountain bikers and picnickers. The Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) descends Chestnut Mountain into the Ocoee River Gorge where the OWC once stood. When the water is high, hikers descending Big Frog Mountain on the BMT are awestruck by the adventurous whitewater rafters, canoeists and kayakers passing by.



The Ocoee River before a water release.



The Ocoee River after a water release. Impressive!



After the fire, there was an immediate call to replace the center. Mike Wright, Supervisor of the Cherokee National Forest, emphasized the importance of input from the community for the project. The Forest Service launched a wide-ranging campaign to survey Polk County residents, whitewater enthusiasts and others interested in the future of the area. A survey by UGA received over 7000 responses from 38 states and the concepts for Reimagining the Ocoee Whitewater Center are based upon this survey. Results of this survey and more are available [here](#).

- ◆ Preserve the Olympic legacy!
- ◆ Rafting
- ◆ Provide more recreational activity areas and public gathering spaces while preserving the magic of the forest.
- ◆ Improve accessibility and add more locations for interacting with nature.
- ◆ Food service
- ◆ Make it a year-round operation with longer hours.

The University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute of Government and [Studio Outside](#), [S20 Design and Engineering](#), [Dean Runyan and Associates](#) and [Lake Flato](#) worked with the Forest Service/Cherokee National Forest, Tennessee Valley Authority and others to create an optimal design for the venue. Cost/funding were not used as a criterion for 'Reimagining the OWC'.

The proposed designs were presented at a public meeting at the Polk County High School on January 30, 2025.

Two entrances from the road are proposed to provide better access to the facility.

No major changes are planned for the Olympic course. The starting point for the course will be further down river from the original. It will include a more user-friendly set up for event organizers to manage events and to hang gates for the courses. Small changes will be made at Smiley Rapid Hole. An often-requested freestyle feature (kayaking or canoeing where people perform various technical moves in one place) will be added to the upper course.

The property has four buildable sites in different zones.

To enhance views up and down the river, the new OWC Visitors' Center will be located further downstream (from the original center) where the bend widens.

The building's open center will offer stunning views of the river from the road as well as from the more expansive parking area, including parking for food trucks.

To make it safer for children, cars will park towards the river.

In addition, there will be a large shady area for everyone to enjoy.



The remains of the old OWC as they are today.

The Middle Pavilion will be on river left, a great place to view the rafting adventures. The proposal includes a larger eddy design so rafters can get out easily if they need to do. A designated space for rescues will be at the Humungous Rapid.

The current vehicle bridge will be converted to a wider pedestrian bridge (safety vehicles will be allowed). A new area designed like western river parks will be developed below the current vehicle bridge on river right. An Open-Air pavilion (on river right) as well as places for families to play in the water, will continue the concept. Additional freestyle opportunities will be below the present vehicle bridge – pools to play in when the water is low.

To improve accessibility, a third pedestrian bridge will be constructed between the two existing bridges. This will accommodate those who don't want to walk all the way up to the current pedestrian bridge and back.

An upper outdoor-air pavilion will be constructed on the original OWC site. It will be a gathering place for picnics and educational interpretations. Plans include keeping the wall and building a courtyard with an area for rocking chairs – perfect for viewing the surroundings. It will have an ecological feature and perhaps some graphics/pictures of The Old Copper Road.



The Old Copper Road Trail.

This will be a multi-year project. More meetings are planned as actual development decisions are made. All in all, the future of the Ocoee Whitewater Center looks to be imaginative and exciting!!

Blue Ribbon for Excellence!

by Joe Cantwell

A great turnout of 26 BMTA volunteers had a very productive Saturday, February 8, maintaining Sections 1b, 1c, and Section 6d. Six maintainers met at Home Depot and drove to the Weaver Creek Trailhead. Working southbound to the Stanley Gap Trail, Ken Cissna, Dave and Sue Ricker, Sam Sly, Kelly Wentworth and Steve Dennison cut four blowdowns, trimmed back one-half mile of mountain laurel and cleaned 17 water diversions.

Nine volunteers consolidated vehicles at Home Depot and shuttled to Big Stamp Gap to meet the remainder of the crews. One group, consisting of Bob Cowdrick, Earl Kuutti, Bill Van Horn, Dara and Diana Denning, Gilbert Treadwell, David Blount, Kathy Gushwa and Marty Dominy diligently worked northbound on 2.2 miles of Section 1b from Big Stamp Gap. Their day included cutting six blowdowns, refurbishing and cleaning 25 water diversions and lopping. Upon their return to Big Stamp Gap, the water diversion crew stated they were tired. Their work received a Blue Ribbon for excellence!



Earl Kuutti, a BMTA first-time trail maintainer. After working on water diversions during the BMTA GA maintenance trip, he was so motivated he continued cleaning out diversions at his house!

The third crew of the day entered the trail at Three Forks and worked southbound for two miles on Section 1c.

Barry Allen, Ian Guttridge, Shane Morrison, Kenny Martin and Brian Trinkle worked 16 water diversions. They also noted an area of black, loamy soil with serious trail erosion. This will be addressed on a future trip to install a series of log buffer steps.

Sawyers Steve Hayden, David Ensley, along with Daphne Martin, Ray Laws and Carol Nufer cut three blowdowns and lopped encroaching growth through this section.

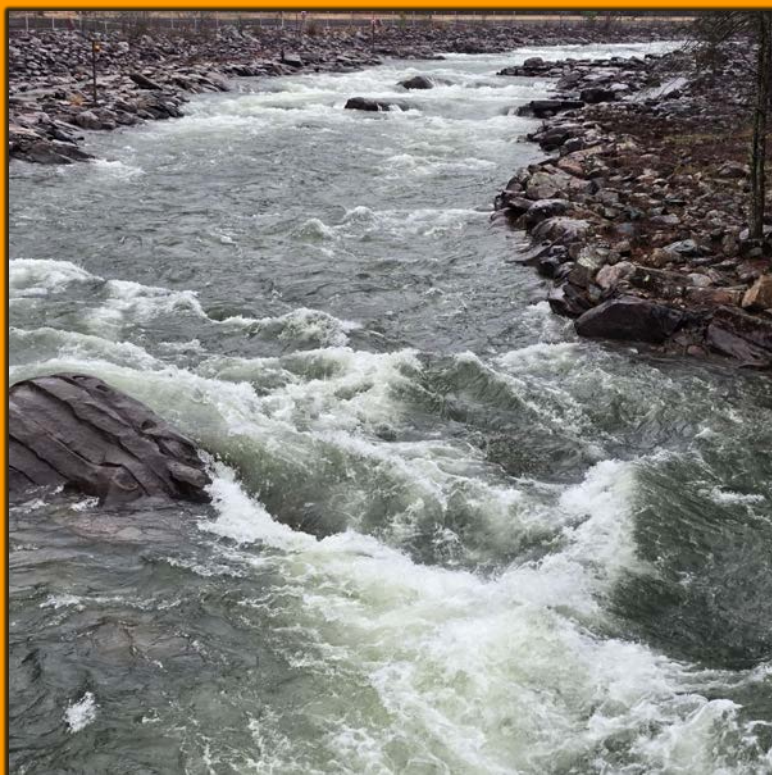
The final totals for the day were 61 water diversions refurbished, 15 blowdowns cleared, and 6.5 miles of trail lopped and cleared of deadfall. Time committed was 79.5 hours of travel and 130 hours of work for a total day of 209.5 hours.

Thanks to all for the outstanding effort and for your continued dedication to the BMTA!

We're just "hiking" in the rain...not singing.

by Ralph Collinson

Our hike was originally scheduled from Thunder Rock Express to the BMT and then back to Thunder Rock Campground. The weather didn't cooperate. It rained hard all night. The down slope on the BMT coming back into Thunder Rock Campground would have been too slippery. Plus, we had light rain during most of the hike. So, we switched to trekking from Boyd's Gap to the Ocoee Whitewater Center. The trail was very wet with a lot of mud and standing water, but it was passable. Four hardy souls decided to do it. Six others decided to stay dry.



Check Out This Month's [BMT Blog](#)

*Spring Awakening on the Benton MacKaye Trail: A
Hiker's Guide to North Georgia's Floral Spectacle*

Fun!!

by Kelly Motter with photo courtesy of Jane Trentin

What do you call 9.77 miles and over 3,045 ft of elevation gain? I call it fun! As part of the GATC-BMTA hikes, our trek began at the Swinging Bridge and finished at Skeenah Gap. The weather started a bit on the cool side, but quickly warmed up - or was it just all that climbing? Thanks to Joyce Baker as co-lead for providing the great hiking weather? Many of the hikers had never been on this section of the Benton MacKaye Trail and were quite complimentary on the condition of the trail. It was also noted that on this section the BMT had fewer rocks than the AT. We encountered very few hikers along the way, one of the pleasures the BMT is known for.



Art Hager, Dan Johnson, Joyce Baker (co-lead), Shelley Parnes, Sharon Morin, Kelly Motter (lead) and John Harris.



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Employer Identification #58-1428009.

**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.*

Tales from the Creek and other stories...

by Patrick Ward

Photos courtesy of Ray Laws, Judy Price, Clare Sullivan, Steve Dennison and Steve Hayden

A big thank you to all the volunteers we enjoyed working with on Saturday, February 22.

There were 15 hardy folks working on Section 12e (Big Lost Creek) and three bold (rhymes with cold and it was) folks on Section 19c (Stairway to Heaven near Fontana Village). Together the two crews worked a collective 150 hours during this one day. Seven sawyers and swampers cleared 37 blowdowns, and excellent tread repair was accomplished at the creek edge.

Much fun was had by all and everyone finished safely and without mishap. Well done!



Eclectic or perhaps interesting notes and observations from the maintenance that I, Patrick Ward, was privileged to enjoy and now share with you.

- ♦ Tim Elmore got creative....arrived early on Friday at Section 19c, hiked on the trail to the first blowdown and stashed his saw for the work the next day. Innovative Tim!
- ♦ We had four Steves working on Section 12e and so Cindy Ward shared her Dad's "Steve Joke" with everyone during the JHA....ha ha ha!
- ♦ Speaking of Steves....Mr. Bayliss had a 25-inch bar on his chainsaw and needed every inch for a couple of blowdowns on Section 12e...thanks Steve!
- ♦ Ray Laws carried the Cant-Hook....now he calls it a paperweight because we did not need to use it, but thankful we had it just in case...thanks Ray!
- ♦ Marty Dominy gets the "Long Distance Award" once again...not only for the longest round-trip driving, but also, he made the full six-mile round-trip on Section 12e with Steve Cartwright to ensure all blowdowns were gone...thanks Marty!
- ♦ Kenny and Daphne Martin were working together, and the comment was made to Kenny by someone, "This does not qualify as a date" to which Daphne responded "This qualifies as a date for me...I love it" or something close to that.... y'all are awesome!
- ♦ End of the day...end of the hike....thinking do I really want to climb that last hill up to the road lugging this saw already for six miles OR do I just cross Lost Creek and have someone pick me up in the campground....well now, who is that already in the creek up to his knees in ice cold water....Ed Sullivan beat me to the punch! I climbed the hill.

Again, I thank you all for cheerfully volunteering and working to make the BMT a trail folks not only want to hike but desire to hike again and again.







Clearing out in progress.



What a difference!

To the Top of the Knob...Scroggin Knob

by Kathy Williams



I like to go "Knobbing" in the winter to be able to view Lake Blue Ridge.



Tiny Sasquatch likes to go with me.



My favorite tree still stands. I call it The Sentinel. It is wise and knowing. Sometimes we talk for a while.

Upcoming

by Kelly Motter, Hiking Director

March

March 5 (Wednesday) Miller Trek Trail at Brasstown Resort, Young Harris. Hike the Blue Trail and the lower section of the Miller Trek Trail for approximately 5 miles. The hike is easy/moderate. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

March 7 (Friday) Talking Rock. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 5 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



March 8 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. Section 2 - Three Forks > Highway 60. Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

March 10 (Monday) Hike to the "Old Dutch Settlement" of the 1840s on 70,000 acres in the Sylco Mountains in the Ocoee District of the Cherokee National Forest. Moderate 5 miles. Contact Hike Leaders Ken Jones and Clare Sullivan at csullivan@bmta.org.

March 19 (Wednesday) Hike inside the historical site of Caney Creek, Tennessee. The FS road to the trailhead of Caney Creek is in great need of repair. The drive is 1.5 hours to get to the trailhead. It's a 15-minute canoe paddle to visit historical Caney Creek, Tennessee. If you are interested in hiking inside the ghost town of Caney Creek, Tennessee, and have a canoe or kayak with a life jacket, come join us. The paddle is approximately 500 feet across the Ocoee and up Big Creek. The hike is 1-2 miles once you arrive. You will need a canoe or kayak, life jacket, paddles and hiking shoes. Contact Hike Leaders Clare and Ed Sullivan at csullivan@bmta.org.

March 21 (Friday) BMT/AT: Upper two loops on Springer Mountain from Big Stamp Gap.

DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5 miles. See all the sights! Springer Mountain, an AT shelter, the beginning of BMT, the plaque honoring Benton MacKaye and Owen Vista!

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



March 22 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. Section 13e - Wildcat Creek » FS 22B, Section 14a FS 22B » Unicoi Mt Trail (TN Hwy 68) and, tentatively, 13d - Towee Creek » Wildcat Creek. Contact the BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

March 22 (Saturday) Skeenah Gap to Wilsco Gap on the BMT. This joint club hike (BMTA and GATC – Georgia Appalachian Trail Club) begins at Skeenah Gap and proceeds northbound to Payne Gap ending at Wilsco Gap. Moderately/strenuous 5.3 miles. The hike requires a shuttle. Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at kmotter@bmta.org.

March 28 (Friday) Hike the iconic Pickens's Nose Trail outside of Franklin, NC. This 1.4-mile out-and-back trail has stunning views of the Nantahala Forest. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org

April

April 8 (Tuesday) Brush Creek Loop in Ducktown, Tennessee. Easy 4.5- mile hike. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

April 9 (Wednesday) BMT Hike. Dally Gap to Double Springs and return. Moderately/strenuous 10 miles. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at sdennison@bmta.org.

April 11 (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 kcissna@bmta.org.



April 12 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

April 15 (Tuesday) Reese Farm Pavillion to Vogel State Park. Easy 4.5-mile hike. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.



Beautiful Lake Trahlyta at Vogel State Park.



Reece Farm was the home of Georgia's Byron Herbert Reece. He was an award-winning novelist and poet.

April 18 (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 kcissna@bmta.org.



April 19 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

April 26 (Saturday) Trout Fest. BMTA booth and outreach. Stop by and say hi!

April 28 (Monday) Wildcat Campground Wildcat Trail.

Lady Slippers will likely be blooming. Turner Trail with a side trip to Rocky Ford Cascades and climb about a half mile on Rock Ford. Seven miles.

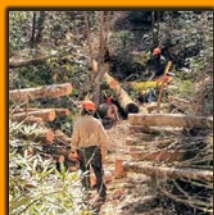
Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at sdennison@bmta.org.



May

May 3 (Saturday) Jointly sponsored BMTA/GATC Hike - BMT Series: Springer Mountain to Three Forks. Moderate 7.8 miles mostly downhill. From Big Stamp Gap to Springer Mountain then down the BMT to Three Forks. Shuttle required. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

May 9 (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 loop of 5.2 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



May 10 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

May 12 (Monday) Rhodo-Coaster Trail at Piney Knob in Murphy. Moderate hike approximately 5 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

May 19 (Monday) Wilscot Gap to GA 60 across from Swinging Bridge on the BMT. Strenuous 11.6 miles. Hike requires a shuttle. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at sdennison@bmta.org.

May 23 (Friday) Amadahy Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 5 miles along the shores of Carter's Lake. Enjoy stunning views of the lake with lunch at the marine campground. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



The Amadahy Trail winds its way beside Carter's Lake.



May 24 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org

May 30 (Friday) Turtle Town Falls in Turtle Town, Tennessee. Moderate and approximately 5 miles.
Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

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

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The deadline for the April Newsletter is Wednesday April 2.
Thank you!