

Early Trail Improvements

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In June 1931, fresh from that year's Appalachian Trail Conference in Gatlinburg, Eddie Stone, president of the GATC, got to work on a plan to improve the Appalachian Trail and its facilities. While other club members lingered on in Tennessee to hike with members of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Hall returned to Georgia to begin assigning members pieces of the trail to maintain. In those days, maintainers were assigned sections about ten miles long. Here in Georgia these days, most maintainers are assigned sections of about one mile in length – and they generally have co-maintainers.

Stone had overseen the construction of the first shelter on the Trail in Georgia. It was located along Amicalola Creek not too far distant from the top of the falls. It had been built by a local, Mr. Head and his sons for \$57, about \$1,100 in today's money. The money was donated by Sam Tate of Jasper and the owner of the marble quarry near there.

Instructions to the handful of maintainers in those days included:

- “1. Placing additional markers and replacing markers as needed. (Paint blazes were not used in the early years. Metal trail markers were the custom.)
2. Placing of trail signs and replacing trail signs as needed.
3. Maintenance of trail, keeping tread clear of fallen logs, brush, etc.; and gradually improving treadway of trail by removing rocks and in some places actually grading of the trail.
4. Locating sources of drinking water and properly marking of same.
5. Complete survey of trail, including securing accurate measurement of your section, together with facts and full notes of to be later used in compiling an accurate detailed trail guide.
6. Undertaking the construction of some form of overnight shelter where this is needed and is possible to work out.
7. Miscellaneous. Improvement of the trail in any way that you may be able to work out. This will give you a chance to devise some unique features for your section.”

In October, 1931, in a report to the Forest Service, Stone listed the following club accomplishments:

- “1. Number of trail markers posted - 400
2. Number of trail signs posted - 34

3. Number of hikes held - 10
4. Points visited - 10
5. Number of persons making hikes – 220
6. Condition of Trail - ____
 - A. Miles marked - ____
 - B. Miles needing markers – 25
 - C. Number of wooden signs needed: 25
7. Number of shelters constructed to date - 1
8. Number of points on or near trail where shelter can be secured overnight - 5
9. Points where provisions can be secured - 2
10. Additional number of overnight camps needed – 4”

It wasn't until the trail was considered complete in 1937, when Myron Avery, the ambitious chair of the ATC overseeing the assembly of the A.T., started to promote the building of shelters. So Eddie Stone and the GATC were well ahead of most of the other clubs taking on this project.

(Source: Friendships of the Trail: The History of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, 1930-1980)