

I TRAILHEAD I

CAIRNS ON THE NORTHERN END OF THE A.T. BY DANIEL JOHNSON.

Prevent Future Norovirus Outbreaks

A number of A.T. hikers have contracted the highly contagious norovirus this season. The predominant symptoms are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, and mild fever. Victims can become dehydrated and weakened, sometimes requiring hospitalization. While the symptoms usually resolve within 24 hours, they are severe and come on suddenly, making it difficult for those affected to get to sanitary facilities and making it more likely that the illness will spread. The virus is transmitted by contact with an infected person (person-to-person), contaminated food or water, or contaminated surfaces.

How can such outbreaks be prevented?

- ▶ Practice good sanitation, including frequent hand-washing with soap and water, particularly after toileting and before preparing or eating food. Hand sanitizers do not appear to be effective against the virus.
- ▶ Follow Leave No Trace practices for disposing of human waste, far from the Trail and at least 200 feet from water sources, campsites, and shelters.
- ▶ Treat all water from natural sources, even springs. Boiling for at least one minute is best; or filter and then treat the water with purification/disinfectant tablets according to manufacturer instructions.
- ▶ Do not share water bottles or eating utensils or eat from the same food bag or dishes as others.

For more information visit: cdc.gov and appalachiantrail.org/LNT

Another Successful SWEAT Crew Season

BY BRYAN ALPER

YOU MAY BE A THRU-HIKER, A DAY-TRIPPER, A SLACKPACKER, a switchbacker or a section hiker, but keep in mind that any recent Appalachian Trail hike through the Smokies has been made possible in part because of the Smokies Wilderness Elite Appalachian Trail (SWEAT) crew members who volunteered to reshape its corridor. This year, the SWEAT crew will continue to work its way through a seventh season and has already demonstrated itself as an invaluable part of Smokies management, going farther into the back country and completing work that no one else could.

Thirty-one maintaining clubs, designated by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) as the maintenance managers of specific sections of the A.T., are varied in size, organization, background, and character. However, all clubs share one common concern: the well-being of the Appalachian Trail. It is their maintenance and management of the Trail that both assures its continued existence and gives it special character. In the Smokies, the ATC works in close partnership with the volunteers of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club who lead A.T. management and maintenance of the Trail between Wesser, North Carolina and Davenport Gap, Tennessee. Through this partnership, the SWEAT Crew was developed.

Top reasons to join the SWEAT Crew vary with each volunteer. Participants could expect features and benefits to include a week-long trip with food, tools, and equipment provided at no cost, and opportunities for certification in Cross-Cut Saw, Wilderness First Aid, and as a Leave-No-Trace-Trainer. Volunteers learn about Trail construction and maintenance from A.T. professionals and get to see Great Smoky Mountains National Park like no one else.



Rewinding to 2012, a third season veteran SWEAT Crew volunteer, Joe Sanchez, talks about the reason for taking another trip. "I am here to get a different perspective to life on the Trail," he explains. "I think a lot of people take for granted the structure of the A.T. It's nice to see the smiles and comments of happy hikers when they see us working." Some volunteers apply invaluable skills that they learned

through a two-week Wilderness College, which is offered to select individuals before the start of the SWEAT Crew season. The unique and educational experience is now made possible each season by Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) and the ATC. After hiking almost 30 miles in three days, with individual averages of 55-pound packs, water shortages due to drought conditions, and a real bad storm to deal with, the crew is reminded that the emphasis of the trip is on safety. Eye protection, helmets, gloves and all essential gear won't be compromised. Trail work is important, but it's more important to get everybody home in working condition.

Tarah Slusher, from Knoxville, Tennessee, says, "My favorite part [of the 2012 season] was the sense of community ... I loved knowing that it wasn't just about what I was doing and that I wasn't alone with my passion. I am part of something bigger than myself and helping preserve something that will be here long after I am gone, and that, I think, is what SWEAT Crew is all about." Trey Coyle and Steven Epps, season 2012 SWEAT Crew co-leaders, were essential to the performance and planning of the success of the teams in the field.

The SWEAT Crew has congregated again for this 2013 season at Soak Ash Creek, the base camp within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park for all program volunteers.

For more information visit: www.appalachiantrail.org/crews