

# *The Georgia Mountaineer Quarterly*

*A Publication of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club*

Inside

Memorable Moments and  
Unexpected Trials on  
the Georgia Beyond 4K

Georgia A.T. History Series:  
The Greear Cabin

The View from Preacher's Rock taken during a GATC hike.  
Join a GATC hike to discover more stunning views of the North Georgia mountains.  
Photo courtesy of Erin Bell

Fall 2025



### 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.

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club is affiliated with  
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# A View From the Appalachian Trail

GATC President Lynne Beeson

### Fall Splendors

Two years ago, I wrote the following: "We are now in the midst of what is proving to be a magnificent season, as we bid farewell to summer and embrace the months when the Appalachian mountains dress themselves, in the words of Dolly Parton, in a 'coat of many colors'. Fall brings small town festivals, pumpkin patches, corn mazes and fairs. It also brings SOBOs (Southbound thru-hikers), who started their long trek on the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) at Mount Katahdin in Maine and are now making their way through Georgia to the finish at Springer Mountain. These hardy hikers take on the hardest part of the trail first, and they finish with the colors of Fall surrounding them. This time of year usually finds the GATC continuing with ongoing trail maintenance activities from third Saturday work trips to special rock crew work, with our maintainers continuing to make sure that their section of the trail, whether a half mile, a mile, or a shelter or a privy, is maintained to standards.

However, as I write this, we find ourselves in a "stop volunteer work" situation on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CON-F) due to the current lapse in funding and the government shutdown. Under our Volunteer Service Agreement with the CON-F, the GATC provides maintenance and other services on the A.T. and within the Chattahoochee National Forest. This is under the overall cooperative management program of the A.T., or the "three-legged stool" as it is often referred to in a management sense. There are three legs to the stool: the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), the land manager (in this case, the CON-F) and the trail maintaining clubs (in our case, the GATC, one of 30 A.T. trail maintaining clubs). GATC is fortunate that we only work with one land manager, the CON-F. The CON-F is federal land. With the government shutdown now underway, our members are unable to provide trail maintenance or conduct trail ambassador patrols until authorization to resume is issued.

What does this mean? The A.T. remains open; however, if one is hiking, it is important to take a few extra precautionary steps and to be aware of the current environment. Now is the time to really sharpen one's Leave No Trace (LNT) awareness and practice those principles. For example:

- Take extra care in planning your hike to ensure your safety and comfort. Emergency response may take longer without the aid of federal staff. (**Plan Ahead and Prepare**)
- Pack out trash. Leave the Trail and its facilities as clean or cleaner than you find them. (**Dispose of waste properly**)
- Be sure to check the weather and carry way-finding devices (map/compass, GPS). Be familiar with their use to ensure a safe hike. (**Plan Ahead and Prepare**)

Fall is one of the most popular and heavily used times for hiking the A.T., especially on our Georgia section as many take advantage of Fall breaks from school and the Federal holiday to plan for short weekend or section hikes to enjoy

the cooler weather, no humidity, less bugs and the many other positive benefits of Fall hiking. Please help us preserve our public lands for all to enjoy!

Our trail work normally does not "fall off" during the Fall; it continues with some of the best weather conditions and mountain surroundings that work to not only restore the trail but restore one's soul. However, as we are currently in a "fall off" time period, it doesn't mean that the GATC is not busy and engaged in many other activities. There's often talk about the trail changing people; the same applies to being a member of the GATC, as one finds new friends and adventures. There are many hikes planned this Fall, from the continuation of the Georgia A.T. series, the Benton MacKaye Trail in GA series; the in-city weekend and weekday hikes, to the rugged GA 4000 Peak Challenge hikes. Take a Hike with the GATC and enjoy the Fall!

There have been discussions the last few years about the A.T. experience and what that entails and how it needs to be protected for the future generations. Protecting the A.T. experience is important work and involves everyone in the cooperative management framework of the A.T. However, we also must talk about the trail club experience, the actual work boots on the ground, those volunteers who have a deep love and commitment to wilderness areas and the endless footpath known as the A.T. Trail Clubs, such as the GATC, are continually facing

### Plan Ahead and Prepare!

the challenges of recruiting new members, engaging members, the "aging out" of current members and finding ways to be a vibrant volunteer organization. Here in Georgia, the GATC serves as the trail's voice and

through our maintenance and protection activities, we are ensuring that the A.T. experience continues. We also need to be vigilant that the GATC voice does not become a whisper, recognizing there is always work to be done in a volunteer organization.

Did you know that this past year the GATC has provided almost 24,000 volunteer hours at a value of close to \$835,000? These are volunteers who are doing this work because they love the A.T. and they love sharing the trail with everyone. Trail club volunteers are the real "trail magic" providers for the A.T.

Other GATC "trail magic" moments this Fall include the annual Trail Skills Workshop, which will be held at Vogel State Park in their new Visitor Center, Nov 1-2. The biennial GATC Women's Trail Summit follows on Nov 21-23 at Amicalola Falls State Park Lodge. GATC will have our annual Holiday Party in December and there are hikes scheduled now through the end of the year. We welcome new members to join in all of these activities and know that there's a place for everyone in our club.

I wrote the following two years ago: "So while you're out admiring the Fall colors and perhaps hiking the Georgia section of the A.T., think about how now may be the time to not 'fall off the beaten path' but join us to help maintain this priceless path!" These words still hold true today.



## A Hiker's Perspective

### Editor Nancy LaChance

I joined the GATC four years ago because, as an avid hiker who has loved hiking the Georgia sections of the A.T., I felt as if I needed to give a bit back to the trail I had come to love. When the GATC removed what I had always seen as “onerous” participation requirements, I signed up-- with no intention of getting involved in the volunteering part at all. I would keep using the trail for my hiking pleasure (guilt-free since I was now a paying member), joined by my hiking buddy, Frodo the Wonder Dog, but I would not get involved. Thank you very much.

What has happened in those four years is a slow, evolving relationship with the Club that has opened my eyes to the value of the relationships formed when one moves beyond monetary contributions and into engagement. Over the past few months, this has become increasingly powerful as I have dipped my toes into various aspects of the Club's work.

Let me begin with a GATC hike experience. The GATC offers a number of hikes every month, and when one came up that I thought might work for me, I signed up. The hike was advertised as a “shuttle” hike, so I showed up at the designated starting point on a lovely not-too-hot Saturday morning in late Summer. It took a while for the group to form, and I found myself engaging in discussions of hiking experience and GATC experience as we waited for everyone to gather. The range of backgrounds was wide, and I immediately felt welcome and connected to the group.

When the hike leader arrived, we arranged ourselves into two cars for the somewhat terrifying ride to the real hike starting point, traversing a moon-surface forest service road that required sturdy all-terrain vehicle capabilities. Once that was navigated, the group started, and I learned the meaning of “no one left behind.” The hike leader was truly committed to ensuring that we stay together as a group – and to rotating hike leadership between each of the hikers so we all got a taste of leading the way. In this way, the lineup shifted throughout the hike, so everyone got a chance to “hike with” everyone, which was a refreshing opportunity to hear from different people about their experience – as hikers and as GATC members, in most cases.

I spent a good amount of time with one of my co-hikers who was able to help me understand what it means to maintain

the trail. He pointed out trail maintenance “evidence” along the way, and at one point he and the hike leader actually pulled out a saw from one of their packs and cleared a minor obstruction in the trail, a tree that had fallen and needed to be removed. I could see a visible pride in these guys as they talked about and pointed to issues and concerns that would be sent out to the trail maintainers for the section we were hiking. You have to feel a bit awed by this kind of delight and dedication to the trail.

We stopped for lunch and continued the conversations and story-telling over lunch and then as we resumed the hike. Then as we resumed the hike, one woman entertained us with tales of a harrowing team competition in Alaska that she had participated in with another team member who was not up to the athletic abilities of the rest of the team. There was a lot of laughter at the crazy antics – and gasps at the extreme challenges the team faced. Another man told stories of his work experience as a jet engineer, not exactly a reassuring way to face my next air travel experience but which resonated with my most recent trip to Austria and the challenges of air travel these days. Another woman talked about her experience on the Camino, which made my mouth water for the lovely tortillas one enjoys sitting in the sun in Spain after a long day of walking to Santiago de Compostella. The stories and sharing continued throughout the day, so I was surprised when we reached the end of the trail (where we had initially parked our cars), everyone arriving back together and everyone feeling very much as if we were old friends who would hike together when we could. These

I was awed by the  
passion, commitment  
and delight . .

were people who I could connect with and who held fascinating reservoirs of fun tales and information. I had both learned and enjoyed the hike. I was sold on the GATC hike experience – not really for the hiking but for the people.

My next step into volunteering was to attend a workshop on identifying “hazard trees” – trees that are damaged, weak, dying, dead or structurally defective that pose a hazard to humans because of their proximity to places where people gather. The workshop was well-taught and well-explained, but what made the experience a stand-out to me was being in the company of people with a passion for trail maintenance. The experience of hearing a dedicated group of trail maintainers and sawyers discussing a “hazard tree” and what should be done with it was for me, a person whose experience is mainly hiking the trails, highly educational. The group discussed each factor with passion and debated over the relative tree damage, the best strategy to mitigate risk and/or to remove a tree that is so risky it needs to be removed or the campsite closed to human use, and even who should remove the tree—Forest Service? Sawyers? Both? Hazard trees are nuanced and assessments have an inevitable degree of subjectivity to them, so we benefited from multiple perspectives and observations by the group as a whole. I was, again, awed by the passion and commitment and delight these people take in their work. I immediately signed up for the November 1-3 Trail Skills Workshop, having found a real joy in being around and learning from trail maintainers.

These two experiences have had a real impact on my understanding of what the GATC is and what it does and how delightful it is to be a bigger part of all that they do. I can only say that I was a supporter... but now I am a true believer in the magic that is the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club.

# Memorable Moments and Unexpected Trials: Completing the “Georgia Beyond 4K” (GB4K) Challenge

Reported by Darrell Skogman

Still round the corner there may wait  
A new road or a secret gate  
And though I oft have passed them by  
A day will come at last when I  
Shall take the hidden paths that run  
West of the Moon, East of the Sun.  
—J. R. R. Tolkien

## The Challenge Begins

“You’d be stupid to do it!”

My wife, Joni, and I had started driving our van up the wilderness road toward the high Cohutta on our way to the Three Forks Trailhead. It was Sunday morning, April 6 before 6 a.m. and a storm front was beginning that would bring high winds, rain, and hail to Gilmer County and its neighbors. The worst of it was still several hours away when we pulled up alongside the pickup truck that was headed downhill. The old man had flagged us down from his open window and I was now almost face-to-face with him as we sat in our driver’s seats with only the rain and dark between us. He was near-on incredulous that we would be driving to the high ridge on a morning like this. After letting him say his piece, Joni and I continued up the road for a bit debating on whether I should carry on with the plan, or postpone a day.

Joni and I did turn the van around after the old man’s tirade. The next morning, Monday, April 7, our friends Doug and Clare took me to the Three Forks trailhead near the summit of Cowpen Mountain. I hit the trail just before 6:30 a.m. under the cover of darkness and fog. The summit of Cowpen is less than a mile from the trailhead. I whacked up to the trailless summit and found a small sign cut from sheet metal with “COWPEN MTN” scratched into it. A pint mason jar with a summit register inside lay next to it. I took a picture of my foot next to the jar and the sign. The time was 6:49 a.m. on April 7, 2025. The challenge had begun.

## The GB4K Takes Shape

I had first thought of this adventure in 2017 while reading about the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club’s Georgia 4000 Challenge (GA4K). The GA4K Challenge is straightforward, if not easy. A hiker can tackle its peaks, all of which can be accessed on day trips, at their own pace and following their own routes. In 2017, the list of completers contained only a half-dozen names and a little information about each one: Name, First Peak, Last Peak, etc. Then, out to the far right, a column titled “Days to Finish.” That column, with a series of four-digit numbers for each hiker’s completion time, is what got my mind turning. Would it be possible to complete this Challenge in under ten days, with a single-digit entry for “Days to Complete?”

Shortly after I began thinking that the GA4K might be speed-hiked, I discovered the website *fastestknowntime.com* with an entry made by Charles Raffensperger in 2015. He wrote “Modeled after the South Beyond 6000 (SB6K) I’m planning a similar challenge in Georgia to climb all 4000 or higher peaks in one continuous footpath.” His blog described his attempt at a “GAB4K” and some of the unexpected troubles he encountered. I realized after reading his blog that, if I was going to be successful in attempting to hike the Georgia 4K Challenge in under ten days, I’d have to be very familiar with the peaks and the route between them before I started. It wasn’t until the late months of 2023 that I began to plot a route to connect the peaks using pavement, gravel, trail, and bushwhacking. I spent many weekends in 2024 and early 2025 walking parts of the route,

visiting some of the more difficult peaks, revising my route, and training physically for the attempt.

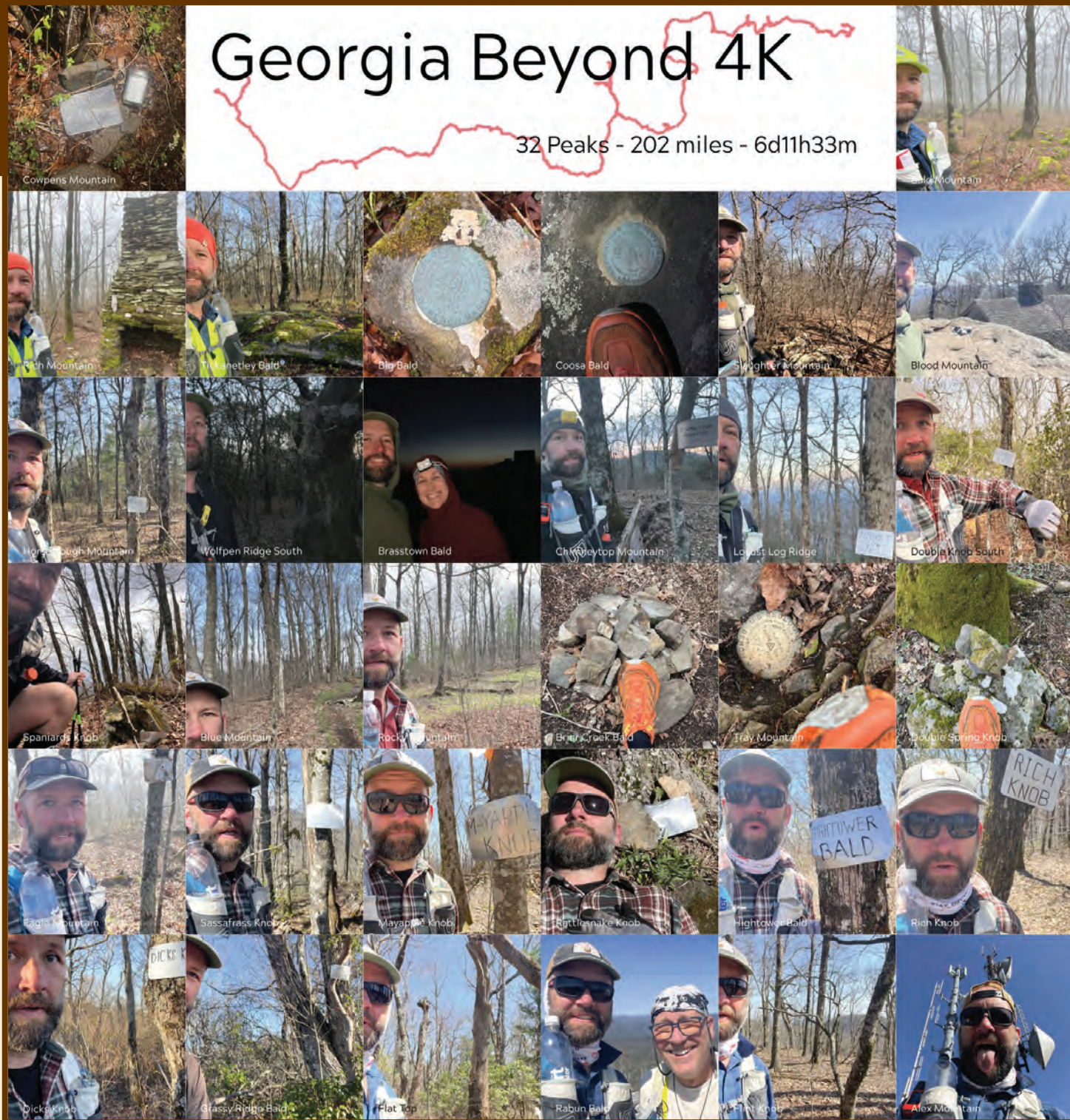
The Georgia 4000 is a group of 32 peaks in the state that are 4000 feet or higher with 120 feet or more of clean prominence. They stretch from the Cohutta Wilderness northwest of Ellijay to Rabun Bald and its lesser peaks east of Dillard. Nineteen of the peaks have no trail to their summit and eleven of those require extended or difficult bushwhacks involving off-trail navigation. Since there is no single trail that connects all these peaks, the first task to undertake while planning for this challenge was to find a walkable route that would connect all of these.

The fact that a 200-mile walkable route across north Georgia still exists is a satisfying reality. The Chattahoochee National Forest paints a wide swath across the mountainous north of the state from Dalton to the eastern border with South Carolina. It is not an unbroken forest and so the challenge cannot rely on forest trail alone. The two places where roadwalks are all but inevitable are near Ellijay where private lands and GA515 cut the Cohutta wilderness off from the bulk of the National Forest and also in the east near Dillard, where US441 does the same to the Rabun Bald group. With the exception of those two road walks, the rest of the path could be done on forest service roads and trails. I also elected to tackle some off-trail bushwhacking (in addition to that necessary to attain many of the summits) in order to shorten the length of the route.

The largest stretch of this optional bushwhacking was across Rich Mountain Wilderness. With the help of CalTopo, LiDAR data, and good-old-fashioned scouting, I was able to find an abandoned road connecting the west side of the wilderness to the gravel road near the summits of the group of peaks in this area. I would use that road to gain the high peaks and then leave the wilderness on a trailless ridge to the east with my sights set on old Aska and ultimately Skeenah Gap.

For off-trail navigation, I used CalTopo’s mobile app exclusively. It is an excellent tool in the backcountry and offers several different layers that can lay underneath the planned route. All this data is downloadable and stays synced with GPS when in the wilderness without cellular service. In addition to my mobile phone, I wore a Garmin Forerunner 935 watch to keep track of my pace, time, mileage, and elevation. The watch includes a compass, altimeter, and GPS location useful for navigation. Lastly, I carried a Garmin InReach Mini Satellite communicator for backcountry text messaging and position verification. To make sure all these devices had the power to get me through unexpected time away from my crew chief, I carried two Nitecore 10K mAh power banks with the necessary charging cables.

I left map and compass behind. Although I am proficient at map and compass orienteering and route-finding in the backcountry and have used them for off-trail navigation for decades, the affordances of modern GPS software and the reliability of the hardware make a map and compass nearly obsolete. For those old-timers wagging their heads at my perceived recklessness, I made three other decisions in my planning to ensure that I was prepared for emergency navigation. First and most importantly, I scouted more than three quarters of the route on foot or in my car before beginning the challenge on April 7. I had already visited 26 of the 32 peaks. I was very familiar with where the route came from and where it was going. Secondly, I planned to attempt the challenge in early April before the trees began their spring bloom. This ensured that I would be able to see deep into the forest as well as across valleys to other peaks and landmarks around me. Lastly, I spent untold hours studying maps in 2D and 3D and familiarizing myself with the roads, trails, and drainages that would be the navigational “handrails” and “backstops” to my route. In short, I became an expert on the route and the terrain surrounding it. Based on all these considerations, I could not envision a scenario in which I would regret not having a paper map and compass with me in the woods.



## Completing the Challenge

The trip itself, not surprisingly, provided its fair share of memorable moments and unexpected trials. The mileage I covered in the first three days was almost exactly what I had planned. Despite the first day being almost exclusively on roads, they were for the most part lonely country roads that saw very little traffic. I was able to make it 37 miles to the Rich Mountain approach road. The sun rose on Day 2 after I had already gained the high road near Rich Mountain's summit. I ended Day 2 after dark having summited Coosa Bald and then spent a dreamy night at Vogel State Park. Day 3 saw a late start which ended up costing mileage in the last part of the day. I was met by Joni and my friend Bill in Neel Gap with hot food and sweet tea. The six mile ridgewalk to Tesnatee Gap was a highlight of the day. I finished Day 3 with a long climb up to the Brasstown group via the Jacks Knob Trail.

I had aspirations of knocking out the Arkaquah Ridge peaks that evening after dark but arrived at the parking lot in need of a long nap. Joni and I opted for Brasstown Bald itself and made it to the summit as the darkness was settling in. After following the paved path back to the minivan, we converted it into "camper" mode and went to sleep in an empty parking lot. We were awakened at 11:30 p.m. by voices nearby. A group of four had pulled up just three or four spaces away and gotten out their telescope. In this huge parking lot, they had selected a spot within 30 feet of our van. We turned on the white noise app on the phone and went back to sleep. They left about 1:00 a.m.

The next morning I was feeling pretty low-energy. I had best-case aspirations of making it 40 miles to the Swallow Creek ford in Hiawassee. I knew 40 miles was extremely optimistic but I'd been surprising myself every day with my mileages and recovery. Joni

# Memorable Moments and Unexpected Trials:

Continued from page 5

had suggested I try for Swallow Creek while we were eating dinner the night before. I said "I can't do 40 miles!" She answered, "Why not?" I didn't have a good why-not. So I knocked out the Arkaquah Ridge as the sun rose, then turned to tackle Double Knob South.

Double Knob South (DKS) is a fiendish summit. Perhaps it seems less diabolical from the Young Harris approach. From the Brasstown approach, one must walk the Wagon Train Trail for more than two-and-a-half miles downhill as 900 vertical feet click off the altimeter. Then, finding a break in the high rock wall that is the right-hand side of the trail, the hiker begins fighting up an absurdly steep hill through healthy rhododendron. The summit is three-quarters of a mile from and 400 feet above the spot where the bushwhack began. Then the unfortunate soul must return to the Brasstown parking lot (though, while sitting on the summit of DKS, this step seems optional). I arrived back at the van way behind schedule with an average daily pace creeping up on 30-minute miles after less than 12 miles covered. I was bushed. Another pass at the Jacks Knob trail (southbound this time!) and a bushwhack up and back down Spaniards Knob had me throwing in the towel for the day. I called for an early rescue at Unicoi Gap. I had barely cracked 20 miles for the day. I headed back home for a night's sleep in my own bed. Hard rain and light hail moved through the mountains that night. I was glad I would not be sleeping in a tent!

My exit at Unicoi Gap at the end of Day 4 put me early on Day 5 at the starting line for a series of climbs on the Georgia A.T. that my family snidely refers to as "The Georgia Triple Frown." Rocky Mountain, Tray Mountain, and Kelly Knob all line up on the profile map as unhappy, jagged, 4000-foot frowns one after another. It's perhaps the low gaps before each of them (Unicoi, Indian Grave, and Addis) that make the peaks seem all the more daunting. Briar Creek Bald was a fourth 4Ker on my list for the day. The rain and hail from the night before had practically cleared the trail of northbound thru-hikers. I spent most of the day on an empty trail cruising north towards Moreland Gap and my A.T. exit into the Swallow Creek drainage.

My only real misadventure came after dark on Day 6. I had started the day at the western end of remote High Cove Ridge just northeast of Hiawassee. After bagging the six peaks on the ridge and following the A.T. south to Charles Creek Road, I met Joni at the Tallulah River for an early dinner and a resupply. I would have liked to knock out another five to seven miles before calling it a day, but the route left the Tallulah River and headed into another pretty remote part of the state. I would have to tackle at least 13 more miles if I left the river. Staying at the river for the evening wasn't an option since it would leave me too many miles on Day 7. So I headed into the woods and up Tate Branch to Dicks Knob, which I bagged just before the sun started setting. I made my way down the eastern side of the ridge on disused 4WD roads to the Coleman River where my plan went awry.

The last peak of the day was to be Grassy Ridge. Maps I had studied showed a road/trail running from very near the eastern bank of the Coleman River to Patterson Gap. This trail, along with a wet bushwhack at the beginning and a steep bushwhack to the summit at the end, would get me across the peak and on to "real" trail into Patterson Gap where I could meet Joni and call it a day. I had scouted the upper bushwhack on an earlier trip to Grassy Ridge and was certain that it would go. The lower bushwhack across the Coleman River was forgotten and went un-scouted. I didn't even remember it was there until I came upon it in the dark, an hour after sundown on Day 6. I was tired when I stepped up to the western bank of the Coleman River and surveyed it with the beam of my headlamp. It wasn't a wide flow but it was brisk and deep. The eastern bank, 10 yards away, was thick with mountain laurel. I walked up and down the bank for 50 yards in both directions searching for a good place to cross. There was no "good" place, only the best among lots of bad options. I didn't mind the dark, or the necessary ford, or the rhododendron—I had been through worse on Double Knob South. I didn't mind the tiredness in my body. But the combination of all

these things made the situation pretty difficult. To top it all off, I was on 4WD roads that were inaccessible to Joni in the minivan. It seemed like I was in a tight spot.

Raffensperger had written about a similar misadventure on his 2015 attempt. He was on the western approach to the Rich Mountain group with his wife (and crew chief!) when they lost their way. He had come to a dead end in the road as night fell and found that the only alternative would be to backtrack and add another tough 12-15 miles to his route.

There in the dark next to the Coleman River, I remembered Charles's story and realized I was in a pretty similar situation. My route had found an unexpected dead end. I, too, had a way to walk out of my situation just as Charles had walked out of his. It wasn't going to be a short walk, and it certainly wasn't the plan, but it had to be done. So after 27 tough miles and at 9:15 p.m., I began the six mile roadwalk to Patterson Gap. It turned out to be a very pleasant walk alone under the almost-full moon. I met Joni in the minivan about a mile east of the gap where the road had become too rough for her to continue. I hit the pillow hard at the Dillard House after 11:30.

The last day of a multi-day trip like this is always mentally challenging. The body knows there is hot food, a soft bed, and a long rest ahead but the mind is aware of the miles between the "now" and the finish. The last day—Day 7—of this adventure was no different. My short backtrack up to Grassy Ridge followed by a long, hot, sunny roadwalk into Dillard started to drain me early. Darnell Creek road had just been reconditioned by the USFS to fight the Big Ridge fire that had been burning in the area just the week before. It was the pleasant road in shade leading to the high ridge between Flat Top and Rabun Bald that changed the day for me. The Bartram Trail connects these two summits and the evidence of firefighting attacks and counterattacks were evident in the charred understory of the forest. I was surprised on Rabun Bald by Charles Raffensperger, who had come from his home in North Carolina to see me finish the challenge he had proposed 10 years earlier. Joni met the two of us coming off Flint Knob and we all walked the road to the summit of Alex Mountain. Six days, 11 hours, and 33 minutes after leaving Cowpen Mountain, I stood on that last summit, having successfully completed the Georgia Beyond 4000 challenge.

Was I stupid to do it? Before answering, go check out some of the peaks yourself. Spend some time on the woods roads and trails. Make a springtime visit to the four water sources on the Duncan Ridge Trail. Climb into the early-morning rime ice on Eagle Peak or Coosa Bald. Did you know there is a spring carpet of trillium and bloodroot in Deep Gap? You can count 11 of the 4K peaks from the shoulder of Rattlesnake Knob. The roadwork into old Aska from Rich Mountain Wilderness rivals any trail walk in the mountains. Pay a visit to the giant shell of a tree on the north side of Horsetrough Mountain. Then decide for yourself.

*"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page."*  
—St. Augustine

Get out there and start reading the book.

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The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club hosts a series of Georgia 4000 hikes each year. Join the club and experience the 4000-foot peaks for yourself with like-minded hikers. Maybe your name will one day be added to the list of those who have completed the Georgia 4K Challenge. Find out more about the GA4K at <https://georgia-atclub.org/for-hikers/georgia-4000/>

Check out a map of the route with photos and commentary at <https://caltopo.com/m/EDE809U>.

# Georgia Appalachian Trail Club

## History Series: The Greear Lodge

Reported by Ron Hamlin

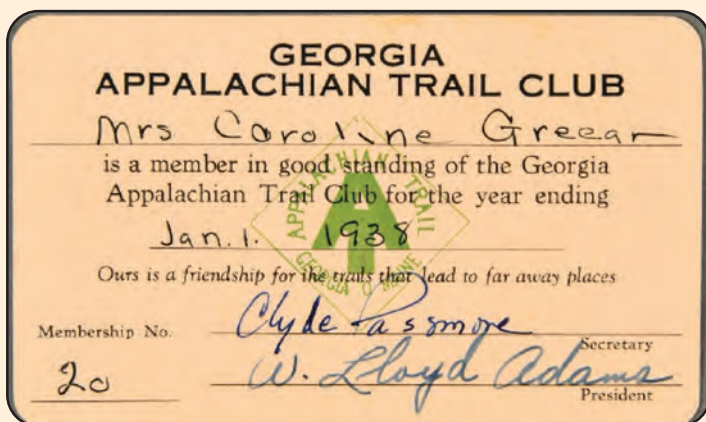
The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club was organized at a meeting that took place in November 1930 in Dahlonega at Zimmer's Mountain Lodge. The lodge once stood two blocks north of the Courthouse Square and was the site of other club meetings and events until the building burned down in 1939.

But there is another building that still stands that once played a central role in the club's activities. It's tucked away on a back street in Helen, Georgia. The home, which was built in 1913 by H.H. Dean, was sold to the Smethport Extract Company which used it for their offices for several years. The company had a large plant that once stood just across the Chattahoochee River from the center of Helen and this house was adjacent to it, so it was convenient to the plant. The company extracted tannins from the chestnut trees that once dominated the mountain forests in the area. Tannins are an important product used for dyes, making leather products and in the beverage industry. By 1930, the chestnut trees in the surrounding hills were decimated by the blight that has reduced the tree from its former forest dominance. The building was bought by John Greear and his wife Caroline who had recently moved into the area.

Around the same time, Eddie Stone and Charlie Elliott were trying to get the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club organized to maintain the



Caroline Cox Greear



trail they had scoped out and which passes along the ridgetop above and through Unicoi Gap nearby Helen. Caroline Greear attended the meeting that took place at Zimmer's in 1930 and became one of the original members of the club; number 20 as her membership card indicates.

John and Caroline converted the house they purchased into the Greear Lodge, which became a hub for GATC member activities through



1931 Annual Meeting at the Greear Lodge

the 1930's and into the early 1940's. When hikes were planned in the Helen area, Caroline would frequently offer free rooms and a discount on meals to fellow club members. The Greear Lodge became a frequent gathering and meeting space for club members where Caroline would also offer coffee, snacks and meals to GATC hikers on their way to the trail or on finishing up their day. While John's participation in club activities was limited, Caroline remained active with the club into the early 1950's.

The house has been in the Greear family for three generations. The lodge atmosphere has been maintained by each of those generations and still reflects the hospitality and warmth that Caroline once provided club members. David Greear, the grandson of John and Caroline, lives there today with his wife and once served as Helen's mayor. He is a professional photographer and respected historian of the town and surrounding area.

# Women's Trail Summit



November 21-23, 2025 ♦ Amicalola Falls State Park  
Presented by Georgia Appalachian Trail Club



## OVERVIEW

### PRE-SUMMIT LEN FOOTE HIKE INN TRIP\* (OPTIONAL)

Nov. 20 • Thursday

*\*Booking required by calling Hike Inn Reservations*

### SOCIAL HOUR

Nov. 21 • Friday, 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

*AFSP Lodge Conference Center*

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER: HEATHER ANDERSON

Nov. 22 • Saturday, 9:00 AM

*AFSP Lodge Conference Center*

### EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS

Nov. 22 • Saturday, 10:30 AM, 1:30 PM, 3:15 PM

*AFSP Lodge Conference Center*

### LONGER WORKSHOPS

Nov. 23 • Sunday, 8:40 AM

*AFSP Lodge Conference Center and  
The Visitor Center Arch Room*

### CLOSING SESSION AND DOOR PRIZES

Nov. 23 • Sunday, 11:00 AM



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**Heather  
'Anish'  
Anderson**

SATURDAY 9:00 AM

## REGISTRATION TIMES

**Nov. 21** • Friday, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

**Nov. 22** • Saturday, 7:30 AM - 8:30 AM

## MEALS

### Continental Breakfast

Saturday & Sunday, 7:45 AM - 8:45 AM

### Lunch is Provided

Saturday, 11:45 am - 1:00 pm

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT <https://georgia-atclub.org/about/womens-trail-summit/>