



JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

OZARK HIGHLANDS TRAIL ASSOCIATION

OHTA's Mission is to Build, Maintain, Promote, and ENJOY the Ozark Highlands Trail.

- OVERSEEING THE TRAIL -

OHTA Board of Directors for 2025-2026

Phil Brown, **President** (Board term ends: June 30, 2026)
Adam Higinbothom, **Vice-President** (Board term ends: June 30, 2028)
Todd Wells, **Treasurer** (Board term ends: June 30, 2028)
Brent Umphlett, **Secretary** (Board term ends: June 30, 2027)
Chris Adams, **Maintenance Coordinator** (Board term ends: June 30, 2026)
Tiffany Mallard (Board term ends: June 30, 2026)
Wade Colwell (Board term ends: June 30, 2027)
Peter Cooper (Board term ends: June 30, 2028)
Randy Soeung (Board term ends: June 30, 2027)

Ancillary Services

Website Development and Maintenance
Social Media Coordinator
Online Store Coordinator
Brochure Business Coordinator
Adopt-A-Highway Program Coordinator
Trailhead Register Data Processor
Arkansas Trails Council Representative
Trail Angels

Brent Umphlett and Leslie Wright Productions
Tiffany Mallard
Mike Lemaster
Elizabeth Granderson
Randy Soeung
Yvonne Liske
Yvonne Liske
Billy and Donna Hignite • Mike Lemaster



HAPPY 2026!!!

There's no more appropriate way to bring in the new year than to first express our deep appreciation to those who have mattered the most during the past year. Who are they? Well, they are, first and foremost, our members. Without each of you, this organization does not exist. The OHTA lives on because of you and for you!

YOU ARE THIS ORGANIZATION'S LIFE BLOOD!!

Then there are our member volunteers who give their all so all can enjoy the Ozark Highlands Trail! That's what it's all about! You know who you are and what all you do for the OHTA., and in your own special, unique way,

YOU MAKE THE OHT THE PREMIER LONG TRAIL IT IS!!

(please take a bow)

Behind the scenes, a lot happens of which few are actually aware, and those 'happenings' are what make it possible for this organization to have the trail we have where we have it. Of what do we speak? Our partner organizations which include the US Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Some extraordinary folks work for these federal agencies, and it is their partnership, in very large part, with the OHTA that has made it possible for the OHT to exist and to continue its growth! We cannot thank you all enough!!



**WE VERY GREATLY APPRECIATE
HAVING EACH OF YOU AS A
PARTNER!!**

(please take several bows, as well)

And there is one partner that deserves very special recognition:

FOSSIL COVE BREWING COMPANY IN FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS!!

Each year since 2016, Fossil has generously made very sizable donations out of the proceeds from their annual Frost Fest Beer Festival. Those donations have gone to a selection of non-profits, and for the past three years the Ozark Highlands Trail Association has been very fortunate to be of the select few chosen non-profits. Those donations have made it possible for our organization to keep on track in its efforts to stay true to our mission of building, maintaining, promoting, and enjoying the OHT—and there are miles of renewed trail building coming during the early months of 2026!

FOSSIL COVE MAKES GREAT THINGS POSSIBLE—HERE'S AN AIR TOAST TO YA'LL!!



Last but not least is our Board of Directors. They make the decisions that guide this organization in the direction of sustained growth, and they do one remarkably spectacular job. What a dedicated and extremely capable team you are. Thank you for unselfishly giving so much of yourselves and your lives in assuring there is a trail, the OHT, people will travel to so they can simply . . .

STEP ON IT!!

**YOU ROCK, AND BOWS ARE
CERTAINLY A MUST-DO!!**

- LOOKING AHEAD ON THE TRAIL -

OHTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Come one, come all to the OHTA Board of Directors meeting!

- **When:** Hopefully, the second Saturday or Sunday of January 2026—you'll each receive an email with the day, date, and time of the meeting when those become available.
- **Where:** Old Tap Room (entrance is the first door on the street side of the building); Fossil Cove Brewing Company; 1946 North Birch Avenue; Fayetteville, Arkansas 72703

Yes, everyone is welcome to attend, so we hope to see you there!

2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

The election of candidates to fill the three OHTA Board positions coming open at the end of June 2026 is rapidly approaching, and preparation to fill those spots is now underway. As you may already know, any OHTA member can toss their hat into the ring as a candidate as long as their membership is up to date. So, if you find yourself wanting to try your hand at a governance position on the board of a dynamic non-profit organization such as ours, then here's some important information for you:

- **How to Turn Yourself into a Candidate:** Just send a picture and brief autobiography of yourself to OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com. Please be sure to highlight the personal attributes and experiences you believe make you the right candidate for a board position. More than anything, believing in yourself and in your ability to work with others as a team toward the goal of moving the OHTA in a positive direction will be a mark in your favor. Of course, if you want to learn more about the responsibilities of being on our board, please feel free to ask at: OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com.
- **Deadline for Candidate Submission:** Sunday, March 15, 2026
- **Days and Dates of Election:** Monday, March 30, 2026, through Friday, April 3, 2026
- **How to Cast Your Vote:** If the OHTA has your email address, a link will be sent to it. Just click on the link, follow the directions, and cast your vote.
- **Voter Eligibility:** 1 membership = 1 vote (**Important:** Family memberships are good for just one vote) If more than one member of a family with a Family membership wants to vote, please join our fine organization by clicking on this link: <https://ozarkhighlandstrail.com/get-involved/>

Bring on the Campaign!!

OHTA RENDEZVOUS

It may be the first of January, but preliminary plans are already being made for the 2026 Rendezvous. That means there will be more details in the weeks to come about what all will occur during the event. For now, though, here's what we know:

- **Location:** TYLER BEND CAMPGROUND alongside the beautiful Buffalo River in Buffalo National River Park
 - **Latitude** 35° 59' 12.0001" N – **Longitude** 92° 45' 50.0000" W
- **Days and Dates:** Friday through Sunday, April 24 thru 26, 2026
- **No fee for tent only camping** in the following group sites:
 - G1, G2, G3 (no electricity)
 - Check in time on Friday, April 24: 1 p.m.
 - Check out time on Sunday, April 26: 12 p.m.

- **Pavilion reserved for Saturday, April 25 from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.** (group shelter has electricity)
 - Saturday evening meal and the OHTA annual meeting will be held in the Pavilion
 - Evening meal served at or around 5:30 p.m.
 - Annual meeting starts at or around 7 p.m.
- OHTA members and their families and friends of all ages are welcome to join the fun and festivities! Our furry friends are welcome, as well, but remember, Buffalo National River (BNR) regulations are that they must be on a leash that is no longer than 6 feet—sorry fur babes and fur parents!
- OHTA's annual meeting will be held after Saturday evening's meal, and the winners of the 2026 election of Board candidates will be announced.
- There is no charge to attend the Rendezvous, and pitching your tent in any one of the three group camping areas reserved by OHTA is free!
- **Tyler Bend Campground amenities**
 - Hiking trails galore
 - Buffalo River Trail/Ozark Highlands Trail (BRT/OHT)
 - Tyler Bend Trail System
 - Old River Trail (ORT)
 - RV sites (non-electric) – some sites are currently available for reservation – others available on a first-come basis
 - Shower and toilet facilities onsite
- **Lodging options nearby**
 - Sky Hawk Ridge, St. Joe, AR
 - Anna's Guest House, Gilbert, AR
 - Buffalo River Outfitters, St. Joe, AR
 - Triple D Cabin Rental, St. Joe, AR (it's right on Hwy 65 at the intersection of Hwy 65 and Hwy 333--the road that takes you down to Sky Hawk Ridge and Anna's Guest House)
 - Gilbertstore.com
- **Dining options nearby**
 - Ferguson's Store and Restaurant
 - Big Springs Trading Co.

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

If your intentions are to attend, please let us know as soon as possible so plans can be made in regard to purchasing necessary food and supplies. You can email us at: OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com

HARE MOUNTAIN HIKE-IN

Yes, the OHTA's 45th year of existence occurs this year, 2026 to be exact! We're having a celebration for this special birthday very near the summit of Hare Mountain on Saturday, November 7, 2026, and we suspect it will be one to which all previous celebrations pale. In keeping with tradition, a deluxe potluck meal will be served in the late afternoon, and, of course, there will be a wonderfully warm bonfire for all to enjoy while dining and sharing stories and bond-building conversation with others. So, bring your family, invite your friends, prepare your gear, and, for now, dream about the wonderful experience of the Hare Mountain Hike-In of which you will be a part in a mere 11 months. Yes, more details will come as the event draws nearer, so stay tuned!

RENEWED TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

You may have noticed that there was mention of this earlier on in this edition of the newsletter. It is not just hearsay; it will be firing up soon!

As many of us know, there are approximately 16 miles of the Ozarks Keystone Trail (OKT) left to be constructed. Through the years, Jackson Rhoades has worked diligently and tirelessly through the Ozarks Keystone Trail Endowment to secure the funding necessary for construction of the OKT through that expanse. Recently, though, it was discovered that, in addition to issues of funding, time itself created another obstacle. Specifically, the original flagging James Hodges hung to mark the proposed and Corps-approved route connecting Panther Creek Bridge with the northern terminus of the Norfork Trail located at Fish and Fiddle Resort had largely disappeared due to the effects of the elements. Well, about a week ago, a very determined team comprised of Josh Granderson, Yvonne Liske, and Steve Prather, spent three days hiking and reflagging the GPS route established by Mr. Hodges. The OHTA now has the green light to start construction of a single-track trail. Thus, with the route running north from Fish and Fiddle freshly reflagged, volunteers from the OHTA and our partner organizations, the North Central Arkansas Master Naturalists and the Ozark Society, will initiate northbound trail construction within the next couple months.

If you think you might want to play a role in this endeavor, monitor you email because announcements pertaining to trail construction will be hitting your inbox soon!

IS THIS EXCITING, OR WHAT?!!

WILDERNESS FIRST AID AND CPR/AED COURSE OFFERING

This following information was sent to all members on December 19, 2025. However, since that time, the OHTA has taken on some new members. So, in case you missed the email sent out about two weeks ago for whatever reason including the fact that you were simply not a member, here is a chance to partake in a course that will benefit you and, perhaps, others. Here's the nitty gritty:

No matter what activity you're pursuing in the great outdoors, you owe it to yourself and your companions to have these Wilderness First Aid and CPR/AED certifications through this course under your belt and cap. Tom Burroughs' depth and breadth of knowledge of everything you'll learn in each of these courses is beyond belief, and having taken three of his courses myself through the years, I know you will not walk away with anything less than greater confidence in yourself and your skill set in reference to addressing emergencies anywhere! His hands-on approach to teaching is remarkable, thoroughly educating, and absolutely empowering! If at all possible, don't miss this opportunity—you'll be glad you didn't!!

- **What:** OSRE-Sierra Rescue International Wilderness First Aid 16hr Certification course (and optional CPR Cert course)
- **Days and Dates:** Saturday and Sunday, February 28, 2026, through March 1, 2026
- **Location:** The Ozark Natural Science Center's Lake Fayetteville Campus
599 East Lakeview Drive, Springdale, Arkansas 72764

WFA Course Description and Details

This two-day course immerses participants in essential wilderness medicine procedures, preparing individuals to take immediate action when an outdoor activity doesn't go as planned and 911 responders are hours away. Time is split between interactive classroom sessions and hands-on field scenarios to prepare participants and help them quickly develop basic backcountry medical care skills. The course focus is on patient assessment, stabilization and emergency treatment of issues such as hypothermia and snakebites, as well as understanding when and how to attempt evacuation. Participants will emerge capable of calmly responding to a wide variety of emergency situations.

This course will be taught by Tom Burroughs who is the Director of Ozark Safety and Rescue Educators and team leader of the Washington County Arkansas Search and Rescue team. Tom has been an emergency

responder since 1990 and is an NREMT/WEMT and WildMed Instructor Trainer. Tom brings a background of many years of backcountry rescue experience and has been teaching these courses since 2006.

All participants will need to be dressed in clothing that can be stained and/or damaged, as the program is heavily hands on, and moulage will be used to promote training authenticity.

Participants will need to be prepared to be outside for many of the training hours, regardless of weather conditions, unless hazardous (e.g., storms or extreme heat or cold). Participants should bring whatever items they commonly carry on their persons in the performance of their duties, as improvisational concepts are an important aspect of this course.

All program supplies and a waterproof field guide, which becomes property of the participant, will be provided by Ozark Safety and Rescue Educators (OSRE) as part of the program cost.

Successful completion of the entire program will result in a three year nationally recognized Wilderness First Aid Certification through Sierra Rescue International and meets the requirements of BSA, NICA, and the American Camp Association for Wilderness First Aid Training.

Course Fee - \$250.00

Here is the registration link!

[https://www.cognitoforms.com/OSREIntrepid/
RegistrationForSierraRescueInternationalWildernessFirstAidCourseFebruary28thMarch1st](https://www.cognitoforms.com/OSREIntrepid/RegistrationForSierraRescueInternationalWildernessFirstAidCourseFebruary28thMarch1st)

There will be an optional CPR/AED certification course on Friday evening, February 28, 2026, following the first day of the WFA course. The cost for this optional course is \$50.00 and registration is available through the WFA course link shown above.

Tom Burroughs

ACA Safety and Rescue Committee Chair
ACA L-5 Advanced Swiftwater Rescue Instructor Trainer Educator
ACA L-4 Whitewater Kayak Instructor Trainer Educator
ACA L-5 Advanced Whitewater Rafting Instructor Trainer
2015 ACA "Excellence in Instruction" National Award Recipient
ITRA Level 3V Swiftwater Rescue Instructor
NREMT/EMT-W/MPIC - SRI Wilderness Medicine Instructor Trainer
Team Leader- Washington CO AR Search and Rescue team
Director, Ozark Safety and Rescue Educators / Clear Creek Paddlesports
Member- Wilderness Medical Society
SwiftwaterRescue@gmail.com
479-595-1655

– ON THE TRAIL –

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

First off, we want to thank each and every one of you who renewed your OHTA membership during the past year! The response from those who were unsure about the status of their membership has been amazing as evidenced by the number of our members who wrote to OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com and inquired.

We are aware that there still are numerous memberships that have either expired or are about to expire, and if you're unsure about where your membership stands, please feel free to contact us at the above-mentioned email address. We will provide you with an answer in a very timely fashion.

Again, we note that for the past 44 years, the Ozark Highlands Trail Association has been about bringing people together to build, maintain, and enjoy the OHT. The trail offers those who step on it a place to hike, backpack, run, and simply enjoy the enormity and bountiful beauty of nature.

Since its inception, the Ozark Highlands Trail Association has been supported through memberships as well as through contributions, and your board members are always searching for new funding sources. Despite the contributions and other streams of funding that may be and have been found, the OHTA cannot exist without members who are willing to give of themselves in the form of membership dues.

For all but the 'Life memberships, renewal is necessary each year. For some, a renewal reminder gets sent out annually, but, unfortunately, due to problems we're working to remedy, not everyone has been getting a reminder. Therefore, we encourage each of our members to check the status of their membership, and if it is time to renew, please do so. You are truly this organization's lifeblood, and we will gladly update you about whether it is time to renew your membership. The Ozark Highlands Trail Association needs and appreciates each of you, and we hope you continue to support this organization!



– LOOKING BACK ON THE TRAIL –



It's been one very memorable year. Among those memories are the conversations many of us were fortunate enough to enjoy while hiking on or maintaining the OHT with others. And, "with others" is what it's all about. This organization is filled with an abundance of very interesting, talented, spirited, caring, and giving folks. In other words, we have a very dynamic group of souls in our midst, and the OHTA is what it is because each member, in their own special way, has given something of themselves to make it special in its own way.

Looking forward with anticipation of what 2026 could bring, the board of directors wants to take this opportunity once again to say thanks to every person who has found importance in being one of our members, a contributor, and/or a partner! You know who you are, and, yes, you are appreciated!

We trust the year ahead will be nothing less than wonderful for you and yours. May there be many memorable gatherings in the year that's here. Take care of you and those you cherish most, and ENJOY THE OHT!!



- TRAILSIDE READS -

The Tower: A Chronicle of Climbing and Controversy on Cerro Torre – Kelly Cordes

Walking Thru: A Couple's Adventure on the Pacific Crest Trail – Michael Tyler

QUOTES FOR THE MONTH

“When I walk, there is no tomorrow. Yesterday is gone . . . there is only here, now. I listen to the forest speak, the mountains, the water. I hear their voices. Trees become family. Rocks

become living beings that you know, and you're happy to see.” Clara Hughes

“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Unlike the passage of time, each step taken as we journey along the OHT leaves behind a spacious abundance to which we can return time and again in real time!





*Till the trails we travel alone become the trail that
brings us together . . .*



OHT – Richland



**YOUR ASSOCIATION WITH THE OHT MAKES THIS THE ASSOCIATION IT IS!
THANK YOU ALL FOR BEING A PART OF THE OZARK HIGHLANDS TRAIL ASSOCIATION!!**

HIKE ONWARD!!



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OHTA's Mission is to Build, Maintain, Promote, and ENJOY the Ozark Highlands Trail.

(ADDENDUM TO CORRECT AN OVERSIGHT)

- LOOKING BACK ON THE TRAIL -
(once again)

MATNEY CAMP RESTORATION CELEBRATION

It can safely be stated that Matney camp has been brought back to life and is looking better than ever! As recently as a year and a half ago, camp visitors would have been disillusioned by the hardly recognizable state



of the area. Yes, the elements had taken their toll—the area nothing like it did during the years prior to being decommissioned. In fact, it took remembering how it looked in its prime to have any notion, whatsoever, that it had once been a place of beauty on the south bank of the White River.

Well, that was then, and now is now. Matney Camp is back! Yes, thanks to the vision, dedication, and hard work of Gordon King and those he recruited for



assistance, the camp's picnic tables, fire grates, tent pads, latrine, community fire pit, and functionality have back to life! And those who attended the Restoration Celebration were introduced to the possibilities the camp affords its visitors.

Matney Camp is fairly unique in that it is accessible only by boat from the White River or on foot via the 0.8 mile single-track spur trail leading to it from the Ozark Highlands Trail (OHT) near Highway 341/Push Mountain Road. What it once again offers is beauty and solitude for families, day hikers and backpackers, youth groups, and nature lovers of all ages to relax and enjoy. Whether you spend a few moments or visit the area for an extended stay, the sights and sounds will put your soul at peace.

Now, as for those who attended the big celebration, they were treated to some great food floated in by boat and prepared on sight by chef Gordon himself. One of the revelers even hand wove 15 to 20 beanies and carried them to the camp for others in attendance to lay claim to for themselves.

And there was a Trail Ranger—OHTA's most prestigious award—plaque awarded to each of two long-time OHTA members, Sean Prewitt and Chris Adams. Trail Ranger plaques are not annual awards. The honor is bestowed only to those who have made a lasting, positive impact on the organization through their many years of dedication and commitment. No two individuals could have been more deserving of the honor than Sean and Chris.



After the celebration ended, most of the attendees hiked out for home. However, five folks pitched tents at locations scattered throughout the camp and stayed the night. And what a night it was with cool night air and the fascinating and, at times, haunting sounds created by the creatures of the dark. The whole experience did not disappoint and made it clear that Matney Camp is a great

place for escaping the hustle and bustle of life and restoring the soul with solitude.



Thank you, Gordon King for making the Matney Camp experience a very pleasurable reality once again!