

Mountain Life



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Falls Branch reroute officially opened on MacKaye Trail

FROM STAFF REPORTS

The 25th anniversary of National Public Lands Day Saturday, Sept. 22, coincided with the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's (BMTA) grand opening of a newly completed and rerouted section of trail to Fall Branch Falls, a popular natural waterfall.

A sister path to the longer Appalachian Trail, the Benton MacKaye Trail spans mountain areas of Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina. The rerouted sec-

tion of trail to Fall Branch Falls is part of the 300-mile long MacKaye Trail that begins on Springer Mountain in Georgia, and ends at Big Creek Campground in the Great Smoky Mountains.

Years of foot traffic had taken its toll on the falls trail. Much of it had been eroded into deep crevices, leaving trip hazards like large roots and exposed rock. The final decision to create a trail reroute was made in late 2013. Work officially began

TRAIL CONTINUED ON 3C



At front, Fannin County Chamber of Commerce President Jan Hackett, John Stephens of the Georgia Forest Service and Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) Georgia Maintenance Director Barry Allen cut the ribbon to officially open a rerouted section of the MacKaye Trail that leads to Falls Branch Falls. Also pictured in back, from left: Darcy Douglas, David Blount, Phil Guhl, BMTA President Tom Keene, Towdy Tipton (obscured) and BMTA Vice-President George Owen.

TRAIL

CONTINUED FROM 1C

Valentine's Day 2015.

"We rerouted (part) of the trail from beside Falls Branch to above it. We hand dug a half-mile of trail, including some pretty severe steps at the end to tie it in to the trail above the falls," said Barry Allen, BMTA maintenance director for sections of the trail in Georgia.

Volunteers put in 1,480 man hours battling roots and stumps on a steep hillside. Four-man teams lugged 40 six-by-sixes uphill to be used for cribbing to stabilize the trail in steep areas, as well as for the 37 steps connecting the new half-mile reroute with the old trail.

Allen, Fannin County Chamber of Commerce President Jan Hackett and John Stephens of the Georgia Forest Service

were on hand with several BMTA members for a ribbon cutting that officially opened the trail reroute Sept. 22.

The the Benton MacKaye Trail Association is a volunteer, nonprofit group formed in 1979 to build and maintain the trail, which passes through remote backcountry in the three states including several federally-designated wilderness areas.

Named in honor of the Appalachian Trail's founder, the BMTA holds workdays the second Saturday of the month in Georgia and on the fourth Saturday in Tennessee and North Carolina. New volunteers are always welcome to participate.

The group also organizes recreational hikes on which different sections of the trail are explored.

More information on upcoming maintenance projects and hikes can be found online at BMTA.org.