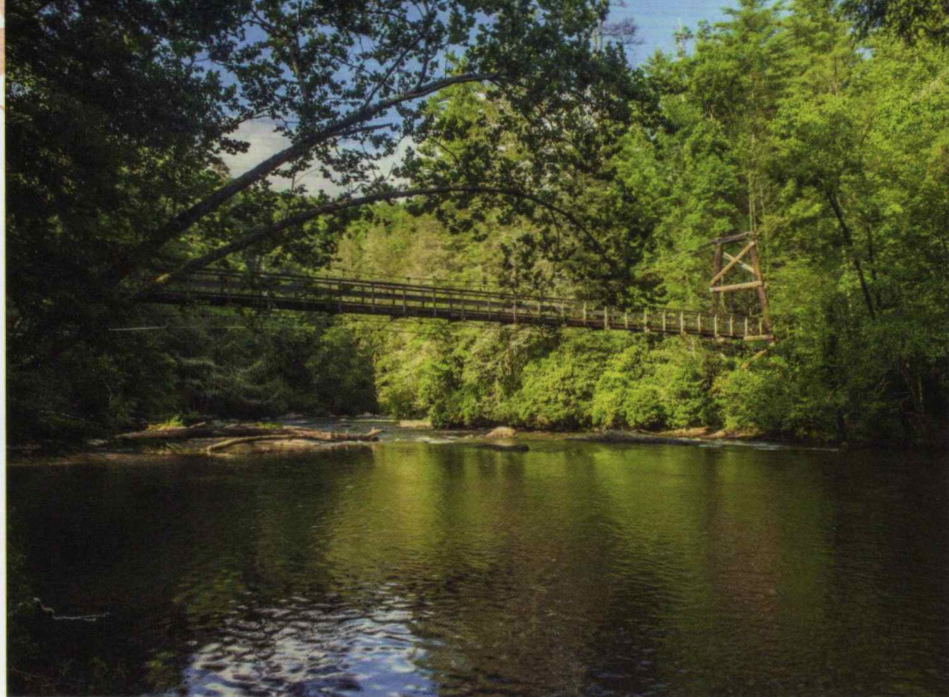


An Awesome HIKING Destination

WRITTEN BY JOY FOREHAND



Swinging Bridge One of the most popular hikes in the Blue Ridge area is on the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) - the destination, the Swinging Bridge over the Toccoa River. It's a 3-1/2-mile hike from the Hwy 60 trailhead to the bridge (seven miles round trip). Along the way, there are scenic mountain views in the distance and emerald green pastures below. You also can reach the bridge via Forest Service Road 816. Built in 1977, the iconic Swinging Bridge over the Toccoa River is 260 feet across. It is an impressive architectural structure. But it's far more than just something to look at. During the spring, summer and fall months, the bridge attracts over 200 visitors each weekend. Fathers are fascinated with architectural design. Mothers, especially of small children, are thankful there's an easy way to cross the river. The kids, well, they just love making the bridge swing and sway. The aesthetics and beauty aside, the 502 planks, 106 posts, innumerable nuts and bolts as well as the cement anchors

that make up the bridge require regular maintenance - all maintained by Benton MacKaye Association volunteers in our partnership with the Forest Service. "Maintaining the bridge is an awesome responsibility," said BMTA's Georgia Maintenance Director Joe Cantwell. "As hikers walk, jump or run and swing side to side, the motion can be pretty rough on the bridge. The motion can loosen the nuts and bolts that hold the bridge together. A few bolts may even lose their nuts, bounce out of the holes and fall into the water below. The weather takes a toll on the wooden planks and railing as well," Cantwell concluded. Steve Pruett, the Section Maintainer for the bridge, checks the bridge regularly. A more detailed annual inspection is conducted by BMTA in February. Missing or loose nuts and bolts, loose cables, overhanging trees and the condition of cement anchors are noted for future repair/replacement / or removal. "It's really a challenging job," said Cantwell. "We have to lift some of the bridge planks up and remove them so we can access the bolts on the bridge stringers. It is a critical job to make sure the bridge remains intact and safe for everyone to use."

If you would like to learn more about hiking on the BMT and/or the work we do on the trail, go to <https://bmta.org/> or email Joy Forehand at jforehand@bmta.org.