

# TN/NC BMTA American Hiking Society Volunteer Vacation October 9-15, 2011 by Richard Harris

This October, we hosted the first ever AHS Volunteer Vacation Crew in the Tellico and Hiwassee/Ocoee Ranger Districts. We planned for 8 volunteers but ended up with 9, coming from all areas of the Eastern US. Because we scheduled this week in October, we did not get the usual group of younger college-aged kids typical of summer work crews. We had 9 seasoned very dedicated and experienced crew members. Most had been on previous Volunteer Vacations or had prior trail work experience.

The crew stayed at the Ranger House in the Tellico Ranger Station complex with all the amenities of home, minus TV, radio, cell phone service, and an internet connection, which the crew all enjoyed the lack of immensely. They prepared their own meals under the tutelage of the crew chief, Tina Temple. Tina was quite experienced at doing this, since this was her 11<sup>th</sup> time being responsible for such a crew.

The nine crew members were:

- Tina Temple – crew chief – Owensboro, KY
- Betty Gill – Columbus, MS
- Bill Twitty – Greenville, SC
- Eric Randall – Nashville, TN
- John Carmichael – Brownsburg, IN
- Kathy Stege – Macon, GA
- Sarah Slover – Cary, NC
- Tina Stambaugh – New Castle, KY
- Mark Harrold – North Wales (Philadelphia), PA

The crew arrived on Sunday night, and after supper, Rick Harris gave the powerpoint presentation on the BMT, then discussed the schedule for the week.

On Monday morning we left for Farr Gap with a few local volunteers (Rick Harris, Ken Jones, Bobby Mitchell, Joanne Mitchell, Richard Sullivan, and Rick Foster) and cleared a few blowdowns out to the intersection with the Crowder Branch Trail. The main focus was creating water diversions along this section, especially the steep downhill section just before the Crowder Branch intersection. We then hiked out via the Crowder Branch Trail, which was partially rehabilitated last year by the SAWS BOOT Crew.



Monday night, Bobby and Joanne Mitchell (Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen – SABCH) gave a talk on how various user groups are cooperating in the local area to maintain trails, including hikers, horsemen, dirt bikers, and mountain bikers. They also gave several examples of projects accomplished in the local area in such cooperative efforts.



Tuesday we returned to Farr Gap and headed down Stiffknee Trail in the rain. We were planning on moving two large root balls off the trail, but this was not a safe undertaking, considering the rain. Thus we changed our plan to logging and brushing out this section and placing a new wilderness portal sign as well as a new BMTA sign down near Stiffknee Gap. Local volunteers were Rick Harris, Larry Dunn, Rick Foster, and Travis Schwarzer (Tellico Trails Tech).



Tuesday night, Leslie Morgan, Natural Resource Program Manager for the Tellico

Ranger District, gave a presentation on how volunteers can work together with the local ranger district personnel to maintain the trails, as has occurred in the Tellico Ranger District. She finished with a very interesting presentation of a project she was involved with a few years ago on reintroducing bears onto the Cumberland Plateau.



Wednesday was a fun day. We first checked out Bald River Falls and Baby Falls, then drove up the Cherohala Skyway, stopping at some of the overlooks, then hiking the BMT out to Whigg Meadow from Mud Gap. We from there drove to the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, where Dick Evans took us on the trail through the forest,



explaining about the forest, Joyce Kilmer, and the recent dynamiting of the dead old growth hemlocks.

Wednesday night we had wood-fired pizza at the Tellico Outpost and listened to music by Mike Rogers, a local musician. He also described the origins of mountain and bluegrass music and of the



various instruments used by these musicians.



Thursday, we headed down to the Ocoee/Hiwassee District and worked on the north side of Big Frog Mountain, putting up 5 new BMT trail signs and doing some treadwork on the West Fork section of the trail. Local volunteers were Rick Harris, Bob Ruby, David Blount, Larry Dunn, Jeff Hunter,

Rick Foster, and Steve Biatowas (Ocoee/Hiwassee Trails Tech).



Thursday night, Bill Hodge (Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards - SAWS) and Jeff Hunter

(Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition – SAFC) gave talks focusing on the importance to mankind of wilderness and maintenance of trails in wilderness areas.



Friday morning we returned to the Ocoee/Hiwassee District, this time to the section along the Hiwassee River (John Muir Trail). We placed a new

trail sign at Towee Creek and did a lot of tread work on the section from Towee Creek toward Big Bend. This was a somewhat dangerous section due to the



narrowness of the trail and the steepness of the side slope. The trail is now much safer for hikers. Afterwards, we visited the powerhouse and the swinging bridge over the river and also the overlook at Big Bend. Local volunteers were Rick Harris, Bob Ruby, Dick Evans, Jim Bishop, and Steve Biatowas (Ocoee/Hiwassee Trails Tech).

Friday night Tina Temple read a poem she penned on our work week, which was quite entertaining.

We gave out certificates and one year memberships to the volunteers and had a “Thorns,



Roses, and Buds” debriefing, discussing what needed improvement, what went well, and what the group would like to see next year. This was very helpful in our planning for future AHS Volunteer Vacation work weeks. The comments were very positive overall. We received high marks for this year’s trip, our first ever.



In fact, we have been strongly urged by the AHS to repeat our work week next year. We have scheduled a repeat performance for Sept 30-Oct 6, 2012. Also,



Steve Biatowas is asking that we plan a similar week

down in the Ocoee/Hiwassee District in April of this coming year, probably April 22-28, with the crew staying in trailers behind the Ocoee Work Center.

