

# THE CHEROKEE HIKER

DECEMBER 2025

VOLUME 42, ISSUE 12



## NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

"I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than trees." Henry David Thoreau

As we approach this gift-giving season, it's important to keep in mind that the best gifts in life cannot be purchased. Our club's existence affirms this statement. A few examples of the gifts we share come to mind: sitting around a campfire telling stories of times gone by; emerging from a tent to the chill of the morning air; the views atop a mountain summit; walking down a path of freshly fallen snow; the right log to sit upon when another step doesn't seem possible; children finding gems along a well-worn path; setting up camp at sunset; lying in a hammock on a starry night; a tasty meal wrapped in aluminum foil cooking in a campfire; a swim in a mountain stream on a hot summer day; breathtaking views bicycling over a bridge; building friendships through sharing adventures together; the serenity of canoeing in a wilderness area; the thrill of accomplishing a hike once believed not possible. Being part of a hike club reminds us that life's greatest gifts do not come in packages received, but through experiences shared. One of the most important meetings of our calendar year is the Annual Planning Meeting where we meet and discuss our events for the upcoming year. In past years we have held this meeting during the month of January. In order to have a completed schedule of events prepared and published by the first of the year, our Executive Committee has agreed to schedule the meeting during the month of December. This year we will meet from 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, 923 Ohio Avenue, Etowah on Sunday, December 7, 2025. Please join us. Bring your trip proposals, your ideas, your

dreams, and your readiness to explore the exciting potential for our club in the year to come. If you cannot bring your proposal to the meeting, you can submit it online on the fillable form titled Lead a Hike Request Form. (To access this form, go to [cherokeehikingclub.org](http://cherokeehikingclub.org) and then click on the tab "Forms" and then click on Lead a Hike Request Form.) Then you can print the completed form and email it to me ([drancoombs@aol.com](mailto:drancoombs@aol.com)) or mail it to me (Rob Coombs, P.O. Box 246, McDonald, TN 37353) or stop by my home and drop it off (5057 South Lee Hwy., McDonald) or telephone me and share your idea (423-400-8008). The Christmas party is 12 noon, Saturday, December 13, 2025 at the Etowah Senior Center. Please check out the details in this newsletter and plan for an afternoon of great food, entertainment, and the election of our club officers for 2026.

**Rob Coombs, Club President**

**REMINDER:**

***TO ATTEND ANY EVENT, YOU MUST CONTACT THE EVENT LEADER AS THERE ARE TIMES DUE TO WEATHER OR OTHER CONDITIONS WHERE A HIKE IS CANCELED OR RESCHEDULED. THE EVENT LEADER WILL NOT BE ABLE TO CONTACT YOU IF YOU DO NOT GET ON THE ATTENDEE LIST.***

## **DECEMBER EVENTS**

**Sunday, December 7, 2025, Annual Planning Meeting** – We will meet at Wesley Memorial United Methodist, 923 Ohio Avenue, 2:00-4:00 p.m. for the Annual Planning Meeting.

**Saturday, December 13, 2025 - Annual Christmas Party** - The Christmas party is at the Etowah Senior Center, 12 noon, and the cost is \$10 per person at the door. After the meal, there will be a brief business meeting. The 2026 officers will be inducted, and then the (always entertaining) "Unwashed Santa" (Dirty Santa) gift exchange will be held. RSVP to [cherokeehikingclub@gmail.com](mailto:cherokeehikingclub@gmail.com) with Subject Line "Christmas Party" and the names of those in your party who are attending. Bring a \$15 to \$20 gift if you would like to participate in the gift exchange. Participation is not required! Annual dues of \$15 per family or individual may be paid at this time as well.

**Thursday, December 18, 2025 - Monthly Hike Club Breakfast** Join us for conversation over breakfast at 8:30 a.m. at Old Fort Restaurant on 25th Street in Cleveland. For more information, contact Jack Callahan at 423-284-7885.

**Wednesdays, December 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 - Wednesday Walks on the Cleveland Greenway** Every Wednesday Jack Callahan leads a 3.75-mile walk on the Cleveland Greenway, meeting at the lower end of the parking lot across from Perkits and the Gondolier restaurant adjacent to Keith Street. Meet time is currently 4:30 p.m. A note on the walk is sent out the beginning of each week on Messenger. Hike difficulty is rated Easy. Contact Jack Callahan at 423-284-7885 if you want to be included in the messages.

## JANUARY AT-A-GLANCE

Events for January will be finalized at the December 7 meeting and published in the January newsletter. The third Thursday breakfast at Old Fort in Cleveland and Wednesday walks on the Greenway will continue.

## PLAN AHEAD

### **Group Campout Stone Mountain State Park, North Carolina, May 10-14, 2026**

Campground includes primitive group sites, individual sites without power and full-service sites with electric and water. There are restrooms with showers. There are numerous hiking trails with huge, exposed granite dome and waterfalls, and a historic homestead. A short drive to MP 213 on the Blue Ridge Parkway is the Blue Ridge Music Center with live Appalachian music every day.

To accommodate the combination of campers wanting individual sites without power and sites with full service, and to be camping together, see attached map for proposed arrangements. Consider sites 2-6 and 46-50 if you would like to camp together. This is just a suggestion, and folks may choose any site. This is a link that shows a photo of each site to help in deciding a campsite: <https://www.campsitephotos.com/campground/nc/stone-mountain-state-park/>

For questions about the event, contact Jack Callahan, event leader. 423-284-7885.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF PAST EVENTS

### **The Construction of the BMT Through TN and NC**

By Richard Harris

Using information provided by Ken Jones, Clayton Pannell, and Otis Pannell

Ken Jones was asked to present the history of the construction of the BMT from the Ocoee River to the border of the Smokies for the Annual Meeting of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association at the banquet Saturday, November 1, 2025. However, Ken ended up in the hospital at Piedmont Atlanta and was thus unable to attend the meeting. I was asked to fill in for him. Clayton Pannell was also unable to attend. Therefore, I interviewed Ken by phone, and I had Otis Pannell interview his dad, Clayton. This article is derived from these two sources. Both Ken and Clayton are considered to be the fathers of the BMT through TN and NC, as George Owen is considered to be the father of the BMT in Georgia.

### **Background on Ken Jones and Clayton Pannell**

Ken was born in Centreville, Alabama near the Talladega National Forest. He says about his childhood, "I loved hiking from a very young age. I always enjoyed walks in the woods with my dad and grandfather. My grandfather was the park manager of Oak Mountain State Park in

Alabama”. During his working career he says he “spent occasional weekends just bushwhacking in areas around home”. He then attended the University of Alabama, obtaining a degree in mechanical engineering. Moving to Chattanooga and then later Athens, TN, he worked for TVA until the age of 46. Part of this time was as a system engineer at the Watts Bar Nuclear Power Plant.

In 1996 he joined the Hiwassee Hiking Club in Athens, Tennessee. Clayton Pannell was in that club and was also the President of BMTA. Clayton got him involved in trail maintenance in the Cherokee National Forest and later on the BMT. His first work trip was on the BMT on Big Frog using a crosscut saw.

Clayton Pannell was in the army from 1958 to 1960. He did basic training at Fort Jackson, SC and served at Fort Rucker, Ala. He was in the 8305th Aerial Combat Reconnaissance. Clayton was a BMTA member since the mid-1980s and was once the maintainer for the section from Dyers Gap to Watson Gap. After retirement, Clayton did section hikes of the AT in one-week segments for several years with a few other friends, and Robert Owenby was in that group. In 1995 he thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail. After returning from his AT thru-hike, he was elected President of the BMTA. He took this position in order to have the authority to represent the club in negotiations and route proposals with the forest service. He thought as President he would have the best chance to see the BMT completed through Tennessee. He joined every club he could find that might give him contacts and resources in this endeavor. He joined the Hiwassee Hiking Club, the Cherokee Hiking Club, the Sequoia Hiking Club, the Chattanooga Hiking Club and the Tennessee Overhill Association. Clayton recruited Ken Jones, Robert Owenby (whom he met on his AT Thru-Hike) and Gary Smith to help in his endeavor to complete the BMT through TN and NC.

### **BMT Design and Construction through TN and NC**

The BMT in 1996 stopped at the Ocoee River. Clayton, who at the time was President of the BMTA, asked Ken to help him route and construct the BMT from the Ocoee River to the border of the Smoky Mountains National Park. Clayton had access to the TVA quadrangle maps for the Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests. The national forest rangers asked the two of them to map out 3 possible alternative routes. This required 2 years of hard labor, hiking on poorly maintained trails, old forest roads and logging roads. Hundreds of blowdowns and heavy brush impeded their progress, especially following the devastation from the Blizzard of 1993 and Hurricane Opal in 1995. Also, trying to figure out how best to cross the Hiwassee, Tellico and Little Tennessee Rivers was a major challenge. In addition, the USFS did not want them to cross any of the sensitive balds, creating another set of problems and obstacles.

Ken and Clayton made their own clinometers. Ken’s consisted of a plumb bob and a plastic school child’s retractor, and Clayton’s was made of wood, a bubble level, and an inspection mirror. Ken and Clayton presented their optional routes to the USFS in 1998. The preferred route involved 85 miles of trail which included 22 miles of new trail (7 miles of new sidehill, 15 miles on old logging roads). The next step was for the USFS to choose the route they preferred and to perform an environmental assessment with NEPA for rare botanicals and archeological artifacts. It took 5 years to complete the NEPA/EA. Delays were due to other priorities within the USFS, including dealing with a lawsuit by the Southern Environmental Legal Center over failure of the

USFS to implement and monitor rare plant indicator species. Also, some folks in the USFS were concerned that the original trail names would be lost once the trail was designated as the BMT. The USFS was assured by Ken that the old names would continue, with maps and signs showing the old names as well as the name of the BMT, which had been designated as Trail #2 (Trail #1 being the Appalachian Trail). The archeological survey was done by Quintin Bass. The first botanical survey was also contracted by the BMTA. Due to the 5-year delay since the first botanical survey, it was necessary to repeat the botanical survey and this was conducted by Jamie Donaldson, who was highly allergic to poison ivy. This complicated the survey! The environmental assessment was approved in December of 2003. The initial NEPA cost of \$5000 was paid for by the BMTA, though the USFS paid for the second botanical survey.

While the EA was in progress, Ken Jones and Clayton Pannell along with Gary Smith and Robert Owenby went out regularly to clear the already established trails along the proposed BMT route. This was a major undertaking since the trails had seen little maintenance since the Blizzard of '93 and Hurricane Opel. Also, the 5-mile route through the TAPOCO (Tallassee Power Company) property between the Nantahala National Forest and the Smokies along the Little Tennessee River was quickly approved by TAPOCO. The four of them cleared this route in 1998 prior to the USFS EA approval.

One week after the approval of the EA, on December 23, 2003, the four of them began working every MWF on the trail. Also, BMTA work trips were carried out every month. The first area to be worked on was the segment along Brookshire Creek and up to Sugar Mountain, since this area was to be designated as the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area in March 2004. The goal was to build the trail through this area using chainsaws and gas-powered brush cutters prior to the WSA designation going into effect. A big National Trails Day Event was held in June 2004, with over 50 people attending. The president of the American Hiking Society was present to start the trail construction event.

Clayton remembers the following about his work trips: "Building new Trail was always slow. It had to be flagged and grade shot. Then we would come back with chainsaws and weed eaters to clear the route and then the fun began. Time to sidehill the trail, digging day after day. It doesn't take many workdays of side hilling to appreciate the miles and miles of digging that was done by all the volunteers that came out, rolled up their sleeves and started swinging their Pulaskis. Ken logged everyone's hours during this time, and everyone maintained their own tools."

Robert Owenby is considered by Clayton and Ken to be an unsung hero. Clayton said he worked as much as the others but was never in the spotlight. Clayton said Robert side hilled the prettiest trail he ever saw. He worked tirelessly for years to see the BMT completed. In an odd week when Ken and Clayton couldn't work, Robert pulled a camper to Low Gap and worked on the trail all week by himself.

The construction and signing of the entire trail were completed by March 2005, just 15 months later. The last work trip finished at Sandy Gap and was celebrated with cake and champagne. The official Grand Opening of the BMT through TN and NC was held at Mud Gap along the Cherohala Skyway in July 2005 with a vine-cutting ceremony conducted by Ken and Clayton. Present were Tom Speaks (Forest Supervisor of the Cherokee National Forest) and other USFS and NPS dignitaries.

## Reroutes after 2005

Since the opening of the trail in 2005, three significant reroutes have been accomplished.

- One was on the John Muir section of the trail along the Hiwassee River. The USFS asked that the trail be rerouted from Towee Creek over the ridge and back down to the river's edge to avoid a section which frequently flooded and made the trail impassable or very dangerous to navigate upstream from the Appalachia Powerhouse. The first attempt on this reroute had hikers wading across Towee Creek. Later, the trail was rerouted again to avoid this sometimes-dangerous creek crossing.
- The second was to avoid the TAPOCO area from the "Fugitive" (Cheoah) Dam up to Neals Gap which required a 3-mile walk along the very busy and dangerous US129 known as the Tail of the Dragon between Deals Gap and the Twenty Mile Creek Trailhead. This reroute brought the trail to TAPOCO Lodge, then along Yellow Creek Mountain to Fontana Village, completely avoiding this dangerous road walk.
- The third reroute was to take the trail from Beech Gap up over Bob Bald, Naked Ground, Haoe and the Hangover, rather than the old route along the Fodderstack, Stiffknee and Slickrock Trails. The old route also required a wade across Slickrock Creek which often was high and dangerous. The new route was much more scenic going over Bob Bald and by the Hangover. The current route of the BMT from the Ocoee River to Fontana Dam is now 102.6 miles long and traverses some of the most gorgeous regions of the Appalachian Mountains. The trail is challenging but well worth the effort.

## Wacker Wellness Week, November 6, 2005


Janet and Rob represented the club at Wacker Wellness Week's Health Fair. They saw hundreds of employees, many who have expressed an interest in the club.



**CHEROKEE HIKING CLUB**

Time outdoors in nature can be beneficial to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. For more than 40 years, the Cherokee Hiking Club has been dedicated to providing outdoor experiences. Our club members participate in a wide range of activities including hiking, bicycling, kayaking, canoeing, backpacking, camping, trail maintenance, and socializing. Our annual calendar of events provides extensive opportunities for club members and friends. If you wish to see the entire calendar of events, check out our web page - [cherokeehikingclub.org](http://cherokeehikingclub.org). Click on the "Events" tab and, then, "Hikes & Backpacks." A few highlights of our 2025 year are listed below.

- ⇒ **Monthly Hike Club Breakfast:** Old Fort Restaurant, Cleveland.
- ⇒ **Club Meetings:** Monthly meetings at the Etowah Senior Center with potluck dinner and presentations related to the outdoor world; Annual Christmas Party
- ⇒ **Walking:** Wednesday Cleveland Greenway Walks; Quarterly walks at Johnson Woods
- ⇒ **Educational:** CCC Camp Tour at Sylco; Etowah Indian Mounds Tour; Dutch Settlement, Cherokee National Forest; Murphy NC River Walk, Lunch & Museum Tour; Yuchi Wildlife Refuge; Oak Ridge and University of Tennessee Arboretum; Paw Paw groves
- ⇒ **Local Hiking, Backpacking, & Camping:** Mount LeConte; Laurel Falls/Buzzard Point; Black Mountain; Shake Rag Hollow; Indian Boundary; Lost Creek; Brasstown Bald; Bob Bald
- ⇒ **Distance Hiking & Camping:** Red River Gorge, Kentucky; Utah National Parks; Land Between the Lakes, Kentucky
- ⇒ **Bicycling:** Great Allegheny Passage Trail - Pittsburgh, PA to Cumberland, MD
- ⇒ **Kayaking & Canoeing:** Boundary Waters, Ely, MN
- ⇒ **Website:** [cherokeehikingclub.org](http://cherokeehikingclub.org)
- ⇒ **Membership:** \$15 per year
- ⇒ **Questions:** Contact Rob Coombs, Club President  
Email - [droombs@aol.com](mailto:droombs@aol.com)





### **Lakeshore Trail Backpack, November 4-6, 2025, Buddy Arnold**

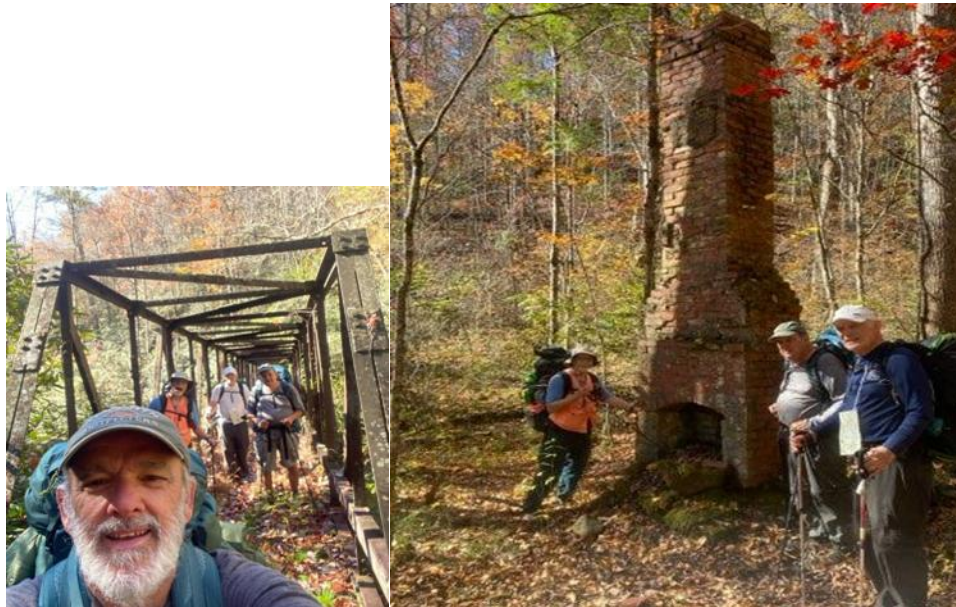
We had originally planned to hike the entire Lakeshore Trail from the tunnel near Bryson City to Fontana Dam (30 miles +). However, I got a stomach bug, so we had to change our plans. I was feeling better by November 4, so we decided to do an out and back. Hikers included Buddy Arnold, Charlie Snow, Henry Mahler, and Jerry Barrow. We started at Fontana Dam and hiked about 7 miles to Camp Site 90. You can see the brilliant colors as we left in bright sunshine and nice temperatures.



Along the way to Camp Site 90, we saw the relics of several old, abandoned cars that were left when the residents were moved during the construction of the dam in the 1940's.



The next day we hiked about 4 miles to Camp Site 88 and set up camp. We crossed over an old railroad bridge and passed relics of several home steads.



That afternoon we hiked to the historical Procter area. This was once a bustling town of over 1000 people, with a large sawmill and school. The town diminished after the sawmill closed in 1928 as lumber was mostly cut and the town abandoned when the dam was constructed. The area became part of the Smoky Mountain National Park in 1944. There is one house remaining and just a large field where the sawmill was located. We saw an old cemetery along the way.

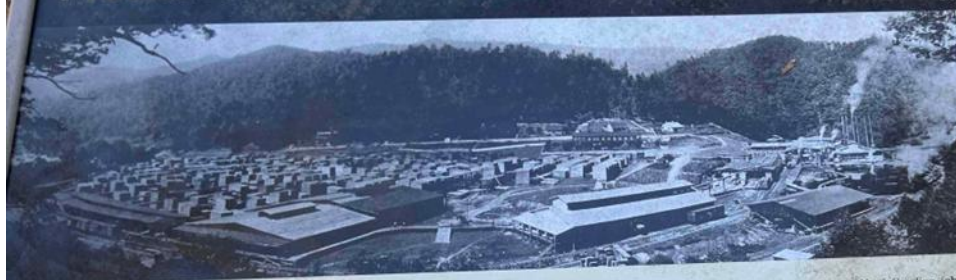






## Proctor: A Hazel Creek Community

Great Smoky Mountains  
National Park, Service  
13.5, Department of the Interior



The Proctor schoolhouse

Imagine this area in the 1920s: the clatter of trains, children heading to school, and men toiling in the lumber mill. This is the site of Proctor, a once-quiet farming community that in 1910 turned into a logging boomtown.

Then established in 1886, Proctor was little more than a post office that served the farms in Hazel Creek drainage — one of which had been here for fifty years. But Proctor's isolation ended when the Southern Railway arrived at the mouth of Hazel Creek in 1907. Three years later the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company built a large sawmill here, and the logging boom was on.

The new "company town" quickly grew to a population of 1,000, with its own doctor, dentist, train depot, cafe, barber shop, and movie theater. But, like most lumber companies of its day, Ritter harvested and then moved on. When Ritter left in 1928, the jobs left, too, and Proctor returned to being a farm community.

The town of Proctor, 1904-1944. In little more than one hundred years the Hazel Creek forest evolved from wilderness to logging site, then back to wilderness again as part of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



Proctor, North Carolina, (above left) and the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company's Hazel Creek Plant (1910-1928) — one of the biggest logging ventures in the region. Proctor was one of many such logging towns in the Great Smoky Mountains.

NOTE: The present-day trail along Hazel Creek follows the bed of the Smoky Mountain Railway, built by the Ritter Company.

Beaver  
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and  
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ans



We spent the night at Camp Site 88 and decided to hike out the 9 miles back to Fontana Dam on Thursday. We saw brilliant colors along the way and some scat that was either a large bear or a very large human!



We'd like to finish the rest of the trail at some point. I will probably schedule another hike in 2026 in the same area.

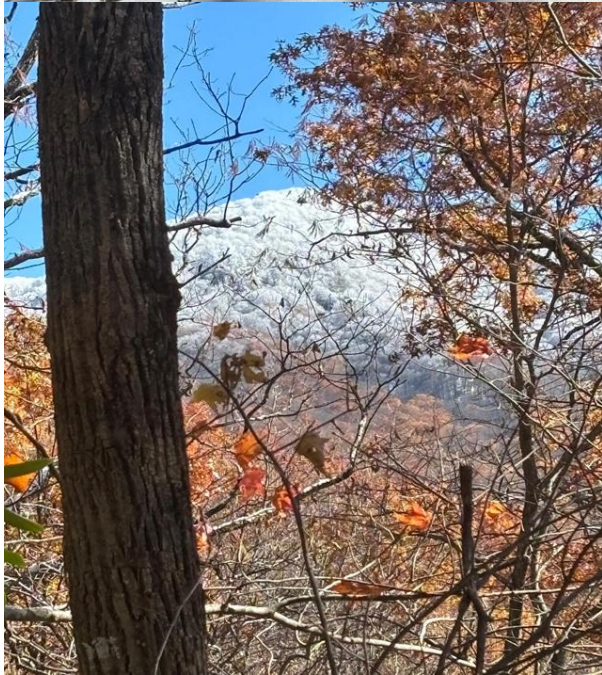


## Sycamore Creek Trail Hike, November 11, Leslie Auriemmo

On November 11, 2025, Nina and Jerry Barrow, Sue Robinson, Leslie Auriemmo and Doug Lynch hiked part of the Sycamore Trail outside of Tellico Plains in the Bald River Corridor. These five hikers were undeterred by the recent snowfall, and the day turned out to be a sunny, beautiful winter's day. There were about 2- 3 inches on the ground, and it made for hiking in a winter wonderland! We did a round-trip hike of about six miles, and everyone had a great time!









**Monthly Meeting, Thursday, November 13, 2025** – The Monthly Club Meeting was held at the Etowah Senior Center and was followed by a presentation by a special guest, Anne Van Curen, alias Grandma Gatewood. This was an especially fun evening listening to the story of a remarkable “senior” hiker. Thank you, Lettie Kirkpatrick, for arranging her visit.



**Greenway Walks, Wednesdays in November 2025-Jack Callahan.**



**Monthly Breakfast, Thursday, November 20, Old Fort Restaurant, Cleveland, Tennessee**



MINUTES  
Cherokee Hiking Club  
Monthly Club Meeting  
6:00 p.m., November 13, 2025  
Etowah Senior Center

President Rob Coombs opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. The meeting Sign-in Sheet was distributed and 32 members signed. Dione Butler won the Tonight's Lucky Hiker door prize. Rob Coombs shared thoughts about his month's hike club quote: "Everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occur while you are climbing it." Andy Rooney

I. The Treasure's Report was given by Rob Coombs. The current balance in the club treasury is \$2,792.25.

II. Corrections from the September minutes published in our newsletter?

A. No Corrections were made

B. A motion was made to accept the report as reported by Jack Callahan, seconded by James Anderson, and accepted.

III. Unfinished Business - No unfinished business to report

IV. New Business

A. New members added to our club roster.

1. None

B. Wacker Wellness Fair - Thursday, November 6, 2025. The fair was discussed and the handout given at the display was included with the handout agenda given to club members at the meeting.

C. Annual Planning Meeting: 2 pm-4 pm, Wesley Memorial United Methodist, 923 Ohio Avenue, Etowah

D. Hikes / Meetings / Events since our last meeting.

1. September 16 - 22 - Utah National Parks, Jennifer Schroll
2. Thursday, September 18 - Monthly Hike Club Breakfast
3. Monday, September 29 - Dutch Settlement - Ken Jones and Clare Sullivan
4. October 13 - 17, 2025 - Piney Campground at Land Between the Lakes

5. November 3-7, 2025 - Lakeshore Trail in the Smokies, Buddy Arnold
6. November 11, 2025 - Sycamore Creek Trail, Leslie Auriemmo
7. Wednesday Walks on the Cleveland Greenway, Jack Callahan

E. Hikes / Activities / Events scheduled for the month ahead.

1. Sunday, December 7, 2025, Annual Planning Meeting
2. Saturday, December 13, 2025 - Saturday Annual Christmas Party
3. Thursday, December 18, 2025 - Monthly Hike Club Breakfast
4. Wednesday Walks on the Cleveland Greenway, Jack Callahan

V. Our presentation for the evening is entitled the Smokey Mountain Storyteller presented by Anne Van Curen.

VI. Our next meeting will be our annual Christmas Party on December 13, 2025.

*Respectfully submitted by Otis Pannel, Vice President on November 13, 2025*



## NON-CLUB OPPORTUNITIES

As always, go to the specific sponsor web page for more information on these events if you plan on attending.

### **TELLICO/OCOEE VOLUNTEER TRAIL CREW**

Check the Facebook page for future workdays.

### **BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION**

See the calendar for upcoming events and trail maintenance sites.



## **NON-CLUB OPPORTUNITIES**

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Check the Facebook page for future workdays.

### **BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION**

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