



The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly

A Publication of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club

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Cover Photo by Jason Gotch



The GATC Mission

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club manages, maintains and protects the Appalachian National Scenic Trail in Georgia with volunteers from its membership and the interested public. The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club promotes the appreciation of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and natural outdoor places through education and recreational activities, with an emphasis on conservation ethics and protection of the forests, their natural resources and wilderness areas.

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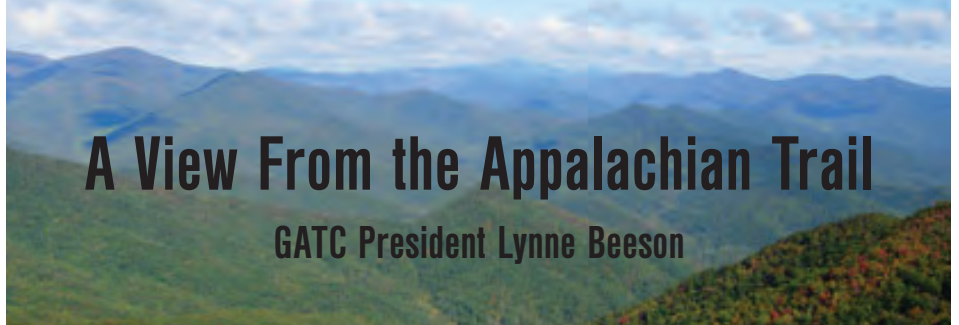
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A View From the Appalachian Trail

GATC President Lynne Beeson

2025. There is something about this year that already seems different in so many ways. First, it's the number itself, 2025. Can it really be a quarter century since the year 2000 when the predominant thought was that the Y2K bug was going to end the world?

Second, good grief, hasn't it been cold? Not just cold, but frigid, complete with snow and ice and no school for days and driving for many has been a challenge. Third, is this really the fourth year of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club's publication, The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly? Published quarterly and featuring articles on many of the projects, programs and work of our volunteer organization, the Quarterly is a tremendous success for the club. It is a magazine for the outdoor-loving public and features not only important information but stories and illustrations of the thousands of hours our volunteers contribute yearly for one singular purpose, which is to maintain the Appalachian Trail in Georgia and help educate those who hike the footpath. In short, it is a snapshot in time documenting the many faces of the GATC and sharing those faces with the public and our communities.

Two years ago, in the Quarterly, I wrote about being in the heart of winter, when the trees are bare, the winds through the gaps and on top of the mountain peaks can be brutal, and one never really knows from day to day what the weather will be like. I could write again

our volunteers are not deterred by the weather

those same thoughts about the changing weather that is a part of our Appalachian mountain environment and how climate change is affecting our weather patterns and will continue to do so. I could complain (uselessly, of course) about how the weather affects our trail work as frozen ground is not hospitable for trail maintenance and an ice-covered trail becomes a ski slope and skating rink. But our volunteers are not deterred by that at all! Many are out in the cold, working their sections, or learning new skills, or taking on new tasks for the club. They do this year-round, regardless of the weather.

I am thinking about the mountain views in winter that are often jaw-dropping, and how the peaks and overlooks provide the long-range vistas not often seen in other seasons; how the cardinals, in their bright red coats of feathers, stand in sharp contrast to the snow covered hills and the gray bark of the hardwoods; how everything is more vivid in color, it seems; then again, the sky can grow dreary and dark. It's winter when much of the landscape lies dormant, or so we think. Dormant, you say? The GATC is definitely not dormant any time of the year. Although winter does offer respite from the "busy season," a flurry of activity is underway right now as we prepare for upcoming major events. You will

find articles or notices about these events in this issue, starting with the First Day of Issuance Ceremony for the Appalachian Trail series Forever Stamps. These stamps are produced by the U.S. Postal Service to commemorate the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's 100th anniversary. One hundred years, imagine that! This event is in Georgia, at Amicalola Falls State Park, and will kick off our AT Gateways weekend 2025. And speaking of anniversaries, GATC is not far behind, with our 100th anniversary coming in 2030.

There is also information about AT Gateways in this issue, which this year will feature informative programs, a cast of characters that includes Grandma Gatewood and other well-known friends, and an opportunity to enjoy "fireside chats" with Trail icons and others.

With March roaring in like a lion, we will close out March with the honor of hosting the Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival World Tour in Blairsville on March 29 at the Union County Fine Arts Center. There will be more information on this exciting event coming soon and you can visit the GATC's website georgia-atclub.org to stay informed.

Over the next few months GATC Trail Ambassadors will be patrolling the Trail and staffing our A.T. Basecamp at Amicalola Falls State Park assisting hikers and sharing Leave No Trace principles. Hike Smart and Stay Safe is our message for all hikers, whether

you're out for a day, a weekend, a section, or a long trek to Maine.

Upcoming events later in 2025 include our bi-annual Women's Trail Summit and the annual Trails Skills Workshop. Both events will be in November and again, check our website for information and updates. You will also find a schedule of club hikes that are open to the public and other news.

If you're not a member of the GATC, I encourage you to check us out. We are a club comprised of individuals from various career paths, interests, and backgrounds. One thing connects us - our passion as volunteers to be stewards of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, where the southern terminus atop Springer Mountain is the starting point for so many, and where our club's 78 miles of the 2,198-mile iconic and world-renowned footpath begins. One does not have to be a hiker to be a member. One does not have to camp in the backcountry or maintain a mile or two of trail. One can support us with a donation, in lieu of membership. However, if you are a member, you become a part of the trail maintaining club that has the responsibility for the best maintained section of the Appalachian Trail! Now, who wouldn't want to be a part of that and find friendships and fellowship along the way?



A Hiker's Perspective

Editor John Turner

What will the Appalachian Trail look like one hundred years from now? The question is timely because the physical A.T., or at least the first trail sections that carried that name, will be one hundred years old later this year. And with a century of history behind it, this is a good time to pause and speculate a little about what the next century might have in store for our beloved A.T. Not only can we try to forecast what the physical treadway might become, we can also let our imaginations run loose and try to daydream about what the experience of hiking the A.T. might be like by the year 2125.

We can start with a given – our planet will be warmer one hundred years from now. And probably wetter. Another safe bet is that the physical trail will have been relocated many times in many places from the path it now occupies. If we confine our speculation to our own patch of the A.T., what will the trail corridor along the north Georgia mountain ranges look like in 2125? Will the famous stone arch at Amicalola Falls State Park (assuming the park and the arch are still there) be framed by palm trees?

Will our mountains' temperate forest of hardwoods, white pines, laurel and hemlocks be replaced by so many new species that the future forest mimics the longleaf pines, palmettoes and Spanish moss of south Georgia? Or, to be more optimistic, will 80-year-old hybrid chestnut trees dominate the forest the way their ancestors did two centuries before? And will the hundred-or-so-year-old hardwoods currently standing in our designated wilderness areas have grown to be towering giants that approximate the magnificence of their ancestors when north Georgia was a single expanse of primeval forest? Assuming, of course, that we still have federal wilderness areas.

What about the wildlife? Will newly-evolved diseases wipe out some animals and cause others to migrate to milder climate zones? Will eastern wolf packs roam the wilderness areas north of Woody Gap? What about a snake species I especially never want to encounter out in the woods – the water moccasin, currently not found in our northern counties because it is too cold for them. Cottonmouths are aggressive and venomous. By comparison our more passive north Georgia timber rattlesnakes are little more than a curiosity and easily avoided by hikers who are paying attention. I don't even want to think about the possibility of pythons that currently infest south Florida migrating north.

What about bugs? Given the damage that the woolly adelgid and the emerald ash borer are currently inflicting on our forests, what invasive insect horrors might be in store for us one hundred years from now? Could we lose all our oak trees? Or poplars? What would replace them? And as for the climate, will we even have a winter down here in Georgia by 2125? Will we have hurricanes in January, tornadoes year round? A four-or-five-month monsoon rainy season? A mosquito season on par with Maine's notorious black fly season?

And the trail itself – will future maintainers bow to future popular demand and smooth new treadways free of rocks and roots and so gently grade the path that Georgia's rugged and infamous pointless ups and downs are a distant memory of a bygone era? Will development encroach to the extent that no unspoiled vistas remain from the few summits touched by the trail? Will the view to the south from Preaching Rock be rooftops and asphalt as far as the eye can see? And what about the experience of hiking the Appalachian Trail, how will that change?

Again, we can start with a given – the technology that in the last few decades has revolutionized communication and navigation on the A.T. will certainly continue to develop at a lightning fast pace. Maybe our shelters will be replaced by comfortable pay-for-stay hostels to accommodate the crowds. Maybe a network of cameras and sensors will make it impossible to stealth camp without paying a fine. Or hike without an expensive permit? And is it much of a stretch to imagine a "virtual Appalachian Trail?" Of course not. Imagine hiking the A.T. from Georgia to Maine, or heck, maybe from Key West to Morocco, from your own basement. And not only visually, but experiencing all the sounds, smells, rain, sun, animals, tired muscles – whatever strikes your fancy from the menu of experiences you can choose from.

What about robots? Imagine robot ridgerunners patrolling the trail. With arrest powers. And how long will it be before a robot completes an A.T. thru-hike? And, of course, records every moment of the "hike" on whatever type of communication then prevails? With a narration by an AI character? Maybe an AI Earl Shafer or an AI Grandma Gatewood? And will the Appalachian Trail Conservancy recognize robots as 2,000 milers and award them a patch? And then, of course robots will then set the record for the fastest known time, and those records will be broken again and again. Under forty days? Easy for a robot. How about thirty? Ten? Who knows where the limit is?

And since dystopian visions of the future have been the fashion in literature and movies and video games for a long time, let's visit the darkest side for a moment. Imagine a breakdown of

Imagine the A.T. experience 100 years from now . . .

society – the A.T. could become a refuge from lawless, flooded cities – an irony Benton MacKaye himself could appreciate since his original 1921 vision for the A.T. included residency camps for vacationing city workers strung along the trail. Worse, the A.T. could become like a Wild West of heavily-armed

roaming gangs, a very different and ugly version of MacKaye's idea of the trail as a "barbarian utopia." Or to take the most pessimistic view we can imagine, the Appalachian Trail could simply cease to exist by the year 2125, abandoned to a riotous tangle of alien vegetation, kudzu, poison ivy and weeds in the south, vines, brambles, blowdowns, unabridged and unfordable streams everywhere. And no one would care because no one would want to hike out there.

The point of all this nonsense is that none of this dystopian speculation has to be the future of the Appalachian Trail in the next century of its storied history. Instead, those of us who care about the A.T. and the hiking experience and who work year round to protect and preserve it, should be thinking about what we want the trail to become. For it surely will continue to change, just as the experience of hiking it will continue to evolve. And another certainty is that challenges we can't imagine now will be thrown up decade after decade for the next generations of trail maintainers and hikers to confront and solve.

What can we do right now to influence what that future will be? Get involved. Get out on the trail. Educate hikers who are new to the A.T. or other trails. Volunteer. Find a way to contribute. A good place to start is the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club. We have been doing this work for almost 95 years and I'm betting our next generations of GATC trail members will be doing it one hundred years from now, just as well if not better than we are. But we have to make that happen, starting now on the trail's one hundredth birthday and continually handing down our knowledge and our passion and our commitment to each generation to come. It won't be easy. Since day one nothing about the Appalachian Trail has ever been easy. I hope it stays that way.

Appalachian Trail Legends Series - Warner Hall, the Man Behind the Iconic Pose

Reported by Ron Hamlin

Anyone who has been around the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club for any length of time or the Appalachian Trail in Georgia would immediately recognize the image of a hiker climbing a mountain carrying an old-style backpack and wearing a crusher hat. That image is immortalized in bronze on the A.T.'s southern terminus marker at Springer Mountain and was, until recently, used by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy on its patches, hats and vests awarded to volunteers. And it is, of course, on the GATC logo. The man depicted in that iconic image is Warner Hall, one of the charter members of the GATC.

How was it that Warner Hall became the model for this famous image? And who was Hall?

By mid-1930, a then little-known effort had been underway to mark out a path for the Appalachian Trail from a point in Georgia all the way to Maine. Eddie Stone, an assistant state forester in Georgia, and Stone's assistant, Charlie Elliott, along with a fellow forester, Roy Ozmer, had worked on marking a trail from Mount Oglethorpe near Jasper to Bly Gap at the North Carolina line and on toward the Smoky Mountains. By July of that year, Elliott had been assigned the task of creating a club to help build and maintain the trail they had marked out, a task that was finally successful with his third attempt, on November 1, 1930, when the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club was founded at the old Zimmer's Lodge in Dahlonega.

Warner Hall was one of the twenty-five charter members at that first meeting and he made a positive impression on Elliott as the two men immediately became good friends. Since this new club was not only created to build and maintain the Appalachian Trail, but also to conduct plenty of activities such as hikes, dances and any other form of entertainment they could think of, activities and transportation chairs were needed, so Eddie Stone assigned those roles to Hall. In a letter to Stone, Elliott quickly lamented that Hall hadn't been elected to the Secretary-Treasurer position "after I had learned him better."

Hall was born in 1904 in Calhoun, GA, where he spent his youngest years. He was the son of James and Viola and the younger brother of Helen Hall. Eventually, the family would move to Atlanta where he attended Technical High School, an all-boys school whose graduates included Bobby Jones of golf fame, Truett Cathey, the founder of Chick-fil-a restaurants, and the former governor of Georgia, Lester Maddox, among many others. After graduation, he attended the Georgia School of Technology, known today as the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he received a B.S. in Engineering Chemistry. He followed that with an M.B.A. in industrial engineering from New York University.

On his return to Atlanta, Hall worked briefly as an industrial engineer before becoming employed at the family-owned newspaper, the Dekalb New Era, as business manager and editor, positions he held from 1929 to 1937. He also supplemented his income by teaching evening classes at Georgia Tech from 1930 to 1933.

Hall was well thought of by other members of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club. He was a young and enthusiastic supporter of the Appalachian Trail project as well as an inspiration to other members of the club. When Eddie Stone stepped down after two years as the club's president, Hall was elected to succeed him. Under Stone, GATC had operated on an informal basis. But Hall and maybe others on the board believed that if the club was to survive and flourish, it had to be established more formally, so the first by-laws for the club were drawn up under his direction. Many of the elements in those first by-laws continue to be important to the club today: create a love and desire for the outdoors, perform trail construction and maintenance, cooperate with trail partners, enlist the support of the general public for the conservation of the state's forests, teach and foster outdoor ethics, and provide accurate maps and information regarding the trails and regions the club has an interest in.

After the Appalachian Trail was successfully established, and as motor roads were being built in the north Georgia mountains, Hall decided it was important to mark trailhead access points to the A.T. An acquaintance of Hall's, Dr. G. H. Noble, was an amateur sculptor. In the spring of 1933 the two men began discussions about plaques that could be installed at trailhead locations along the Appalachian Trail in Georgia. Noble encouraged Warner Hall to strike a pose to use as his model for the plaque. That pose and Noble's design for the plaque are well known today throughout the A.T. hiking community. Noble joined the GATC in 1934.

Three A.T. plaques using Noble's design were cast in 1934, but money was available for installing only the one located at Neel Gap. In the midst of the depression, the cost to the club of \$20 for each installation, about \$570 each in today's money, was beyond GATC's capacity. One of the bronze castings was displayed for a time at a jewelry store in downtown Atlanta but whatever happened to it remains a mystery. Plaster castings of the design were also made, and one of them was sent to Myron Avery, the chairman of the Appalachian Trail Conference at the time. GATC received so much interest in the plaque that club officials offered them for sale to the other A.T. clubs but found no takers. A similar marker was made by the Blue Mountain Club in Pennsylvania and installed at the Delaware Water Gap in 1936, but it disappeared in 1958.

Warner Hall would continue as club president until 1936, when he stepped down to continue as a general member of the board for another three years. Along with his work and GATC activities, Hall also served as an officer in the military reserves. When the United States entered the second world war, he was called to active duty in January 1940, and transferred to Birmingham. Throughout the war, he served within various Army information and intelligence units and was discharged from the military with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Following the war, he continued to work for the government, mainly in Washington, D.C. and Boston, MA, until his retirement. He remained single until 1961, when he married.

When he died of leukemia at the Walter Reed Medical Center in 1973, his old friend, Charlie Elliott, wrote a tribute to him that appeared in the Atlanta Constitution. In part he wrote "Although he hadn't lived in his native state for many years, Warner Hall's friends here numbered in the hundreds. Many thousands more who probably never heard his name, have enjoyed such contributions he left behind him as a wilderness foot trail through the mountains of North Georgia, and a memorial forest."

The trail Elliott referred to, of course, is the Appalachian Trail and the forest is the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest in North Carolina, which Hall teamed up with the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club to help preserve. Again, to quote Elliott, "Warner Hall did many things for conservation back in the days when conservation was not as popular as it is today."



Benton MacKaye (left) with Warner Hall in 1934



Warner Hall striking the iconic pose

The Springer Mountain plaque



Celebrated Thru-Hiking Yellow Brick Has Roots in Georgia

Reported by Leon M. Rubin

The story of “Bricky” – arguably the most celebrated Appalachian Trail thru-hiker of the 2024 season – began and ended right here in North Georgia.

More than six months after his creator, “Rifle” (Abraham Reyes) of Duluth, dropped the “Yellow Emergency Hiking Brick” off at Neel Gap’s Mountain Crossings, Bricky completed his hike (technically a flip-flop) at the iconic Arch at Amicalola Falls State Park.

And what a hike it was!

What began as a lark between friends turned into something that often characterizes the Appalachian Trail – a sensation. Between the third week of February and October 2, Bricky inspired the creation of a Facebook Group, “Follow The Yellow Brick Trail,” that grew to 2,000-plus members. He was the star of several YouTube videos and appeared in a news segment on a Boston television station. He “ate” in a Chinese restaurant, had acupuncture and a massage, visited Times Square and Grand Central Station in New York, and was a guest at a public ribbon-cutting ceremony in Virginia (garnering some extremely quizzical looks).

He scaled Dragon’s Tooth, almost got thrown off McAfee Knob (well, not really) and joined the revelers in the Hiker Parade at Trail Days in Damascus. He acquired a pair of googly eyes and his own miniature backpack – and had to be glued together when he broke in half after a fall.

Finally, after he and Rifle walked through the Arch, they were greeted with a celebratory cake!

So, how in the world did this happen?

“The inspiration came when a friend of mine – ‘Not Yet’ – was thru-hiking (in 2023),” said Rifle. “I told him I’d meet him as often as I could and we got together at Neel Gap. He asked me to get him a frozen pizza, a Dr. Pepper and a nail clipper. When I saw him, he said, ‘What about my bricks?’” The puzzling question stuck with Rifle.

When Rifle officially decided to hike the Appalachian Trail in 2024, he said, “I wanted to make the brick real.” He picked up some yellow Rustoleum at Home Depot, painted a brick and took it to Mountain Crossings. “I dropped it off on a Wednesday and got on the trail on Friday.”

He soon met a group of thru-hikers that included “Gadget,” “Soap,” “Sassafras” and “Cheese Block” and told them about the brick. “I said, ‘You’ve got to help the brick get to Katahdin!’” He couldn’t imagine, he admitted, that such a thing would actually happen.

When this newly formed A.T. tramily discovered the Yellow Brick at Mountain Crossings, they rallied around the mission. Rifle had put lettering on the brick: “EMERGENCY HIKING BRICK. FOR ALL YOUR EMERGENCY BRICK HIKING NEEDS. NOBO 2024.” Cheese Block added “Bring me to Katahdin” and went on to carry the brick the first 20 miles to Blue Mountain Shelter. Shortly



Bricky



Bricky at the Arch at Amicalola Falls State Park with (from left to right) Rifle, Gadget and Soap.

thereafter, Gadget introduced Bricky to the hiking community in a YouTube video, which started to attract attention. (It's had nearly 2,000 views at last count.)

As the idea of carrying Bricky on the trail gained momentum, Rifle was both amused and amazed. "Who's going to want to move five pounds of this useless thing?" he asked rhetorically. "Who would willingly hike with a brick?" And then he added, "It encapsulates hikers perfectly. It adds to the insanity of it all. People are doing it because it's fun or ridiculous. It's what the community made it."

In early September, after being carried by more than 60 hikers, Bricky triumphantly summited Mount Katahdin with a trail tramly that included "Frodo," (Colin Kane) – also an Atlanta-area thru-hiker. After bringing Bricky back to Georgia (in his checked baggage), Frodo and Rifle met for breakfast in Dahlenega and the brick was returned to its creator.

This transfer was important since, contrary to what most of his bearers assumed, Bricky didn't actually start his hike at Springer Mountain, but rather at Neel Gap – some 31 miles up the trail. So, the heavy burden of making Bricky's thru-hike complete fell back on Rifle.

Re-enter Gadget and Soap, who actually met each other on the day they left A.T. Basecamp at Amicalola Falls State Park Visitor Center; they ultimately reached Katahdin together. Not long after finishing their thru-hikes, they decided they weren't quite ready to leave the A.T. behind.

Gadget and Soap went back to North Carolina and headed south, unfortunately just about the time that Hurricane Helene plowed through. After weathering the storm at the Green Dragon Hostel in

Hiawassee, they retraced their steps to Blood Mountain. Rifle hiked up to meet them again and handed Bricky off.

Pausing that night to camp at Woody Gap (with Bricky!), the pair recounted how they first learned about his true origins.

Soap remembered it this way: "Rifle says, 'I've got a bit of a confession to make'" and then revealed that he had driven the brick to Neel Gap. "We told him, 'If it makes it all the way to Katahdin, you have to get it to Springer Mountain,'" Gadget added.

The next day, they hiked with Bricky to Springer, arriving just in time for a beautiful sunset. Rifle met them once again the next day and they all carried Bricky the 8.8 miles down the Approach Trail to the Arch.

Bricky's hike was complete!

Earlier, when he first heard that Bricky had actually summited Katahdin, Rifle was thrilled. "No way!!! BRICKY FINALLY MADE IT!!!" he said in a text.

"I give all the credit to the maniacs who did it," he says. "I'm just glad I was able to give it a start."

Editor's Note: A long-running gag among A.T. thru-hikers has been to secretly stuff a heavy rock (or a brick if one was handy) in a friend's backpack and wait for the inevitable reaction as the extra weight took its toll and the hiker discovered the joke that had been played on him or her. The story of Bricky takes the old gag to a whole new ridiculous level – very typical of the serendipitous things that often happen on the Appalachian Trail

GA 4000 Challenge Series - Three Summits in One Winter Day

Reported by Lars Holmquist

Winter is the best time for GA 4000 Challenge hikes. Sure it's cold but the visibility from the summits is good without leaves on the trees and the underbrush is less troublesome for bushwhacking up a steep mountain. So back in late December an intrepid group of Georgia Appalachian Trail Club members tackled one of the toughest challenges on the list – Rich Mountain, Big Bald and Tickanetly Bald in one day.

This was a very satisfying winter hike. We started up the steep slope at a brisk pace due to the 25-degree temperature, but the effort of climbing quickly warmed us up. Near the top of the very appropriately named Cold Mountain, we encountered an inch or more of snow. Through the frost-covered branches of the tree canopy, the Rich Mountain Wilderness sparkled in the morning sunshine.

With more than 12 miles of hiking and nearly 3,000 feet of elevation gain, and none of it on official trails, this is a tiring trek, especially because some of the distance is traveled by bushwhacking and much of it is on seldom-used trails. But it was hard not to be struck by the peaceful feeling in the woods on newly-fallen snow. Good company, great stories and brilliant weather distracted us from the aches and pains and exhaustion of the climbing.

We crossed over Rich Mountain and examined the remains of an old wooden fire tower and stone chimney, which was all that was left of the observer's cabin. Bushwhacking south from the summit, we joined an old trail southbound to Tickanetly Bald, where we had lunch on a rock outcrop. Then we returned along a forest service road to Big Bald, crossing some open fields along the way.

Our group consisted of me leading the hike and GATC members Susie McNeely, John Bricknell, Robert Bobinski, Irene Hall and Scott Deitchman.



At the chimney on Rich Mountain- left to right: Susie McNeely, Irene Hall, John Bricknell, Scott Deitchman and, Bo Bobinski.

The GA 4000 Challenge - North Georgia boasts 32 mountain peaks that are 4,000 feet or higher. Climb all 32 of them and you qualify as a Georgia 4000er and can sport our patch on your backpack or hiking shirt. The hikes are led by an experienced GATC leader and vary in difficulty. Non-members are welcome to sign up for a GA 4000 Challenge hike, but group size is limited. Most of the hikes are during the winter months and hikers must be prepared for the difficult conditions they may encounter. For more information about the GA 4000 Challenge series and to find a list of scheduled hikes, visit the GATC website at Georgia-atclub.org.



On Tickanetley Bald (from left to right)
Lars Holmquist, Irene Hall, Scott Deitchman,
Bo Bobinski, John Bricknell, and Susie McNeely.

U. S. Postage Stamps Honoring the Appalachian Trail Will be Released at the A.T. Gateways Event at Amicalola Falls State Park

The A.T. Gateways gathering at Amicalola Falls State Park this year will begin a day earlier than previous years with the official roll-out of a set of 15 U.S. Postal Service stamps honoring the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The first-day-of-issue for the Appalachian Trail stamps, one of which features an image of Long Creek Falls just off the A.T. in Georgia, will take place at 10 a.m. Friday, Feb. 28 with a ceremony at the Amicalola Visitor Center.

A.T. Gateways, sponsored by the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, is an annual weekend-long event at Amicalola that brings hikers and outdoor enthusiasts together to celebrate the Appalachian Trail and to encourage hiking as a recreation activity for people of all ages and backgrounds. Officials from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and other dignitaries are scheduled to attend the Friday unveiling ceremony of the A.T. Forever stamp series, which is a pane of 15 stamps arranged in five horizontal rows of three stamps, each featuring scenic images taken along the trail

The Amicalola Visitor Center was chosen to host the A.T. Forever stamp unveiling ceremony because it is the location of a famous stone arch, which is the unofficial southern beginning point for many hikers who attempt to hike the entire 2,198 miles of the Appalachian Trail in one year or over multiple years. An 8.8-mile Approach Trail leads from the arch to the official



A.T. southern terminus at Springer Mountain, where the first white A.T. blaze is located.

Following the U.S. Postal Service ceremony on Friday, which is open to the public, A.T. Gateways will continue Saturday and Sunday morning in the park with sessions on hiking and the outdoors at the Amicalola Lodge, located in the park above the famous waterfall. Vendors of various outdoors products will be on hand at the Lodge Saturday and Sunday morning.

Some of the planned sessions Saturday in the Lodge will feature an update with the latest information about the impact of Tropical Storm Helene on the Appalachian Trail, a discussion of foot care and how to deal with hiking injuries, a panel discussion with authors of books about the A.T. and a session on how hikers can use digital technology on trails.

GATC trail maintainers will be in the park working on a section of the Approach Trail and will demonstrate trail building and maintenance techniques during the weekend.

Anne VanCuren will be in character as Grandma Gatewood, the first woman to solo thru-hike the Appalachian Trail at the Visitor Center Saturday morning and at the Lodge for the afternoon, with a fireside chat at 2 p.m.



The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club Hosts the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour in Blairsville, Saturday March 29 at 2 p.m. at the Union County Fine Arts Center

Take in the stunning natural beauty and explore the globe in another collection of the world's greatest mountain and adventure films from the Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival. Come be a part of the journey in this year's World Tour.

Georgia Appalachian Trail License Plates Are More Than Just Nice to Look at on Cars and Trucks

Georgia motorists who enjoy hiking or just want to contribute to outdoor recreation have a cool way to help support the Appalachian Trail and also sport a nifty-looking license plate on their vehicle. Every one of those A.T. specialty tags registered in Georgia equals \$10 annually going to projects that will make the trail in Georgia a little better for everyone to enjoy.

Each year those \$10 portions of the license plate purchase or renewal fee are distributed through grants to various organizations, individuals and programs for the exclusive purpose of improving the Georgia section of the A.T. or the experience of hiking it. The way this works is the collected specialty fees are sent to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and then re-distributed to grant applicants in Georgia.

The grant decisions are made by a five-member committee that includes three members of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club and two ATC officials.

For 2025, the committee awarded 14 grants totalling \$77,053 to five organizations. Since the A.T. specialty tag program began in 2013, Georgia motorists have contributed more than \$500,00 to the Appalachian Trail through their tag purchases and renewals.

The two largest 2025 tag grants will make a big impact on the A.T. hiking experience. The joint Georgia Appalachian Trail Club and ATC program to provide ridgerunners on the A.T. during the late winter and early spring, when large numbers of hikers are on the trail in Georgia, received \$14,665 and a GATC program that connects youth to the outdoors through sponsored and guided trips on the A.T. received \$15,000.



Nine other grants awarded to GATC will provide training and equipment for trail maintenance, outreach programs to educate hikers, first aid training for trail workers and materials for trail building.

The A.T. Communities of Rabun County / Clayton and Union County / Blairsville were awarded more than \$10,000 for improvements at an A.T. trailhead at Dicks Creek and for an information kiosk. The Len Foote Hike Inn also received a grant for place-based service learning.

The criteria for the grant awards are for initiatives that enhance, conserve, protect and or maintain portions of the Appalachian Trail located within Georgia.

Large dead tree removed by sawyers



Early in January while scouting for a trail maintenance work trip, Georgia Appalachian Trail Club sawyer Doug Gallant was alerted by a thru-hiker about a large dead tree that had recently fallen across the Appalachian Trail above Horse Gap. Doug happened to have all his sawyer equipment and helpers on hand so they climbed up the trail and made quick work of removing a section to clear the trail. The tree was about 25 inches in diameter.

GATC Contributes to a Foodbank Serving the Area Devastated by Helene

Tropical Storm Helene caused enormous destruction to western North Carolina and beyond and Georgia Appalachian Trail Club members responded to the tragedy last fall with a food drive to help people struggling to rebuild their lives.

GATC members contributed a total of \$2,315 to the Manna Foodbank near Asheville, a nonprofit organization that serves 14 counties and 220 partner agencies in western North Carolina. In addition to the monetary donations, GATC members brought 760 pounds of food and other household products to the December Holiday Party. Board members John Turner and Tom Lamb then delivered the food to the Manna warehouse.

Manna's chief development officer, Mary Nesbitt, said GATC's monetary donations would provide at least 9,000 meals to people in the area. Many of them lost their homes when Helene struck the area with devastating rains and wind Sept. 27.

The Manna Foodbank facility also suffered tremendous damage from the storm. Nesbitt said the Manna warehouse was flooded and the organization lost all of its food supplies and equipment. The building was considered a total loss. However, she said, the organization was able to relocate to an 84,000 square foot warehouse a few days after the storm and volunteers quickly helped Manna get back in business.



John Turner, Mary Nesbitt, Manna's Chief Development Officer and Tom Lamb



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