



## Points of Interest

Click the title to go directly to the page.

[President's Column](#)

[Support](#)

[Phased Reopening](#)

[Craddock to Weaver](#)

[Boling Park](#)

[Lake Notteley](#)

[Wildcat Creek Loop](#)

[Trillium Extravaganza](#)

[Towee Creek Loop](#)

[Upcoming Hikes](#)



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**BMTA Headquarters**

# Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 37, ISSUE 5

MAY 2020

## President's Column

Six weeks. After spending thousands of hours in the National Forests over the last several years, it has been six weeks since my last trip to the Benton MacKaye and the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. I'm getting fat and restless walking trails and parks in my home county of Gwinnett, but I have been a responsible citizen by adhering to the guidelines of the USFS and local governments during the virus shutdown. Earlier this week, I sent an inquiry to the Blue Ridge Ranger District asking about plans for opening some of the areas of our trail now considered off limits. The BRRD, which is the home to the Benton MacKaye from Springer Mountain to Weaver Creek, replied promptly: *"look for a plan by the end of the week."* Rest assured, as soon as I receive a timeline for opening the trail, I'll get it to the membership.

I absolutely HATE to focus on bad news, but I need to report on a series of virus related cancellations. I hope to get all of this bad news out of the way at once so we can return to good news and accomplishments in the coming months.

Regretfully, I must report the cancellation of our organized Annual Meeting at Unicoi State Park in November. The Board decided to take this action after it became clear there would be too many health concerns with a large meeting in the fall of the year. Since our by-laws do require an annual meeting in October or November of the year, we are currently looking at options to minimize the risk to our membership and still meet the requirement of holding an annual meeting. We will provide more details on this event in the June President's Message.

The National Trails Day event for June has been cancelled. For many years, the Benton MacKaye and the Georgia Appalachian Trail Clubs have held a joint event, most recently at Vogel State Park. Initially, the plan had been to hold a joint work day at Amicalola Falls State Park, but due to health concerns, this event has been put on hold and will not be rescheduled for 2020.

Work-Walk-Week in North Carolina has been cancelled, as have all trail related work activities for at least the next month. We hope to return to work on the trail in early summer, but will draw guidance from the USFS and NPS on this front. Initially, we will structure work days a bit differently, utilizing smaller groups spread out on several sections of trail for maintenance, rather than working a single section of trail intensely with one large group.

All training classes for chainsaw and crosscut saw have been cancelled. However, the Forest Service has added one year to the saw cards of all sawyers whose cards expire during the 2020 calendar year. Qualified sawyers are becoming a scarce commodity, so if you have a card, we really need your help as soon as volunteers are released to work on the trail.

Essentially all local festivals have been cancelled for the next several months. Since we had booths reserved at a number of these local festivals and events, opportunities for publicity and outreach have been dramatically reduced or eliminated for 2020.

Sorry to bear the news of all of these cancellations.....

**Until next month – Please stay safe and well.....**

## **Forest to Barry: Saving this for your upcoming fat reduction plan.**



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**Membership**

## Great Smoky Mountains National Park Phased Reopening on May 9

Following guidance from the White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and state and local public health authorities, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is increasing recreational access and services. The National Park Service (NPS) is working servicewide with federal, state, and local public health authorities to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and using a phased approach to increase access on a park-by-park basis.

Beginning May 9, the park will reopen many roads and trails. The health and safety of employees, partners, volunteers, visitors, and local residents remains the highest priority in park reopening decisions. Park managers will examine each facility function and service provided to ensure those operations comply with current public health guidance, and will be regularly monitored. Park managers will also continue to work closely with the NPS Office of Public Health using CDC guidance to ensure public and workspaces are safe and clean for all users.

“We recognize this closure has been extremely difficult for our local residents, as well as park visitors from across the country, who seek the park as a special place for healing, exercise, recreation, and inspiration,” said Superintendent Cassius Cash. “We are approaching this phased reopening with that in mind, as we balance our responsibility to protect park resources and the health and safety of everyone.”

Park managers are implementing new safety measures in facility operations and services to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 as areas reopen to the public. Campgrounds, picnic pavilions, visitor centers, and many secondary roads will remain closed during the first reopening phase, which is expected to last for at least two weeks. Some of these measures will include disinfectant fogging operations for restrooms and public buildings, installation of plexiglass shields at visitor centers, personal protective equipment requirements for maintenance workers, new safety protocols for emergency services staff, and reduced group size limits.

While many areas will be accessible for visitors to enjoy, a return to full operations will continue to be phased and services may be limited. The park typically has more than one million visitors each month, May through October, from across the country. When recreating, the public should follow local area health orders, practice Leave No Trace principles, avoid crowding, and avoid high-risk outdoor activities. The CDC has offered guidance to help people recreating in parks and open spaces prevent the spread of infectious diseases. We will continue to monitor all park functions to ensure that visitors adhere to CDC guidance for mitigating risks associated with the transmission of COVID-19, and take any additional steps necessary to protect public health.

For the most up to date information about facility openings, service hours, and access, please visit the park website at [www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/conditions.htm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/conditions.htm). Park rangers remain available to answer questions and help with trip planning via email or phone during business hours at (865) 436-1291, (828) 506-8620, or [GRSM\\_Smokies\\_Information@nps.gov](mailto:GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov).

--NPS--

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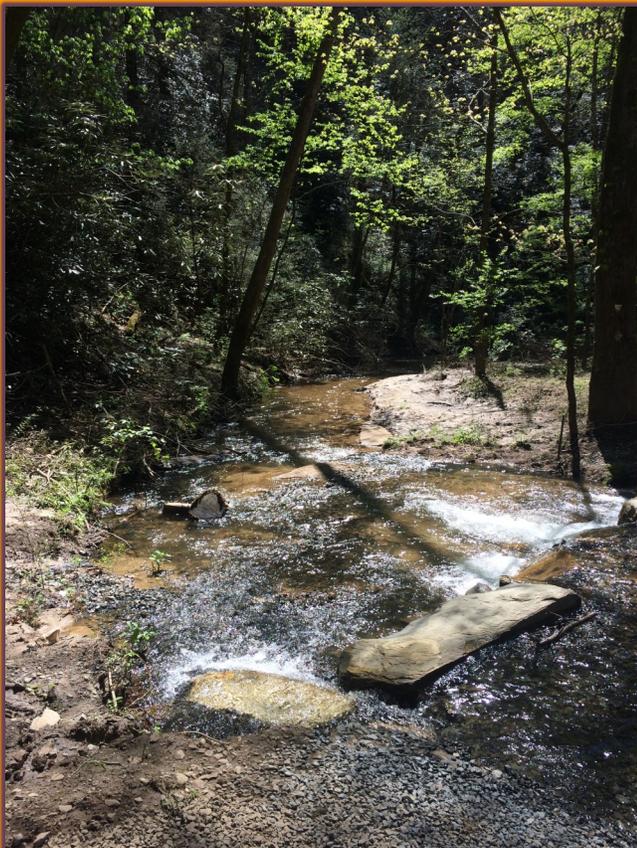
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## Craddock Center to Weaver Creek

by Tom Sewell with photos from Roger Herr and Ken Cissna



Tom Sewell led this hike along the BMT from the Craddock Center, which is located where the BMT crosses Hwy 515, to Weaver Creek. This section of the BMT (7a) is mostly on unmaintained county roads with little or no traffic. We found two creek crossings that required water shoes. Our group, all of whom were eager to be outside hiking and doing so safely, agreed that the wet feet and “social distances” were worth the chance to hike. Besides hike leader Tom Sewell, the hikers included Howard Baggett, Ken Cissna, Roger Herr, Roger Roy, and Carolyn Sewell.

## Etowah River – Boling Park Trails

by Howard Baggett and Ken Cissna

Howard Baggett led Darcy Douglas, Sara and Jerry Bland and Ken Cissna, with his dog Artie, on a beautiful April 3 birthday hike for Sara.

From the main trailhead, we hiked the White Trail to the intersection with the Orange Trail. If we had continued on the primary trail and done the Green Loop, we wouldn't have seen any of the ugly logging that has decimated most of the trails in the area. Instead, we turned onto the Orange Trail and took it to its intersection with the Purple Trail. There, we turned around and headed back to the main trail. To continue any further we'd have been in the heavily logged area. Along the Orange Trail we saw a huge crop of beautiful May Apples sparkling in the sun. We then continued along the Etowah River to the church, went around the Green Loop back to the main trail, then took it back to the trailhead.

We totaled 6.6 miles, mostly flat with some hillier sections. While many of the trails in north Georgia are either packed or closed, we saw only a few hikers, fishermen and runners. We hope these beautiful trails remain an undiscovered treasure in Canton.



Dogwoods were brilliant against the blue sky.



Toadstool trilliums!



All smiles! Howard Baggett, Jerry and Sara Bland and Darcy Douglas.



Howard and Darcy deep into a May Apple garden!

# Trails of Lake Notteley

by Martha Fowler

Martha Fowler led seven hikers on April 15 to hike the trails of Lake Notteley near Blairsville. We hiked about 2½ miles. It was a cold start to the day but warmed nicely and we had some pretty views of the lake. The hikers included Sara and Jerry Bland and Martha's daughter, Renee Stauffer, her husband Tim, along with their children Scarlett and Eli.



Lake Notteley



Renee, Scarlett and Eli.

## Where Does Your Blaze Find You?



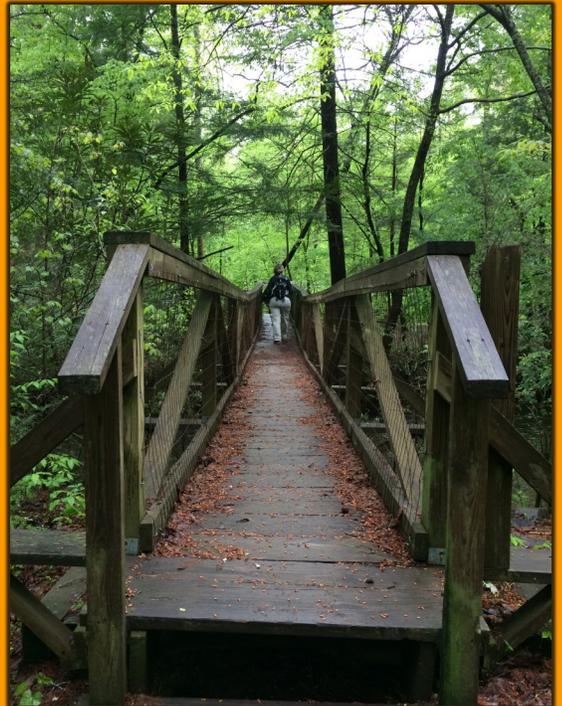
## Wildcat Creek Loop

by Steve Dennison with photos courtesy of Nancy Dennison and Kathy Williams

Six members and one guest spent three hours hiking on Friday, April 24, in the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area Wildcat Tract. On the pre-hike of the trail Steve Dennison and his wife Nancy were treated to a wild turkey sighting with Nancy discovering a cache of pink lady slippers. Spring was venturing out with May Apples, Wild Ginger blooms, Flame Azaleas as well as the exquisite cascades of Rocky Ford Falls. Concluding the 5-plus mile hike we saw a GA state truck with a young lady releasing trout into the stream. Hiker Larry Jarkovsky immediately went to his truck to get his fishing gear!



Wildcat Creek was filled to its banks.



A bridge into the serenity of the forest.



Clear, sparkling and mesmerizing.



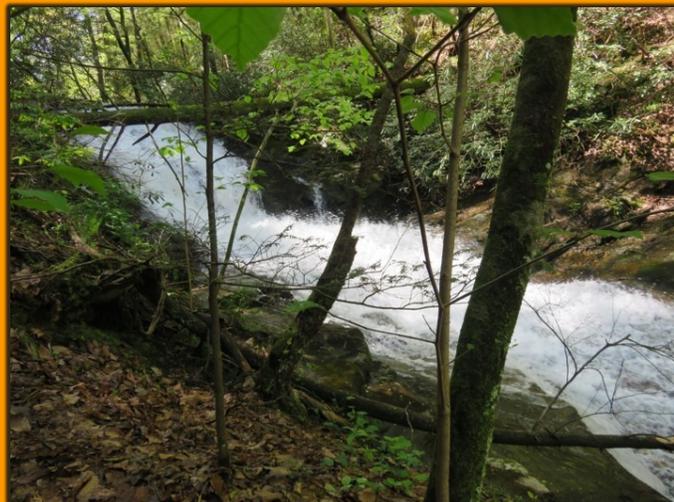
The craggy rocks seemed old and wise.



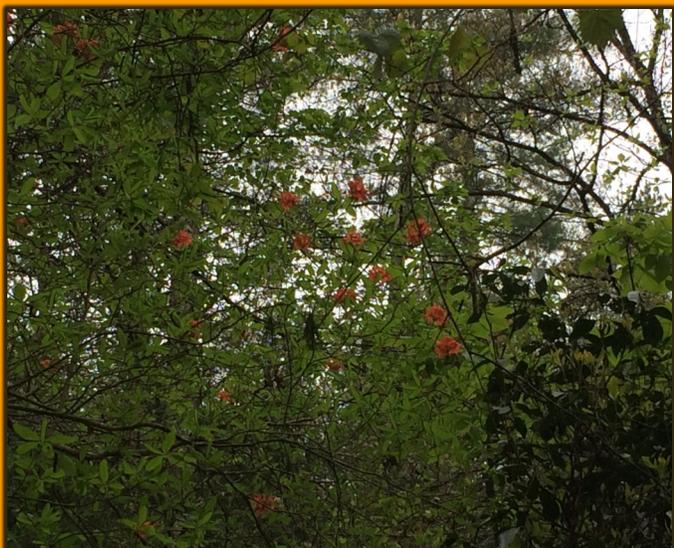
**Wild Ginger blooms!**



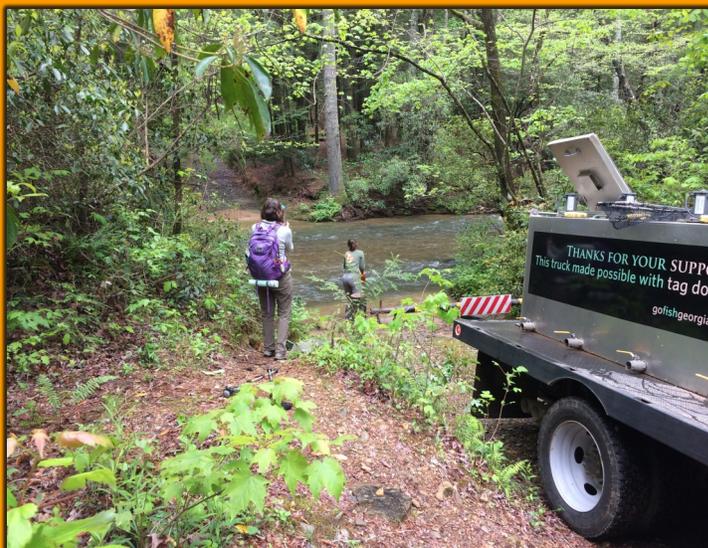
**Pink Lady Slippers all in a row!**



**The Cascades of Rocky Ford Falls were bursting with spring rains.**



**Flaming Azaleas were high up in the canopy.**



**The release of rainbow trout was fascinating to watch.**

## Trillium Extravaganza

by Ken Cissna with photos courtesy of Paul Black

On Monday, April 27, eight of us drove our high clearance vehicles out to Hudson Gap for the promise of viewing outstanding wildflowers, especially Trilliums. The ditch getting from Bushy Head Gap onto Forest Service 793 continues to be a significant problem. I am encouraged that some pink flags have been placed on either side of where a culvert is needed and I'm hoping that means that work there might be imminent. Truthfully though, even with a culvert installed, the stretch from Bushy Head Gap to Hudson Gap badly needs attention. It is the worst piece of Forest Service road that I've been on in some time.

Fortunately, the flowers did not disappoint. We walked about 5.5 miles on the BMT from Hudson Gap to Hatley Gap and back. We were treated to magnificent fields of Trillium at several locations as well as numerous other spring flowers including Yellow Fairybells, Bellworts and some dogwood blossoms floating in the understory. We saw four species of Trillium. Out in abundance we saw Grandiflorum, Yellow and Catesby's (not pictured in the photos) and a single instance Sweet Betsy. Perhaps the star of the day was a gorgeous bunch of Showy Orchis.



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# Towee Creek Loop on the BMT and the Hiwassee River

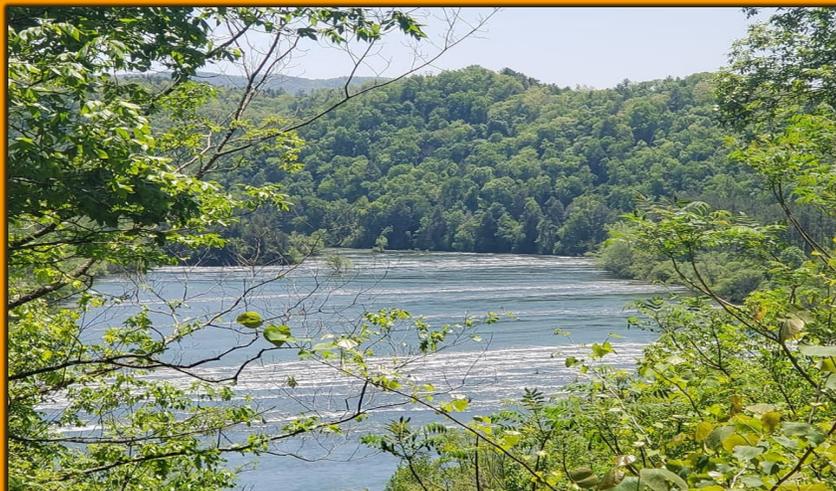
by Clare Sullivan with photos courtesy of Clare Sullivan and Richard Harris

Social distancing didn't spoil our loop hike along the Hiwassee River and the BMT/John Muir Trail. We noticed fishermen were having a very lucky morning as we walked by the river! Our 5.3 mile hike thrilled us with at least 17 different blooming wildflowers and lots of blowdowns. We went through, around, over and under the exciting downed trees.

Our hiking members were Ken Cissna, Rick and Brenda Harris, Larry Jarkovsky and Judy Price. We welcomed guests Sue Robinson and Doug Lynch and hope to see them on future hikes.



Navigating blowdowns and practicing social distancing.



## Upcoming Hikes

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 10 or 20 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@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.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!

### May

**May 2** (Saturday) BMT in the Cohuttas: Dally Gap to Spanish Oaks, down BMT to Jacks River Trail to the first river crossing, then back to Dally Gap via Jack’s River Trail.  
6.9 miles, moderate. 750 feet total elevation gain. Three creek crossings not requiring water shoes. High clearance vehicle recommended as there are five miles of Forest Service road to reach Dally Gap.

Hike leader: Tom Sewell. For more information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

**May 2** (Saturday) Cow Camp and Bald River Trails. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Co-sponsored with the Cherokee Hiking Club.

5-6 miles, moderate. One significant stream crossing likely, so bring hiking poles, water shoes and a small towel in case the water is up.

Hike leaders Rick and Brenda Harris. For more information, contact [harrisri@aol.com](mailto:harrisri@aol.com).

**May 6** (Wednesday) Wildflower Hike on BMT: Stanley Gap Trailhead to Rocky Mountain and return. 4.9 miles, moderate. We will enjoy a leisurely lunch atop Rocky Mountain. Along the way, Trillium and Lady Slipper gardens will provide the perfect backdrop for the hike. (Note: This hike will not occur if the Stanley Gap Trail remains closed; another may be substituted).

Hike leader: Joy Forehand. For further information, contact [jgeftwitter@gmail.com](mailto:jgeftwitter@gmail.com).

**May 8** (Friday) BMT in the Cohuttas.

4-5 miles, easy to moderate. Exact section to be determined.

Hike leader: Larry Dumas. For more information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

**May 14** (Thursday) BMT: Northbound from Bushy Head Gap.

Approximately 6 miles, moderate.

Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

**May 26** (Friday) Amadahy Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog).

4-5 miles, easy-moderate.

Hike leader Ken Cissna. For further information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

## June

**June 1** (Monday) Thunder Rock Loop Trail.

7 miles, moderate. Starting at Thunder Rock Campground, across Rhododendron Trail, up and across Bear Paw and Chestnut Mountain Trails, returning on the Thunder Rock Express.

Hike leader Evelin Yarns. For further information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

**June 2** (Tuesday) Synchronous Firefly Hike.

1-2 miles, easy. Spend an evening watching synchronous fireflies in the Great Smokey Mountain National Forest interpreted by naturalist Liz Domingue. These special fireflies light up in synchrony and are found only in the Smokies and in Thailand. The hike is recommended by members who have had this experience. This hike is limited to 15 participants and cost \$31.50 per person. Hikers need to bring a water bottle, yard chair and a flashlight with a red beam or one covered in red cellophane. Payment is due to the hike coordinator. Liz will even call for barred owls while you enjoy the light show. The hike will probably start in Gatlinburg. (Note: This event will occur if the Great Smoky Mountain National Park is open and will not occur if it is closed.)

Hike leader Liz Domingue. For further information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

**June 6** (Saturday) BMT in the Cohuttas: From Watson Gap to Dyer Gap and back. 8.6 miles round trip, moderate. One rock-hop stream crossing.

Hike leader: Tom Sewell. For further information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

**June 20** (Saturday) At the Ocoee Whitewater Center: Up Thunder Rock Express Trail, then onto the BMT to Forest Service road 45, back to Thunder Rock Express and down to our cars. 4 miles, moderate to difficult. We may be able to watch the water in the Ocoee River arrive at the Ocoee Whitewater Center before the hike.

Hike leader Clare Sullivan. For more information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).

**June 22** (Monday) East Lakeshore Trail – Morganton Bridge and Wildcat Point. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). 5.2 miles, easy. (Shuttle, if guidelines allow a shuttle by then).

Hike leaders Rick and Brenda Harris. For more information, contact [harrisri@aol.com](mailto:harrisri@aol.com).

**June 26** (Friday) BMT: Lost Creek Section. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). 6.5 miles, easy. Beautiful walk along Big Lost Creek. One stream crossing will probably get your feet wet so come prepared.

Hike leader: Ken Cissna. For more information, contact [hikeleader@bmtamail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmtamail.org).



**Don't Scream! Get outside and hike!**

**The deadline for the June Newsletter is Wednesday June 3. Thank you!**