



## MARCH 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
FarOut Data Coordinator	Josh 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 -**

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

As was noted in the Ozark Highlands Trail Association's February edition of the newsletter, OHTA and FarOut have joined forces to bring safe, efficient, and interesting navigation of the Ozark Highlands Trail (OHT) into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our newly designated FarOut Data Coordinator, Josh Granderson, has been compiling data and sharing it with Alice Bodnar, FarOut COO and General Counsel, in an effort to assure the accuracy of waypoints and all other OHT navigational info users can access on their FarOut app.

To kick this task into high gear, we need your help. So, we're asking OHT hikers to share with us any accurate data you believe could benefit FarOut users on the OHT. You can do this by sending it to Josh at [granderlife@gmail.com](mailto:granderlife@gmail.com). Specifically, if you know of a historical site near the trail, sending the GPS coordinates and a brief history of it would be welcomed. Also important to share would be the GPS coordinates for trail hazards you've recently encountered while on the trail. Of course, from a hiker's perspective, there is plenty of other information that could benefit those using the OHT, so please feel free to send it in, as well. Our goal is to assure that all accessible information on FarOut is as current and accurate as possible! Your help in this endeavor will be appreciated!

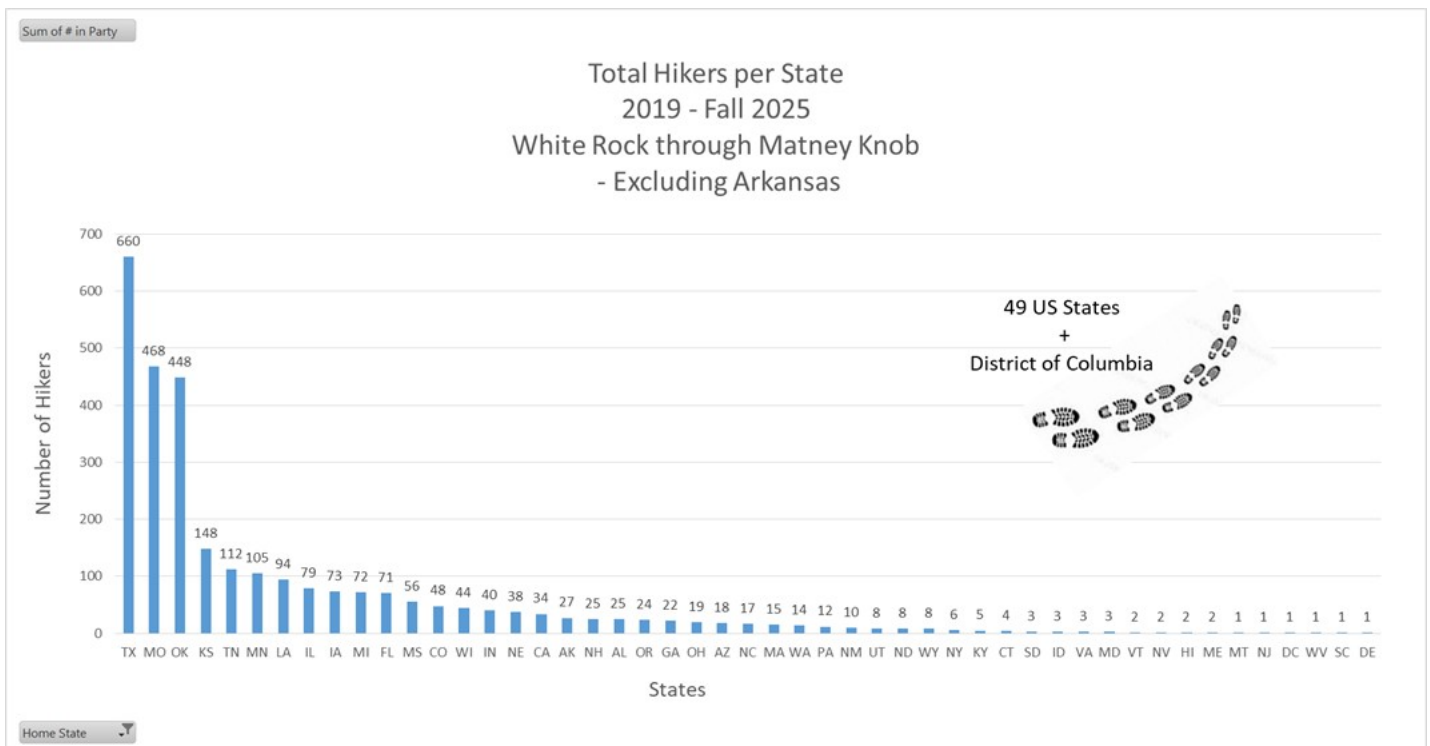
## OZARKS KEYSTONE TRAIL – BUZZARD ROOST GAP

Preliminary steps are well underway toward initiating construction on the 19 miles of new volunteer-built single-track trail through the OHT–OKT Buzzard Roost Gap. Here’s where things stand at this point in time:

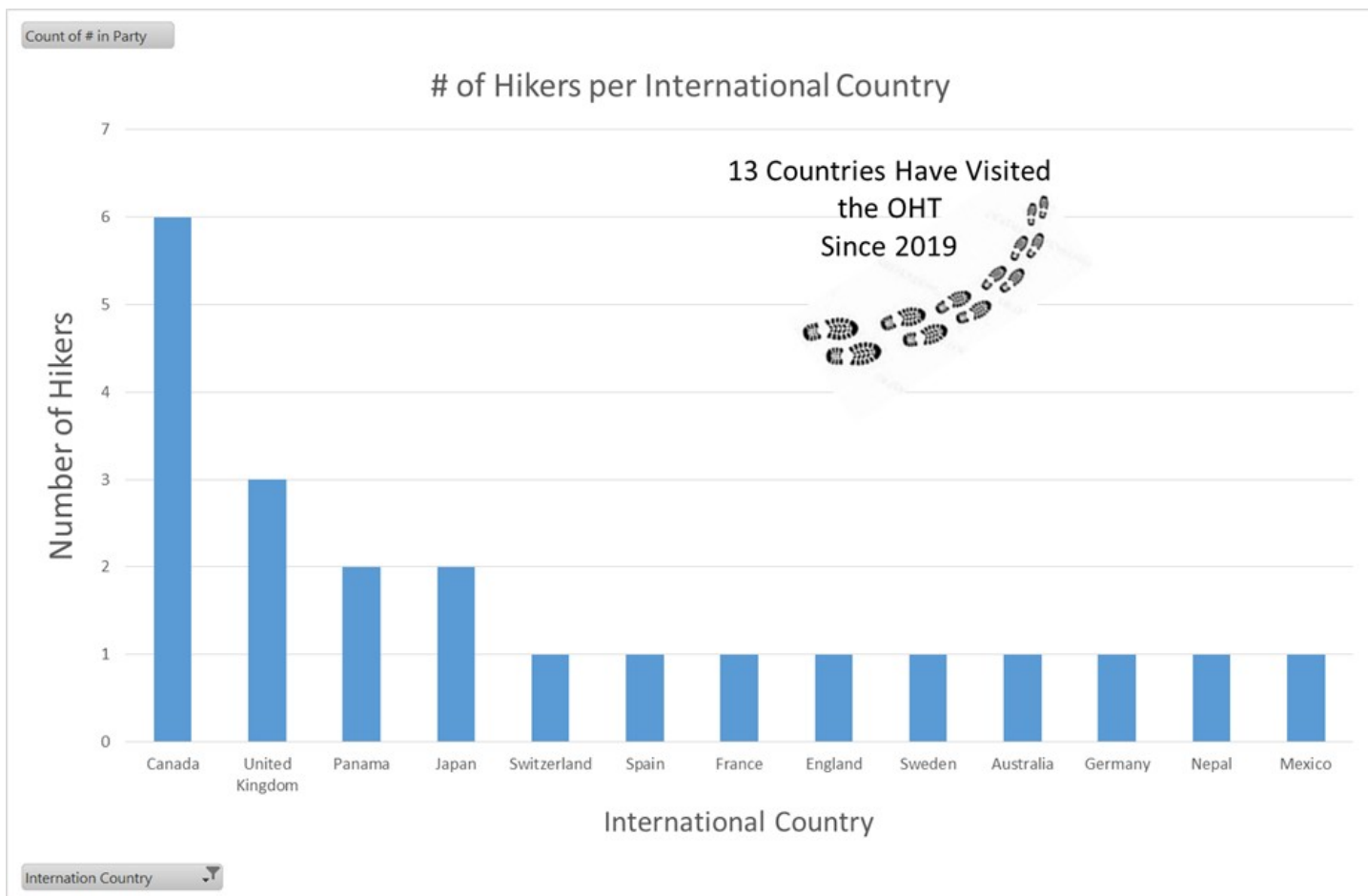
- Confirmation has been received that team/section leaders will soon receive training in the techniques of trail building from a group of five very experienced and accomplished trail builders led by none other than the founder of the OHTA, Tim Ernst.
- Volunteers from the Ozark Highlands Trail Association (OHTA) and the Ozarks Keystone Trail Endowment (OKTE) are working diligently to ensure the southernmost segment of the new trail’s official track will soon be finalized.
- The launch date for construction remains a few months away.
- Excitement continues to build as we get closer to completion of a continuous, world-class trail system across the Ozarks from Lake Fort Smith to the Arkansas/Missouri border
- The names of those who want to play a role in building this segment of new trail are being compiled, and if you’re interested in being on that list, please let us know at: [ohata@ozarkhighlandstrail.com](mailto:ohata@ozarkhighlandstrail.com).

## WHO ALL IS USING THE OHT

At long last, here are the data from the trailhead sign-in sheets. In the latter part of October 2025, Yvonne Liske took on the task of collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data gathered from the register box at each of the 23 trailheads along the OHT. This has turned out to be no small undertaking, for, as it turns out, a total of 16,035 hikers signed into the various registers between 2018 and the fall of 2025. According to Yvonne, “A few fur friends may have been included, but aren’t they hikers, too?”



In addition to the number of hikers on the trail through the years, the origins of those hikers have been learned. Of course, an overwhelming number of trail users are Arkansas residents—Arkansas numbers were removed so the distribution of hikers from other states could be shown more clearly. The chart on the preceding page shows that following the number of hikers from our great state, Texas hikers have given a strong second-place showing. Missouri and Oklahoma followed with almost equal numbers. At this time, the OHT has hosted hikers from the District of Columbia and 49 of our 50 states. Rhode Island is the one missing link to all 50 states being represented. So, if you know someone from Rhode Island, invite them down for a nice Ozark hiking experience.



One of the exciting revelations the data produced is that, since 2019, folks from 13 different countries have hiked on the OHT. Surprisingly, there have even been hikers from Nepal and Panama. As an aside, if anyone has any information on any of the hikers from foreign lands, it would be great to hear about their OHT experience. Please send it to [ohta@ozarkhighlandstrail.com](mailto:ohta@ozarkhighlandstrail.com).

Though no graph is shown for this, the data were broken down to show the number of hikers per trailhead. It came as no surprise to find that White Rock has the highest total with Fort Douglas following in second. It is important to note, though, that all of the registers east of Grinder's Ferry (located just east of the Highway 65 bridge over the Buffalo River) were installed in 2025. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume the numbers from those boxes will increase through time. Of the boxes installed in 2025, Matney Knob showed the highest usage, and we suspect this finding may have come about as a result of its proximity to the large number of hikers who travel there from the local area for a simple day hike. It is also exciting to learn that there have been many hikers pulling everything from overnight hikes to thru-hikes from Lake Fort Smith to not just Woolum, but all the way to Matney Knob. And it's not too far in the future that we'll be able to include hiker information from all of the Norfolk and Keystone sections! Yes, we'll have our finger on the pulse of the OHT from the AR/MO border to Lake Fort Smith!

The trailhead registers produced several other great surprises in the form of positive notes left by hikers. Their postings ranged from comments on the beauty of the trail to observations about how well maintained the trail is to shout-outs to our trail's maintainers. Many hikers noted trail conditions for fellow hikers to heed, and, of course, there were those who didn't seem to like the number of ticks in the warm season. Really, what's that about?!

It was especially heartwarming to see how many people got engaged while on the trail along the number of couples who spent their honeymoon doing a long-distance hike. That noted, given what we've learned to date, it's a pretty safe bet there is plenty more to learn about who is using our great trail and how they're doing it! We are excited!



In closing, here's a note from Yvonne: "I hope everyone has enjoyed seeing the summary of the hiking data and was as excited as I was to capture and present it. The data certainly support our thoughts on how many people are using the OHT. Please encourage fellow hikers to log in so we can see their progress."

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

The OHTA extends its heartfelt appreciation to each of you who renewed your Ozark Highlands Trail Association (OHTA)

membership this past month! The response from those unsure about the status of their membership has been phenomenal and is greatly appreciated! Naturally, there are those among us who remain unsure about the status of their membership. If you're one of those, please feel free to inquire at [OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com](mailto:OHTA@ozarkhighlandstrail.com) about the status of your membership. We will respond as quickly as possible.

For more than 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.

We reiterate that for everyone but those with "Life" memberships, renewals are required annually. We are doing our best to send annual reminders to each person whose membership is about to expire, but challenging 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 ensuring 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 board position 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:

- **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/>

## You, too, could be a driving force for this organization!!

### OHTA RENDEZVOUS

The 2026 OHTA Rendezvous is drawing closer by the day. The planning is pretty much done, and the wait is on. If you believe you'd like to attend this year's big event, here's the information you'll want to have:

- **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**

The OHTA is aging and getting finer with the passage of time. In fact, about two months before the end of this year, our organization will enter its 45<sup>th</sup> year, and as it is with wine, so, too, it is for the OHTA—it just keeps getting more exquisite with age. As has been true in the past, a celebration is in order, and this year's birthday party will be held near the summit of Hare Mountain on Saturday, November 7, 2026. 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 (fur babes included), invite your friends, prepare your gear, and, for the time being, dream about the wonderful experience of the Hare Mountain Hike-In of which you will be a part in a mere 8 months. Yes, more details will come as the event draws nearer, so stay tuned!

- LOOKING BACK ON THE TRAIL -

MAINTENANCE BASECAMP—FEBRUARY 28, 2026

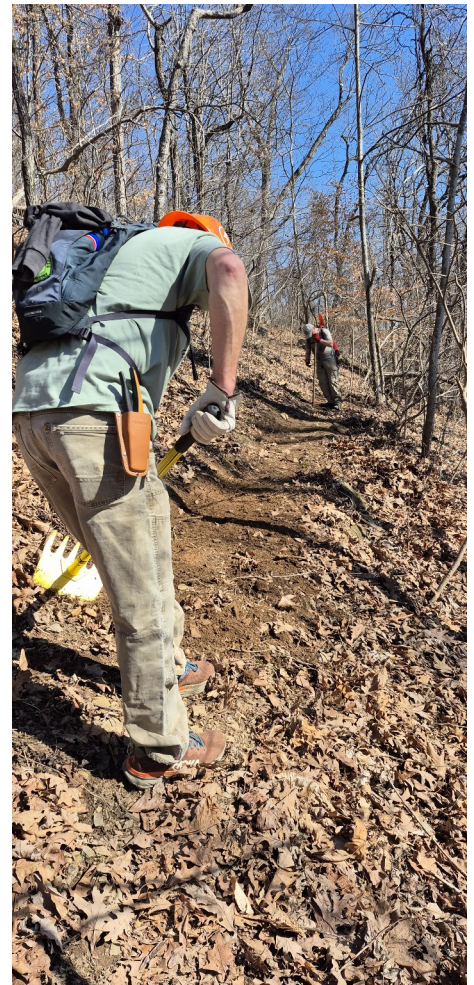


It's been said that a lot can change in a day's time, and on Saturday, February 26, that was certainly very true for sections of the OHT to the east and west of the Ozone Recreation Area and Campground.

Friday evening, volunteers from various parts of Arkansas and as far away as Kansas City started gathering at the Hignite retreat in Ozone, Arkansas. By the following morning, roughly 22 folks were present, and Billy and Donna Hignite made sure they were all well fed. Following the meal, maintainers and sawyers split into five teams and headed to sections along the OHT from MM 77 to MM 93. The day's work menu included sidehill tread repair, directional sign restoration, placement of caution signs warning hikers of potentially dangerous encounters with dogs, removal of deadfalls and encroaching growth from the trail corridor, and

resurrection of about 20 long-lost steps on a hillside that included routing the trail back to its original location. As for those steps, they were constructed in the early days of the trail but had not encountered a boot in many, many years. Once everyone returned to camp, the Hignites dished up some superb chili, apple pie, and a made-from-scratch, sinfully delicious chocolate cake.

It was a maintenance day to remember, and the OHT is certainly in much better shape for it. We want to thank every person who volunteered for this event, Chris Adams for his miraculous maintenance basecamp magic, and Billy and Donna Hignite for the remarkable beings they are! Yes, **THANK YOU ALL! YOU'RE ALL REMARKABLE!!!**



## - VENTURING NEAR THE TRAIL -

### ARKANSAS SITE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Interested in 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 just for you:

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 -

*The Last Island: Discovery, Defiance, and the Most Elusive Tribe on Earth* – Adam Goodheart

*Wanderlust: An Eccentric Explorer, an Epic Journey, a Lost Age* – Reid Mitenbuler

### QUOTES FOR THE MONTH

*“You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes a day. Unless you're too busy, then you should sit for an hour.”* Zen saying

*“A little while and I will be gone from among you, whither I cannot tell. From nowhere we come, into nowhere we go. What is life? It is a flash of firefly in the night. It is a breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is as the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.”* Chief Crowfoot





*Ever notice how worries or concerns about the world's problems seem to dissipate, even vanish as we venture through the calming beauty of the forest on a trail? Hmm, it does happen. Perhaps this finding amplifies the importance for there being more trail time on our schedules?*



*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!!**