



# BEARS, BOARDS & Broads

## IN THE TENNESSEE MOUNTAINS

They made it happen again! The Dynamic Duo—Veronica (Ronni) Egan, Director and Associate Director Rose Chilcoat—of THE GREAT OLD BROADS FOR WILDERNESS organized another significant Broadwalk. This time the Great Old Broads moved to the Eastern U.S. and set up camp in the Eastern Tennessee Mountains (75% of America's population is within 500 miles), ready to explore and explain areas of Cherokee National Forest included in the TN Wilderness Act of 2010. The Broadwalks are a staple in the information schematic of THE GREAT OLD BROADS FOR WILDERNESS—an organization committed to maintaining and preserving healthy ecosystems and wild lands while sharing hilarious fun.

The “wrinkled ranks,” as the Broads refer to themselves, exist because of a comment by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). Senator Hatch advocated opening wilderness areas to roads so that “older people” would have access. Sitting in a café after a long hike, a group of older women heard the Senator. “Our founders didn’t want to be used as scapegoats,” Chilcoat observes. ‘They were women of a certain age, physically active, politically savvy, who realized theirs was the missing voice in the wilderness dialogue.’ As British writer Dorothy Sayers wrote, “Time and trouble will tame an advanced young woman, but an advanced old woman is uncontrollable by any earthly force.” These Old Broads agreed, so in 1989 THE GREAT OLD BROADS FOR WILDERNESS was born. Twenty-one years later they are 5500 members strong (“I are one”), and “Broadbands” (local organizations) are at work in 15 states. Men have not been excluded from the GOBs; their participation as GREAT OLD BROS is encouraged.

From their headquarters in Durango, CO, the GOBs have developed a comprehensive program to monitor and

promote the protection of America's public and wilderness lands. One of their newest projects is the creation and maintenance of a *Healthy Lands Project*. Using cameras and GPS (Gamerass), volunteers and staff are compiling a data base, currently 200,000 photos, to document habitat destruction on public lands. The data is public information available at [www.greatoldbroads.org](http://www.greatoldbroads.org). Broads also testify at hearings on land use policy, write letters to legislators and the media, and participate in protests and rallies. “Tree huggers”?—well, if that's what it takes to protect public lands and wilderness, a GOB will undertake the job—uniquely. After a recent visit with BLM officials in Washington to introduce the *HLP*, the delegation adjourned to the National Mall for a game with leaf blowers tossing about a bright yellow ball. Passersby were informed that the game simulated the effects of off-road vehicles and snowmobiles on public lands out West.

The Tennessee Broadwalk marked a GOB return to the East. The municipal base for the Broadwalk was Tellico Plains, TN, a community nestled in the foothills of the Tennessee Mountains. Major attractions to the area include the Cherohala Skyway, a National Scenic Byway, and the nearby birthplace museum of Sequoyah, the Cherokee chief who developed a writing system for his people. Census data places the population of Tellico Plains between 800-900 residents, that is until the Harleys arrive. Because of the Tail of the Dragon Loop (318 curves in 11 miles), the area is popular with motorcycle riders.

Arriving in Tellico Plains after the long journey from Texas, I found myself in the lead car of the high school's homecoming parade— an auspicious start to a weekend with the Broads. Whole hillsides were covered with kudzu, the mile a minute vine which consumes everything in its path. Somehow I missed my turn and

had to search for some assistance. When I spotted the older man leaning against what appeared to be his yard-art car, I pulled into his gravel drive. He greeted me with a smile and a “I have just what you need right here. I'll bet you don't even know what this is. This is an Electrolux soaper to clean your rug.” He patted the upright, grass encased cleaner. “And if you don't need that, I have a genuine Electrolux cleaner right back here. Works, too.”

My hasty refusal was smothered by his land bargains; however, I eventually obtained the directions I needed. As I was leaving he noted, “Well, I'll see you in heaven, if not before. Are you gonna' be there?” I could only mutter, “I hope so.” Finally I reached the GOB base camp at Hidden Lake Campground and Resort with its 5-acre lake open to swimming and fishing. On the hill above the lake was an earth-bermed cedar building with facilities on the ground level and a patio with a view on the second story. Rustic cabins and teepees were scattered about the property with plenty of hook ups and room for tents.

At the foot of the hill was the serving area built on the backside of a covered stage and meeting area. After the dinner prepared and served by the same stalwart threesome who cared for us throughout the Broadwalk, Ronni and Rose took center stage for introductions and to rally the crowd. Laura Hodge, an 11-year resident of Tellico Plains and photographer/historian, introduced us to the area and its wilderness issues. The central concerns are the politics affecting the passage of the Tennessee Wilderness Act of 2010. Rose observed, “I never realized my passion for wilderness would mean I had to become a political junkie.” A campfire under a Milky Way-laced Tennessee sky brought the day to a welcome close.

After a hurried breakfast on Friday morning, the Broads traveled to the Tellico



Plains Ranger Station. The main building, still in use by the US Forest Service, was the first CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) Building in Tennessee. After a visit with the Rangers, Broads were introduced to Jeff Hunter, Bill Hodge, and Ken Jones. Jeff and Bill are avid hikers and advocates for Tennessee Wild, a project of the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition. They are wilderness educators who promote volunteerism and stewardship of Tennessee's wild places. Ken, a volunteer and trustee of the Benton-MacKaye Trail Association, would also supervise the trail work. The Broads circled up, chose their hard hats, and learned how to handle a

Pulaski. The Pulaski is a grubbing tool with a heavy rectangular head at the end of a long handle. The head is an ax on one end and a mattock (grub hoe) on the other and is a major firefighting tool with multiple uses. Considered primitive, as all tools in a wilderness must be, the Pulaski proved the major tool for the Broads trail work projects. Safety was repeatedly emphasized. There were even a few cautionary comments about dealing with black bears, residents of these mountains.

Jeff's group was assigned trail work in the Citigo Wilderness Area. The trail, created by cutting into the mountain,

had been reduced in width because of the dirt erosion had deposited from the mountain top. This group used the Pulaskis ("Stroke and rest, stroke and rest") to loosen the dirt, then the fire rake shoved the excess dirt over the mountainside. The trail was made safer by its increased width. In spots, the eroded trail was rebuilt. Although the group worked tirelessly, more work could easily have been done. The project emphasized the necessity of volunteers for constant trail maintenance.

The second group, led by Ken, cleared earth berms that had formed along a trail's edge. The berms acted like dams



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and held water after a rainfall so that the trail was muddy and dangerous for an extended period. Once again, Pulaskis were the chief tool and required using energy and muscles. By the end of the day, most of the GREAT OLD BROADS were ready for hot showers, happy hour and good food.

In the evening, Ken Jones regaled the group with his stories about the creation of the Benton MacKaye Trail named after the Massachusetts forester who conceived the Appalachian Trail (AT). The BMT is linked to the AT and can be intersected at a number of points so that hikes can be casual or serious. A loop of the BMT is over 500 miles. "It is also an important link in the Eastern Continental Trail, the 4400-plus mile route from Key West, Florida to Cape Gaspe, Quebec, Canada." The BMT, like the AT, is maintained by dedicated volunteers.

Saturday was an exciting day. Hiking began and so did black bear season. Dogs and hunters with their muzzle loaders could be heard in the woods, and bear scat peppered the trails. Several hikes were offered including the Joyce Kilmer (poet of "Trees") Memorial Forest and Slickrock Wilderness area. I chose the hike to Wicks Meadow, a beautifully open mountain-top space which allowed a 360 degree view including both Tennessee and North Carolina. The hike followed a path, probably once a railroad bed built by loggers, through this now largely second or third growth "northern" forest. Our hike was fortunate to have both Jeff and biologist, botanist Dr. Doris Gove. Both recognized the trees—a rare black cherry, for example—and the plants along the trail. Would you have known that the small clump of red berries snuggled close to the ground was a jack-in-the-pulpit—the only plant which can choose to be male or female or that the seeds from a jewel wood (impatiens) taste like walnuts? The length of the trail was filled with information from these two about Nature's complex and amazing organization.

Along the way, Jeff could not resist turning over stones in the shallow streams to find salamanders. The sun's rays streaked through any opening in the forest canopy, so that the mottled light formed patterns on the largely green understory. Only once

did the scattered leaves cause us to look up to discover the brilliant red canopy of a maple tree. Although we felt we were alone, we met a mother and daughter as we hiked the trail and found a host of college students camping at the base of the meadow—everyone enjoying the beauty and peacefulness of this wilderness area.

We returned to Hidden Lake just in time to meet Katherine Foster, Tellico District Ranger for the Cherokee National Forest. She discussed some of the many management concerns unique to her district, (not the least of which is funding). She reported that with the support of wilderness groups, the Forest Service closed a motorized area near the headwaters of the Tellico River. That decision produced immediate results. Now, instead of the river's filling with mud every time the rains fall, the waters continue to run clear. The Forest Service, she noted, remains helpless in the continuing loss of the hemlocks; but the Service is engaged in a cross-pollination program in hopes of restoring the American chestnuts.

Sunday, I chose the waterfall hike. Fog settled over the area and rain threatened. We followed Bill through a different kind of woods. The giant rhododendrons were ever-present but a few old growth trees (one so large adults could stand inside its split trunk) towered over the steep hillsides. Their

location had saved them from the loggers. The ground was moist, so the ever-present boars had dug wallows, uprooted plants, and overturned soil. Bear scat was fresh. Dogs, motorcycles and automobiles could be heard nearby even as we were encircled by green. Large roots from the old trees often created natural stairsteps for our descent while nurse logs displayed their wealth of new life. The fog added an eerie sense of wonder as it settled silently. At times we seemed to be going straight down, until without any notice there appeared a narrow waterway filled with huge boulders. "Time for a rock scramble." Looking up, the water quietly, gently fell over the face of the black stone mountain whose

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children littered the landscape below. The silence of the woods was audible, as every GOB experienced the magic of this place. Even Bill, who had seen the waterfall in all kinds of weather, was in awe of the fog encased scene. Rain caused us to pull ourselves away as we made our climb back to the top - going up seemed harder than going down.

We stopped at a local café on our way back to camp. The food was warm and welcome, and we also wrote postcards to Tennessee senators. Getting back to camp to find that second wind was useful, as happy hour was a valuable time for questions and answers on National Wilderness Protection efforts, bills in Congress and some GOB conversation. Leonard Winchester, Chair of Citizens for the Economic Future of Swain County arrived to announce the successful resolution of a 2005 Broadwalk focus—the North Shore Road Settlement (a long story with a happy ending).

The few days of this Broadwalk passed quickly. In the beginning, a collection of broad-minded women from all over the country—Michigan, New Jersey, Arizona, Tennessee, Utah, Colorado, Texas, Maryland, Rhode Island, Missouri, Maine—had gathered. We told our stories. There was the retired Methodist minister who was forced to match wits with a bear to save her lunch; the lady building contractor who sang about her life in a dune shack or the several who had hiked from the top to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. One GOB tenderly cared for the potter wasp's nest constructed some months before on the inside facing of her driver's side door. We separated having learned, laughed, and sung together and shared experiences from our world-wide travels and opinions from diverse educations. We separated but remain united in our respect and love for the planet whose beauty and complexity we share and whose care is our charge—today for tomorrow.

"Enough is enough. Thus far and no farther. Think of your children. Of their children. Of the hawks, buzzards, lizards, bear[s]. Save a little room and time for the free play of the human spirit and the wild play of the animal kingdom."-----Edward Abbey

#### THE GREAT OLD BROADS FOR WILDERNESS

Find more information about the Tennessee Wilderness Act of 2010, that was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker in June, on the Tennessee Wild blog at [http://www.tnwild.org/blog/senator\\_alexander\\_and\\_senator\\_corker\\_introduce\\_tennessee\\_wilderness\\_act\\_2010](http://www.tnwild.org/blog/senator_alexander_and_senator_corker_introduce_tennessee_wilderness_act_2010).

More information can be found through The Wilderness Society at <http://wilderness.org/content/tennessee-long-quest-wilderness> and the Southern Environmental Law Center at [http://www.southernenvironment.org/cases/tennessee\\_wilderness](http://www.southernenvironment.org/cases/tennessee_wilderness)



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