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Points of Interest

Click the title to go directly to the page.

[Joe Cantwell](#)

[Clean Trails Day](#)

[Turtletown Falls](#)

[Churning Waters](#)

[Tellico History Day](#)

[Can We Dig It?](#)

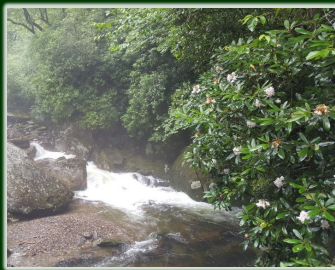
[Hangover](#)

[Marking the Trail](#)

[Walk to the Gulf](#)

[Upcoming](#)

[Partners](#)



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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 43, ISSUE 7

JULY 2026

Remembering Joe Cantwell: A True Trail Steward

by Bob Cowdrick



The Benton MacKaye Trail Association lost a dear friend, dedicated volunteer, and passionate steward of the outdoors with the passing of Joe Cantwell.

Joe's commitment to the BMTA was recognized when he received the prestigious Trail Worker of the Year Pulkaski Award.

With 252 maintenance hours to his credit, he became a member of the 2022 100-Hour Club and quickly became one of BMTA's most valued volunteers.

Joe's love for the outdoors began with the influence of his father, Kermit Cantwell, who instilled in him the importance of protecting wild places. That passion guided Joe throughout his life. A graduate of the New York State College of Forestry and Syracuse University's Civil Engineering program, Joe built an impressive career focused on balancing progress with environmental stewardship.

After retirement, Joe dedicated his time to being a community volunteer, a baseball umpire and trail maintainer. He adopted BMT sections in 2021 and became a regular participant on Georgia and Tennessee work trips. He graciously served as the BMTA's Georgia Director of Trail Maintenance where he taught others with dedication, skills and a cheerful can-do attitude.

The BMT was also a place where Joe found friendship and joy. In 2022, he and fellow BMTA member Patti O'Dell were married and continued to share their love of hiking, travel and being community volunteers.

Joe leaves behind a legacy of service, conservation and friendship. His contributions to the trail and the BMTA family will not be forgotten.

Thank you, Joe, for the miles you maintained, the wilderness you protected and the examples you set.

BMTA Celebrates Successful National Trails Day Event with a Clean Trails Theme

by Bob Cowdrick

On Saturday, June 6, 2026, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association proudly participated in National Trails Day by hosting a Clean Trails event at three popular recreation destinations: Fall Branch Falls, Swinging Bridge, and Bald River Falls.

The day was a tremendous success, bringing together visitors, volunteers, and trail supporters who share a common commitment to preserving and protecting our public lands. Throughout the event, BMTA volunteers engaged with hikers and visitors, promoted Leave No Trace principles, collected trash, and helped improve the outdoor experience for everyone enjoying these beautiful locations.

The numbers tell an impressive story:

- **682 visitors engaged**
- **141 volunteer hours contributed**
- **20 BMTA volunteers participated**
- **19 states (as far as CA and UT)**
- **3 countries (Germany, Peru and Poland)**
- **1 discarded bed spring** (among the more unusual items collected)

These stats show both the popularity of our public lands and the importance of continued stewardship efforts to keep them clean, safe, and enjoyable for future generations.



This successful event was made possible through the support of our partners at the **U.S. Forest Service** and **AllTrails**, whose collaboration helped make the day possible. Most importantly, it was the hard work, enthusiasm, and dedication of our BMTA volunteers that made the event truly special.



Gracie wanted to help! Photo by Martha, her human.



Signs informed hikers about the negative impact of trail trash.



Every conversation with a visitor, every piece of litter removed, and every hour donated contributed to the success of the day.

The positive interactions with hundreds of trail users provided an excellent opportunity to share the BMTA mission and promote responsible outdoor recreation.

Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time and energy to support National Trails Day. Together, we continue to make a lasting difference on the BMT and in the communities we serve.

Turtletown Falls Hike

Photo courtesy of Ray Laws



Tadun, wife Maggie, and their three sons Asher, Landry, and Paxton Knight enjoying the refreshing Turtletown Falls. The family is from Nebraska and are BMTA Members.



BMTA PARTNERSHIPS

Help BMTA preserve, protect and maintain the Benton MacKaye Trail.

Become a BMTA Business, Silver, Gold, Platinum or Diamond Partner today!

Go to [Partnerships](#) to view the details.

Employer Identification #58-1428009.

**If you receive a benefit as a result of making a contribution to a qualified organization, you can deduct only the amount of your contribution that is more than the value of the benefit you receive.*

2026 AWARDS BANQUET

November 7 2026
Copperhill, Tennessee



*The work our volunteers do is priceless!
The Banquet is our way of saying thank you for a job well done!*

Will You Be in this Year's T-Shirt Picture?

*It only takes 30 Hours for a T-Shirt or
100 Hours to Become a Member of the 100-Hour Club*

**Trail Worker
of the
Year**

**Annual
Meeting
Raffle**

**Volunteer
of the
Year**



Go to [HIKE THE HILLS](#) for hike descriptions.
Go to [LODGING](#) To view lodging options.

Churning Waters and Canopy Cocoons

by Clare Sullivan with photos courtesy of Clare Sullivan and Kathy Williams

Just eight minutes! That's about how long it takes for the water release from Ocoee Dam #3 to completely fill the riverbed at the Ocoee Whitewater Center. It's such a beautiful sight to see as the river creates the roaring rapids. Two of the hikers cancelled the morning of the hike and that left Kathy Williams and Clare Sullivan to enjoy the hike. Information was shared about the history of the 1996 Olympic Kayak and Canoe Course. After trying to get to FS Road 221, we decided to back up and hike from Thunder Rock Campground. There were a few trees down, but the trail has been cleared. This is always an exciting and lovely hike near the Ocoee River.



Sirens and flashing lights alert people to the water's arrival.



The riverbed becomes a raging torrent!



The whitewater rafters arrive right behind!



Clare did some maintenance That big blowdown will have to be done later.



One of the more unique bridges on the BMT.



Lush, green canopy mountain cocoon.

Great Tellico History Day

Photos by Rick and Brenda Harris

The BMTA booth at the Great Tellico History Day was busy with the ever-popular cross-cut experience. Young and old enjoyed themselves with this hands-on heritage journey.



Sometimes you put your back into a task and sometimes you put your tongue into it!



Look how tall that saw is!



The Charles Hall Museum and Heritage Center had numerous presentations on the area's history.

Can We Dig it? Yes, We Can!!

by Brenda Harris with photos courtesy of Brenda Harris, Rick Harris, Phyllis Jones and Clare Sullivan

A team of dedicated trail volunteers convened to repair a critical section of the Benton MacKaye Trail between Unicoi Crest and Beech Gap. The hardy crew converted a treacherous slip and slide area that had been exacerbated by the Cherohala Skyway's substantial drainage issues. We call it the "Grand Canyon of the BMT". It had already washed out two bridges. Through diligent effort and determination, our volunteer crew succeeded in revitalizing the trail, ensuring safety and accessibility for future hikers. Also, accolades to our team for effectively mitigating the impact of an impending injury to a hiker. With our mission accomplished, we celebrated our triumph with ice cream at the Cherohala Outpost. And we beat the storm!



Phyllis Jones, Barb Childress and Brenda Harris.



Steve Cartwright and Bob Cowdrick get down and dirty.



Steve Cartwright diligently making this switchback.



Byron Coker and Ken Jones are deep into the task.



Kenny Martin works the tread.





Lunch buddies!



Can we eat ice cream? Yes, we can!!

Hangover and Growing Over

by Jode Mull with photos courtesy of Rick and Brenda Harris



Seven folks went on the strenuous hike to the Hangover from the Wolf Laurel Trailhead, about six miles of arduous uphill and steep downhills.

The BMT between the Stratton Ridge Trail and the Hangover is very, very overgrown and desperately needs a work trip (or two or three). This will require sling blades, loppers and scythes. Only two logs were across the BMT, both easy stepovers.

The weather was fine, cool and not too muggy. The views from the Hangover, as always, never disappoint with vistas into the Smokies and the other surrounding mountains and lakes.

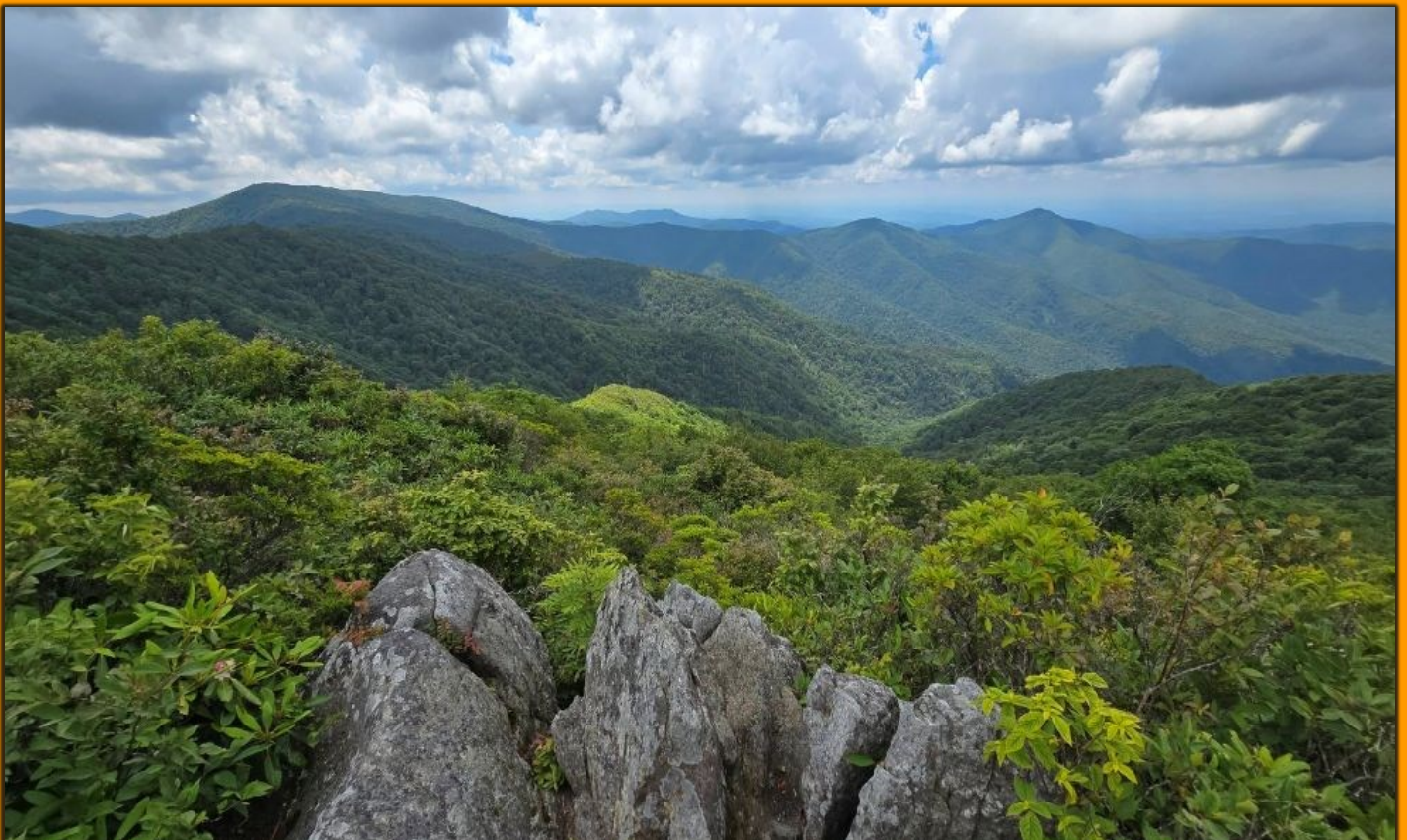
After the hike, we all went to the Cherochala Outpost on the Skyway near the Indian Boundary Campground and had Mayfield ice cream. If you haven't tried it, get the new flavor Peanut Butter Cup. It is our favorite now!

Participating in the hike were Rick and Brenda Harris, Bob Cowdrick, Jode Mull, Daphne Martin and Stephanie and Rodger Gordon.





"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness." John Muir



Marking Our Trail for Others to Follow

by Darcy Douglas

On June 30, our fourth post with a blaze attached was installed at Whigg Meadow. The blaze on the rock was completely obscured by June growth, so the taller post will be visible to hikers coming up the trail into the very open parking area abutting the meadow itself.

Daphne Martin, Steve Hayden and Darcy Douglas accomplished the task (and did some trail maintenance for about 45 minutes, too). The Blaze Team has been approved to create and use these in areas where we don't have suitable trees in open areas. Ian Guttridge helped create the signs themselves.

If you are interested in participating in this type of trail maintenance, please contact me via email or phone. This is so important to those who hike the Benton MacKaye Trail and can be done on your own schedule. This is easier for some who aren't always able to join group work details. You also can go fast or slow, making this an adaptable type of maintenance!

Due to various factors, we do have those no longer able to blaze, so we are always interested in having new people volunteer for this activity! I look forward to hearing from you at bmtadarcy@yahoo.com or 404-431-3614.



Steve Hayden and Daphne Martin installing the new blaze sign.



The July BMT Blog Is Here!

***'Summer on the BMT: Cool Trails,
Mountain Streams & High Ridges'***

*Use the Subscribe Button in the Blog to
Subscribe to the New RSS Feed!*

A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf by John Muir

Reviewed by George Owen

Now here's a book I think every BMTAer should read and really enjoy. It's so beautifully yet simply written and just a most wonderful travelog. Plus, it's by one of my most favorite Americans and a great forefather of the American environmental movement.

John Muir wrote this about his first long-distance trek. In 1867 Muir began his walk from Indiana through the Cumberlands and Appalachians to Cedar Key, Florida. Since he doesn't name it, the modern map of this trip and other evidence I reviewed would indicate he crossed the Appalachians where today he would be trekking on the Benton MacKaye Trail at Unicoi Gap and then heading southeast to a town he names and visits, Murphy, North Carolina.

He passes through a fairly new town, the only one on his trip he didn't like, Blairsville, Georgia. On September 21, 1867, he writes, "Most luxuriant forest. Many brooks running across the road. Blairsville [Georgia], which I passed in the forenoon, seems a shapeless and insignificant village, but grandly encircled with banded hills. At night I was cordially received by a farmer whose wife, though smart and neat in her appearance, was an inveterate smoker." (Oh, well, so much for the town that is now my mailing address!) The next day he traveled south over an old dirt road that became the Logan Turnpike and what is now Tesnatee Gap, Georgia. He was in the company of three mountaineers "in the box of a shackly wagon that seemed to be held together by spiritualism" and pulled by a mule. He mentions a harvest of asters. He arrives at Mt. Yonah by evening.

On October 8, he reaches Savannah where one of my favorite stories about Muir happens. In "Camping among the Tombs" he describes several nights in Savannah's Bonaventure graveyard while waiting for his brother from up North to telegraph him money to continue his trip. John is now almost penniless.

Here I have my own story. My wife Sandy and I once vacationed in Savannah. We journeyed out to Bonaventure Cemetery so I could see John Muir's sleeping place among the giant moss-draped live oaks. At the historic cemetery's office, I asked the lady manning the desk if she knew "where John Muir slept in 1867". She not only had never heard of such or the man, she said, but she immediately began perusing some large very official-looking record books. Then she told me the cemetery "had no record of a John Muir *buried* there". Then it became obvious the semantic problem. This elderly and gracious woman had interpreted my term of "sleep" or "slept" as referring to death and burial. I never learned where John Muir slept, not even from the cemetery manager after our helper consulted with him. He had never heard of John Muir either!

After receiving money from his brother John decided to pass up hiking the great long-leaf forests of South Georgia and instead paid for a trip on a ship from Savannah to Fernandina, Florida. There he struck out from Fernandina across the Florida peninsula, via Gainesville, to Cedar Key. He faced swamps, gators, plenty of snakes and encounters with mostly rural Floridians. Some were friendly and provided food and bedding for him, others not so much.

As Muir approached Cedar Key, he came down with malaria. Once there he was taken into the home of a gracious local family, Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson, where he convalesced for about three months.

The latter third of the book is about Muir's trip by ship to Cuba, where he stayed a month in the Havana area. Later he traveled to California where he took up farming, writing, hiking, becoming one of America's most famous men. Once he even camped in Yosemite with President Theodore Roosevelt.

The book is available on many sites including Amazon and eBay. I could not recommend a non-fiction book more than this one, a superb travelog by one of our greatest Americans - please go read it! It's still overwhelmingly enjoyable to me!

Upcoming

by Ray Laws, Hiking Director

July



July 11 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. Section 8.
Contact Bob Cowdrick at bcowdrick@bmta.org.

July 17 (Friday) Bob Bald, Location: Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center, Time 9:00 AM. THIS HIKE IS OPEN TO DOGS AND TO MEMBERS OF BOTH THE BMTA AND CHC. This 7- mile, somewhat difficult, iconic hike takes us from Beech Gap at the State Line on the Cherohala Skyway up 900' to the summit of Bob Bald, with its iconic views mostly to the south and east. In the distance we can see the Skyway winding on its way toward Robbinsville. We will eat lunch at the top, then return the way we came. We can plan to eat supper at one of the restaurants in Tellico Plains or maybe just get ice cream at the Tellico Beach Drive-In. What to bring: food, water, your dog on a leash. Contact Hike Leaders Rick and Brenda Harris (and Nahme, our dog) at rharris@bmta.org

July 20 (Monday) BMT in Cherry Log to the chapel, small lake and to the shelter and back.
Moderate 4-miles through Sisson property.
Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.



July 23 (Friday) BMT: Lost Creek Section. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy 6 miles. Beautiful walk along Big Lost Creek. One stream crossing will probably get your feet a little wet so come prepared. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org

July 24 (Friday) Cartecay River Loop Trails. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5-6 miles, much of it along the beautiful Cartecay River. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org

July 27 (Monday) Boyd's Gap to Thunder Rock Campground 6 miles mostly downhill or flat on a well-maintained trail along the Ocoee River. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

August

August 1 (Saturday) Bear Creek Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 7 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org



August 8 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

August 18 (Tuesday) Emery Creek. Moderate 5 miles. The trail for this in-and-out hike is fairly easy, but 26 stream crossings (a number up to your ankles and two around your knees), a potentially slippery rock toward the beginning and again at the end and numerous blowdowns across the trail make it more difficult than it otherwise would be. Holly and Emery Creeks, two lovely waterfalls and a beautiful trail make it worth the trouble. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

August 21 (Friday) Rhododendron Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 3.6 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

August 21 (Friday) Warriors Passage. Location: Cherochala Skyway Visitor Center, departure time: 9 AM. This 6.1-mile National Recreation Trail is mostly (but not all) downhill with over a 2000' drop in elevation. We will leave cars at the bottom on Old Furnace Rd, then drive to the top of Waucheesi Bald. From there, we will hike 0.9 miles down the road to where the trail leaves the road and starts our steady and at times steep descent to Mule Pen Gap, then cross Toby Creek, Bald River Road, Wildcat Road and downhill to a crossing of Wildcat Creek, which we must wade. Sometimes we also have to wade Toby Creek. We will probably eat lunch at the Toby Creek crossing. Afterwards, we will retrieve our cars from the bald and maybe eat supper somewhere in Tellico Plains. The road up to Waucheesi Bald is in pretty bad shape, so if you plan to drive to the top, bring a 4WD high clearance vehicle. This trail is an old Cherokee Indian route over the mountains and was constructed by Boy Scout Troops out of Knoxville over 50 years ago. Those who hike it will receive a free 50-year commemorative patch. Bring lunch, water, your dog on leash. Contact Hike Leaders Rick and Brenda Harris (and Nahme, our dog) at rharris@bmta.org



August 22 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact:

BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org

August 26 (Wednesday) Lost Creek Trail. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

August 31 (Monday) Boyd's Gap to Thunder Rock Campground. Six miles mostly downhill or flat on a well-maintained trail along the Ocoee River. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

September

September 11 (Friday) Ocoee area: Boyd Gap to Old Copper Road Trail to Thunder Rock Campground. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog) About 5 miles, moderate. Lunch by Ocoee River. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



September 12 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.

September 18 (Friday) Rocky Flats Trail. Location: Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center, departure time: 9 AM. This 5.0 mile fairly difficult hike takes us to the old Hollinghead place at Rocky Flats with still standing chimneys. This is a mile into the hike off Doublecamp Creek Road bordering the Citico Creek Wilderness. Then the trail courses up and down around various ridges and ends up at Warden Fields. Afterwards, we will retrieve our vehicles at the starting trailhead and drive back to Tellico Plains for possible supper somewhere. This hike is in the Citico Creek Wilderness therefore we must limit the hike to 12 folks. What to bring: lunch, water, your dog on leash. Contact Hike Leaders Rick and Brenda Harris (and Nahme, our dog) at rharris@bmta.org.



September 26 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA

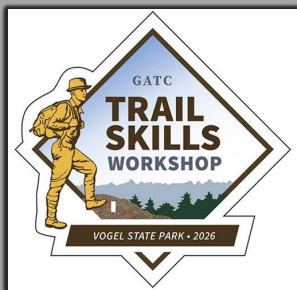
Contact:

BMTA TN-NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

September 29 (Tuesday) Gahuti Lite: Five intersecting trails loop at Fort Mountain State Park. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). About 5 moderate miles. Highlights include cascading creeks, a long-distance view and a lakeside walk. Ends with a moderate uphill walk. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

To access our website calendar, go [HERE](#).

Trails Skill Workshop Returns to Vogel State Park October 9-11, 2026



Registration will be opening for the Trail Skills Workshop on July 1, 2026.

You'll find all the information you'll need for this event by following the link below.

[TSW 2026 Flyer](#)

When you're ready to register, follow this link:

[TSW 2026 Registration](#)

**The deadline for the August Newsletter is Wednesday, July 29, 2026.
Thank you!**

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Welcome BMTA Partners!

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association is grateful for the help and support provided by our Partners. 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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ROBERT CRAWFORD
HIXSON, TN



GOLD PARTNERS

