



Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Newsletter

Exploring the Smokies Since 1924

April 2021

Park Announces Group Permit Process for Whiteoak Sink

Great Smoky Mountains National Park officials announced the implementation of a trial reservation system for group access to the Whiteoak Sink area during the 2021 wildflower season beginning Monday, April 12 through Friday, April 30. This trial project will allow managers to determine if better coordinating group access can reduce trampling and soil compaction around sensitive plant populations.

Beginning March 11 at 10:00 a.m., group leaders may make reservations at www.recreation.gov for a special park use permit to access the area for groups of eight to twelve people. Leaders may reserve either a morning permit, allowing access from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., or an afternoon permit, allowing access from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Two permits will be issued each weekday during the reservation period. A standard special park use fee of \$50 is required for each permit, along with a \$6 reservation fee. Payments must be made online through www.recreation.gov at the time of reservation. Group leaders may reserve two permits per season.

During the trial period, groups of more than twelve people are not allowed in the area at any time. In addition, no permits will be issued on weekends. The intent of the trial reservation system is to better protect sensitive wildflower species that can be damaged when large groups crowd around plants off-trail to take photos or closely view blooms. Individuals and small groups, less than eight people, may access the Whiteoak Sink area without a permit throughout the wildflower season. Volunteers will be available on site to provide safe-viewing information and to collect monitoring data.

The Whiteoak Sink area is primarily accessed from the Schoolhouse Gap Trail between Townsend and Cades Cove. In addition to stewardship of sensitive wildflower populations, resource managers continue to be concerned about critical habitat for bats found at the same location. In 2015, park officials closed the area during the winter months to limit human disturbance to important bat hibernacula and to help hikers avoid interactions with White-Nose Syndrome (WNS) infected bats, which had been documented flying erratically during the day and diving towards people. Unfortunately, recent monitoring has documented a dramatic decline in bat populations throughout the Whiteoak Sink area. For that reason, park officials have determined that the full winter closure is no longer necessary due to the extremely low number of bats in the area. However, access within 25 yards of the Blowhole Cave opening is prohibited from October through May to reduce disturbance to remaining bats.

Park managers have been monitoring sensitive wildflower species in the Whiteoak Sink area since 2016. During the first year of monitoring, managers documented 62 plants that were damaged by trampling and the creation of 370 feet of new social trails by visitors trying to view or photograph individual plants. Based on this monitoring, park managers implemented several strategies to protect wildflowers during the peak season that draws over 5,000 visitors to the site. A volunteer cadre provides daily information to visitors about how to safely view wildflowers and signage is installed to help remind photographers about the importance of remaining on the trail to reduce soil compaction and trampling. With these efforts, plant trampling has been reduced by 80%, although, social trail creation and soil compaction is still a concern. By managing group size and frequency through this trial permit system, park managers hope to further reduce impacts.

For more information about permits for group access to Whiteoak Sink, please email Special Park Use Permit Coordinator Jamie Sanders at jamie_sanders@nps.gov or visit www.recreation.gov on March 11. At that time, more information will be available about permit details.

“This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never dried all at once; a shower is forever falling; vapour is ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal dawn and gloaming, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls.”

~John Muir

Abrams Falls Trail Closure Dates For Rehabilitation

The Forever Trail Team will begin a rehabilitation project on the popular Abrams Falls Trail, due to work to be done on the Trail, a full closure will be necessary for the safety of both the crew and visitors. The Abrams Falls Trail and associated parking areas will be closed May 10, 2021 through November 10, 2021, excluding federal holidays, on Monday mornings at 7:00 a.m. through Thursday evenings at 5:30 p.m. weekly. The trail will be fully open each week on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

MEET YOUR 2021 BOARD MEMBERS

This month's Board member is Communications Director Cindy Spangler.

I have been a member of the SMHC since 1983 and have served on the board since 2012. My dad, Bob Cook, was president in 1986-1987 so I've got a homegrown association with this wonderful club. My current positions are Communications Director and Merchandise Distributor. I've hiked all the trails in the Smokies two times and completed a section hike of the AT in 2015 with SMHC members Melanie Harmon and Debra Barton. After retiring from a 30-year career with the UT Ewing Gallery of Art and Architecture, I adopted a section of the AT--Clingmans Dome to Mt Love--which is the highest elevation section on the Trail. When I'm not hiking in the Smokies, I enjoy reading and working in my yard.



Welcome new Life
Member in SMHC

Larry K. West

Reminder for Members: Dues for 2021 are due. Dues are important in the operation of the club. COVID has resulted in a delay in collecting dues for 2021. For information about membership and paying your dues visit <http://www.smhclub.org/membership.htm>

SMHC Hiking Guidelines During COVID

1. One hike leader will serve as pre-registration contact, with e-mail and phone # available in the write-up. Pre-registration is required for all hikes.
2. **No more than 10** total participants may be on a hike (including leader, co-leader). Registration will have to be halted when there are 10 participants.
3. All meetups will be at the trail head, so adjust meetup drive time accordingly.
4. **Shuttles or key swap shuttles that involve drives of 15 minutes or less are acceptable. Since there may be a mix of vaccinated, partially vaccinated and unvaccinated people in shuttles, all riders must be able to sit next to a cracked window, and wear masks.**
5. Hikes will be chosen to avoid crowded trailheads and crowded trails.
6. **Carpooling among individuals who are fully vaccinated and have waited at least 2 weeks since their last vaccination, is permissible. However, hikers should still do what is comfortable for them, including driving alone if that is their choice.**
7. Avoid hikes that will involve a key swap or shuttle.
8. Hikers must sign a release form, with accurate contact information.
9. Inform hikers if anyone becomes ill with in a few days of the event, with symptoms concerning for COVID-19, to contact the hike leader immediately. (In addition to the usual pre-hike info). For regular pre-hike prep, see <http://www.smhclub.org/outingpreparation.htm>.
10. All participants must have a face mask, to use at trailhead meetup, and then if needed, when distancing on the trail from other hikers is not feasible.
11. Maintain 6 ft. of distance between hikers, and if possible 10-12 ft.
12. Stop at junctions to be sure group is all present, given the spacing out.

MASKS UP!!!!

"The COVID Committee of the SMHC would like to respectfully remind everyone to have "Masks Up!" when congregating at trail junctions or other stops, not just at trailheads. In addition, with rising COVID case numbers this winter, if any hike leader feels uncomfortable leading a hike, please notify spangler@utk.edu."

The ATC continues to advise long-distance hikers to postpone hikes until 2022 or when the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has deemed the pandemic under control, and/or a COVID-19 vaccine or effective treatment is widely available and distributed. Visit appalachiantrail.org/COVID-19 for more information.

PLEASE READ AND SHARE WITH OTHERS!!!!!!!!!!!!

PIGEON RIVER WATER QUALITY THREATENED BY UPCOMING HEARING

Until the mid-1980s, the Pigeon River that flows through Coker County (between the GSMNP and Cherokee NF) and into the French Broad River (and then into Knoxville) was a sensory mess, dirty, smelly, and polluted, all resulting from discharges by Champion International Paper Company (now Blue Ridge Paper Products) in Canton, NC. Successful lawsuits by citizens and regulatory action forced a clean-up of the river that has made Coker County a budding adventure travel destination (around \$52 million in direct tourism expenditures in 2019 and especially rafting on the Pigeon). **Now, Blue Ridge Paper has requested renewal of its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) discharge permit and seeks to loosen regulations, including removal of a color variance, on effluent entering the Pigeon River, thereby opening the possibility of returning the river to its past polluted state.**

Please consider your citizen's input, asking that the permit requirements not be relaxed. **A hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, April 14, at 6 pm, to be done remotely on the internet.**

To attend, you need to register by noon on April 14 at this link: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=31F2etC5mkSFw-zCbNftGRcM2xmuszROiks3JDQp2_RURjJSWUpMRThRSURXVzA5WFU5MkdNUzk1UC4u

You can submit public comments by email through April 30, using "Blue Ridge Paper Products" in the subject line and sending to publiccomments@ncdenr.gov More information can be found at <https://deq.nc.gov/news/events/rescheduled-notice-intent-issue-npdes-wastewater-discharge-permit-nc0000272-proposed> or by Googling "Blue Ridge Paper Products hearing."

~Will Skelton, Conservation Chairman



From The Archives

An intimate view of the club's history and evolution can be realized by reading the yearly handbooks and other books by club members, particularly "Harvey Broome, Earth Man" and "Out Under the Sky of the Great Smokies" by Harvey Broome. The 1935 handbook is an excellent example of the breadth of interests covered. The first page begins with the poem "The Sea and the Hills" by Rudyard Kipling with an analogy of the lure of the Hills for hillmen. Scattered throughout the rest of the handbook are 17 other verses. During these early years, the hike write-ups themselves were often well-constructed literary accounts. Following the poem by Kipling is the club's code of ethics, the same as those printed in every handbook and on the inner front cover of this year's handbook. And near the end of the handbook is a bibliography of books of interest in four categories: The Smokies; On the Trail; Birds, Trees, Flowers, and Rocks of the Smokies; and Mountain Stories and Songs.

One focal point of interest for the club and discussed throughout the 1935 handbook was the near completion of the hiking club cabin, the "Cabin in the Greenbrier," in 1935. The President in 1935, H.R. Duncan, was also the chairman of the cabin committee throughout its construction. Two work trips were scheduled to build furniture for the cabin and rock walls nearby. Several long day hikes started with overnight sleeping in the cabin. This practice became a club tradition for many years thereafter.

Social events for 1935 included a reception for new members, a square dance, Mrs. Ross' Wildflower Garden, Mountain Ballads and Folk Songs, a Watermelon Feast, the annual Fish Fry at DeWine's Spring, an overnight birthday party celebrating the 11th anniversary of the club, and a Square Dance at the Installation Banquet.

One event that year that stands out is a "Vacation Camp," for August 10-18. Presumably headquartered at the cabin, the description mentions possible overnight hikes "to surrounding points of interest such as Greenbrier Pinnacle, Mt. Guyot, Brushy, Porter's Flats, et cetera ad libitum." And the write-up ends with: "Due to one's inability to see that far ahead, the leaders will be selected later, and full information as to food, clothing, and shelter, given them." Signed by: "Foreign Correspondent."

Also planned were AT work trips and the three days of the AT Conference. The third annual photography contest was announced, with a mention in the handbook introduction that the judges of the second photography contest in 1934 admonished the photographer for their poor representation of the beauty of the mountains! There was a special recognition of a veteran hikers group "to honor those who have met the Southern Appalachians at their best in hot and cold, wet and dry, and conquered the peaks." The group consisted of Harvey Broome, Carlos Campbell, Brockway Crouch, E. Guy Frizzell, George M. Hackman, A.G. (Dutch) Roth, and Jas. E. Thompson.

~ Brian Worley, Historian

UPCOMING HIKES

Meeting Places

Pre-registration with the leader is required for the hike and to ensure you know when and where to meet. We request that you cancel your registration ASAP if unable to hike to allow someone on the waiting list to take your spot. Please familiarize yourself with the Club guidelines in this newsletter.

A.T. Work Trip

Saturday — April 3

We are glad that the National Park Service is allowing us to have a chainsaw window again this April to let us get blowdowns off the trail expeditiously. As of the trip update there are very few blowdowns on our more accessible AT sections so we are planning to put most of our effort toward helping section leaders get an early start on routine trail maintenance activities. Details of the work needed and how we will organize work teams will await receiving expressions of interest from section leaders and volunteers who want to get out on this trip. In light of the ongoing Covid policies, teams will be formed in advance of the work day, and participants will be expected to drive individually to designated meeting points to meet up with their team. The alternate bad weather date will be April 10.

Bring gloves, lunch, snacks, and plenty of water. If you have a hardhat, ear protection, and/or safety glasses, please bring those as well. Our points of trail access will include Newfound Gap, Indian Gap, Spruce-Fir nature trail, Fork Ridge Trail, Collins Gap, and Clingman's Dome. Driving distances will vary based on distance from your home to any of these points.

Pre-registration with the leader is required.

Leaders: Dick Ketelle 865-483-3792 rhketelle@comcast.net

Franklin LaFond 678-464-3380, ox97GaMe@aol.com

Curry Mountain to CS 20 on Meigs Mountain

Wednesday — April 7

This out-and-back hike on the Curry Mountain trail will take us up the Curry He and Curry She mountains (interesting names) to the Meigs Mountain trail. We will turn left (east) and hike to Campsite 20 for lunch. Return same way. Hike: 11 miles rated moderate. Elevation gain about 1,400 ft. Meet at Metcalf Bottoms picnic area.

Pre-registration with the leader via email is required.

Leaders: Ron Brandenburg, ronb86@comcast.net or text 865-898-7602. Pat Watts, watts_at_home@yahoo.com (Group 1 at 8:30 am) and Ron (Group 2 at 9:00 am).

MASKS REQUIRED IN NATIONAL PARKS

Masks are required to be worn by everyone in the National Parks and on Federal Property.

Visit our Website: www.smhclub.org

Porters Creek

Saturday — April 10

We will park at the trailhead in Greenbrier Cove, hike 3.6 miles to backcountry campsite 31 for lunch and return. The hike starts out easy on a gravel jeep road. Along the first mile there are several historical sites including remnants of an old cemetery, the Messer Farmstead, and the former SMHC Cabin. The trail then narrows and becomes more rugged passing Fern Falls at the 2.7 mark. There should be numerous wildflowers to enjoy along the way with about 1500 feet of elevation gain. This 7.2 mile hike is rated moderate. Hike is contingent on scheduled bridge opening on late March. Meet at the trailhead at end of Greenbrier Rd at 9:00 am. Hike is limited to 10 hikers.

Pre-registration with the leader is required.

Leaders: Nancy and Don Dunning 865-705-9416 ngdpt@aol.com

Sams Creek

Off Trail

Saturday — April 10

This mostly off-trail route begins at the end of the gravel road in Tremont. We follow the abandoned Thunderhead Prong, Sams Creek, and Starkey Creek railroad grades, always climbing, until reaching the AT in Starkey Gap. Heading east on the AT, we reach Sugartree Gap and then plunge back down into the uppermost valley of the Sams Creek drainage. After crossing upper Sams Creek, we'll find our way back to the Sams Creek manway to retrace our steps to the trailhead. The hike is rated difficult since only a short segment is on a maintained trail. There should be a good selection of April wildflowers in bloom and views from the state-line ridge. Total trip ~ 9 miles (~3000 ft. elevation gain & loss).

Pre-registration with the leader is required.

Leaders: Mike Harrington 865-984 -7167

mike_harr@bellsouth.net

Steve Dickinson 865-253-0555 winston.fob@comcast.net

Backpack from Noland Creek Trailhead to BCS 71 and Out by the "Tunnel to Nowhere"

Saturday-Sunday — April 10- 11

BACKPACK

This is a loop hike beginning at the Noland Creek Trailhead and looping back through the Tunnel to Nowhere. From the Noland Creek Trailhead, we will hike up Noland Creek to BCS 64, hang a left, and hike Springhouse Branch Trail to BCS 71 at the junction of Forney Creek and Springhouse Branch. That will be an 11-mile day, but Noland Creek is pretty level. After spending the night at BCS 71, we will hike down toward the lake on Whiteoak Branch Trail and head toward the Tunnel. If we feel energetic, we can hike Goldmine Loop or just head through the Tunnel and back to the cars. Mileage for Sunday is around 5 miles if we do not do Goldmine. Due to Covid restrictions, we will meet at the Noland Creek Trailhead at 9:00 am on Saturday. Hikers will make their own individual Backcountry Reservations after preregistering.

Pre-registration is required. Contact Steve Dunkin at

jsdunkin1302@gmail.com

Leaders: Steve Dunkin, jsdunkin1302@gmail.com, 865-202-3286

Tim Bigelow, 865-607-6781

Frozen Head State Park Wildflower Hike

Saturday — April 17

Frozen Head State Park encompasses over 24,000 acres of wilderness and wildflower diversity. The hike will begin and end at the large picnic area. Typically, we will be able to enjoy dozens of species of wildflowers this time of year. Besides the wildflowers, on this year's hike (Panther Branch and North Old Mac Trails) we will enjoy waterfalls, footbridge crossings, cascades and cascade crossings, and an overlook with distant valley views. Hike 6 miles and rated moderate. Meet at Frozen Head large picnic area just beyond Visitor Center @ 9:30 AM. A reminder: This is a wildflower hike and as such WILL be at a much slower pace.

Pre-registration with the leader is required.

Leader: Jim Quick, jghiker37@aol.com, 865-660-3351

White Oak Sinks

Sunday — April 18

We will walk up an old gravel road (lots of bank flowers and ferns) and then drop into the north side of White Oak Sinks. Be prepared for wet feet. We will follow narrow paths to a few smaller sinks (why do bluebells just grow in the bluebell sink?) Then we will stroll across the big sink (a limestone window) looking for green violet, shooting star, a bat cave, and a waterfall. (Drop a twig boat here and it will ride into Tuckaleechee Caverns.) Hike: 7-8 miles, rated moderate. Meet at the Tuckaleechee Caverns parking lot to caravan and arrange parking up a narrow road. Meeting time is 9:00 am.

Pre-registration with the leader is required.

Leaders: Alan Sweetser 865-938-7627

Doris Gove 865-456-8198 dorisgove@aol.com

Black Mountain Cumberland Trail

Saturday — April 24

The Black Mountain Section of the Cumberland Trail features some nice overlooks, rock formations, possibly a visit to the cave and wildflowers. This hike is rated difficult due to the distance and elevation of the trail. There is no water source on this trail. You will want to bring plenty of water as it can be warm in April. This is a ten-mile in and out hike. We will meet at the Shell Station in Crab Orchard off Exit 329 of I-40 so that everyone will start at the same location. The meeting time is **8:00 am EST**. The hike is in the central time zone, but we will follow EST.

Pre-registration with the leader is required.

Leader: Dale Potter, 865.773.8114, dalepotter55@gmail.com

Road Closures

Cades Cove Loop Road- Vehicle-free Wednesdays May 5-Sept 1, 2021

Cades Cove Loop Road- Fully Closed for resurfacing Sept 7-Sept 27, 2021

Forge Creek Road- through July 31, 2021

Heintooga Round Bottom Opens May 14

Newfound Gap Road- Intermittent delays through Nov 30, 2021
Bridgework Replacement

Rich Mtn Road Opens April 9

Ramsey Prong Road & Greenbrier Road- Closed through April 23, 2021

Black Oak Ridge

EASY HIKE

Monday — April 26

Let's celebrate the return of daylight savings time with an evening walk and look for wildflowers in the west end of Black Oak Ridge Conservation area in Oak Ridge. We'll meet at 5:30 pm at the west entrance off Perimeter Rd. (off Blair Rd.) and explore a loop trail starting at Dyllis Orchard Rd. and up to the ridge where mountain views to the west and the slowly disappearing K-25 plant to the east can be seen at the powerline crossings. Hike 4.5 miles with 500 ft elevation gain.

Pre-registration with the leader is required.

Leader: Tim Bigelow bigelowt2@mindspring.com 865-607-6781

Twentymile, Long Hungry Ridge, Twentymile Loop

Wednesday — April 28

This loop hike takes us to part of the GSMNP that we do not visit very often. We will start on the Twentymile trail at the Twentymile Ranger Station, going past the Twentymile Cascades to Long Hungry Ridge trail to Campsite 92. After lunch, we will head back down Long Hungry Ridge to Twentymile Loop trail, then Wolf Ridge trail to ultimately make it back to the Ranger station. Hike: 10 miles rated moderate. Elevation gain about 1,650 ft. Meet at the Twentymile Ranger Station.

Pre-registration with the leader via email is required.

Leaders: Ron Brandenburg, ronb86@comcast.net or text 865-898-7602. Pat Watts, watts_at_home@yahoo.com (Group 1 at 8:30 am) and Ron (Group 2 at 9:00 am).



You can help support the SMHC from your shopping by taking few minutes of your time. Kroger has a program known as Community Rewards that they use to donate to qualifying organizations.

Log into your Kroger account online and select My Account. Under that menu select Community Rewards. Enter **MV194** for your reward sponsor. That will select the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. Save it. Logout and then log back in to verify it saved your information.

This does not cost you anything, nor does it affect your fuel points.

Each quarter Kroger donates to the SMHC a check from the Community Rewards that is used to help support trail maintenance and other club projects.

If every member signed up and encouraged their family and friends to do the same, this would result in a substantial increase in the amount of money Kroger will donate to our club.

Do not put it off until later. Take a few minutes and enter your information in your Kroger account online. You can check each quarter to see how much money your spending at Kroger resulted in a donation to the club. You will be glad you were able to help the SMHC and the Smokies.

For The Record

Jakes Creek History

January 30

Had a total of 11 people go on this hike. Mark Snyder, the hike leader signed up one extra in case one of the first eight was a no-show. We went over the covid-19 guidelines for safer hiking and all present acknowledged they had read the recommendations in print form. Up the road along Society Hill we walked with a few stops along the way. Pointed out the Chapman cottage as well as the remains of the apple barn-cider mill. Pointed in the direction of where the old water tank could be found as well as lots of trash strewn about including the remains of numerous glass jars for the cider just piled in a trash heap. We walked passed the left turn and went straight as we were following the logging railbed. Showed where the train crossed Jakes Creek and continued to the backcountry stable-water pump house to point out where Lemon Ownby (Uncle Lem) lived. From there we walked back to where Uncle Lem's sister lived with her husband, Mr Lee Higdon. We then went to Bert Ownby's homesite, Uncle Lem's brother, and saw artifacts strewn about.

From Bert's we crossed the footlog, and pointed out where the railbed lay and how it switched- backed up the mountain. Before we began to hike the railbed, now the Meigs Mountain Trail, Uncle Lem's brother-in-law Wesley Ogle's home place was pointed out. Now back on Jakes Creek trail we proceeded to the Avent Cabin, which proved to be a first time visit for about half present. Some stayed at the Avent Cabin while others went to Mrs. Myna Avent's grown daughter's cabin site, Mary Avent. A brief history was shared about the order of ownership of the cabins and Sam Cook. We returned to the trail to begin hiking in earnest to the site of Blanket Mountain fire tower. After we got to the second water crossing, five turned back as the water was up and the clock was ticking, as Janet Snyder, the sweep and wife of the hike leader, often says to Mark "less talk, more walk". So six hikers continued to Jakes Gap and then to Blanket Mountain. After a brief lunch break, and still not to the gap, Janet took the lead, as she's the real hiker, and Mark took the sweep and he guaranteed no one was behind him. When Mark got to the top of Blanket Mountain the other five were ready to come back down. It was a beautiful hike down the mountain trail as the snow began to fall, lightly covering the trail. Hopefully, all enjoyed as much as we did.

~ Janet and Mark Snyder



Trillium Gap to Brushy Mountain

February 24

Eight members and one visitor assembled at the Rainbow Falls TH on what promised to be a beautiful February day. And it was! Any slight chill wore off quickly as we started the hike, and especially when we started climbing. A fair number of blowdowns on the trail were successfully navigated but will certainly need to be cleared before the llamas start trekking to LeConte. Grotto Falls was beautiful and full. There was a thin layer of snow and ice as we got higher, but nothing too difficult. Hiking out to the clearing on Brushy Mtn offered us clear beautiful views of LeConte and the surrounding peaks. Temperatures in the high 60s by our return- a gorgeous day

Seven member hikers formed group 2 on this brisk sunny morning. Parking was tight but all but two found places to park near the trailhead. Early in the hike we saw two groups of deer near the trail. They did not care that we were there and continued foraging. Numerous blowdowns both big and small made the trail more challenging than it is. Some serious trail clearing will be needed before the llamas can make the trek to LeConte. Grotto falls was looking good with plenty of water. This trail is a steady but not too steep a climb all the way to Trillium Gap. The short trail from Trillium Gap to the top of Brushy Mountain is a mess, with mud, loose rocks, and some big steps. But the view from the top makes it worthwhile. Imagine sitting on top of a mountain with a great view, in the warm sunshine and no wind while eating lunch. That is what we had making it hard to leave.

~ Ron Brandenburg, Diane Petrilla

Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Officers and Directors

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