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President:	Tom Keene
Vice President:	George Owen
Secretary:	Joy Forehand
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GA M/C:	Barry Allen
TN/NC M/C:	Vacant
Smokies Coord:	Larry Dumas
Hiking Director:	Ken Cissna
Store:	Ken Cissna
Membership:	Darcy Douglas
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Past President:	Bob Ruby
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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 34, ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER 2017

President's Column November 2017 by Tom Keene

Dick Evans, Ken Cissna, Debra and Phil Guhl Headline Annual Meeting Award Winners

The 2017 BMTA Annual Meeting at Vogel State Park featured splendid fall color, important news from the Forest Service and above all a chance to honor the genuine heroes of our organization.

Start with the fall color. Here's the view from the deck of our meeting place in Vogel just before we began. Not a bad atmosphere for our 2017 gathering!



Photo by Ken Cissna

Before I turn to the awards, I need to record several important events earlier in the evening: First, at the all-members, business meeting, we discussed the highlights from the various officers' annual reports – and elected a new slate of officers for 2018. The new and returning officers began their service immediately after the annual meeting and are already listed on the [BMTA Homepage](#).

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Next, following a fine dinner (courtesy of Amazing Grace Catering of Blairsville), we heard from two of our key Forest Service partners from the Southern Region office in Atlanta: **Chris Spord**, who (amidst much else) manages Recreation and Volunteer Partnerships for the region; and **Kelly Balcarczyk**, Community Engagement Specialist in the Atlanta office. Kelly served as our principal speaker but Chris also made remarks (which included an erroneous prediction on the next day's LSU-Alabama game!). Both Chris and Kelly stressed the importance to the Forest Service, in these tight budget times, of their partnerships with volunteer organizations like the BMTA. Kelly also brought the very welcome news that we were approved for a FS grant to fund a Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) group to work on remote areas of the trail this coming summer. Next month's newsletter will have more information on this and other initiatives targeting the maintenance backlog in TN-NC. Stay tuned!

The Awards: Which brings us back to the most pleasurable part of every annual meeting – honoring those who have made stellar contributions to the trail over the past year and in some cases for many past years. In this column I will provide just a quick list of the awardees; but [see the articles below](#) for lots more details and plenty of great photos!

The 2017 BMTA Awardees

*Ken Cissna was the second recipient of the **Volunteer of the Year Award** for his contributions on so many fronts, especially as Hike Leader, BMTA Store Manager and as do-everything guy for our presence at community festivals.*

*Phil and Debra Guhl were named **Georgia Maintainers of the Year** for their amazing contributions -- more than 300 combined hours!*

*Meanwhile, **Dick Evans** (over 182 reported hours!) was named **Tennessee/North Carolina Maintainer of the Year** for his invaluable leadership in maintaining our North Carolina sections as well as leading our efforts in the Smokies.*

*In addition **Dick Evans** now joined a very select company as recipient of the association's highest honor, the **Distinguished Service Award**, for his major contributions over many years, perhaps most notably as architect of the Yellow Creek reroute that enabled us to move the BMT off the extremely dangerous road walk along the Tail of the Dragon road below Deal's Gap.*

*Special recognition was also extended to **Kathy Williams**, our **Newsletter Editor Extraordinaire**, as well as to five retiring board members: **Marge Heller** and **Marcia Lehman** (Publicity), **Ralph Heller** (Membership), **Ken Jones** (TN-NC Maintenance) and **Dick Evans** (Vice President).*

Beyond the individual honors, no less than forty-seven members earned the coveted **Maintainer T-shirts for 2017** ([see attendees below](#)) for 30+ hours of trail work. In addition, 13 of that group earned the **100+ Hours Award** for hitting triple figures in reported work-hours for the year. Brilliant!



Photo by Mike Kovitch

CONGRATULATIONS & THANKS TO ALL OUR HONOREES!!

Last but not least - massive thanks to **Darcy Douglas** for her stellar work coordinating the 2017 meeting, and to **George Owen** who pulled together a wonderful weekend of hikes for all to enjoy.



Debra and Phil Guhl



Ken Jones and Tom Keene



Ken Cissna and Tom Keene

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT IS DICK EVANS!!

by Marge Heller



BMTA's highest honor was awarded to Dick Evans at our 2017 Annual Meeting. As past President and past Coordinator of Maintenance for NC and the Smokies Section, Dick is the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award. He is only the fourth to receive this Honor. The first three Honorees were: Ken Jones, Clayton Pannell and George Owen. During Dick's years of service to the BMTA, he has worn many hats. He is best known and respected for accomplishing the Yellow Creek Re-route - a 21 mile relocation, which removed the BMT from a dangerous stretch of public highway and reopened a section of former Appalachian Trail between Tapoco Lodge and Fontana Village allowing direct access to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Congratulations, Dick!!



Annual Meeting Highlights

Photos courtesy of Mike Kovitch



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2017-2018 Board Members: Tom Keene, Ken Cissna, Jeff DePaola, George Owen, Margaret Meadows, Larry Dumas, Darcy Douglas, Joy Forehand and Barry Allen.



Mike Kovitch official photographer
Courtesy of Ralph Heller



Best part of any meetin--the eatin!!



MEMBERSHIP REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 2017

By Darcy Douglas

This month we have quite a few new members as well as renewals! Please take this opportunity to renew your membership for 2018! If you wish to make a donation this year, this is also a good time. You can do that with PayPal on the BMTA.org website or send it with your written form, also accessed at bmta.org. Incidentally, one of the things you can do on the written form that you cannot do on PayPal is let us know what areas you might be interested in. It's been challenging to fill Ralph Heller's shoes as Membership Director after the exhaustion of the Annual Meeting work, but with his help I might be getting the hang of it!



Annual Meeting 2017

by Darcy Douglas

I'd like to thank a few people for their work on the Annual Meeting which made my job quite a bit less stressful! George Owen, working with Ken Cissna, planned three days of hikes, arranged the leaders (dealing with the inevitable changes), made special parking arrangements and set up meeting locations since we didn't really have a central location this year. Ken Cissna planned, with me, for our store presentation, brought all the items he'd chosen, neatly displayed them all and managed sales throughout the evening. Ken also worked with me for several months about our new mugs which were held back until the awards time. Tom Keene and I must have exchanged a million emails over the months about awards, speakers, scheduling of events, food and so much more. Jane Heim of Amazing Grace Catering bent over backwards to provide just the meal we wanted and I heard nothing but compliments from those who dined! Ralph Heller managed the mailed-in orders promptly (there are quite a few who eschew PayPal, apparently!) so I had what I needed in a most timely fashion. Terry Miller made website changes on a dime for our committee which was much appreciated! Dick Evans set up our special PayPal site for the meeting! Rick Harris managed our T-shirts and the new hat! Ken Jones, Ralph Heller and Barry Allen managed the Maintainer Hours and award winners for the year. Both Treasurers Margaret (Evans and Meadows) were most helpful and prompt with all the financial issues. Kathy Williams worked with us to make the newsletter articles work, even at the last minute. And Joy Forehand helped with the meal distribution. Thank you so much to all of you for working as a team, working on time, so last-minute items were few and for your always positive attitudes about accomplishing the tasks needed for a wonderful Annual Meeting!!!!

You are awesome!!!!

BMT HATS & SHIRTS FOR HUNTING SEASON

by Marge Heller

Blaze orange saves lives during hunting season. A plain vest, on the trail, isn't nearly as effective as the combination of a blaze orange shirt and hat. It's all about maximizing your presence to hunters and minimizing the risk of being misidentified. **NEW BMT ORANGE SHIRTS & HATS** are available now!

Hat: \$12, Shirt (wicking - small, medium, large, extra-large) \$14.95. Available at BMTA's on-line store. Click [HERE](#).



Here's store manager Ken Cissna in his--you're guaranteed to look better in yours!!

Bear Hair Trail

by Ken Cissna

Four BMTA members (Gilbert Treadwell, Andy Dalton, Bruce Dalton and Ken Cissna) and one guest (Cindy Tehan) enjoyed the Bear Hair Trail Friday morning in advance of the annual meeting. Weather was perfect, views were great and LOTS of color was to be found, both on the trail and on the overlook of Vogel's Lake Trahlyta. We covered about five miles.



Stunning view of Lake Traylyta from overlook off Bear Hair trail.

Waterfalls, Waterfalls, Waterfalls

by Ken Cissna



Ralph Heller and Ken Cissna in their new BMTA shirts in front of main waterfall at Helton Creek Falls.

Although we later learned that we missed one hiker, Ralph Heller and Ken Cissna embarked on the Waterfalls hike Saturday morning.

We started with Duke's Creek Falls, which is listed as 2.2 miles. The falls were beautiful—they all were—and we saw lots of fellow hikers, including many with young children. After that, we proceeded to Helton Creek Falls, which is so short it hardly qualifies as a hike. There we met long-time member Mona Street who we were supposed to meet up with earlier for the hike—we told each other where we were and when but still couldn't figure out how we missed each other. Again, we enjoyed the falls.

Finally, we headed down to DeSoto Creek Park where we walked the half mile to the Lower Falls (the Upper Falls was temporarily closed).

We were sorry more hikers didn't turn out for this one, but we enjoyed our time together, the hike, and the falls.

Trail Trivia

What was the original name of Weaver Creek Road?

by Marge Heller

The BMT runs down to the end of Weaver Creek Road. Do you know what it was called previously?

TRIVIA ANSWER: Hog Gut Road ... because of its many twists and turns.

I learned this from the owner of Mystic Mountain Pizza in Blue Ridge. It was her grandmother who owned acreage in that area and decided that Weaver Creek Road was a better name. With permission from the county, the name changed.

Mystic Mountain Pizza is family owned and operated by Brannan Mathis. Check it out for delicious wood-burning pizza and more! **3397 East First Street, Blue Ridge, GA.**

PS: Most everyone approved of the name change, except the local swine!

November Work Trip Report

by Barry Allen/ Photos courtesy Mike Kovitch and Ben Yaun

November 11, 2017-- Veterans Day. As we started our day on the trail, I asked for a show of hands from our veterans. Looking around the crowd, I guessed that over a third of the volunteers present that day had also served the nation in the armed forces. Veterans from Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, veterans from the drug wars along the coast, veterans serving the nation in ways many of us have never imagined. And now they were serving again -- volunteering for no pay and limited appreciation -- except what we could dole out. Thanks to you all.

It was a truly amazing day: beautiful weather and the most remarkable volunteer turnout of the year -- thirty-eight people of all ages. First timers and folks that never miss a day, guests who had heard about our group at recent festivals, members and non-members, even an entire family -- Patrick and Cindy Ward with two of their amazing kids. Definitely a day I will remember.

Tasks for the day consisted of logging out Section 3 where several massive trees had come down during Irma, rebuilding steps just north of Little Skeenah Creek and cleaning water diversions south of Skeenah Gap. The first team led by Bob Cowdrick, left at 8:30 on the nose; they had volunteered for a thru-hike of Section 3, covering 6.5 miles with two chain saws and other heavy equipment. This group had some big trees to tackle and I expected them to be on the trail for a long day!



Continued next page

The rest of our volunteers converged on Little Skeenah Creek at 9:00, lining GA 60 with cars for 50 yards, and spilling over onto the Forest Service Road to the Swinging Bridge. Following a tribute to our veterans, a safety talk and a note from Thrivent Financial – the group who had so generously donated the timbers needed for rebuilding the stairs – we were off to the races. Everyone shared the task of carrying timbers to the job site. Each timber was carried from GA 60 with a four person team, over Little Skeenah Creek Bridge and then up to the worksite. Hand tools, saw horses, chain saw and even a generator with skill saw followed the timbers over the foot bridge – an amazing procession of men, women, tools and material.

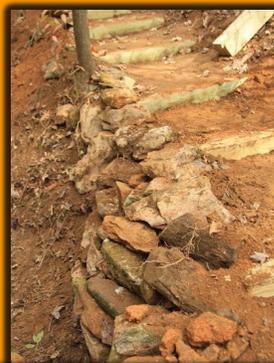


Once timbers were delivered the staging area other teams began to disperse for the daily work plan. A second saw team, led by Phil Guhl, left the staging area and headed to Skeenah Gap. They were to log out the first two miles of Section 3, two miles that the first group walked through without pause in an effort to clear the next four miles of trail. Following the saw teams, Tom Keene herded a group of volunteers to Skeenah Gap armed with fire rakes, Pulaskis and trail hoes. Their task was to clean water diversions on a steep, straight uphill climb moving south from Skeenah Gap. Tough work, but vitally important to the trail.

Back at Little Skeenah Creek, Darcy Douglas led a group of volunteers gathering rocks and making gravel to be used as backfill on the steps. The rest of the group began the task of removing the old steps to make room for the new. Marty Dominy, after driving for hours to be with the group, set up saw horses, generator and saw and began prepping each timber by scoring the top side to improve traction in wet and icy conditions – an all day job involving thousands of cuts.

The step team worked steadily until about 2:30, hardly pausing as the first 22 steps went into place. Then Rock. Over the next couple of hours, rock bars and sledge hammers were the order of the day. One more step. Then another. Four-thirty rolled around and the step team was out of gas. Other teams had completed their tasks and wrapped things up for the day. The last team to arrive back at Little Skeenah Creek was the first one out – the 8:30 AM saw team arriving at 4:00. And they were exhausted after a hard day on the trail. It was time for everyone to stop. The steps weren't quite done, but they were getting close, **AND WE WERE TIRED.**

Four days later, seven volunteers converged back at Little Skeenah Creek. At 2:30 on Wednesday the 15th, the last step went into place, step number 34. Uphill, around a switchback, through rock -- until coming back to grade. Quite a job, but what fun to work with all of our BMTA volunteers! Thanks to you all.



December Work Trip Announcement

by Barry Allen

- ◆ **Where:** Section 6, Fall Branch Falls
- ◆ **When:** Saturday, December 9, 2017, 9:00 AM
- ◆ **Meet:** The Iron Bridge Café and General store at 8:00 AM or Fall Branch Falls at 9:00 AM
- ◆ **Plan for the Day:** Finish long-suffering re-route at Fall Branch Falls, clean water diversions
- ◆ **What to bring:** Minimum two liters of water, long pants, boots, gloves and snack or lunch for the day.
- ◆ **Contact:** Barry Allen at bmtabarry ATgmail.com or 770-294-7384

Before the year ends, we really must get back to Fall Branch Falls for some finish up work! We have just a few more steps to install but we'll need to haul in another timber or two. We also have about 50 feet of trail to dig and just up from the falls we have a number of water diversions to spruce up for the wet months ahead.

I hope to make this a shorter day than our November day on Little Skeenah Creek, ending by lunchtime. And if the day is nice, I'll bring a grill and we can share a burger and brat down on the creek! And maybe some egg-nog and holiday cheer. MERRY CHRISTMAS and thanks for all you do.

BMTA Wedding Congratulations Russ and Olivia!!

By Marge Heller



BMTA member Russ Ivey posted a photo of his groom's cake on our Facebook page. It couldn't help but catch my eye because in the middle of the very creative, lovely, green, forest cake was a tent, with two campers/hikers, a bear and a BMT sign!

Upon contacting Russ, he graciously gave me the OK to share it in BMTA's Newsletter. He recently joined the BMTA after visiting our display tent at the April 2017 Trout Festival in Blue Ridge. According to Russ: *"The reason we chose that cake is because Olivia and I made a pact that that we would section hike the entire BMT together. It also slightly depicts the one night we had a bear come into our camp while we were in the tent between Dyer and Watson Gap. We're currently five miles short of finishing Georgia and continuing north from there. The trail is our favorite, by far."*

Note to Newlyweds: please update us on your progress of section hiking the BMT. Photos are welcome!

AmazonSmile Benefits BMTA

If you are going to make purchases from Amazon during the holiday season or any other time, please use this address:

BMTA's unique link is [http:// smile.amazon.com/ch/58-1428009](http://smile.amazon.com/ch/58-1428009).

If you do so, Amazon will direct a small share of your purchases to BMTA. A convenient way to do this is to click on the link and then bookmark that page on your toolbar or wherever you keep hiking links.

BMTA is Going to Len Foote Hike Inn, Again!

By Ken Cissna

For I don't know how many years in a row, members of the BMTA will be able to enjoy a *half price* winter outing to Georgia's extraordinary, beautiful backcountry lodge, the Len Foote Hike Inn. Our dates this year are February 27-28. The hike is 5.1 miles of moderate difficulty. This opportunity is exclusively for BMTA members. You may invite a guest as long as he or she stays in your room (two bunkbeds per room). Only 20 rooms are available so make your reservation *now*.

For reservations contact the Hiking Director to get the BMTA code. Then, go to <http://hike-inn.com/reservations/>. Cost (including tax) is about \$70 for one person in a room and \$100 for two sharing a room. Their superb dinner and breakfast are included in the price. The hot showers are wonderful and the rooms are all heated (being cold at night isn't a problem—in fact, I've found you have to be careful not to set the heat too high and get your room too hot).

For information about the Len Foote Hike Inn, go to <http://hike-inn.com/>. Space is limited.

For further information about our hike contact the Hiking Director, Ken Cissna, by email at [kcissna AT usf.edu](mailto:kcissna@usf.edu) or by calling 706-636-1741.



Upcoming Hikes

by Ken Cissna, Hiking Director

BMTA normally schedules a minimum of two hikes per month, one of five to eight miles and moderate difficulty, and one that is shorter and easier. In addition, we have occasional backpacking hikes and more difficult ones that might be called “hardy hikes.” Occasionally we co-sponsor hikes with other organizations. Although more hikes are in Georgia than the other states, you will find hikes in all three BMT states: Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

If you are interested in leading a hike or have a hike you’d like to see us offer with someone else leading, please contact me at [kcissna AT usf.edu](mailto:kcissna@usf.edu) or 706-636-1741.

The hikes for the next two months are listed below. Many people love winter hiking best of all, with cooler weather and long distance views. More hikes will be forthcoming, so check the Activities Calendar of the website and next month’s newsletter for updates. Enjoy.

December

December 2nd (Saturday) Raven Cliff Falls.

6 miles, moderate, in and out. We will pass several other falls on this hike. The falls shoot through a cliff and the water falls 170 feet.

Contact hike leader Larry Dumas at [ledumas AT hotmail.com](mailto:ledumas@hotmail.com)

December 15 (Friday) BMT: Highway 60 to Swinging Bridge on the Toccoa River.

4 miles, moderate. Short shuttle.

Contact hike leader Ken Cissna at [kcissna AT usf.edu](mailto:kcissna@usf.edu) or 706-636-1741

January, 2018

January 12 (Thursday) BMT Section 14a from Hwy 68 to Coker Creek and back to Hwy 68

8 miles, moderately strenuous. Lunch at Coker Creek.

Contact hike leaders Clare and Ed Sullivan at [clare7982 AT gmail.com](mailto:clare7982@gmail.com) or [edsulli AT gmail.com](mailto:edsulli@gmail.com)

January 15 (Monday) Big Frog Mountain via Big Frog Mountain Trail and BMT, return 11-12 miles total, moderate to strenuous. Uphill first half and downhill last half. Elevation change is 1300 feet starting at 2900 feet to 4220 feet. Hiking time about seven hours. Short shuttle on FS roads. Beautiful views along the ridge lines.

Contact Hike Leader Tom Sewell at [SewellTom AT yahoo.com](mailto:SewellTom@yahoo.com) or text to (706)669-6406.

January 30 (Tuesday) Brush Creek Trail.

7 miles, easy-moderate. Begins at Boyd Gap overlooking the upper Ocoee River put-in and descends through pine forest and passes some low-grade coal deposits. After two miles the trail turns east and continues on the west side of Upper Ocoee Lake with some great views of the lake.

Contact hike leader Hank Baudet at 706-946-4318 or [geezer95 AT gmail.com](mailto:geezer95@gmail.com)

February, 2018

February 6 (Tuesday, 6:30pm) Beginning Backpacking Class.

Travis Crouch, AT and BMT section hiker and owner of North Georgia Mountain Outfitters, will conduct a class for beginning backpackers and for anyone who would like a chance to benefit from his considerable experience. He will discuss backpacking techniques, equipment options and strategies for safe and enjoyable hiking. Later in the Spring, BMTA will conduct one or more beginning overnight hikes for the “graduates” of the class.

For further information or to register for the class, contact Ken Cissna at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741 or Travis Crouch at travis AT hikenorthgeorgia.com or 706-698-4453.

The class will be conducted at North Georgia Mountain Outfitters, 14244 Hwy 515 N, Suite 1200 Ellijay, GA 30536; 706-698-HIKE(4453), approximately three miles north of Ellijay on highway 515. See <http://www.hikenorthgeorgia.com>.

February 7 (Wednesday) BMT Kimsey Highway from Dry Gap to Thunder Rock Campground.

5.7 miles, moderate, mostly downhill. Long shuttle. Possibility of doing a “key exchange” if enough sign up. Spectacular hike mostly along a ridge. Kimsey “Highway” is a historic Indian Trail.

Contact Hike Leaders Tom Sewell at SewellTom AT yahoo.com or by text to 706-669-6406 or Tim Holby 828-361-4205.

February 17 (Saturday) Wagon Train Trail – Brasstown Bald. Co-sponsored with Georgia Forest Watch 5 miles, easy-moderate. Two miles of gentle downhill to the overlook and back, plus up to the tower if we’re feeling like that. Besides the views, we’ll be hoping for the spectacular ice formations on the trailside cliffs (if temperatures cooperate).

Contact hike leaders Sue Harmon of GFW suepharmon AT gmail.com or 770-540-3672 or Ken Cissna of BMTA at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741.

February 27-28 (Tuesday-Wednesday) Overnight trip to Hike Inn.

5.1 miles, moderate – each day. BMTA members only.

For more details, contact hike leader Ken Cissna at kcissna AT usf.edu or 706-636-1741 as well as the article on page 17 in this newsletter.

March, 2018

March 3 (Saturday) Boling Park/Etowah River– mostly different trails than we enjoyed last year 5-7 miles, moderate.

Contact hike leader Howard Baggett at howardeb AT windstream.net

March 30 (Friday) Green Mountain Trail in Aska System Trails.

4 miles, easy, with moderate elevation gain and loss. Good views of Lake Blue Ridge. Short shuttle.

For further information, contact hike leader Hank Baudet at 706-946-4318 or Geezer95 AT gmail.com

The December Newsletter Deadline is January 3, 2018-Thank you!!