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Points of Interest

Click the title to go directly to the page.

[Symbols](#)

[Clean Trails Day](#)

[Hiwassee Loop](#)

["New Eyes"](#)

[Annual Meeting](#)

[Out and About](#)

[Designate](#)

[Nature's Generosity](#)

[In Stone](#)

[Whigg to Beech](#)

[Conservation Corner](#)

[Hardman to Hanging Dog](#)

[Upcoming](#)



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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



VOLUME 43, ISSUE 5

MAY 2026

President's Column

Visual Nametags: Symbols of Who We Are

by Bob Cowdrick

A person *isn't* literally a visual name tag, but our brains *do* treat faces as powerful identity anchors.

When you recognize someone visually, your mind instantly pulls up a whole "identity file" — skills, traits, emotions, history, etc. In that sense, a person's face becomes the *trigger* for everything else you know about them.

Every member of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association carries a visual nametag that represents their unique contribution to our trail community. These symbols communicate identity at a glance, building belonging and trust both on and off the trail.



Think about what you bring to the BMTA: your knowledge of the BMT, the history of the area through which the trail passes, your talent for maintaining the BMT, your gift for welcoming new hikers, or your quiet dedication to support the organization. Your visual nametag captures all of it — no words needed.

Members also recognize one another through shared markings. As examples, members of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy relate to the iconic white blaze — a simple rectangular flash of white that has guided hikers for generations. Our valued Forest Service partners carry the USFS shield, a nationally recognized emblem of land stewardship and partnership. We, BMTA members, associate with the white diamond, a bold geometric mark that signals trail knowledge, commitment, and community on the Benton MacKaye Trail.

When you see these symbols, you see a person who shows up, gives back, and belongs.

What does your visual nametag say about you?



2026 Clean Trails Day

**Benton MacKaye Trail Association
AllTrails
Blue Ridge Ranger District
Tellico Ranger District**

Celebrate National Trails Day with Us June 6, 2026

BMTA members and USFS agents will be on hand to answer your questions about hiking, camping and trail maintenance in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and to tell you how to have a safe, responsible and enjoyable hike. Learn about:

- ◆ Pack It In / Pack It Out
- ◆ Leave the Trail as You Found It
- ◆ Hiking Etiquette
- ◆ Stay on the Trail
- ◆ Hiking Safety
- ◆ Trailhead Locations
- ◆ Impressive Landmarks
- ◆ Hiking Accessories
- ◆ Campsite Locations
- ◆ Camping Accessories

Three Locations



FALL BRANCH FALLS
Cherry Log, GA



SWINGING BRIDGE
Suches, GA



BALD RIVER FALLS
Tellico Plains, TN

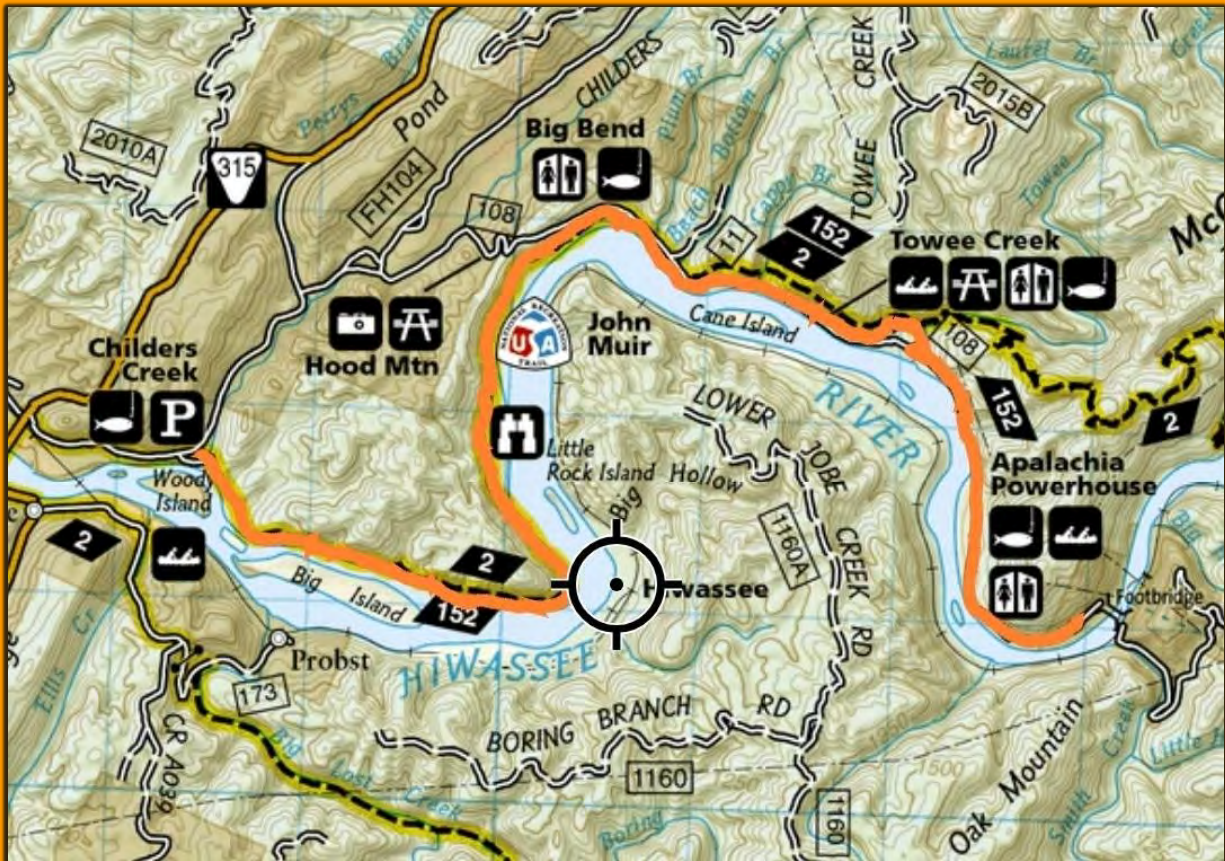
For More Information, go to [Clean Trails Day](#).



Hiwassee Loop Hike

by Rick Harris

This was a joint BMTA and Cherokee Hiking Club dog-friendly hike. Thirteen hikers and five dogs met at the Childers Creek Trailhead at 10 AM, then shuttled cars to the parking area by the powerhouse. We started from Childers Creek, hiking north on the Benton MacKaye/John Muir Trail (BMT / JMT). The flowers were amazing, all varieties and colors.



We saw fire pink, violets, azalea, trilliums, ragwort, plantain, phlox, dwarf crested irises, phacelia and wild comfrey, to just name a few. The water in the river was low with the generators cut off. So, there were lots of fishermen wading out into the river. The weather was warm and sunny. The trail from Childers Creek to Big Bend was in excellent shape with only one small blowdown.

We ate lunch at Big Bend, then we travelled on the section from Big Bend to Towee Creek. There were about eight blowdowns, one which was hard to get over, and the trail is quite narrow and steep in places, making for some scary maneuvering. One hiker (we won't mention her name to protect the guilty) fell off the side of the trail down into the road but she was not injured. We have a report afterwards she is more embarrassed than sore.



Wild azaleas

Continued next page



We took a long break at Towee Creek, letting the dogs play in the water and talking with a family at the picnic tables. We then hiked on the somewhat new segment of trail to the switchbacks. There we exited onto the road and walked the rest of the way to the powerhouse area on the road. We snacked on homemade cookies and drinks at the cars, courtesy of the Harris's. Even Nahme got a cookie.

Participants (13 + 5 dogs): Richard and Brenda Harris (+Nahme), Sarah Kennedy, John Hisey, Stephanie Gordon, Rodger Gordon, Janna Hawkins (+Crockett), Doug Lynch, Jiliane Burley, Judy Norton (+Ellie), Tracey Piel, James & Gayle Drummond (+Sofi and Lacy).



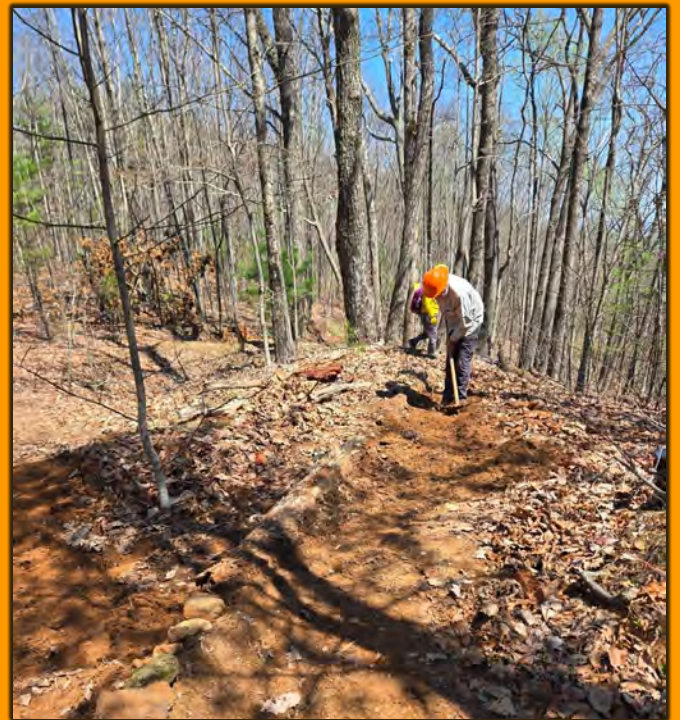
“New Eyes” on Section 8a

by John Oudin with photos courtesy of Kathy Gushwa and John Oudin

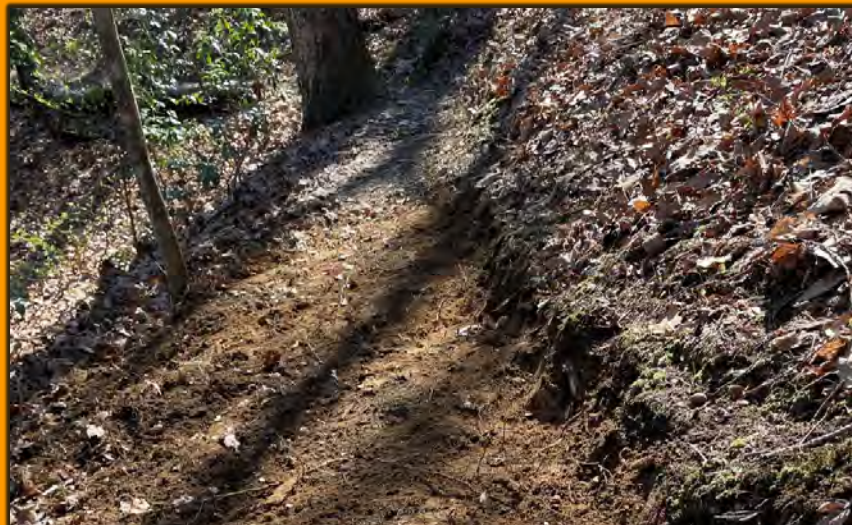
“New eyes” of Shelton Crow evaluated a significant walk-around on Section 8a! John Oudin pointed out a 20" tree blowdown had been blocking the path for several years (Steve Dennison indicated probably eight years or more) forcing walk-around hikers to make a new "braid" on the trail. Shelton started removing the rotted tree (amazingly) with a rogue hoe while other maintainers assisted with a silky to remove the tree and return the trail to its original path. They also dug a long path for water diversion. A good example where improvising "new eyes" and dedicated teamwork (Shelton Crow, Jan Jeffcoat, Kathy Gushwa, Steve Dennison and John Oudin) can significantly impact trail maintenance!



Shelton Crow begins the removal of the rotted blowdown.



Path now cleared and water diversion created.



Side hilling repair.



2026 Annual Meeting & Hike Fest

November 5-8, 2026

Copperhill Brewery in Ducktown, TN

Be a 2026 Award Recipient



FRIDAY NITE SOCIAL
Rod's Rockin' Rolls



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For additional information and pictures, go to [Lodging/Event Facilities](#).

BMTA Out and About



Ed and Clare Sullivan, Tom Darden, Judy Norton and Anne Anderson represented the BMTA at the Polk County Tennessee Annual Chamber of Commerce Banquet held at the Copperhill Brewstillery in Copperhill, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of Clare Sullivan.



Senator Warnock staffers are all smiles after they completed an almost two mile trek on the BMT to Fall Branch Falls.

From left to right: Cydney Karlins, Legislative Assistant in Senator Warnock's Washington D.C. office, Susie Leggett, Outreach Director, Northeast GA, in Senator Warnock's Atlanta office, Clare Sullivan and Ken Cissna, BMTA National Scenic Trail Committee members, Jesus Rubio, Northeast GA Outreach and Immigrant Affairs in Senator Warnock's Atlanta office.



Hike Leader Ralph Collinson treated hikers to the Trails of Jack Rabbit. These trails have great views of Lake Chatuge.



BMTA Maintainer Shelton Crow cut this large tree on Double Hogpen Gap thereby helping a chain sawyer avoid a five-mile round trip. We moved the tree off the trail. Hikers had been walking off the trail to avoid the high step over. Courtesy of Steve Dennison.

BMTA Store Notice:

Orders placed between May 8th and the 24th will be mailed on Tuesday May 26th.

Please plan accordingly.

CCC HISTORY DAY

VOGEL STATE PARK

BUILDING AMERICA'S PARKS



VISIT THE MUSEUM
SATURDAY, MAY 9th

Designate the Benton MacKaye Trail as — *National Scenic Trail* —



— A Cross-State Economic Opportunity —

Elevating the **Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT)** to National Scenic Trail status would boost outdoor recreation tourism and drive economic growth across Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina.

Key Metro Areas within the BMT Region



— Estimated Annual — **ECONOMIC IMPACT**



— Total Population: **10.46 Million** —



Supports Rural Communities

Boosts local economies in gateway towns.



Enhances Recreation Access

Increases trail use and visitation.



Strengthens Public Lands

Improves interagency coordination.



High Return Investment

Low-cost, high-impact federal action.

A National Scenic Trail designation for the **Benton MacKaye Trail** would generate **over \$10 million** annually in economic activity.



Nature's Generosity Traveling Exhibition 2026-2028

by Kathy Williams

Many of those we see hiking in the forests are out there on a mission to photograph the natural beauty of our planet. From April 4 to May 31 there is a stunning exhibit at the Blue Ridge Mountain Arts Association's (BRMAA) Art Center in Blue Ridge, Georgia. The exhibit, Nature's Generosity, is an effort by the [Wilderness Photography Foundation](#) to "invite visitors to experience and enjoy the breathtaking beauty, diversity, and fragility of our natural world through the lens of world class photographers."-(BRMAA) Many of the photographers are from Georgia and Tennessee. A program has each one listed with a biography. You can view this impressive exhibit until May 31 and admission is free. The Art Center is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 AM to 6 PM. For more information: [Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association](#).



BRMAA Director Kate DeLong at the Nature's Generosity Exhibit.



Setting the Trail in Stone

Photos courtesy of Art Kolberg



Patrick Ward, Barry Allen, Gideon Prisk, Joe Cantwell, Andy Meeks and Marty Dominy putting in new steps at Fall Branch Falls. Also working at the site were Daphne Martin, Art Kolberg and Ken Cissna.

The trail - "set in stone."



The April BMT Blog Is Here
***'Safe Solo Hiking on the BMT:
Smart Planning & the Right
Mindset'***

Use the [Subscribe Button](#) in the Blog to
[Subscribe to the New RSS Feed!](#)

Whigg Meadow to Beech Gap

by Rick Harris with photos courtesy of Brenda Harris

Brenda and I led a hike on the section we maintain for the BMTA - a distance of five miles from Whigg Meadow to Beech Gap including the walk up to the top of the bald. The weather was sunny and clear, though there was a haze probably due to wildfires in the area. As the day progressed, clouds moved in prior to the expected rain event on Saturday.

We met at the Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center at 9 AM and carpooled to Beech Gap. Then we all got in one car and drove to Whigg Meadow. It was cool up there at 5000', at about 56 degrees. Rick discussed the history of Whigg Meadow, the grave over to the side of the bald, the annual bird counts, bear encounters on the bald during huckleberry season and the work being done to plant more balsam fir trees on the bald. We then hiked toward Mud Gap. The trail is in excellent shape, and we only came upon one single blowdown.



John Hisey, Nahme, Roger Gordon, Rick Harris and Stephanie Gordon take in the spectacular view!

From Mud Gap, we visited the gravesite of the unknown soldier killed by the Kirkland Bushwackers during the Civil War. We then hiked to the field in the old quarry used to build the Skyway. There we discussed the airplane crash into Johns Knob at the quarry, killing nine servicemen.

We then hiked to the North River Road crossing where we ate lunch and ran into a couple of dirt bikers who took our picture. The Skyway was noisy today with lots of motorcycles and fancy roadsters roaring down the highway.



At the grave of the unknown soldier.



Pull up a log and sit a spell!

After lunch, we climbed up the steep trail to the ridgetop and followed the ridge to the switchbacks down to the Unicoi Crest Overlook on the Skyway. We crossed through the parking lot and continued on the BMT to the deep ravine caused by runoff from the Skyway. We viewed the plans to remediate this problem by constructing a segment of trail down along the ravine then back up the other side. Unfortunately, we have had to cancel the work trip to do this remediation for Saturday due to the incoming rain event with thunderstorms expected that day.

We then made our way to Beech Gap then drove back to Whigg Meadow to retrieve our other vehicle. It was a great, cool, somewhat windy day, hiking at high elevations.



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.*

Conservation Corner

by Darcy Douglas, Conservation Chair

LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES, NUMBER TWO.

Travel and camp on DURABLE SURFACES.

That means rock, gravel, sand and dry grasses. Well-built trails are dug down to a durable surface and should be used without going over to the side where there isn't a constructed trail. Please stay on these established trails rather than bushwhacking or using social trails. Crossing switchbacks causes erosion. Where stairs are placed, please walk on them rather than beside them. In Maine, trails are constructed so steps have rocks on both outside edges to deter people from doing this. Established campsites work, but if you choose to camp elsewhere in a more natural setting, please remove all traces of your presence before leaving.

At this writing, NO CAMPFIRES are allowed in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, Cherokee National Forest, Nantahala National Forest and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park due to the drought and wildfire danger.



Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.



Walk on constructed walkways not only to stay dry, but to protect the trails.



Use established campgrounds.

Talented People We Need You!

We have many members who are talented in woodworking, quilting, crafting, photography, etc. who might like to donate something for the raffle at the Annual Meeting November 5-8, 2026. Some of the most sought-after items came from our members. Thank you!

Contact Donna Jones, the raffle coordinator, if you can help at djones@bmta.org.

From Hardman Farms, Jackrabbit to Hanging Dog

by Kathy Williams

One of the interesting things about attending George Owen's Hiking Class is discovering the astounding number of trails within 200 miles of where we live. There is a trail along the Chattahoochee River in Helen, Georgia that goes from Helen to Hardman Farm. A great day is a tour of this historical site followed by an easy trek on the trail. The class usually takes a short hike after the classroom activities and after one we headed to Jackrabbit Mountain Biking and Hiking Trails along the shores of Lake Chatuge. I was intrigued to learn about the Hanging Dog Recreation Area. Sounded like a good horror movie to me. Was it haunted? It turns out that the name of the area came from a tale about an Indian going down a creek in a canoe with his dog. A low-hanging branch caused the Indian to duck, but the hapless dog was caught in the branch and died.

Aside from informing the class about the many trail systems photographer Mike Wilson came and gave tips on how to use our cameras to best capture our time spent in the outdoors. Mike brought some lighting assets and, on the after-class hike he demonstrated their uses.



Photographer Mike Wilson begins his presentation on Nature Photography.



George Owen with the class prior to a wildflower hike at Hogpen Gap. Ralph Collinson was the Hike Leader.



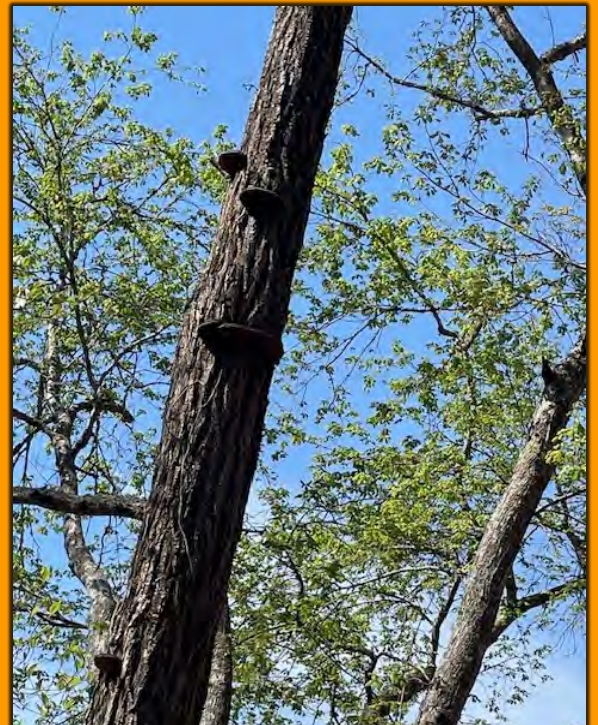
Mike Wilson works with Liz Henderson to zoom in on a unique feature of the stump.



We were encouraged to look for frames within nature.



The Trails of Jack Rabbitt took us along Lake Chatuge.



An intriguing fungus along the Jack Rabbitt

In the classroom George entertained the class with some of his “Old Troll Tales.” He was covering the dangerous critters and plants in our area and shared his mishap with bear spray that he tinkered with while in a vehicle. It did not go well! Learning about poison ivy turned out to be quite useful when we went to the Coosa Backcountry for a short hike that was laden with the noxious plant. Since wildflowers were bursting out all over, we also went to Sosbee Cove where a trove of them were waiting. A great way to end the day’s class!



Dayton and Martha Miller were Hike Leaders as we began our trek at Sosbee Cove.



Showy orchis



Dwarf crested iris



White trillium

Upcoming

by Ray Laws, Hiking Director

May

May 6 (Wednesday) Unicoi State Park, Helen, GA. Bottoms Trail, Frog Pond Nature Trail and Unicoi Lake Trail.

Moderate 5.5 miles.

Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.



Unicoi Lake Trail

May 8 (Friday) Brush Creek Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 7 miles. Almost all gently downhill. Short shuttle. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

May 8 (Friday) Flats Mountain hike, leaving Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center at 9:00 AM. THIS HIKE IS OPEN TO MEMBERS OF BOTH THE BMTA AND CHC. Moderate 6.2-mile hike takes us along the crest of the mountain which sits above the lake at Indian Boundary. The trail for the most part is downhill (~2000' drop) and most of this downhill trek is in the last two miles. We will leave cars at the bottom along Citico Creek Road, then travel to the trailhead at the top of the Cherohala Skyway at mile 19. We will first climb a couple hundred feet to two balds, then start our downhill trek, partly in and partly out of the Citico Creek Wilderness. We will be limited to 12 hikers. What to bring: Lunch, water, your dog on a leash. The middle 2 miles is often quite brushy unless we have been up there to clear the brush on a Thursday work trip before our hike, so long pants and long sleeve shirts are recommended. We will eat lunch at a gap about halfway down the trail. Afterwards, we can congregate at the Tellicafe for supper. Contact Hike Leaders Rick and Brenda Harris (and Nahme, our dog) at rharris@bmta.org



May 9 (Saturday) BMTA GA/TN/NC Combined Maintenance Trip. Vicinity of Tapoco Lodge.

NOTE: This is a combined Work Trip for both GA and TN/NC. It will be the only work trip during May 2026.

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

You can also register [Online](#).

May 11 (Monday) Brush Creek Loop in Ducktown, TN. Moderate 4.5 miles along Ocoee Lake # 1. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

May 18 (Monday) Smithgall Woods State Park just outside of Helen, GA. Goldmine Trail. Moderate 5 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

May 22 (Friday) Amadahy Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy/moderate 5 miles along the shore of Carter's Lake. Lunch at the marine campground. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

May 29 (Friday) Green Mountain Trail (Deep Gap to Lake Blue Ridge). DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog) About 4 moderate miles, up Green Mountain and then down to the Lake. Shuttle required. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

Continued next page

June

June 6 (Saturday) Clean Trails Day

BMTA and [AllTrails](#) are partnering on this spring's Clean Trails Day. Stop by one of our event tents at Fall Branch Falls in Gilmer County or the Swinging Bridge in Fannin County where BMTA volunteers will be on hand to answer your questions about hiking, camping and backpacking opportunities in the area. They also can tell you how to hike the trails safely and leave the pathways in pristine condition for future hikers to enjoy. For information contact Joy Forehand at jforehand@bmta.org.

June 12 (Friday) Turtletown Creek Falls. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5 miles. Turtletown Creek plus two of the most beautiful falls you'll ever see on a short hike. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org



June 13 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA

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

June 15 (Monday) Piney Knob Gobbler Trail. Murphy, NC. Moderate 6 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

June 19 (Friday) BMT: From Thunder Rock Campground, up Thunder Rock Express Trail, across Chestnut Mountain Trail and down BMT. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5.2-mile loop. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

June 20 (Saturday) "Watch the Water Arrive". Begin at the Ocoee Whitewater Center to watch the rapids arrive from TVA Dam 3 release. The rafts ride the rapids down. Then hike the BMT from FS Rd 221 - Thunder Rock Campground via shuttle. The rosebay rhododendron just might be in bloom. Easy 3.4 miles, except for one hill. Contact Hike Leader Clare Sullivan at csullivan@bmta.org.

June 26 (Friday) The Hangover. Meet at the Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center at 9 AM. THIS HIKE IS OPEN TO DOGS AND TO MEMBERS OF BOTH THE BMTA AND CHC. This 7-mile fairly difficult iconic hike takes us from the Wolf-Laurel Trailhead up 500' or so on the Stratton Ridge Trail to the BMT, then right on the BMT to Naked Ground (down 500'), then Haeo (up 500'), then on to the Hangover (down and up 200' or so). This is a must-do if you have never done it before and if you are healthy and strong enough to hike it. This is not an easy hike. In places the trail is quite steep and rocky and there may be significant brambles to hike through. We will eat lunch at the Hangover, which is about a mile-high rocky overhang with great views into the Smokies, Santeelah Lake, Tellico Lake and the Tennessee River, the Cumberland Plateau and the ridges we just hiked. We will return the way we came. Afterwards, we can eat supper at one of the two Mexican Restaurants in Tellico Plains. This hike is in the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness therefore, we must limit it to 12 hikers. 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



June 27 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact:

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

June 29 (Monday) Yonah Preserve. Cleveland, GA. Moderate 5 miles around the lake. Contact Hike Leader Ralph Collinson at rcollinson@bmta.org.

July

July 10 (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 11 (Saturday) BMTA GA Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@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 7.0 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 wind 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 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 25 (Saturday) BMTA TN/NC Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact:

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



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

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

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