



THE GEORGIA MOUNTAINEER

Vol. 79, No.5

The Bulletin of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club

May 2005

Shelters Along The AT In Georgia

By Whit Benson

Benton MacKaye's idea for an Appalachian Trail was published in the "Journal of the American Institute of Architects" in 1921. In the article, he envisioned a trail along the Appalachian Mountains served by a series of hostels and inns with meal and sleeping facilities similar to those in the White Mountains.

While the AT was completed in 1937, MacKaye's vision of an elaborate support system consisting of hostels and work centers never materialized. Instead, on the Georgia Trail, a series of crude, one room cabins were built approximately every ten to twenty miles. Most of these cabins were built during the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the U. S. Forest Service. The cabins, built with logs cut on site, consisted of a single room with a dirt floor. A fire place and chimney constructed of stone was usually in the back of the cabin opposite the door. The roof was a standard "A" shape with split wood shingles. The two exceptions to this type of construction were the Blood Mountain cabin which was constructed of stone in 1934, and is still standing today, and the Tesnatee Gap shelter. The Tesnatee Gap shelter was a solidly built open three sided Adirondack type lean-to built of logs. It was still in use in the 1960's until after the construction of the Richard Russell Parkway.

The first shelter was built at Amicalola Falls in 1931 by a local mountaineer for \$57, contributed to the GATC by Luke Tate of Jasper Georgia. It was an open cabintype shelter with sleeping space for twelve people. This shelter was submerged when a dam was built above the falls and Amicalola Lake was formed.

In addition to the shelters at Blood Mountain and Tesnatee Gap, shelters were built by the CCC at Rocky Knob, Tray Mountain (known as the Montray shelter), and at Snake Mountain just north of Powell Mountain, where the trail begins the long downhill grade



First Shelter - Amicalola



to Dicks Creek Gap. There was also a shelter built near Bly Gap. Technically the Bly Gap shelter was not part of the Georgia shelter system, but it was located just a few feet inside North Carolina where the AT crossed the state line. Abandoned fire wardens' cabins were used as shelters at Sassafras Mountain just north of Mount Oglethorpe, and on Frosty Mountain on what is now the Approach Trail.



Original Montray Shelter

With the advent of World War II, all of the cabintype shelters fell into disrepair. In most cases, the roofs leaked and the dirt floors were either dust or mud, depending on the weather. Another problem was the wild hogs that roamed the mountains. Farmers would turn their hogs loose to forage in the mountains. The hogs were using the shelters more than hikers, and frequently in bad weather the hiker had to chase the hogs out before he or she could get out of the rain. By 1950, most of the cabintype shelters were in ruins.

In early 1950 several hundred pounds of metal signs were obtained from a junk yard by Larry Freeman. These signs were carried from Tray Gap, over Tray Mountain to the Montray shelter. Using the signs, a new metal roof was put on the shelter and painted green to blend in with the surroundings. The chimney was rebuilt from the rocks of the old chimney that were scattered on the ground, and bunks were built from saplings cut on site. This repair work enabled the old Montray shelter to be serviceable for a few more years.

Continued on page 10

Seventy Five Years Of Stewardship & Friendship

Shelters Along The AT In Georgia

Continued from page 1

In the meantime the Forest Service had condemned the fire warden cabin on Frosty Mountain and offered the material to the GATC, if we would tear it down. It was decided that the material would be used to construct a new shelter down by the spring on the side of Frosty Mountain. On a number of work trips during 1952, the construction of the new three sided lean-to type shelter was accomplished. This was the first lean-to type shelter constructed by the GATC, and lasted approximately sixteen years until it was destroyed by fire.

In the ensuing years, trail reroutes and the encroachment of chicken farms along the trail north of Mt. Oglethorpe forced the shelters into the background. In the late 1950's and during the 1960's, the Forest Service offered to build new shelters at Hawk Mountain, Rocky Knob and Tray Mountain, if the GATC could transport the materials where the shelter sites were not near a road. On several weekends the GATC carried building materials from Henson Gap to Rocky Knob, and from Tray Gap to the north side of Tray Mountain. Lean-to shelters replaced the old cabin type shelters which had fallen into disrepair. The Hawk Mountain shelter was built on the edge of Hawk Meadow, which was accessible by truck from Forest Service (FS) 42. Over the next few years, the Forest Service built additional shelters at Big Stamp Gap, Gooch Gap, Low Gap, Addis Gap and Plumorchard Gap. Unfortunately, several of these shelters were near roads and were subject to vandalism by non-hikers.

The Big Stamp shelter has had a nomadic past. In 1977, after the AT was rerouted away from Big Stamp Gap, the shelter was loaded onto a flat bed truck by the Forest Service and carried to a point north of Springer Mountain known as Cross Trails, so that it would be on the AT. This shelter was right on FS42 and was frequently used by non-hikers. In 1984 the Forest Service and the GATC again loaded this shelter on a flat bed truck and moved it to the headwaters of Stover Creek, via an old abandoned service road that ran up the east side of Stover Creek from Three Forks. This shelter has thus transitioned from being the Big Stamp Gap shelter to the Cross Trails shelter to the Stover Creek shelter.

The 1970's ushered in a new era for shelter

building with the occasional availability of helicopters from both the Forest Service and the Army Rangers from Camp Merrell. With this new mode of transportation, access was provided to more remote areas along the AT, away from roads. New shelters were built at Tray Mountain (1971), Springer Mountain (1972) and Whitley Gap (1974). A shelter now existed approximately every ten miles along the Georgia Trail.

The 1980's were an era of shelter maintenance and repair. The only new shelter built during this decade was the Blue Mountain shelter built in 1988. This shelter replaced the old Rocky Knob shelter. The area around Rocky Knob had become overused, and the Forest Service wanted to let the area recover. Again, the Forest Service airlifted the materials to the site with a helicopter. A number of GATC work trips were utilized to lay the foundation, and build the shelter. The old Rocky Knob shelter was then torn down and removed by helicopter.

In 1981 the old stone shelter on Blood Mountain, built by the CCC, was renovated by the GATC. With the Forest Service air lifting construction materials and water from Lake Winfield Scott, a new roof was installed to replace the old tile roof, a concrete floor was poured over the existing dirt floor, and a raised sleeping deck was constructed in the back room.

During the late 80's maintenance, such as replacing rotted roofs and siding, was done on the shelters at Gooch Gap, Addis Gap, Plumorchard Gap, and Low Gap.

During the early 1990's the Federal Government established a Presidential Initiative Program which provided funds for building new shelters along the Georgia AT. This initiative stipulated that three parties must be involved; i.e., a government agency, a volunteer organization, and a commercial company. The Forest Service partnered with the GATC and Upper Loft Designs in building a series of shelters. Upper Loft Designs was a company near Clayton, Georgia that held classes and built structures based on beam construction, where the framework of a structure was formed by using large wooden pegs to fasten pre-cut wooden beams together. The Forest Service provided funds, coordination, and transportation via helicopter to the

construction site. Upper Loft Designs provided the building materials and supervision. The GATC provided the labor. A new shelter was built at Deep Gap just north of Kelley Knob to replace the Addis Gap shelter which was removed. The old shelters at Plumorchard Gap, Springer Mountain, and Hawk Mountain were replaced with the timber frame design. A description of the construction of the Plumorchard Gap shelter can be found in the "Appalachian Trailway News" May/June 1993.

The old shelter on Springer Mountain, built in 1972, was dismantled and transported via helicopter to Black Mountain Gap, on the Approach Trail, just south of Springer Mountain where it was reassembled.

In 1998, thru-hikers Jerry and Minnie Bowden of Roswell, Georgia offered to pay for the materials for a new shelter to be dedicated to Tillie Woods, also of Roswell, Georgia, and her late husband Roy Woods. Tillie and Roy ran a hostel for hikers at their home in Virginia called Woods Hole. The new shelter, located south of Slaughter Gap, is of the "Adirondack" type, a three sided, stacked log structure based on a design by the Nantahala Hiking Club. The shelter has been named the "Woods Hole Shelter". The shelter has a raised sleeping deck and an extended roof over a cooking area. It is the only log shelter in Georgia.

In 2001, the family of hiker Kurt VonSeggern offered to donate funds for a new shelter in memory of Kurt. It is located on Gooch Mountain south of Gooch Gap. The shelter has two levels for sleeping and a covered cooking area. ~~Further details and pictures about the construction of both the Gooch Mountain and Woods Hole shelters are available on the GATC website.~~

Counting the present shelter at Amicalola State Park, the beginning of the Approach Trail, there are 14 shelters along the AT in Georgia. These shelters are generally modern lean-to types and are spaced every 4 to 7 miles. Most of them are near good water sources and several have privies of the moldering type. A lot of effort has gone into the building of shelters over the years, and the GATC now has a shelter system to be proud of.

NOTE: Information for this article came from "Friendships of the Trail" and conversations with Marion McLean, Jerry Seabolt, and Larry Walker.