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Points of Interest

Click the title to go directly to the page.

[President's Column](#)

[Trail Revealed](#)

[Seeking Coolness](#)

[Corporate Members](#)

[Synchronous Fireflies](#)

[Thunder Rock](#)

[Dollars at Work-Thank you!](#)

[Good Decision](#)

[Lost Creek](#)

[Signs at Work](#)

[Upcoming Hikes & Work Trips](#)



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BMTA Headquarters



President's Column

Last month, it was a great pleasure to tell readers that the trail was open! All 300 miles! In places, the Forest Service had not yet opened the trail for maintenance, but the entire length was open for hiking. We also talked about areas of the trail that were impacted by rough spring weather and a moratorium on maintenance. Most of these areas were in Tennessee.

I take special pride in reporting that during the month of June, maintenance crews cleared almost 27 miles of Tennessee trail. Much of this trail was cleared with crosscut saw and ax. Rick Harris did yeoman's work – organizing, leading or participating in multiple work trips every week. For an *interim* trip on the third Saturday of June, the BMTA mustered 22 volunteers in Tennessee with three small groups working north from the Tellico Trout Hatchery Section and two more groups working south from the Sycamore Creek Trailhead. *On the same Saturday*, two additional groups worked Section 12 in the Lost Creek area. One week later on the normal Tennessee work date, 17 volunteers split into three crews, working Section 12 near Kimsey Highway and the Little Frog Wilderness.

With mutual concern for one another's health, every effort has been made to keep proper distances at gathering points. Last week, the safety session was held in the large parking area of a local church with Rick Harris encouraging at least six feet between attendees. Volunteers broke into small groups and most members drove their own vehicles to work points. Ride sharing has been kept to a minimum. In most locations, volunteers are able to drive themselves to a trailhead. We encourage volunteers to only do what they are comfortable doing during these challenging times.

Yes, the trees have been a constant companion. On one weekday June trip, David Blount and Rick Harris removed 17 trees with crosscut, working from Coker Creek toward Loss Creek. Two days later, a crew of Brian Trinkle, Ben Yaun, Patrick Ward and Shane Morrison took out 30 trees near the Hiwassee on the opposite end of the same section – all with crosscut or ax. In the second half of June, the USFS finally removed chainsaw restrictions. A third team then went back with chainsaw to connect these sections. The number of trees down in Tennessee has been averaging about 13-15 trees per mile of trail. By comparison, in Georgia an early evaluation in May revealed fewer than two trees down per mile of trail.

A big thanks to the many volunteers working in small groups to care for the trail. A hearty well done!

Several members have forwarded notes and information on the **Great American Outdoors Act**. We should all follow this bill closely as it can provide much needed funding for recreational needs on Federal land holdings (National Parks/National Forests).

Funding for this bill comes from offshore oil and gas leases accrued in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) – a program dating back to the Lyndon Johnson administration. As I read the history of the LWCF, funds from offshore oil and gas leases, about \$900 million annually, were earmarked for ‘outdoor recreation’, primarily for land acquisition and maintenance in National Forests and National Parks. The problem with the LWCF has always been that once the funds are collected from offshore leases, Congress must annually appropriate the monies that can be spent by each agency. Since its inception, over \$40 billion has been collected from offshore leases, but only \$18 billion has been appropriated for spending from the LWCF (with deficit spending, Congress has used these funds in areas that were never intended).

The Great American Outdoors Act mandates a spending level of \$1.9 billion for the next five years – monies going directly to address recreational needs in the National Forests and National Parks.

I encourage all to do their ‘due diligence’ and then contact your congressional representative and encourage their support of HR 7092. The Senate version passed in June with bipartisan support. The House version should be voted upon before the end of July.

The appropriation of funds from the LWCF can help dramatically with the backlog of maintenance needs on many trails in the National Parks and National Forests.

Till next month.....



BMTA Treasurer Candidates Sought

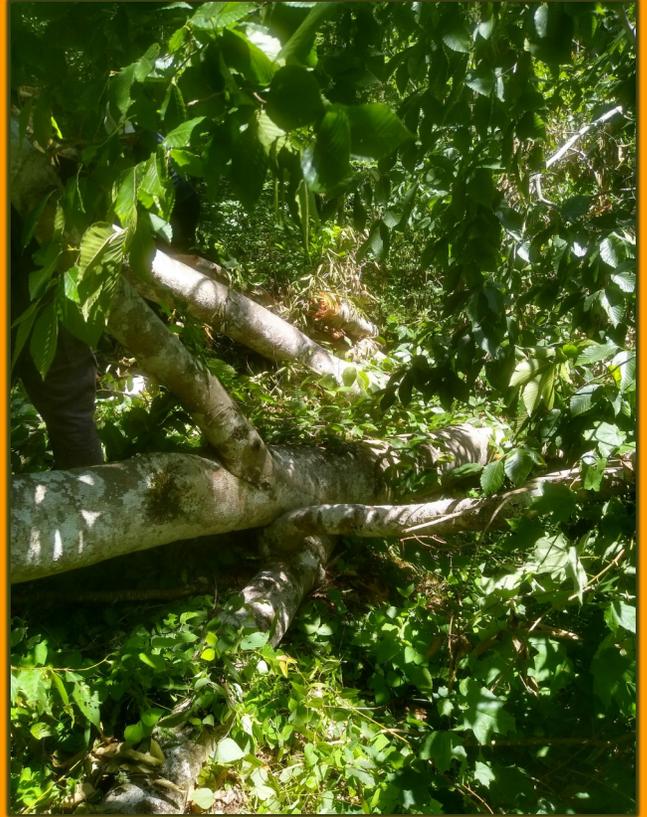
The Nominating Committee for the 2021 Board of Directors is looking for candidates for the BMTA Treasurer position. Margaret Meadows has performed exceptionally for three years and is ready to work with her successor.

The Treasurer is a full voting member of the Board and also is on the Executive Committee.

Skills needed include: accounting, budgeting and Excel spreadsheets. Most bank transactions are entered online with most purchases from, and donations to BMTA, coming through PayPal. Computer skills are necessary.

If you are willing to consider contributing some of your time and administrative skills to help keep BMTA the well-managed nonprofit organization that it has always been, please contact Nominating Committee Chair, Bob Ruby, bmtabob@gmail.com, or the other Committee members: Sue and Dave Ricker or Clare Sullivan.

The Trail Revealed from Beneath the Forest





Seeking Coolness in the Cohuttas

by Tom Sewell

Tom and Carolyn Sewell led seven hikers on a delightful hike on Sections 9 a, b and c. We started at Watson Gap with a brief uphill trek, then downhill for two miles to the South Fork of the Jacks River where we joined the northern terminus of the Pinhoti Trail. For a view we then took the Pinhoti Trail for 0.2 mile to its crossing of the river but choose not to ford the river. The section of the BMT alongside the river is an old road bed with several “rock step” minor creek crossings. At about ½ mile before the BMT leaves the river, we found a great clearing with logs and easy river access for a lunch break. Once we reached the point where the BMT leaves the river trail to head up to Dyer Gap we choose to retrace our steps back to Watson Gap. The hike was a total of 8.5 miles and we were provided a dense canopy of trees from the June sun.



Pictured seeking the coolness of the forest were hikers Carolyn Sewell, Connie Dassinger, Tom Johnson, Mike Firment, Kees deVente and Roger Roy.

BMTA Corporate Members

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association is grateful for the help and support provided by our Corporate Members. When you visit one of these businesses, please identify yourself as a BMTA member and be sure to thank them for their support!

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SYNCHRONOUS FIREFLIES

by Suzanne Downing

On Tuesday, June 2, four BMTA members and two guest joined Liz Domingue from JUST GET OUT-DOORS, for an Evening with Synchronous Fireflies. I had been looking forward to this trip for a year. Then Covid-19 happened. With the National Parks shut down, I just assumed our trip would be cancelled. But, the stars aligned and the National Parks partially reopened just in time!

Our group included J and Nancy Watlington, Sara Stenbridge with her mom Carol, and Suzy Downing and her friend Stephanie. We met up with Liz in the parking lot at the back of the Sugarland Visitor Center. The visitors centers have not reopened and all the NPS events are cancelled so it was easy for us to find each other. After introductions our group drove to the secret firefly watching destination. We hiked in on a maintained trail about 1/4 mile and set up our chairs. Our night vision came easily since the moon was just a few days shy of being full. While we waited for darkness Liz took this time to tell us all about the fireflies we would hopefully be seeing.



She explained that the synchronous fireflies, AKA lightning bugs, are just one of the many species of fireflies found in the park. We learned about the males' flashing patterns and how they are trying to outcompete each other to attract a female. The female does the choosing so the males have to put on a good show for the ladies!

Liz also told us about bioluminescence, which is the light produced by a living organism. If we got really lucky she hoped that we might see a few Blue Ghost fireflies too. Well, not only did we see a few but we saw a whole lot of them! This firefly has a flash with a bluish tint and when it flashes it stays lit up like it's glowing for about 30 seconds. As they glowed and flew through the woods it was like watching tiny little fairies zipping around!



It was truly an amazing evening and if you've never experienced this miracle of nature, I highly recommend it!

Thunder Rock Loop Hike

by Clare Sullivan

Seven BMTA hikers and two new hikers had a fun day watching the “water arrive” at the Ocoee Whitewater Center and then hiking 5.3 miles on the Tanasi Trail System. Along the hike we ate fresh blueberries, raspberries and blackberries! Welcome to Rod Jude and Susan Klevansky. We hope to see you on future BMT hikes.



Before the “arrival.” Photo courtesy of Greg Redman.



After the “arrival.” Photo courtesy of Greg Redman.

Continued next page



How sweet the shade!



Rosebay Rhododendron added to the magic.



Socializing distantly.



Is your preference a blackberry?



Or perhaps a raspberry to enhance your hike?!

Your Donation Dollars at Work Thank You for Your Support!

by Frank Forehand, Membership Director



Your donations make projects like steps, informative / directional signs, a clear trail for hikers and other projects possible.

A special thanks to those who recently have donated to support BMTA's mission to maintain and protect the BMT!

A graphic designed to look like a wooden sign. On the left is the logo for the Benton Mackaye Trail Association, which features a diamond shape with a tree and the text "BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION". To the right of the logo, the text reads: "Join Now!" in a large, bold, green font. Below that, in a smaller green font, it says "Use this link to become a BMTA member:". At the bottom, the word "Membership" is written in a green, italicized font.



Good Decision Made for an Enjoyable Hike

by Steve Dennison

The BMT hike from GA Highway 60 to the Toccoa River Swinging Bridge concluded on a Tuesday, March 16 about 28 hours after its original Monday 9 am start time. Weather looked a little "iffy" during the weekend and the early Monday morning forecast worsened considerably to 80% probability of thunderstorms — about the time we would cross the bridge. Registered hikers received emails, texts, or landline calls rescheduling the hike to Tuesday, which provided a much better weather outlook.

Only five of the original 10 hikers, members Anne Anderson, Ken Cissna, Mike Pilvinsky and hike leader Steve Dennison plus one guest, Bill Cox, made it Tuesday. Others had prior commitments. We learned that a friend of some of us had attempted this hike Monday, about when we would have been out there and she had been drenched. We were happy that we had changed to hiking Tuesday. Low humidity, low temperatures and a camera-shy turtle on the trail greeted us. We saw rhododendrons, mushrooms and few hikers — except at the bridge where we saw approximately 30 people.

On our way in we passed a family of four from Alpharetta who had camped at the bridge the night before. They had packed up and were headed back to their car at Highway 60. The nice part of it was that it was the younger child's first backpacking trip and everyone was proud of her. We were pleased that they'd chosen the BMT for this experience.



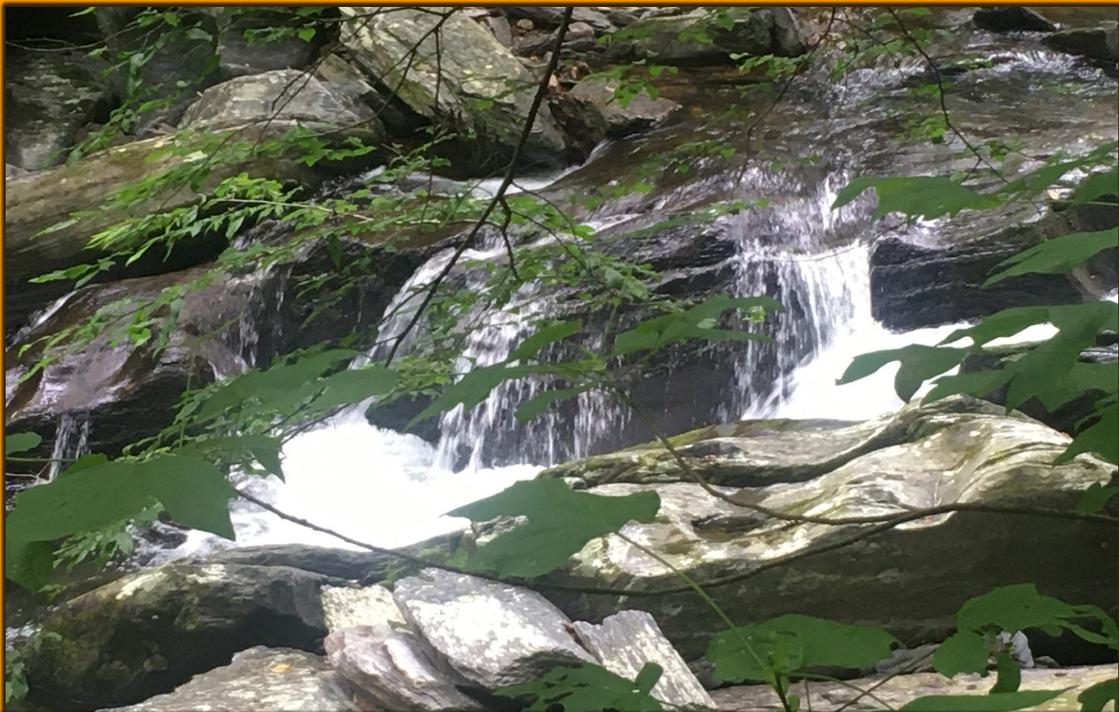
BMT: Lost Creek Section

by Ken Cissna

We had enough hikers that I was either going to have to turn people down to stay below BMTA's 10-hiker limit or we had to split the hike into two groups. Fortunately, Mike Pilvinsky was willing to take a group of hikers and we split into two groups that enjoyed walking along beautiful Big Lost Creek.

My group included members Martha Fowler, Tom Johnson, Susan Klevansky, Mike Leach and guest Jill Williams. Mike's group had member Rod Jude and three guests, Stephanie and Hank Hodgkin and Beth Rothermel. We had a great day for hiking, though it did sprinkle briefly — long enough for us to get out rain jackets and pack covers.

After the hike, two of our number went to the restrooms at Lost Creek Campground and apparently turned left exiting the campground rather than right. They had quite an adventure, and a bit of a frightening one—all hike leaders (and hikers too) need to be very sure that everyone knows not only how to get to the trailhead but also how to get back home.



Signs Committee Busy in Georgia

by George Owen

Over recent years the BMTA Signs Committee has been composed of only two people - co-chairs Ralph Heller and George Owen.

Now with expanded sign creation and placement, the committee has recently added four people to serve more efficiently. Those added in recent months include Nelson Ashbrook, Bob Cowdrick, David Ricker and Sue Ricker. This growing committee has been a great help in securing installation of our much increased placement of signs in Georgia at key trail locations.

A few months ago, as the new Benton MacKaye Trail parking lot at Big Stamp Gap was being completed, several new signs were produced and installed on the trail near that facility. Now an expanding program of both new and replacement signs is moving forward with more signs being produced than ever before.

Most recently two giant signs - the largest ever produced by BMTA in Georgia - were installed by a team of four at the GA Highway 60 crossing at Little Skeenah Creek. With masks on for protection in this Corona virus time, the team placed a sign on either side of the highway. Each sign indicated the distances to the tenth of a mile to several key points of interest to hikers either southbound or northbound. Installation was done on the Saturday, June 13 work trip by Ann Redman (who had driven from East Texas just for the work trip), Dave Ricker, Ralph Heller and George Owen.



In recent months the BMTA has employed the fairly new sign shop at Ace Hardware in Blue Ridge for our sign production. This shop is able to produce signs of all sizes and types meeting basic U.S. Forest Service guidelines within days and for a rather modest price.

Ralph Heller is, and has been our expert in attaching signs to posts so as to be rather secure. Others on the committee are starting to learn his technique.

Much more sign production is planned for the months ahead, and the Signs Committee much appreciates the BMTA Board in recent years providing generous funding for our signs.

While the signs currently being produced by this committee are mainly for Georgia, we are also willing to work with the maintenance directors and Forest Service in our other two states for perhaps more signs in those areas.

Upcoming Hikes and Work Trips

by Ken Cissna, Hiking Director

BMTA normally schedules four or five hikes per month, some “leisure” hikes that are shorter and easier and some five to eight miles and of moderate difficulty. 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. Some, but not all, of our hikes are “dog friendly.” Although more hikes are in Georgia than the other states, you will find hikes in all three BMT states: Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee.

These, however, are not normal times. Because hiking in the out-of-doors is good for one’s mental and physical health, we encourage BMTA members and others to continue hiking as much as possible during this national health crisis *and to do so safely*. To that end, we are continuing our hiking program and welcome people to hike with us. In the interests of safety, we have instituted some modifications that you need to know about:

1. **Only hikes that do not require shuttles are allowed** under the auspices of BMTA.
2. All hikers must drive to the meeting place and trailhead in their own cars -- no carpooling except among family members.
3. Any potential hiker who is feeling ill, has traveled within the past 14 days to a location with a significant number of cases of the novel corona virus (COVID-19) or has been exposed within the past 14 days to a person who has been confirmed as or is even suspected of having COVID-19 must not come on a hike.
4. All hikes are limited to 10 participants —hike leaders may impose even lower limits.
5. Before, during and after a hike, participants must maintain an appropriate social distance from one another (an absolute minimum of six feet—but ten, fifteen or twenty is much better).

We have had to make more adjustments than usual to our hike schedule—dropping some hikes, substituting others, revising hikes to avoid shuttles, etc. Please forgive the inconvenience.

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 hikeleader@bmtaemail.org.

The hikes for the next couple of months are listed below. More hikes will be forthcoming, so check the Activities Calendar of the website, BMTA’s Facebook page, our various email alerts and next month’s newsletter for updates. Enjoy!

July

July 9 (Thursday) Gahuti Lite: Five Trails Loop at Fort Mountain State Park. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). About 5 miles, moderate. Highlights include cascading creeks, a long distance view and a lakeside walk. Ends with a moderate uphill walk.

Hike leader Ken Cissna. For more information, hikeleader@bmtaemail.org



July 11 (Saturday) GA Work Trip - Section 7 – Sisson Property. 1) Level and widen the trail as well as work on water diversions.

To RSVP, contact Phil Guhl, bmtaphil@gmail.com.

July 13 (Monday) Hanging Dog (near Murphy NC).
6 miles, easy to moderate.

Hike leader Evelin Yarns. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org

July 14 (Tuesday) BMT: To Buck Bald and back.
3 miles round trip, easy. Top provides beautiful 360 degree view of the surrounding mountains.

Hike leader Clare Sullivan. For more information, hikeleader@bmtamail.org.



July 18 (Saturday) TN/NC Work Trip - Section 16a, Roundtop to Sledrunner Gap. We will drive to Sandy Gap and work from there brushing out the trail. Will run a chainsaw crew as well. One way in and out. Volunteers will have to leap frog the work in order to maintain necessary social distancing requirements. To RSVP, contact Crew Leader Steve Cartwright, scdcmc@comcast.net.

July 22 (Wednesday) Select Trails of Talking Rock Nature Preserve. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). 4-5 miles, easy to easy-moderate.

Hike Leaders: Howard Baggett and Ken Cissna. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

July 24 (Friday) Cartecay River Loop Trail and Clear Creek Shoals.
About 5 miles, moderate. Includes a short drive between trailheads.

Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

July 28 (Tuesday) To Rainbow Falls and back.
3.8 miles, easy. Two creek crossings. Trip to two other beautiful falls just above Rainbow Falls a possibility.

Hike leader Clare Sullivan. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

July 29 (Wednesday) Turtletown Creek Falls.
4 miles, moderate. Two beautiful falls in one short hike.

Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information, hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

August

August 3 (Monday) Rock Town Trail (near Lafayette, GA, in Wilderness Management Area).
4.2 miles, moderate. Big boulders are pretty neat.

Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

August 7 (Friday) BMT/AT Loop from Big Stamp Parking lot.
4.6 miles, moderate. This loop hike includes 1.2 miles on the Appalachian Trail and 3.4 on the Benton MacKaye Trail as well as the southern termini of both trails and two great vistas, one on each trail.

Hike leader Mike Pilvinsky. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

August 8 (Saturday) BMT: Loop from Dyer Gap.
5 miles, moderate. Elevation change of 700' up and then down. Follows USFS road 64a up to Flat Top Mountain then BMT back to Dyer Gap. Includes the headwaters of the Jacks River.

Hike leader Tom Sewell. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.



August 8 (Saturday) GA Work Trip Section 8.
To RSVP, contact Phil Guhl, bmtaphil@gmail.com.

August 14 (Friday) Old Copper Road Trail.
4.5 miles, easy.

Hike leader Larry Dumas. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

August 21 (Friday) Cartecay River Loop Trails. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog).
About 6.5 miles, moderate.

Hike leader Ken Cissna. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.



August 22 TN/NC Work Trip Section 16b – Roundtop to Sledrunner Gap.
To RSVP, contact Rick Harris, harrisri@aol.com.

August 24 (Monday) Bear Creek Trail.
6 miles, moderate. Bring water shoes—two stream crossings, second one likely to get you wet.

Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

August 31 (Monday) Wildcat Creek Loop.
5 miles, moderate. Beginning at Wildcat Creek Campground, much of the trail runs near Wildcat Creek.

Hike Leader Steve Dennison. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

September

September 1 (Tuesday). Yonah Mountain.
4.2 miles, strenuous. One of the best views for lunch in north Georgia.

Hike leader Mike Pilvinsky. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

September 10 (Thursday) BMT: Mud Gap to Whigg Meadow.

5.8 miles, moderate. In recent years, we have seen professional birders catching, measuring and banding birds at Whigg Meadow in September. We hope they are there again this year.

Hike leader Tom Sewell. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.

September 11 (Friday) Stanley Gap Trail from Fall Branch Falls to where Stanley Gap and BMT diverge, and back. About 6 miles, moderate.

Hike Leader Steve Dennison. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.



September 12 (Saturday) GA Work Trip Section 9.

To RSVP, contact Phil Guhl, bmtaphil@gmail.com.

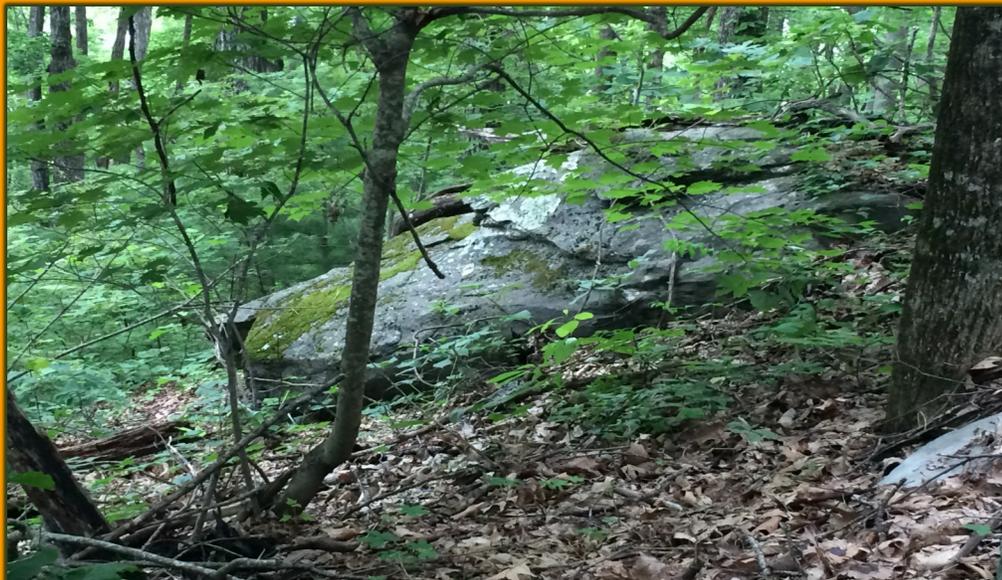
September 25 (Friday) BMT: Highway 515 to Weaver Creek and return. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog) 5 miles, easy. Mostly along dirt roads. Two “rock hopping” stream crossings that could get your feet wet depending on stream levels and recent rainfall.

Hike leader Ken Cissna. For more information, contact hikeleader@bmtamail.org.



September 26 (Saturday) TN/NC Work Trip Section 16e – Loss Creek to Coker Creek CS.

To RSVP, contact Crew Leader Steve Cartwright, scdcmc@comcast.net.



**The deadline for the August Newsletter is Wednesday, July 29.
Thank you!!**