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Coalition of trail workers help Little Citico Creek



Members of the Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen, the Tellico Ranger District, Cherokee Hiking Club, Benton MacKaye Trail Association, Friends of the Cherokee National Forest and McMinn Saddle Club all came together recently fulfilled their pledge "To leave the trail and the outdoor community better than we found them" by clearing trails in the vicinity of Little Citico Creek. The pledge and event was part of National Trails Day which is an annual event held on the first Saturday in June.

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The American Hiking Society's (AHS) National Trails Day is the largest trail event in the United States. Held the first Saturday in June, the AHS encourages local organizations through the country to focus on public events aimed at promotion, conservation, stewardship, and trail service. The theme and pledge for this year was "to leave the trail and the outdoor community better than we found them".

In line with that theme, a coalition of trail workers from the Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen (SABCH), the Tellico Ranger District, Cherokee Hiking Club (CHC), Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) Friends of the Cherokee National Forest (FCNF) and McMinns Saddle Club (MSC) fulfilled the pledge by clearing trails in the vicinity of Little Citico Creek.

"We are fortunate to live next to the foothills of these ancient Appalachian Mountains. There is a tranquility in the undisturbed beauty of the flora and fauna. It provides a quiet serenity in the slowness of time, the one place where progress is not the goal. It's a reset," said SABCH member Terri Haver. "That gift needs to be protected and available for future generations which is why we chose Little Citico Creek for our project for National Trails Day."

Tellico District's Lead Wilderness and Trails Technician Robert Alwood and Assistant Fire Engine Operator Allen Chapman along with a group of 14 hikers/trail workers and seven equestrians set out from the Young Branch Horse Camp. The equestrians headed uphill to where wind damage (blowdowns) was known to have occurred. The chainsaws were packed on a very large mule and a horse - safely attached with leather scabbards. The scabbard is a sheath that slides the blade under the rider's leg between the saddle and saddle blanket.

When a blowdown was encountered, the riders dismounted. The horses were held either by another rider a good distance away from the flying sawdust, or they were loosely tied to a sapling ... or to whatever was safely available.

Surprisingly, the horses are unfazed by the whine of the chainsaw. Some horses have been doing this long enough to know the routine and will ground tie. They've learned to go forward or backward to their owner by voice command. Of course, some horses can't be trusted and need to be secured.

When multiple cuts are needed to remove blowdowns, the blade can get extremely hot. It must be cooled before mounting it back on the pack animal. If enough bottled water is available, the blade is cooled by running water over it. Otherwise it's just a matter of waiting.

The ground crew of 14 hikers from CHC, BMTA and FCNF as well as the two Forest Service agents from the Tellico District were driven to another trailhead. This crew was equipped with a variety of tools ... loppers, a weed eater, a pole saw (used to clear overhead branches), nippers, handsaws and chainsaws. They split into two teams to brush and log out the trail.

An extremely successful workday, the crews hiked or rode over 20 miles, clearing 13 miles of trail. They removed 30 blowdowns as well as the encroaching growth of rhododendrons and ground saplings.

The group's efforts received high praise from the Forest Service. "This was the best National Trails Day I've been to," said Alwood.

If you would like to learn more about these groups and/or trail maintenance, contact Terri Haver, terri.haver@gmail.com. She will direct your inquiry to the relevant group.