

BMTA Backpack Trip

Deals Gap to the Ocoee River

98 miles

October 24 – November 4, 2010

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Though this trip is 98 miles over 12 days, backpackers can join the trip at any point along the way. So figure out when you are available and join us as we hike nearly all the TN/NC Section of the Benton MacKaye Trail. Much of this trip will be above 3000 feet, up to 5000 feet in elevation. This will be the peak fall leaf season at this elevation. The weather should be crisp and cool with a low likelihood for rain, perfect for a fall backpack trip. Because this backpack goes through several wilderness and wilderness study areas, at any point along the trail, we will be limited to a maximum of 12 backpackers.

We will have several rendezvous points along the backpack to resupply with food and to pick up/drop off backpackers. Two major resupply points will be arranged, one at the Tellico River Crossing, and one at Unicoi Gap. Thus those backpacking the entire distance can get resupplied about every 4 days easily.

Each person is responsible for all his/her own gear, food and cooking equipment. You may want to make arrangements with other backpackers to share tent, food, cooking gear, etc. The leaders will keep those signed up informed of who is going for which segments with phone numbers and email addresses to facilitate this sharing of resources to minimize backpack weight.

Those who want to drive up the day before the start of the backpack can spend the night with Rick & Brenda Harris at their house near Tellico Plains, TN off the Cherohala Skyway.

Abbreviations and Information Sources:

DB = *BMT 2009-2010 Databook*, \$5.95, can be purchased through the BMTA website www.bmta.org or at most backpacking stores in the region

DB 189.9 = S>N mile 189.9 in the *BMT Databook*

GB = *Benton MacKaye Trail Guide – Tennessee/North Carolina Section*, \$10, can be purchased through the BMTA website www.bmta.org or at most backpacking stores in the region

GB 45 = *Guidebook*, page 45

27BLS = Oct 27 Breakfast, Lunch, Supper

Another great source of info is the *Trails Illustrated map of the Tellico & Ocoee River* section of the Cherokee National Forest, #781. Most regional backpacking stores and many visitor centers and gas stations stock this map. Or you can order it directly from Amazon.com

Also, one of our BMTA Members, Ernie Engman, has written a thru-hikers guide on the BMT. His *Benton MacKaye Trail Thru-Hikers' Guide* can be purchased directly through him at <http://bmtguide.com> for \$11.95

Sunday, October 24, 2010: Meet at Deals Gap on US 129 on the south side of the Smokys at 10AM (DB 189.9, GB 45). Those who want to drive up the day before can spend the night with Rick & Brenda Harris at their house near Tellico Plains, TN off the Cherohala Skyway. People not backpacking will shuttle your cars back to Rick & Brenda Harris's house for safe keeping. We will backpack from Deals gap down to the Little Tennessee River, crossing the river on the US 129 bridge just below Cheoah Dam (DB 185.2). We will then hike into the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness along Slickrock Creek and camp at a primitive campsite where Slickrock Creek and Little Slickrock Creek join (DB 181.6, GD page 42-43).

Total distance: 8.3 miles

Rendezvous points: Deals Gap at 10 AM or the parking lot on the north side of Cheoah Dam along US 129 around 1 PM

Monday, October 25, 2010: We will hike from the campsite at the junction of Slickrock Creek and Little Slickrock Creek (DB 181.6, GD page 42-43) up the Stiffknee Trail on the BMT to Farr Gap (DG 178.0, GB 43), then along the Fodderstack Trail with great views into the surrounding mountains to a campsite near the old Crowder homestead site (DB 174.6, GB 41). This section is pretty tough because of the 2500+ feet of elevation gain. Thus the distance will be somewhat short.

Total distance: Total distance 7.0 miles

Rendezvous point: Farr Gap around noon

Tuesday, October 26, 2010: We will hike from the Crowder homesite (DB 174.6, GB 41) along the Fodderstack Trail to the campsite at Cold Springs Gap (DB 165.6, GB 39) or possibly we will camp at a stream crossing a short ways before Cold Springs Gap (DB 167,5, GB 39). Those with excess energy can take a side hike to Bob Bald (an extra 3 mile round trip) with its incredible views of the surrounding mountains at about 5400 feet elevation.

Total distance: Total distance 9.0 miles. Side hike to Bob Bald adds another 3 miles

Rendezvous point: None

Wednesday, October 27, 2010: We will hike from Cold Springs Gap (DB 165.6, GB 39) to the Cherohala Skyway at Beech Gap (DB 163.8, GB 37), then over Johns Knob visiting the site of an old plane crash, then past Mud Gap (DB 160.8, GB 37) and on to Whigg Meadow (DB 159.2, GB 37) with its full 360 degree views at the highest point along the BMT on this backpack at 5000 feet. We will camp in Whigg Meadow. Water is available closeby. This is a great place to just hang out and take in the beauty. There is a wildlife pond and the old Whigg homestead site in the meadow and the opportunity to perhaps see a bear or two or maybe some boars or deer.

Total distance: Total distance 6.4 miles. Side hike to the plane crash site will add another mile or so of bushwacking.

Rendezvous point: Beech Gap around 10:30 AM, or Mud Gap around 2 PM, or Whigg Meadow around 3 PM. The Tellico River Crossing is a major resupply site.

Thursday, October 28, 2010: From Whigg Meadow (DB 159.2, GB 37), we will hike down along Sycamore Creek to a campsite close to the junction of this creek with the Tellico River (DB 152.1, GB 35).

Sycamore Creek is a beautiful creek with several small waterfalls. At the Tellico River crossing (DB 151.8, GB 35) there is a trout rearing station where we can see and drool over the giant mama and papa rainbows. The Tellico River is a beautiful mountain stream famous for its trout fishing. We will cross the river on a concrete bridge. No wading required. This is a major resupply point.

Total distance: Total distance 7.4 miles.

Rendezvous points: Whigg Meadow before 9AM or the Tellico River Crossing after about 2PM. From Deals Gap to the Tellico River, you need to have food for 4 days (24LS, 25BLS, 26BLS, 27BLS, 28BL). 28S and 29B will be at the Tellico River site. The next resupply point will be Unicoi Gap on the afternoon of Oct 31. Thus meals for the next few days would be 29LS, 30BLS, 31BL.

Friday, October 29, 2010: From the Tellico River campsite (DB 152.1, GB 35) we will climb up Sugar Mountain, then down into the Upper Bald River drainage to the junction with Brookshire Creek (DB 143.9, GB 33). We will then ascend up the Brookshire Creek valley to a campsite about half way up (DB 145.5, GB 33). This section is through the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area, a very primitive and wild area which is remote and hard to access except via the BMT on foot. This day has a lot of elevation gain, thus the relatively short distance.

Total distance: Total distance 6.6 miles.

Rendezvous points: Tellico River Road up until about 9AM. There are no road crossings until Sandy Gap.

Saturday, October 30, 2010: From the campsite along Brookshire Creek (DB 145.5, GB 33), we will continue on up to Sledrunner Gap at the State Line between TN and NC (DB 143.7, GB 31) and follow the old State Line Trail along the BMT up over Rocky Top, Round Top, Nit Top and Hazelnut Knob to a nice campsite at Sandy Gap (DB 137.4, GB 31). This section has a lot of up and down, though generally is heads down to Sandy Gap. There are two sites to get water en route and water is available close to Sandy Gap a short ways down the Kirkland Creek Trail. There is a road which comes to Sandy Gap, but it is a long drive from civilization. This stretch of trail is infamously known as the "Heart of Darkness" because of its remoteness and its difficulty to get trail maintenance crews into the area. A shuttle between Sledrunner Gap (accessed via Beaverdam Bald) and Sandy Gap is over 50 miles, about half on forest service gravel road.

Total distance: Total distance 8.1 miles.

Rendezvous points: Sandy Gap, a very long distance on remote forest roads. Not recommended, but possible. We will camp in the gap Saturday night.

Sunday, October 31, 2010: From Sandy Gap (DB 137.4, GB 29), we will head uphill to Six Mile Gap (DB 135.3, GB 29) (with a side hike of about 1 mile round trip to Waucheesi Bald), then over Cantrell Top and down to Tate Gap (DB 133.5, GB 29), the site of the old Doc Rogers home which is partly still standing. From there we will head on generally downhill to Unicoi Gap (DB 129.0, GB 29), a major resupply point. Waucheesi Bald is another high elevation bald with incredible 360 degree views of the surrounding mountains. The old Doc Rogers home is a good lunch spot with a spring which runs right through the old ruins.

Total distance: Total distance 8.4 miles.

Rendezvous points: Sandy Gap, a very long distance on remote forest roads. Not recommended, but possible. We will camp in the gap Saturday night and will probably leave by 9AM on Sunday morning. There is no road access to Tate Gap. We will camp near Unicoi Gap on Sunday night. This is a major resupply point. We should be there by 3 PM or so. Meals from the Tellico River to Unicoi Gap would be 29LS, 30BLS, 31BL. 31S and 1B would be eaten at Unicoi Gap. From Unicoi Gap to the Ocoee River, meals would be 1LS, 2BLS, 3BLS, 4BL.

Monday, November 1, 2010: From Unicoi Gap (DB 129.0, GB 27), we will follow the BMT along a section shared with motorcycles down past Buck Bald (DB 125.4, GB 27) (side trip to Buck Bald adds about 2 miles), then across TN 68 (DB 124.3, GB 27) and down to Coker Creek (DB 120.3, GB 23) and on to a campsite at Loss Creek (DB 119.1, GB 21). The first half of the day is on ridge top trail, the second half along the Hiwassee River, a state scenic river and is on the John Muir National Recreation Trail.

Total distance: Total distance 9.9 miles plus 2 mile side hike to Buck Bald.

Rendezvous points: Unicoi Gap before we leave about 9AM, then Buck Bald around 11 AM to 12 noon, then TN 68 around 2 PM, then Coker Creek/FS 228 around 4 PM.

Tuesday, November 2, 2010: From Loss Creek on the John Muir Trail (DB 119.1, GB 21), we will continue to parallel the Hiwassee River through the Narrows, then to Towee Creek parking area (DB 114.6, GB 21) and past the kayaking/canoeing section of the river for the next several miles to the Childers Creek JMT Trailhead (DB 110.4, GB 19), then the bridge over the river at Reliance on TN 315/TN 30 (DB 109.7, GB 17), and finally past the canoe livery and up Lost Creek to our campsite (DB 107.1, GB 17) near Lost Creek Campground. This is a long day, but not very difficult.

Total distance: Total distance 12.0 miles

Rendezvous points: Towee Creek parking area at 11 AM, Childers Creek JMT Trailhead at 2 PM, and Hiwassee Outfitters at 3 PM.

Wednesday, November 3, 2010: From the campsite along Lost Creek (DB 107.1, GB 17), we will cross White Oak Flats Road near Lost Creek Campground (DB 105.1, GB 15) and head up the mountain crossing McFarland Road (DB 101.2, GB 15) and Kimsey Highway (DB 98.8, GB 15) (don't get excited, it is a remote dirt forest service road). We will camp near Kimsey Highway. Water is available at a spring 0.2 miles down the west side of Kimsey Highway.

Total distance: Total distance 8.3 miles

Rendezvous points: White Oak Flats Road at 10 AM, McFarland Road at 12 noon, and Kimsey Highway at 3 PM or later. All of these road crossings are fairly remote.

Thursday, November 4, 2010: From Kimsey Highway (DB 98.8, GB 15) it is a fairly easy hike mostly downhill to the Ocoee River at Thunder Rock Campground (DB 91.8, GB 15). We should be there by noon or earlier. We will have our cars there to pick us up at the parking area just outside the Thunder Rock Campground.

Total distance: Total distance 7.0 miles

Rendezvous points: Kimsey Highway up until we leave about 9 AM, and the Thunder Rock Campground along US 64 and the Ocoee River about 12 noon.