

Ten Years of Trail Maintenance by NC High Peaks

In 2010 the founders of High Peaks recognized that no one was taking care of the hiking trails in the Black Mountains and elsewhere in Yancey County. For decades the US Forest Service had provided this



service but due to budget and staff cuts they were no longer able to do so. The Carolina Mountain Club (CMC) was already maintaining trails in the Asheville area including the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST) from the Smoky Mountains to Black Mountain Campground. Many of us got our start working on CMC trail crews. We decided to provide a similar service for Forest Service trails in the Blacks.

With tools donated by the Forest Service we formed a weekly trail crew that goes out every Monday, weather permitting. The crew is made up of local men and women who want to “give back” to the trails in recognition of the pleasure we take from hiking in these beautiful mountains.

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Before and After Photos of Tree Removal and Step Construction

We do our best to keep the trails clear and safe by removing fallen trees blocking the trail, weed-eating annual growth to prevent the trail from closing in and doing various forms of “tread work”. Tread work includes widening the tread where needed, installing and maintaining water-bars to divert rain off the trail, installing steps to prevent further erosion where the water cannot be channeled off the trail and, when necessary, relocating the trail. The latter are called “relos” and may be just a simple shift of the trail a few feet or a totally new route. The objective of a relo is to build a more sustainable trail that will require less maintenance. Relos require a lot of planning and permitting so as not to compromise the ecology and historical character of the area. These reviews are done by the US Forest Service.



Before and After Weed-Eating Thick Growth on the Big Butt Trail

Over the years we have built partnerships with many organizations. Our primary land management agency partner is the US Forest Service-Appalachian Ranger District headquartered in Mars Hill. They have provided us with tools and materials over the years as well as encouragement and guidance. Early on we became the Friends of Mount Mitchell State Park and through that association we have supported their trail maintenance activities and other programs. We also partner with the

Blue Ridge Parkway to maintain Parkway trails including Crabtree Falls Loop and the Blue Ridge Pinnacle Trail. Over the years we have done special trail projects with Mountain Heritage High School and Mayland Community College at their Star Park.

We have leveraged our efforts through the Recreational Trails Program by applying for and receiving four major grants. Using the grants we have hired a local trail contractor to work on the Mount Mitchell trail both in the park and on Forest Service land. This is the subject of the Mount Mitchell Trail Renovation article.

Why do volunteer crew members come out week after week to do hard physical labor? As one crew member said “you couldn’t pay me enough to do this work but I’ll do it as a volunteer”! First of all we get a good physical workout each week. Secondly, we enjoy the company of like-minded individuals working toward a common goal. And of course we have the spectacular scenery of the Black Mountains! In winter there are magnificent views through leafless trees, in spring we enjoy following the succession of wildflowers. In summer we can work in the cooler temperatures of the highest elevations in lush green forests. And who doesn’t love the colors of fall? On almost every trail there is a breath-taking view or an interesting environment of trees, plants, flowers, rock formations, insects, etc.

We hope to continue giving back to the trails in the Black Mountains of Yancey County for many years to come! If you would like to join us on a Monday just e-mail trails@nchighpeaks.org



Removing Debris at Linville Falls

