



APRIL 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 Navigation Partner
Ozark Keystone Trail, Buzzard Roost Gap Lead Developer
Trail Angels

Brent Umphlett and Leslie Wright Productions
Tiffany Mallard
Mel Zabecki
Elizabeth Granderson
Randy Soeung
Yvonne Liske
Yvonne Liske
FarOut – <https://faroutguides.com/>
Yvonne Liske
Billy and Donna Hignite • Mike Lemaster

- ON THE TRAIL -

OHTA RENDEZVOUS

April 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)



Early spring flowers along the OHT -- photo courtesy of Sofia Merriman

- Check in time on Friday, April 24: 1 p.m.
- Check out time on Sunday, April 26: 12 p.m.



Photo courtesy of Sofia Merriman

- **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 – we will start gathering at 9 a.m. in the parking area for the group campsites – location of the hike is yet to be determined, but the distance of the hike will run somewhere between 3 and 5 miles
- A load of locally cut firewood will be supplied for all Rendezvous participants to use – a pile of the firewood will be located near the group campsites
- 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

OZARKS KEYSTONE TRAIL – BUZZARD ROOST GAP

The OHTA and OKT are proud to announce the start of trail construction through the Buzzard Roost Gap along the shore of Norfolk Lake. As was noted in previous editions of the OHTA Newsletter, work to lay out and flag the



line of the trail-to-be through the Gap was initiated about two or three months ago, and, at this point in time, the line is established for several miles north from the northern terminus of the Norfolk Trail.

On Saturday, April 4, 2026, the OHTA and the OKTE held a trail-building clinic for prospective crew leaders. Tim Ernst and four other individuals with extensive experience in the construction of single-track hiking trails provided training for close to 25 prospective trail-building team leaders through a combination of lecture and hands-on instruction. The hands-on training led to the actual construction of new trail through two ravines along the proposed route.

On Sunday, several of the freshly trained team

leaders put their newly learned skills to work clearing about 0.9 mile of trail corridor and then building approximately a quarter mile of trail.

Yes, the work is off and running, and the future is looking bright for the OHTA/OKTE to announce to the world one of these days that our trail is complete! In the weeks and months to come, crew leaders will begin scheduling work days for volunteers who want to participate in building some trail, and those dates will be shared with our members once they are announced. So, please give some thought to whether you want to play a role in the expansion and completion of our trail. How to let us know about your desire to participate will be revealed once more information is available.



For now, we'd like to give a big THANK YOU to the trainers: Tim Ernst, Sean Prewitt, Bob Robinson, Wade Colwell, and Duane Woltjen. As well, thanks to each and every one of you who volunteered for the training! You all are very much appreciated!!

PASSING THE OHTA STORE'S TORCH

At this point in time, the OHTA is on the cusp of experiencing some significant transitions. One of those happens to involve a change in the management of the OHTA.

For years, Mike Lemaster devoted an unimaginable amount of his time and energy to managing OHTA's online store. When orders came in, it was Mike who made sure they were quickly processed and the merchandise was mailed to our customers. Whenever problems arose, Mike quickly solved them. Without a doubt, the quality of service our store customers enjoyed was a direct reflection of Mike's professionalism.

Of course, all good things will pass, and so it is true for the management of OHTA's online store. In late February, the need for passing along the store's management became undeniable, and Mike made the difficult decision to 'turn over the keys' to someone else. As good fortune had it, the decision about who would assume his long-held position was made easy by none other than Mel Zabecki. In the latter part of 2025, she let it be known that she would be willing to manage OHTA's store when the day came for someone else to take on the job. Well, the day came, Mel was true to her offer, and Mike willingly handed his store responsibilities to her.

Indeed, change and uncertainty within an organization can bring with them concern. However, in OHTA's case, the transition in store management produced no concern because there was and is no doubt that Mel has everything it takes to successfully pick up where Mike left off.

With all of this in mind, a big THANK YOU to Mike is in order for your years of superb service to the OHTA! Mel, THANK YOU, as well, for assuming management of OHTA's store. It is comforting to know the store is once again in very capable hands!

2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

The 2026 election for the three open positions on OHTA's Board of Directors has come to an end, and the results are finally in! This year, as opposed to last year, our organization was very fortunate to have five highly qualified candidates running for a board seat, and as was anticipated, we had a great race. That said the time has now come to announce the winners . . . at this year's Rendezvous on Saturday evening during the annual meeting that will follow the event's feast! So, please be there, especially if you ran for a position, for the outcome is important to know. Remember, though, whether you were chosen or not by our members to be on OHTA's board, there will be another chance to run in 2027. Hope to see you all at the Rendezvous!

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. 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.

The board truly appreciates your continued support in preserving the beauty of the OHT and in assuring the viability of the OHTA.

BEING BEAR AWARE AND WISE

The advent of spring brings with it a rush to the trail by those who love all things outdoors. Among those are hikers and backpackers, OHTA's volunteer trail maintainers, and let's not forget, bears. Yes, the bears are out from their winter rest and foraging for food, and though people are nowhere near the top of preferred cuisine by members of family Ursidae, we cannot help but remember the two attacks on humans that occurred in the fall of 2025.

Given those unfortunate occurrences, it is imperative that we do all we can to ensure such attacks are avoided and even prevented.

It is for that reason the OHTA is including the adjacent "Six Outdoor BearWise Basics." Please take time to review the six basics of being BearWise, and, if you will, share this information with members of your family, your friends, your not-so-friendly acquaintances, and every outdoor enthusiast you know. Doing so could save your life and the lives of others!

And before we forget, this information was provided to the OHTA by Robert Duggan, Recreation Program Manager for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests. Thank you, Robert!!



Be BearWise
OUTDOORS

Six Outdoor BearWise Basics



Stay Alert & Stay Together

Pay attention to your surroundings and stay together. Walk, hike, jog, or cycle with others when possible. Keep kids within sight and close by. Leave earbuds at home and make noise periodically so bears can avoid you.



Leave No Trash or Food Scraps

Double bag your food when hiking and pack out all food and trash. Leaving scraps, wrappers, or even "harmless" items like apple cores teaches bears to associate trails and campsites with food. Don't burn food scraps or trash in your fire ring or grill.



Keep Dogs Leashed

Letting dogs chase or bark at bears is asking for trouble; don't force a bear to defend itself. Keep your dogs leashed at all times or leave them at home.



Camp Safely

Set up camp away from dense cover and natural food sources. Cook at least 100 yards from your tent. **Do not store food, trash, clothes worn when cooking, or toiletries in your tent.** Store in approved bear-resistant containers OR out of sight in a locked vehicle OR suspended at least 10 feet above the ground and 10 feet from any part of the tree.



Know What To Do If You See a Bear

Black bears are seldom aggressive and attacks are rare. If you see a bear before it notices you: stand still, don't approach and enjoy the moment; then move away quietly in the opposite direction. If you encounter a bear that's aware of you: don't run; running may trigger a chase response. Back away slowly. Visit [BearWise.org](https://www.bearwise.org) to learn what to do if a black bear approaches, charges or follows you.



Carry Bear Spray & Know How To Use It

Bear spray is proven to be the easiest and most effective way to deter a bear that threatens you. It doesn't work like bug repellent, so **never** spray your tent, campsite or belongings.

Learn More:
[BearWise.org](https://www.bearwise.org)



Helping People
Live Responsibly with Black Bears

BearWise® – Created and Supported by State Wildlife Agencies and Bear Biologists • © 2019

– LOOKING AHEAD ON THE TRAIL –

HARE MOUNTAIN HIKE-IN

As you may already know, the OHTA's 45th 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 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 toasty 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 7 months. Naturally, 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.

If you’d like another incentive to participate in the Community Forester Program, just know that doing so would be 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 9th 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), by phone (479-236-3938), or at the April 25th Rendezvous meal and annual meeting at Turner Bend.

USFS AND WILDERNESSVOLUNTEERS.ORG

USFS personnel are currently working with Wildernessvolunteers.org on a reroute project on the Whitaker Point /Hawksbill Crag Trail. The hands-on work will take place from May 17, 2026, through May 23, 2026, and OHTA members are welcome to join in. This project is a little different from most in that participants will be required to pay a fee for taking part in this week-long experience. If you'd like to learn more and believe joining the effort is something you just might enjoy, click on the link below:

<https://wildernessvolunteers.org/wv-project/ozark-st-francis-national-forest/>

Thank you! Hope to see you there!

– TRAILSIDE READS –

The Impossible Journey: An Incredible Voyage Through Every Country in the World Without Flying – Thor Pedersen

One Ordinary Man – A novel based on the true story of Harry Hopkins – Steve Vesce

QUOTES FOR THE MONTH

“If you understand, things are just as they are; if you do not understand, things are just as they are.” Zen saying

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.” Henry David Thoreau



Hoisting a pack onto your shoulders, putting a few miles of trail behind you, taking in the view of eagles soaring below from your perch atop a bluff, preparing a meal by headlamp after a long day on the trail, and listening to the rhythms of the night while nestled in your tent. What do these all have in common? A big ol' smile . . .



Photo courtesy of Sofia Merriman

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!!