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## BMTA Officers 2024-2025

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**BMTA Headquarters**

# Benton MacKaye Trail Association

VOLUME 42, ISSUE 5

MAY 2025

## National Scenic Trail, Is the Third Time the Charm?

by Ken Cissna

On April 9, 2025, we had a first in our quest for National Scenic Trail (NST) designation for the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT): The Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study Act of 2025 (hereafter BMT NST Act) was introduced in both houses of Congress simultaneously. The bills are identical (and they are identical with what was introduced last year) — S. 4352 and H.R. 2768. The bills also were introduced earlier by several months than we'd ever had our bills introduced in any of the previous Congresses. For previous articles in the *BMTA Newsletter* and more information on this topic see [April 2021](#), [June 2022](#), [July 2022](#), [June 2023](#), [August 2024](#) and [January 2025](#).

This makes the third time the BMT NST Act has made its way into Congress, and we're hoping the third time will be the charmed effort that the Feasibility Study bill passes the Congress and will be signed by the President.

This year, Chuck Fleischmann (TN) in the House and Thom Tillis (NC) in the Senate took the lead roles.

Most of our other co-sponsors have supported us in the past:

In the House, Steve Cohen (TN), Lucy McBath (GA), and Chuck Edwards (NC).

In the Senate, Raphael Warnock (GA) and Ted Budd (NC).



We appreciate all of your support and promise to keep you informed as things develop with the two bills.

### Additional Information

[Rep. Fleischmann's Press Release, 4/30/2025](#)

[BMTA's National Scenic Trail Quest Webpage](#)

## 2025 Vets for BMTA

by Patti Barrows

*“How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roes!”*

—Maya Angelou

The BMTA Board and members are excited to announce we will hold the first annual Vets for BMTA event at this year’s Hike Fest in Bryson City, North Carolina. Every year, the BMTA holds a Hike Fest to celebrate the accomplishments the association has achieved to advance awareness of the BMTA, maintain the trails and advocate for the engagement of future generations in the Southern Appalachian Mountains of Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina.

At this year’s Hike Fest, there will be a special event to celebrate the veterans who are an important component of the BMTA’s mission. This event will be held Friday, October 31, 2025, at the Deep Creek entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park under the pavilion. The specific time will be announced as the event gets closer.

Veterans demonstrate their commitment to their countries through dedication, leadership, sacrifice and fellowship with other service members and the greater community. This spirit of military service is easily seen in the engagement of veterans with the BMTA. You’ll frequently find a veteran participating in one of the many scheduled hikes and/or working hard on the maintenance trips that are held throughout the year.



The BMTA’s mission is *‘To preserve, protect and maintain the Benton MacKaye Trail’*. The veterans who are part of the BMTA exemplify their commitment to preserve, protect and maintain the BMT – just as they did for their country.

In the iconic words of Maya Angelou, please join us to *‘celebrate our heroes and she-roes’* of the Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and allied armed services who work alongside us on the BMT.

**We Salute You!**

If you are a veteran, please use this link to complete the [Veteran’s Survey](#).





## BMTA's 2025 Hike Fest

Bryson City, NC

October 30 — November 2

**Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest** — (3 miles/easy) — A gentle, yet inspiring walk. Wander the memorial loop to experience the magic of the old growth forest!

**Mingus Creek Trail** — 5.8 miles/moderate) — Mingus Mill was an African American pioneer and accomplished jazz musician. Visit the Mingus grist mill and learn about one of the early "co-ops" in the new country. Follow along the Mingus Creek Trail and relax while surrounded by the lovely sounds of nature. Visit several historical cemeteries. This trail is part of the Mountain to Sea Trail.

**Take A Walk with Suzy Downing** — (2 to 3 hours/easy) — On Halloween, walk through the woods along the Indian Creek Trail looking for "spooky images" that could turn into wonderful Halloween photos. Bring your "phone camera". Limit-10 hikers

**Deep Creek-Waterfalls Loop Trail** — (about 3 miles/easy) — Beautiful waterfalls are the hiker's reward. Visit Juney Whank Falls, Indian Creek Falls and Tom Branch Falls. Lots of photo opportunities. At each falls, benches or large boulders provide ample seating for time to sit and enjoy the falls.

**Deep Creek Loop Trail** — (7 miles/moderate) — Begin hiking in a clockwise direction on the Deep Creek Trail. Enjoy the beautiful sounds of the creek. A roughly .6 mile climb over a ridge descends to join the Indian Creek Trail and continues to Juney Whank Falls. See three stunning waterfalls on this classic hike!

**Thomas Divide Trail** — (about 7 miles/moderate) — Access the trailhead via the Tom Branch Road at Deep Creek for an in-and-out hike. The trail snakes through the woods, passes old home sites and offers lovely views from various vantage points. Hear stories about the loggers who worked in the area.

**Lonesome Pine Overlook** — (7 miles/moderately strenuous) — Hike in-and-out along the Noland Divide to the Lonesome Pine Overlook for a 280-degree view. See 4 states from this gorgeous overlook! The climb includes 2300 feet in elevation gain. The challenge is real, but the reward of the spectacular view is worth the effort!

**Take A Walk with Suzy Downing and Bring Your Phone Camera** — (2 to 3 hours) — Enjoy an easy walk through the woods starting at the "Tunnel to Nowhere". Head toward the Benton MacKaye Trail. Learn phone camera strategies that will enhance your photographs. Limit — 10 hikers.

**Tunnel Bypass Trail** — (2.25 miles/easy) — This fun hike starts at the parking lot near the "Tunnel to Nowhere", yet bypasses the tunnel. The undulating trail has a few steady climbs to get the heart working, but not to exhaust the hiker.

**Noland Creek Trail** — (about 5 miles/easy) — Hike begins at the Noland Creek Trail parking area. Hear the sounds of nature as you wind along the trail that hugs Noland Creek. This trail has a few steady climbs to get the heart working, but not to exhaust the hiker.

**Lower Forney Loop Trail (unofficially named by Dick Evans)** — (about 8 miles/moderate) — Hike starts at the Tunnel on the Road to Nowhere, continues up White Oak Branch and Forney Creek Trails. Return via the BMT/Lakeshore Trail. The loop is mostly level on old railroad beds. Visit Campsite 74 (near the lower Forney) as well as the Woody Cemetery to learn about history in the area.

**Lake Shore Trail along the BMT** — (about 10 miles/moderate) — Wander through the Tunnel to Nowhere heading toward the Lakeshore Trail. Once on the Lakeshore Trail, the path at times hugs the shore of Fontana Lake. Learn the history of the Road to Nowhere — still a point of controversy for many locals.

**Tsali Recreation Area—Right Loop** — (about 11 miles/strenuous) — For a more strenuous challenge, embark on the 11-mile Right Loop Trail that includes an optional overlook with a stunning view of Fontana Lake. Learn about the inspiring history of Tsali, the Cherokee leader who displayed extraordinary courage in the face of the US government forcing the Cherokee Nation to leave their sacred lands.

**Appalachian Trail from Tellico Gap to Wesser Bald** — (2.8 miles/easy) . Enjoy this shortest hike to Wesser bald...the hike begins with a fairly steep climb during the 1.4 miles for a breathtaking view from the bald.

**Tsali Recreation Area- Thompson Loop** — (7.7 Miles/moderate) — Enjoy a meandering loop that offers lovely overlooks of Fontana Lake, stream crossings, logging roads and the remnants of pioneer home sites. For a shorter adventure, do an in out.

**Wesser Creek Trail** — (8.8 miles/moderate) — An adventure for those hikers heading home to Georgia. The hike to the bald rewards hikers with exceptional views.

**Make your reservations now! Call Lands Creek Log Cabins—(888) 346-9793**



# American Hiking Society's National Trails Day

June 7, 2025

Bring a Friend to a Work Trip to

Leave the Trail Better Than You Found It

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association, Georgia Appalachian Trail Club and Mountain High Hikers are joining forces to celebrate National Trails Day by working to improve three sections of trail. Sign up today — use one of the links below.

- ◆ BMTA — [Thunder Rock Campground](#)
- ◆ GATC — [Blood Mountain](#)
- ◆ MHH — [Cooper Creek](#)

When the Work Is Done, Join Us for a

***Chowtime at the Trailhead Social***





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

*Celebrate the BMTA's 45th Anniversary!*

October 30—November 2, 2025

Lands Creek Log Cabins

**Cabin Block Expires 6/1/25**

**Book Your Cabin Today!**



For reservations, contact:

**Lands Creek Log Cabins**

**(888) 346-9793**

**Be sure to mention BMTA!**



A beautiful day on the Brush Creek Loop! Photo courtesy of Ray Laws.



## Georgia Maintenance Trip

by Joe Cantwell with photos courtesy of Clare Sullivan and Steve Pruett

The April maintenance trip concentrated on issues identified by scouting within Sections 3a (Hwy 60 to Wahalla Overlook), 3c (Bryson Gap to Skeenah Gap) and 4b (Payne Gap to Wilsco Gap). A total of 20 volunteers divided into four task-oriented crews for the day.

Barry Allen, along with Ian Guttridge, Andy Meeks and Shane Morrison, replaced four rotten steps on Section 3a. The crew then traveled to a step that had been recently dislodged by a vehicle on River Road just south of the Suspension Bridge. This important work makes the trek much safer for future hikers.



Bob Cowdrick returned to the upper half of the reroute south of Skeenah Gap on Section 3c. The work involved tread repair and adding to the rock steps at the switchback. Bob's crew included the award winner Ken Cissna for cleaning 18 diversions and returning them to perfect textbook condition. The remainder of this hearty crew were Ed and Clare Sullivan, Kelly Motter and Steve Pruett. A total of 33 diversions were refurbished.

Continued next page





Steve Pruett and Ken Cissna are experts on water diversions.



Bob Cowdrick locates the perfect rock for a step.



Kelly Motter digs the perfect hole for the rock step.



Now the perfect step is in place!



The third crew attacked the erosion issues that have plagued Section 4b between Wilscot Gap and Payne Gap. Marty Dominy (Section Maintainer for 4b) joined Steve Dennison, Joe Cantwell, Art Kolberg, Bill Cox and Mike Pilvinsky in this all-out effort to install and refurbish 84 water diversions. Mike reported no lingering adverse effects after his first digging effort in nearly two years. Marty will watch this area and report on how well the diversions are holding up.

The final crew, led by sawyer Steve Hayden, included swampers Daphne Martin, Laurie Schatz, and Byron Coker. Ten trees were logged out between Wilscot Gap and Payne Gap. The largest being a 22-inch oak which required diligent planning to safely remove with an 18-inch bar. Job well done! In keeping with her adopted trail name "The Daphinator", Daphne was elected to carry Steve's saw the 1.8 miles back to Wilscot.



**Trail is hiker ready!**



**New signage was put into place.**



**Leave No Trace! A ballon unearthed.**

Once again, as Georgia Maintenance Director, I whole heartedly thank each of you for putting forth the effort to make these trips an outstanding success. This trip alone involved 45 travel hours and 98 work hours. Your efforts continue to keep the BMT a showcase of trails as communicated to us by the many hikers we meet.



## Reece Farm to Vogel State Park

Photos courtesy of Ralph Collinson



The waterfalls of Lake Trahlyta at Vogel State Park are a refreshing reward on a hike!



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

*'Embrace the Wild: Camping on the  
Benton MacKaye Trail'*





## Deep in the hills we went...

by Patrick Ward with photos courtesy of Brenda Harris and David Blount

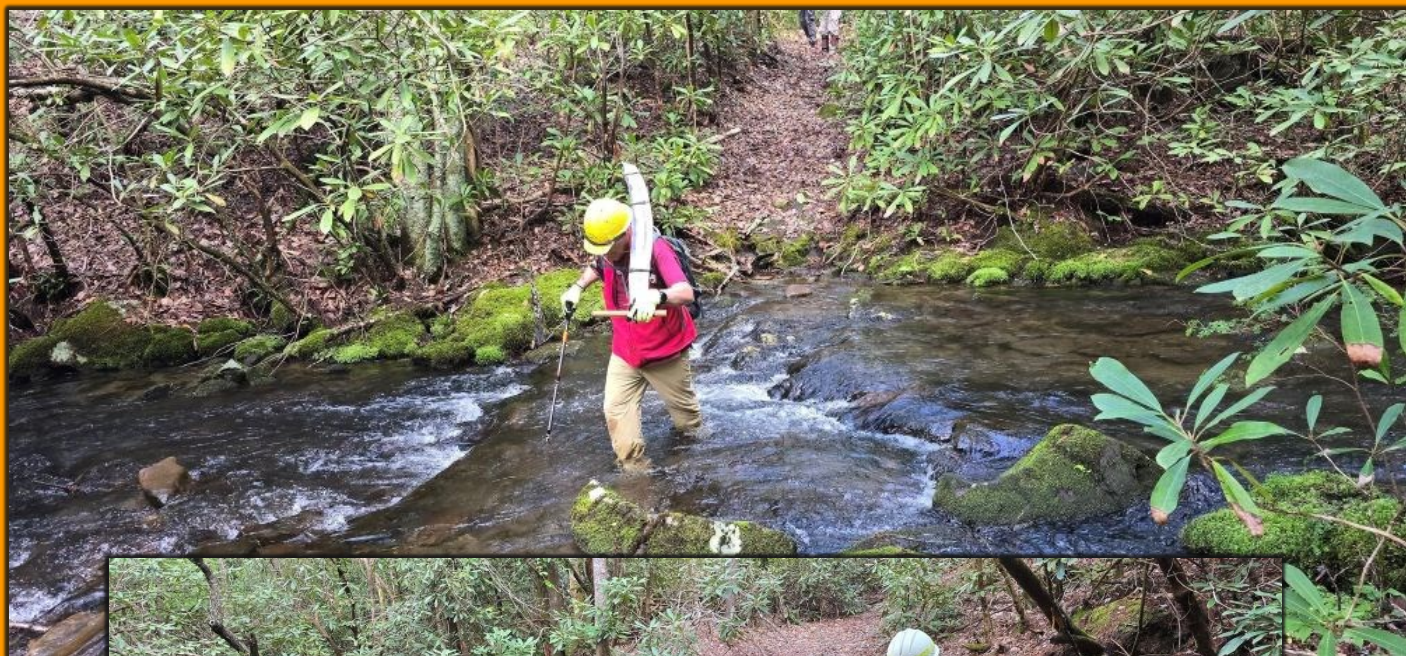
Deep in the hills we went...our mighty band of 13 split into two crews of six and seven. Our destinations were Sections 16c and 16d of the glorious Benton MacKaye Trail. The rallying point for the morning was the historic and special place called Tellico Plains, Tennessee. We learned from our hardy band of volunteers some unique points of interest about Tellico Plains....Stokely had a huge factory there back in the day, Tellico Grains is an area favorite for pastries and such, the Cherohala Skyway has its western terminus in this location, Rick and Brenda Harris live there and one member grew up in the quaint town at the edge of the mountains.

Setting off for longer than desired drives to the trailheads these volunteers climbed into their vehicles (sharing rides...as much to save gas as to have extra time of fellowship) with smiling faces and anticipation of an awesome day clearing trail and being together. The two crews split after about one hour of driving backwoods and rough roads. Crew 16d stopped a little before crew 16c which headed to Beaverdam Bald and into the fog of the morning.



Continued next page





Whew!

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Both crews worked long hours on this day as the clouds and fog lifted to what became an extremely pleasant day to clear blowdowns and make the trail a more enjoyable experience. Between the crews, 27 or maybe more blowdowns were removed, and countless sticks and debris found their way off the trail. Most volunteers eventually reconnected with their personal vehicles well after "5 O'clock somewhere." We enjoyed no injuries or weary hearts...this was a grand day deep in the hills!

To our volunteers for the day I salute you - Scotty (and you get to do this for a living...lucky!), Steve D (which way did he go), Brenda (the flower of the band), Rick (what's up Doc?), Ken (Mr. Sharp Saw), Keith (solid dude), Ralph (glad to have you!), Tim (shout out for the first timer!), Barb (glad to meet you!), David (man I love your accent), James (walk on number 1) and Charlie (walk on number 2).

To my lovely bride (Cindy) - thank you for supporting me to go play in the woods with my friends today.

A pleasure to serve with everyone one of you,  
Patrick





# Wandering Around Brawley Mountain

by Kathy Williams

I enjoy wandering the forest alone. I embrace the solitude and the joy it gives me. I do, however, notify my children as to my location and we agree on times to check in. So, I set out for a hike and lunch from Wilscot Gap to the Brawley Mountain Fire Tower. I had never been on this section of the BMT, and I was looking forward to it. The day was perfect, and long-range views were still visible as spring began to offer wildflowers as an extra treat. Lunch today would have an ambiance not found in a restaurant.



This is the way.



Turn here.



Ahhh



Continued next page





Lake Blue Ridge dazzling in the distance.



My lunch spot awaits!



Every turn I had to stop and gaze.



"Come, this way." said the tree serpent.



## Elusive Wildflowers - Bushy Head to Hudson Gap

by Kathy Williams



Usually hikers are escorted by neighboring “hiker dogs” when trekking this section. Today they did not appear, but we did have our trusty Artie and the wildflowers to enhance our experience!



Continued next page





## BMTA PARTNERSHIPS

Help BMTA preserve, protect and maintain the Benton MacKaye Trail.

Become a BMTA Business, Silver, Gold, Platinum or Diamond Partner today!

Go to [Partnerships](#) to view the details.

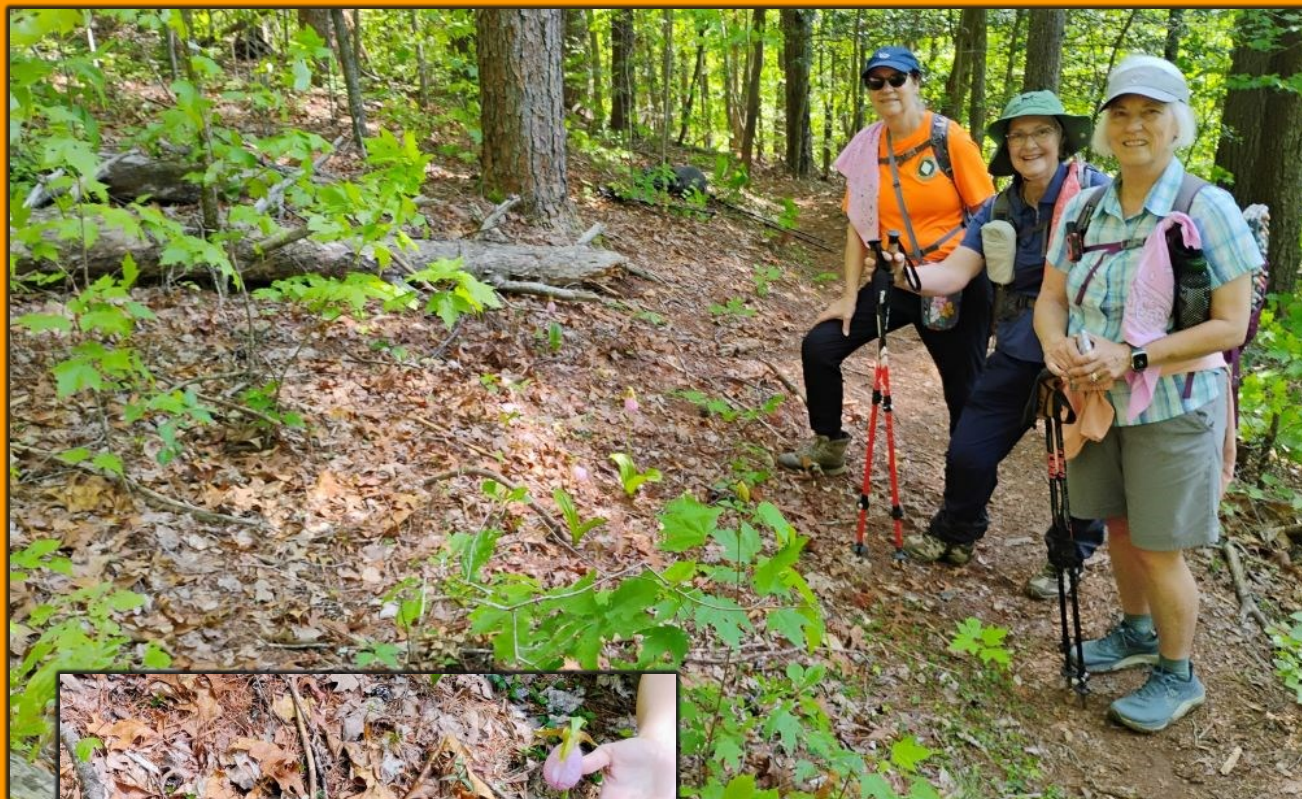
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*\*If you receive a benefit as a result of making a contribution to a qualified organization, you can deduct only the amount of your contribution that is more than the value of the benefit you receive.*



## Trail Treats

Photos courtesy of Steve Dennison and Judy Price



BMTA members Martha Fowler, Sue Ford and Jan Jeffcoat are rewarded for their steep climb. Pink lady slippers!



Strange and intriguing fungi.



76-year-old thru hiker— trail name "Tree Slayer".



# Upcoming

by Kelly Motter, Hiking Director

## May

**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](mailto:kcissna@bmta.org)



**May 10 (Saturday)** BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. Section 10 - Dally Gap >> Double Springs Gap  
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at [bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org](mailto: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](mailto:rcollinson@bmta.org).

**May 16 (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](mailto:kcissna@bmta.org).



**May 16-17 (Saturday)** BMTA TN/NC Overnight Work Trip. Section 17c partial –Whigg Meadow » Mud Gap  
Where: Section 18b – Haeo Lead intersection (SW) » Hangover Lead Trail (Wilderness)

Contact the BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at [bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org](mailto:bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@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](mailto:sdennison@bmta.org).

**May 30 (Friday)** Turtletown Falls in Turtle Town, Tennessee. Moderate, approximately 5 miles.  
Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at [rcollinson@bmta.org](mailto:rcollinson@bmta.org).



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## June

**June 6** (Friday) Brush Creek Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Seven easy/moderate miles. Almost all gently downhill. Shuttle required. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at [kcissna@bmta.org](mailto:kcissna@bmta.org).

**June 7 National Trails Day** see page 4.

**June 11** (Wednesday) Hike the trails of Jack Rabbit. Moderate 5-mile hike. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at [rcollinson@bmta.org](mailto:rcollinson@bmta.org).



**June 14** (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA. Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at [bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org](mailto:bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org).

**June 20** (Friday) Turtletown Creek Falls. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5 miles. Turtletown Creek plus two of the most beautiful falls you'll ever see on a short hike. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at [kcissna@bmta.org](mailto:kcissna@bmta.org).



**June 28** (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA. Contact the BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at [bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org](mailto:bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org).

**June 29** (Sunday) BMT Series – Join with GATC on this series. We will hike from Wilscot Gap to Shallowford Bridge Road. This is a moderate to strenuous hike of 7.7 miles and requires a shuttle. Contact Hike Leader Kelly Motter at [kmotter@bmta.org](mailto:kmotter@bmta.org).

**June 30** (Monday) Hike on the BMT at Lost Creek Campground in Reliance Tennessee. Easy/moderate 5-mile hike. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at [rcollinson@bmta.org](mailto:rcollinson@bmta.org).

## July

**July 5** (Saturday) BMT Series with GATC. Fall Branch Falls to Weaver Creek Road. This moderately strenuous hike is about six miles long and goes over Rocky Mountain and Scroggin Knob. Shuttle required. Meet at Food Lion in Blue Ridge. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at [kcissna@bmta.org](mailto:kcissna@bmta.org).

**July 10** (Thursday) BMT Watson Gap to Shadow Falls off So Fork Trail. Moderate 8 miles round trip. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at [sdennison@bmta.org](mailto:sdennison@bmta.org).







Lost Creek

**July 11 (Friday) BMT: Lost Creek Section**

DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog).

Easy 6 miles. Beautiful walk along Lost Creek. One stream crossing will probably get your feet a little wet so come prepared.

Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at [kcissna@bmta.org](mailto:kcissna@bmta.org).

**July 12 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA**

Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at [bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org](mailto:bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org).

**July 18 (Friday) Cartecay River Loop Trails. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE** (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5-6 miles, much of it along the beautiful Cartecay River.  
Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at [kcissna@bmta.org](mailto:kcissna@bmta.org).

**July 26 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA**

Contact the BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at [bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org](mailto:bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org)

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

The deadline for the June Newsletter is  
Wednesday, June 4.  
Thank you!

