

## TRAILS FOREVER.... THROUGH THE EYES OF A VOLUNTEER

By Jay & Sandra Aldrich (VIP's Great Smoky Mountain National Park; Adopt-A-Trail; Trails Forever)



What would a day be like working as a Trails Forever volunteer for the Great Smoky Mountain National Park? Well, workday begins between 7:30 AM to 8:00 AM when the volunteers meet Great Smoky Mountains Staff at the designated trailhead within the Park. Each volunteer is briefed on all the safety related issues about the various tools that will be used for the trail project, including Pulaski's, shovels, pick axes, clippers, loppers,

hand saws, fire racks, pry bars, rock chippers, and McLeods. Each volunteer needs to carry one or more of these tools to and from the trail worksite that has been designated a Trails Forever Project. Volunteers are also briefed on what the goal for the day might be and the time frame that we intend to do the restoration work within.

Oh yes, the day goes on rain or shine. Each volunteer picks up his or her tools and the crew heads out on the trail. The hike to the worksite could be anywhere from a few feet to a few miles onto the trail before beginning. First order of business is to separate into teams and be instructed about the work needed to complete the specific project. Volunteers have worked on Trails Forever projects through the Park on anything from improving drainage, to building structures, and rehabilitating areas that hikers have impacted.

Let me describe some of the great work that was accomplished in this endeavor. The Forney Ridge Trail was a big focus this past summer and there were many different kinds of projects completed on the trail. Wooden walkways had to be installed so that hikers wouldn't be walking on muddy trails and creating wide areas of impact. Large rocks had to be moved so that steps could be constructed making it easier to maneuver on the trail. Large steps with wooden supporting sides were put in place to make walking easier and prevent further erosion. These wooden structures were then filled in with dirt and large rocks. Later in the process, it was discovered that in some of these structures the rocks were too big and had to be removed, crushed, and replaced to make it easier for hikers to walk on. The larger rocks were placed on the sides of the wooden logs, and each of the volunteers began to collect smaller rocks and chip away at those rocks that could be made into smaller units. Then McLeods were used to pound the rocks into the ground as if to make them appear they have been there for years. One other time, we began to grade the land around the wooden walkway so that water would drain better and not let it stand on the trail making the area muddy.

Rainbow Falls Trail, adopted by Sandra and Jay Aldrich, through the Park Adopt-A-Trail Program is one of the five trails that lead to Mt. LeConte. This is a 6.7 mile trail that has numerous issues from a trail maintenance perspective. Trails Forever embraced this trail this

past summer and 25 individuals embarked to make improvements. Over the years, hikers have made some short cuts near the switchbacks so that they could short circuit the actual trail. This endangers the natural woods, harms the trees that are trying to come back in the forest, and creates serious erosion issues. Staff from the NPS, worked together with dedicated volunteers to rehabilitate these areas and improve the drainage on the trail. In order to improve the switchbacks and rehabilitate the shortcuts, each participant had to collect leaves, sticks, and fallen logs to restore the trail to its original appearance as if no one had ever created these shortcuts. The leaves are then scattered on the bare earth, then fallen branches are placed upon the leaves, and finally larger fallen trees and limbs are strategically placed so the area would no longer draw the attention of the hikers. Natural surroundings were successfully restored. Many of the trails' waterbars were cleaned and improved by using picks, and McLeods to deepen and widen the ditches so that water would naturally flow off the trail and prevent future trail issues.

How about the Smokemont Loop Trail where each of us carried Locust logs up the steep embankment of the trail to be placed into the ground so that we could construct new water bars to improve the drainage? Let me tell you, this is real work trying to strip the bark from the logs using a two handled bark stripper, before they could be carried by two people up the trail! Why do we remove the bark? So that the log will last longer in the ground since bark is known to trap moisture and cause logs to rot. Everyone chips in from students who come to volunteer, to women, and men.

The day comes to a close sometime between 3:00 PM and 4:30 PM. Each of the volunteers tired and dirty, from a day working on a trail that is now better than when we arrived early in the morning. Each of us says "no matter how long we have worked, tired, or weary we may be, to see the finished product makes it all worth the effort". One thing that can be said: this trail is now more beautiful than when we arrived.

Why then do we love the Trails Forever Program funded by the Friends of the Smokies? What better way is there to give back to the National Park and know that for years to come we have had a hand in the preservation of a section of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. What better way can you see change before your eyes and know that future visitors to these areas will find the satisfaction in knowing that the trails they walk on today will be there for their children and their children's children. This is a process that must continue and never end. Yes, this is a National Park, and we volunteers take this Park to be our cherished land. Without all the dedicated Trails Volunteers, who knows what our trails might look like years from now. Since our past volunteers took such good care, we must take such good care now and forever.



# From the Friends

by Rev. Dr. Daniel P. Matthews

It's sure been a great couple of years in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. 2009 saw the celebration of the 75th anniversary, and groundbreaking on the first REAL visitors center on the North Carolina side of the Smokies.

Last year, our Park garnered more federal stimulus dollars to take care of important infrastructure needs than any other national Park service unit! Superintendent Dale Ditmanson's team demonstrated that they had the right people in place, and the right projects lined up in order to complete nearly \$80 million of crucial work and take advantage of those available funds.

While that shovel work was underway, history was being made in a quiet little valley outside of Cherokee, or just past Smokemont, depending on which way you're traveling on US 441. The Great Smoky Mountains Association was building the NEW Oconaluftee Visitors Center.

Formerly there was a small structure there, serving 300,000 people a year through educational exhibits, interpretive and informational staff and volunteers, and even a bookstore. Mind you, they were doing all of this excellent work in a space not much larger than many folks' living rooms. The original building was a magistrate's office years ago, as well as a ranger's home. This historic stone structure remains for office and meeting space alongside the magnificent new facility.

I became chair of Friends of the Smokies on January 1st of this year. Justice Gary Wade, Friends' first board chair, tells me that at the initial meeting of the founding board members, the Park presented a "needs list". On it was a new Oconaluftee Visitors Center. That was 1993. At a price of \$2 million it was a little out of the price range for Friends' first year!

We exist because the Park needs more than what it gets on an annual basis through governmental appropriations. It needs us now, and it needs us more than ever.

The Oconaluftee Visitors Center is an example of Park partnership. Great Smoky Mountains Association provided \$3 million to build the facility, and Friends of the Smokies provided \$550,000 for the interior exhibits. It's the first official visitors center on the North Carolina side of the Park, and it's the first entirely partner-funded building in the Smokies.

We also worked with the Association in 2006 to make the Twin Creeks Science Center a reality. With contributions of \$250,000 each and utility infrastructure support from the City of Gatlinburg, when startup construction costs outstripped available dollars, the Park's partners stepped forward to make this long-awaited facility possible.

In our Park, the people's Park, it is cooperation and friendships that make stewardship happen. When you renew your Friends membership, shop in the Park bookstores, or volunteer for the Trails Forever work crew, you are being a good steward of this precious resource.

You already know Friends of the Smokies. We hope you are a member, or drive your car proudly sporting our North Carolina or Tennessee license plate, or maybe you've attended one of our special events like the Evergreen Ball or hiked with Get on the Trail with Missy Kane. In eighteen years, we've attracted over 4500 generous

members, and the support of nearly 30,000 faithful license plate owners (annually) in two states. Your support is vital.

There's a donor recognition plaque outside of the new Oconaluftee Visitors Center, and it's important to recognize those donors who gave generously for something so historic. Our heartfelt thanks go to Friends of the Smokies' North Carolina license plate owners, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, contributors to the Oconaluftee Visitors Center donation box, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership, The Cannon Foundation, Eastern Band of Cherokee Community Foundation, and the Swain County Community Foundation.

And we thank YOU for being a Friend of the Smokies.



## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PARK

By Dale Ditmanson, Superintendent

With the snip of nine pairs of scissors the golden ribbon spanning the entrance to the new Oconaluftee Visitor Center was cut, opening the long-awaited center to the public. The April 15 dedication brought to fruition a

plan dating back to the Park's earliest days, and it served as the culmination of our 2009 75th Anniversary observance when ground was broken for the 100% partner-funded facility.

Back in the 1930's, when the Park's future development was being mapped out, planners recognized that the Park would have two major entry points, one at each end of the yet-to-be completed Newfound Gap Road, which would link North Carolina and Tennessee. From the start, it was the Park's expectation that there would soon be full-fledged visitor centers at entrances near Gatlinburg and Cherokee.

The Park's first Superintendent, Ross Eakin, was blessed with a massive infusion of Depression-era federal funds and labor in the form of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and he promptly put the 4,000 CCC "boys" to work to make the Park's development and restoration plans a reality. They redeveloped the two low-standard state roads over the mountain into a true scenic Park road. Others constructed the Park's new Headquarters just outside Gatlinburg, which housed our north entrance visitor center in its lobby for just over 20 years.

In 1940, CCC laborers finished the modest 1,700 square foot Ranger Station/Magistrate's Courtroom that was pressed into service near Cherokee as an "interim visitor center", until a purpose built facility could be constructed. In 1961, the "Mission 66" Program provided funding to build the Sugarlands Visitor Center

Continued on page 4



## 2011 PARK SUPPORT FRIENDS OF THE SMOKIES' NEEDS LIST

Here's a snapshot of a few of the projects we're funding this year, and we ask you to help us reach our goal of providing more than \$1.2 million to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2011. We APPRECIATE your membership support, your license plate renewals, and your contributions for hemlocks, wildlife, and more.

Donate any time on our secure website at <http://shop.friendsofthesmokies.org/>

### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT Monitor Air Quality Impacts on Water Quality \$115,000

One of the Park's biggest single resource issues is trying to improve water quality in North Carolina and Tennessee. All of the Park's watersheds have their headwaters deep within the protection of the Park far from any upstream point-source pollution, but due to the large amounts of air borne acid and mercury being deposited, and leaching out of soils, many of the Park's high elevation streams are too acidic to support brook trout. This project supports a long-term UT study that will help correlate changes (reductions) in acid being deposited with changes in water quality at a site on Noland Divide.

### Support Appalachian Bear Rescue (ABR) \$10,000

Each year a number of orphaned or injured Park bears are treated and housed in the nonprofit Appalachian Bear Rescue Center until they can be released back into the Park. Prior to the creation of the Center, most of these animals were euthanized. The Park supports the operation of the center in return for providing another option.

### Suppress Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Infestation \$50,000

Since 2003, Friends of the Smokies has provided more than \$1.3 million to the Park to combat the exotic, invasive hemlock woolly adelgid. To date, more than 130,000 individual hemlock trees have been hand-treated, and more than 4,000 acres of hemlock-dominated forest have been set aside as special conservation areas. The eastern hemlock is the only shade-tolerant conifer in the Smokies, and it helps to regulate forest and stream temperatures to support the habitat of a myriad of other species including brook trout and migratory birds.

### RESOURCE EDUCATION Parks as Classrooms \$103,700

Approximately 18,000 students every year in Tennessee and North Carolina receive curriculum-based environmental education opportunities through the Parks as Classrooms program. These hands-on, ranger-led lessons utilizing Great Smoky Mountains National Park as an enormous outdoor classroom help foster a love for nature and inform the next generation of Park supporters.

### Expand Educational Outreach \$128,423

Additional funding for environmental education to expand Parks as Classrooms as well as the Junior Ranger program and the Not-So-Junior Ranger program. Funding for this initiative is from Toyota Motor Sales North America as part of a \$1 million education grant.

### Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program \$11,200

The goal is improved science education capability! Teachers become seasonal employees in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. They learn the science of the Park, and go back and teach their students. Funding for this initiative is made possible by a grant from Alcoa.

### FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

**Cades Cove Fencing \$43,500**  
Restoration of several miles of historic fencing to replace barbed wire currently in place.

### Replace Structural Logs at Baxter Cabin \$20,700

Each year the Park requests support from Friends of the Smokies to maintain the integrity of historic structures. The Park's Historic Preservation Crew plans to replace the lower course of logs which are usually the first to rot due to moisture. They will also re-chink the exterior and replace the eroded clay mortar within the stone chimney.

### Continuing Trails Forever Rehab Work along Forney Ridge Trail \$146,900

In 2008, the Aslan Foundation, Friends of the Smokies and the Park established the pilot phase of Trails Forever called "Trails Now", using \$50,000 from the Park's trails budget and \$50,000 from Friends of the Smokies; Aslan matched with \$100,000. "Trails Now" funds will support ongoing improvements along this popular trail which leads to Andrews Bald.

### Purchase Additional Trails Forever Equipment Trailer \$3,000

A search and rescue vehicle, hemlock woolly adelgid sprayer trucks, six Prius hybrids (donated by Toyota), a neighborhood electric vehicle for Cataloochee's Elk Bugle Corps (funded in-part by a NCSU Clean Fuels Advanced Technology grant), and one Trails Forever equipment trailer are all examples of transportation solutions previously provided to the Park by Friends of the Smokies.

### Furnish and equip the Appalachian Clubhouse and Spence Cabin \$65,000

In 2011, these recently restored historic buildings will open in Elkmont for daily rental (to host weddings, corporate meetings, etc.) This project will outfit the facilities and prepare them for use.

### Rehab Laurel Gap Shelter \$50,000

The last of the Smokies backcountry shelters needs to be renovated. The previous shelters have been rehabilitated with funding help from the Haiman Foundation and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) with labor donated by a volunteer work crew. Laurel Gap is not on the Appalachian Trail, so the ATC funding is not available. A Haiman Foundation grant will provide

\$11,000 toward the Laurel Gap rehab.

### RESOURCE & VISITOR PROTECTION Support for the all-volunteer Elk Bugle Corps \$5,000

During the peak visitation periods for elk-viewing in the Cataloochee area of the Park, a team of dedicated volunteers provides interpretive and safety information to Park visitors to enhance their viewing experience while helping to preserve the natural behavior patterns of the elk herd.

### Support for the Appalachian Trail Ridgerunner program \$38,700

More than 30 miles of the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) are located inside Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Ridgerunner volunteers assigned by the ATC patrol the A.T. on foot each year from March through October; they spend weeks providing visitor information and conduct routine maintenance of the trails and trail privies. Ridgerunners are also valuable in responding to emergencies reported on the A.T.

### Support for the Volunteer Roadside Assistance program \$7,300

The Smokies recruits a series of retired law enforcement officers and their spouses to patrol Newfound Gap Road and Cades Cove, providing directions and visitor information, responding to disabled vehicles and lock-outs, and assisting with motor vehicle accidents and bear-related traffic jams. Their presence has substantially freed up the commissioned law enforcement rangers in the Park, enabling them to respond more quickly to more in-depth law enforcement activities.

### Black Bear Hiking Patrol \$4,500

Educating visitors to keep both visitors and bears safe by providing specially trained volunteers with an "Instant Bear Patrolter Equipment Kit" that will be ready & waiting when day-to-day needs arise concerning bear activity on high use trails in America's most-visited national Park. This is specialized work, and the equipment will ensure they are prepared for their assignments.

To see our full list of 2011 Park Support scan this code with your smartphone or visit the website at: [www.friendsofthesmokies.org/needs.html](http://www.friendsofthesmokies.org/needs.html)

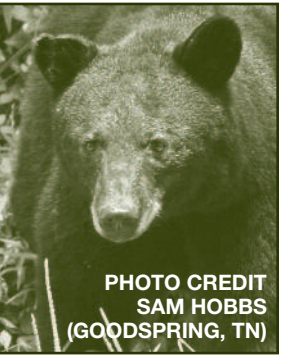


PHOTO CREDIT  
SAM HOBBS  
(GOODSPRING, TN)





PHOTO CREDIT  
JOHN NORTHRUP

## KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Between newsletter issues, there's always a lot happening with Friends of the Smokies. To stay connected to the latest events & happenings you can take advantage of the following:

- Sign-up on our homepage at [www.FriendsOfTheSmokies.org](http://www.FriendsOfTheSmokies.org) to receive our e-newsletters.
- Learn about the work of the Trails Forever crews at [www.SmokiesTrailsForever.org](http://www.SmokiesTrailsForever.org)
- Like us at [Facebook.com/SmokiesFriends](https://www.facebook.com/SmokiesFriends)
- Follow "SmokiesFriends" on Twitter.
- Visit the events page of our website at <http://www.friendsofthesmokies.org/events.html>

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PARK CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

near Gatlinburg, but at Oconaluftee, funding issues extended "interim" into seven decades.

In 2005, after several years of exploring funding options, we concluded that if we were to get a new center to provide all the type of services and experiences that visitors should expect, we and our partners could set a course to create it without relying on the Federal funding process. Beyond finding the money, the project we have just completed is a product of steadfast leadership, sheer determination and trust. It took trust for the National Park Service to allow a private non-profit – the Great Smoky Mountains Association – to contract directly with local architects and builders to finally design and construct an iconic structure at a main entry to America's most-visited national Park in North Carolina. And it took trust that the Friends of the Smokies would be able to provide over \$500,000

to equip the new center with the wide array of superb quality visitor orientation and cultural history exhibits and other media that such a center deserved.

For most of its existence, managers of national Parks were conditioned to faithfully submit their construction funding requests, and then wait for the federal funding process to provide the resources their units needed. The public and Park visitors were generally resigned to wait with us. In this case, we were able to move beyond that paradigm, for which I think we all can take great satisfaction and pride. My staff, and I, and the millions of visitors who will visit the new center owe all our partners and their supporters a huge debt of gratitude for this outstanding achievement that will serve generations to come.

37764-7660  
 Kodak, Tennessee  
 Post Office Box 1660  


---

 NATIONAL PARK  
 MOUNTAINS  
 GREAT SMOKY  
 Friends OF

Non-Profit Org.  
 U.S. POSTAGE  
 PAID  
 Knoxville, TN  
 Permit No. 475