

The Splendor of Spring on the BMT



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Treks to see colorful wildflowers are the most popular hikes of the spring season. During the last week of April/first week of May, the Weaver Creek to Fall Branch Falls section of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) offers stunning displays of pink lady slippers, trillium, flame azaleas, dwarf-crested iris, and more.

A member of the orchid family, the pink lady slipper tops the list of flowers to see. As they grow, the flower progresses from a white or cream color (albeit with pink veins) to a pale pink or an eye-catching hot pink. Pure white lady slippers do exist, but they are extremely rare. Several years ago, three of these snow-white ladies were spotted on the Weaver Creek section of the BMT! Pollination occurs once a bee enters the slit in the flower's pouch. Hairs inside the pouch lead the bee to pass beneath the stigma where it deposits pollen from a visit to another flower. The bee then picks up fresh pollen as it exits the flower. To an observer, that process can look a bit like a tennis match as the bee bounces around trying to get out of the flower.

Shortly after you depart from the Weaver Creek Trailhead, the stunning oranges and yellows of the flame azalea are in sharp contrast to the dark-green of the forest. As you begin your descent from Scroggin Knob, several gardens of the pink ladies peek through the brush. If a white lady is blooming, it most likely will be found between Scroggin Knob and the water cutoff to the spring. Shortly before the cutoff, the orchids begin to line the pathway, exploding into a garden of huge lady slippers across from the cutoff. The ladies continue to line the trail up and away from the intersection.

Your next wildflower area on the BMT is beneath the top of Rocky Mountain where a wide array of white, pink and magenta trillium dot the hillside. A huge field of cinnamon ferns is on the downhill side of the trail. The side trail to the top of Rocky Mountain takes you to a perfect spot to pause for lunch ... a few bright yellow trilliums usually reside at the top.

From here, you can continue on to see glistening whitewater rush down the 100' rock cliff of Fall Branch Falls or you can return to the Weaver Creek Trailhead.

In late May, the Weaver Creek section has large orchards of white and pink apple-tree-size mountain laurel interspersed with a few late-blooming flame azalea extending up and down the hillsides. They are the most prevalent shortly after you cross the first stream and continue until you begin the steeper ascent to Scroggin Knob.

Be aware, several sections along the trail from Weaver Creek to Rocky Mountain are moderately strenuous. You can do an in-and-out from the Weaver Creek Trailhead or hike through to Fall Branch Falls (5.2 miles one way / requires a shuttle).

To learn more about the BMT, our sponsored hikes and the work we do, contact Joy Forehand, jforehand@bmta.org.