



Blue Ridge Parkway News Release

Date: June 8, 2010

For Immediate Release

HEAD: Just A Walk In The Park

SUBHEAD: Mountains To Sea Trail Extended By Local Volunteers


WAYNESVILLE, N.C. – What would bring a dentist, a colonel, an electrician, a postal worker and an engineer together? The answer is National Trails Day, an annual celebration that encourages appreciation, awareness and enjoyment of America’s trails. This event was celebrated at the most visited National Park Service site in America: The Blue Ridge Parkway.

Volunteers from Western North Carolina gathered on the parkway near Waterrock Knob on Saturday morning with a common purpose – to extend a section of the Mountains To Sea Trail by 800 feet through dense woods. Of the more than two-dozen people present, at least three had never built a trail in their life. That didn’t matter, because they were with the Carolina Mountain Club, whose mission is to enjoy and maintain the trails in the region.

“Anybody who loves the outdoors would love the Carolina Mountain Club,” said Pat Johnson, a resident of Asheville. A first-time trail builder, Johnson was not deterred by the hard work, steep hills, or getting his hands dirty. He stated “I’ve been a hiker for years, and I enjoy trails so much.”

Johnson and the other volunteers ascended the steep slope of the mountainside to reach the location of the new section of trail, marked only by blue ribbon. After a safety briefing, the volunteers spread out over the trail section and began clearing the shrubs, top layer of soil, and rocks. Slowly the winding trail began to take shape. Although it would be easy for mechanical equipment to cut a road through the forest on the Parkway, the Carolina Mountain Club chooses to build meandering, windy trails that move around natural features instead of through them.

“There are two reasons we have for going around things,” said Piet Bodenhorst, a crew leader with the volunteer organization. “First,” he said with a laugh, “we’re lazy. Second, there’s no reason to take the character out of the trail. The mind needs to be active while you hike and (it) needs to see things.”



Bodenhorst has built trails with the Carolina Mountain Club for more than a decade. For him, building trails isn't the most rewarding part of what he does with his free time – it's walking those trails he's helped make a reality.

“When you walk on a trail you've helped to build,” Piet exclaimed, “you see how everyone contributes a little and doesn't think it's much. But when you see what lots of hands can do ... you really see what can be accomplished.”

The trail crew was not made up of young men and women in the prime of their youth. Most of the regular trail crews the Carolina Mountain Club directs are made up of retirees. On Saturday, the oldest person swinging a hazel hoe was 86 years young.

“Anyone can see how an older person can lose their wits when they lay around all day. Your memory starts to leave you. With nowhere to go, older folks just walk around the house all day,” Bodenhorst said. He added, “if you give folks a place to go out in nature, away from a sterile environment, you'd be surprised how sharp it keeps them.”

Even though trail building involves sharp implements used to cut through underbrush, trees and soil, in addition to the chains and winches used to uproot tree stumps, there are few injuries among members of the Carolina Mountain Club. All members train under experienced trail builders before they are permitted to operate the more dangerous equipment. Novice trail builders are not novices in life, however. Almost every member of the trail club has years of experience in a professional trade. While many may not think the skills of a dentist would be useful in building a trail, members of the Carolina Mountain Club would beg to differ.

“The trail bosses aren't the only ones who are able to offer valuable advice when we come across a problem,” Bodenhorst said. He continued, “Instead, we get input from 40 years of experience. Electricians approach a problem differently from a dentist, but they both have different ways of solving problems. Everyone has something valuable to offer.”

When the volunteers called it a day in the mid-afternoon, everyone walked back toward their vehicles along the trail they spent the day building. What began as a thinly marked path through the woods ended as a meandering trail, built to last and to be enjoyed by thousands. Everyone from the new trail builders to the old hands left with a smile. National Trails Day is designed to encourage all Americans – young and old – out on the trails like the ones these volunteers helped to build. Perhaps there is something to the saying that ‘the outdoors keeps a person young’:

“I've lost weight, my health is better, and I feel better getting out and working every day,” Bodenhorst said with a grin. He added, “We like to say ‘Come out with the Carolina Mountain Club, and we'll keep you going for 10 more years.’”

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The volunteers of the Carolina Mountain Club host many hikes in addition to their trail-building events. For more information about the Carolina Mountain Club, please visit their website at www.carolinamtnclub.com/

For more information about volunteering on the Blue Ridge Parkway, contact the volunteer coordinator at (828) 471-4779 x242.

PHOTOS:



WAYNESVILLE, N.C. (June 5, 2010) – Twenty-seven volunteer members of the Carolina Mountain Club gathered on the Blue Ridge Parkway recently to extend the Mountains To Sea National Recreation Trail. Over a period of 5 hours, the volunteers cut nearly one thousand feet of trail through the forest. The activity was scheduled to coincide with National Trails Day, which encourages awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of America’s trails. (NPS Photo)

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WAYNESVILLE, N.C. (June 5, 2010) – Richard Ostenfeld, a resident of Asheville, N.C. gathered with twenty-six other volunteer members of the Carolina Mountain Club on the Blue Ridge Parkway recently to extend the Mountains To Sea National Recreation Trail. Ostenfeld joked with other volunteers as he worked to cut the roots from a stump that was in the middle of the proposed trail. The activity was scheduled to coincide with National Trails Day, which encourages awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of America’s trails. (NPS Photo)

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