



## FEBRUARY 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	Brent Umphlett and Leslie Wright Productions
Social Media Coordinator	Tiffany Mallard
Online Store Coordinator	Mike Lemaster
Brochure Business Coordinator	Elizabeth Granderson
Adopt-A-Highway Program Coordinator	Randy Soeung
Trailhead Register Data Processor	Yvonne Liske
Arkansas Trails Council Representative	Yvonne Liske
Trail Navigation Partner	FarOut – <a href="https://faroutguides.com/">https://faroutguides.com/</a>
Ozark Keystone Trail Buzzard Roost Gap Lead Developer	Yvonne Liske
Trail Angels	Billy and Donna Hignite • Mike Lemaster

**- ON THE TRAIL -**

#### **OZARKS KEYSTONE TRAIL – BUZZARD ROOST GAP**

The Ozark Highlands Trail Association (OHTA) and the Ozarks Keystone Trail Endowment (OKTE) are excited to announce a joint volunteer effort to construct approximately 19 miles of new single-track trail through the dramatic OHT–OKT Buzzard Roost Gap.

This new volunteer-built trail (VBT) segment will extend north from the current northern terminus of the Norfolk Trail at CR 1028 (Fish & Fiddle Road), tracing the rugged west shoreline of Norfolk Lake to the Panther Creek bridge on CR 396. Once completed, it will form the final link in a spectacular and highly anticipated continuous trail section from Norfolk Dam to the Arkansas–Missouri state line.

The original Buzzard Roost route was expertly flagged by volunteer, James Hodges, in 2019. While much of that early flagging faded over time, a skilled team of OHTA volunteers recently reflagged the entire corridor, marking the first major milestone toward construction.



Another Buzzards Roost Gap crew member

worldwide. Just as importantly, FarOut offers offline maps and elevation profiles, allowing users to track progress and plan routes even without cell service. Now, detailed information for the entire Ozark Highlands Trail (OHT) is available right in the palm of your hand.

Thanks to the diligence of Josh Granderson, with support from Chris Adams and Brent Umphlett, the OHTA recently finalized a License Agreement with Alice Bodnar, COO and General Counsel for FarOut. As a result, the OHT information on the app has been largely updated. Moving forward, updates will be made regularly as we continue to make progress on the trail.

Volunteer crews are now focused on clearing leaves, limbs, and debris along the route, allowing hikers and trail runners to preview the alignment and provide feedback to refine flow, safety, and overall trail experience. Once the full corridor is cleared and finalized, work will begin on building the trail bed itself.

All phases of the trail construction project will be overseen by OHTA volunteer, Yvonne Liske.

She will be assisted by trained section leaders; recruitment and training are currently underway. While a formal groundbreaking date has not yet been set, corridor construction is officially underway, marking a major step forward.

This VBT collaboration represents an exciting milestone for both OHTA and OKTE—another significant stride toward completing a continuous, world-class trail system across the Ozarks from Lake Fort Smith to the Arkansas/Missouri border. Interested in volunteering? Please contact us at: [ohata@ozarkhighlandstrail.com](mailto:ohata@ozarkhighlandstrail.com).

**FAROUT – [HTTPS://FAROUTGUIDES.COM/](https://faroutguides.com/)**

If you aren't familiar with FarOut, it is the premier navigation app for long-distance hiking, running, biking, and paddling. It provides reliable, specific information on water sources, camping spots, and trail conditions for hundreds of trails



Buzzards Roost Gap reflagging crew



This is an incredible opportunity for both the OHTA and the OHT! That noted, we owe a huge THANK YOU to Josh Granderson, Brent Umphlett, Chris Adams, and Alice Bodnar for making this possible.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Once again, we want to give a special thanks to everyone who has renewed their Ozark Highlands Trail Association (OHTA) membership! The response from those unsure about the status of their membership has been amazing and is greatly appreciated! For those among us who remain unsure about the status of their membership, please drop us an email at [OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com](mailto:OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com). We promise we will respond quickly.

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.

For 44 years, the OHTA has brought people together to build, maintain, and enjoy the Ozark Highlands Trail (OHT). From its start, the board has relentlessly looked for alternative funding sources and contributions, and those efforts have yielded some remarkable results. Despite their efforts, though, one reality remains: The OHTA cannot exist without the support of its members. You are our lifeblood.

Now, for everyone but those with "Life" memberships, renewals are required annually. While we aim to send annual reminders to each person whose membership is about to expire, technical issues have prevented us from being fully successful at getting those notices out. So, please check your status and renew if necessary.

We truly appreciate your continued support in preserving the beauty of the OHT and in assuring the viability of the OHTA.

## - LOOKING AHEAD ON THE TRAIL -

### 2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

At the end of June 2026, the terms of three OHTA board members end. Given that, preparations to fill those vacancies are underway, and any OHTA member with an up-to-date membership can run. If you're interested in serving on our board, it's important to understand that you would be running for a position on the board and not to become an officer on the board. Board officers (e.g., President, Vice-president, Treasurer, Secretary, Maintenance Coordinator) are elected each year by board members near the beginning of July.

So, if you find yourself wanting to have a direct say in the governance of a dynamic non-profit organization such as ours, here's some important information for you:



January 2026 on the BRT

- **How to Turn Yourself into a Candidate:** Just send a picture and brief autobiography of yourself to [OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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/>

## The Campaign Is On!!

### OHTA RENDEZVOUS

February is here, and plans are coming together for the 2026 Rendezvous. Though there is still some planning left to do, here's what we know at this point:

- **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 **potluck meal (includes a casserole competition)** served at or around 5:30 p.m. in the Pavilion
  - Brief annual meeting starts at or around 7 p.m. on Saturday evening following the meal in the Pavilion – there may be a presentation by a special guest following the meeting
- 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!
- Group hike Saturday morning at 9:30 – location is yet to be determined
- 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](mailto:OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com)

### **HARE MOUNTAIN HIKE-IN**

Yes, the OHTA's 45<sup>th</sup> year of existence occurs this year, 2026 to be exact, and keeping with tradition, we're having a celebration for this special birthday. The big event will be held very near the summit of Hare Mountain



January 2026 – BRT at Pruitt

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 through 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 9 months. Yes, more details will come as the event draws nearer, so stay tuned!

## - VENTURING NEAR THE TRAIL -

### COMMUNITY FORESTER PROGRAM

Are you looking for a more well-rounded outdoor existence? Would you enjoy connecting with other people, learning a few things along the way, and maybe even letting folks in the “tree-loving” community know about the Ozark Highlands Trail? If so, here’s information about a program where of those things can happen: In 2025, Fayetteville started a Community Forester program with the City’s Urban Forestry and Parks Commission. Through the program, there are a lot of neat things to learn and like-minded people to meet. If this sounds interesting, and you want to learn more, just click on this link:

<https://www.fayetteville-ar.gov/4452/Fayetteville-Community-Forester-Program>

For now, though, here’s some information that might help sway your decision to participate in the program:

The program offers participants the choice of working toward three levels: “Tree Keeper,” “Steward,” or “Champion.” There are typically two sessions for the same topic - you really only need to attend one of them. Topics include Dendrochronology (study of tree rings), invasive species, tree anatomy and function, winter tree identification, fire and forests, hiking with a forester, and more! The format for each varies from doing field work, short classroom presentations, and participating in volunteer events. You can find a more detailed description of what all is offered by clicking on the link above.

- **Next event:** Saturday, February 21, 2026; 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
- **Location:** Kessler Mountain Regional Park - Saddle Up Trail
- **Address:** 2600 W. Judge Cummings Road, Fayetteville, Arkansas

Registration to events is recommended but not required, and bringing along your friends is very much welcomed.

Attending is a great way to get the word out about our wonderful Ozark Highlands Trail Association!

### ARKANSAS SITE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Interested in yet another way of developing a more well-rounded outdoor existence? How about connecting with folks in the archeological community? If this sounds interesting and you want to learn more, here’s some information about a great training opportunity you’ll want to read:

The Arkansas Site Stewardship [Program](#) is a joint effort between the [Arkansas Archeological Survey](#) (ARAS-the professional archeologists) and the [Arkansas Archeological Society](#) (AAS-the volunteer avocational archeologists). After participating in a day-long workshop, becoming members of the Society, and submitting a successful application, stewards are assigned archeological sites to monitor 2 to 4 times per year. No formal archeological training or knowledge is necessary—you’ll learn everything you need to know at the workshop. Then, if you become a steward, there will be additional training opportunities available for deeper dives into different aspects of archeological stewardship.

Not all sections of the Ozark Highlands Trail (OHT) have registered archeological sites, but many do. If you have a section assigned to you for maintenance, hopefully there will be sites you can visit as you do maintenance activities.

So come join in! The workshop will be on May 9<sup>th</sup> at the Ozone Community Building at 14137 AR 21 in Ozone, Arkansas. Click [here](#) to register. Mel will be happy to answer questions via email ([mzabeck@uark.edu](mailto:mzabeck@uark.edu)), by phone (479-236-3938), or at the April 25<sup>th</sup> Rendezvous meal and annual meeting at Turner Bend.

– TRAILSIDE READS –

*If I Live Until Morning: A True Story of Adventure, Tragedy and Transformation* – Jean Muenchrath

*Across the Top of the World: The Quest for the Northwest Passage* – James P. Delgado

QUOTES FOR THE MONTH

*“Sunsets are proof that endings can often be beautiful, too.”* Beau Taplin

*“The purpose of life is to discover your gift. The work of life is to develop it. The meaning of life is to give your gift away.”*

David Viscott



The work never ends -- before ↑ -- after ↓



*What's the purpose, your purpose, the driving force that moves you from prone to vertical each passing day? Uncertain what it is? Well, then, here's a possible remedy for low purpose : Find a section; any section of the OHT will work. Walk down it a distance, and ponder your purpose—out and back. Perhaps it will come to you . . .*

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



**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!!**