

## **2022 NCNPS SPRING HIKE & LEADER DESCRIPTIONS**

### **Suggestions for Friday Afternoon on Your Own**

We will not have organized hikes on Friday. Have fun in and around Bryson City or the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Join us at the United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall to socialize and view the auction plants Friday 6-8 pm.

***Clingman's Dome, TN*** - At an elevation of 6,643 feet, it is the highest mountain in the Smokies. The observation tower offers spectacular 360° views of the Smokies. A hike to Andrew's Bald begins at the edge of the parking lot. Just over the TN border, 25 miles from Cherokee. Check the weather as it is unpredictable. <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/clingmansdome.htm>

***Mingo Falls, Big Cove*** - Mingo Falls is located in the Big Cove community just north of Cherokee. At 120-foot tall, it is one of the tallest waterfalls in the Southern Appalachians. The walk from the parking lot is short (just a hundred yards) but very steep. <https://www.greatsmokies.com/charokee-waterfalls/>

***Oconaluftee River Trail and Visitor Center*** -1194 Newfound Gap Rd (US 441), Cherokee, NC 28719  
The Oconaluftee River Trail is a pleasant walk along the Oconaluftee River, located at the visitor center, and travels around the Mountain Farm Museum. Open 9am – 5pm

*Saturday Hikes – 9 am at the trailhead (unless noted in directions for Kanati and Thomas Divide trails on Saturday) to 4 pm carpool if possible*

*Sunday Hikes – 9 am at the trailhead to noon (shortened version, fewer miles)*

### **SATURDAY AND SUNDAY MORNING HIKES**

#### ***Big Laurel (Alarka Laurel) headwaters of Alarka Creek***

*Conleys Creek Rd. Big Laurel, NC 28713 Nantahala National Forest*

Big Laurel is a rare remnant Red Spruce bog at the headwaters of Alarka Creek in the southwest corner of Swain County. At 4,000-plus feet, the southernmost stand of Red Spruce in the Southern Appalachians is situated in the tract managed by the U.S. Forest Service. This hike offers a unique view into a relict and more boreal-type ecosystem containing an interesting intersection of spruce-fir forest and swamp forest-bog complex/southern Appalachian bog.

There are numerous rare species and many flowering plants of interest, so late April is an excellent time to visit. The hike is generally composed of walking flat trails with a handful of short rises to view some of the surrounding rich and acidic coves. There is a large meadow with a covered shelter for picnicking and gathering around.

On this hike we have a unique opportunity to assist MountainTrue with a region-wide BioBlitz and will be soliciting data contributions via iNaturalist. Participants on the Alarka Hike are invited to collect and share data, which will be curated by MountainTrue, and utilized locally by the USFS, NCWRC, Trout Unlimited, and the Little Tennessee Native Fish Conservation Partnership in support of a watershed-level restoration planning effort for Alarka/Big Laurel. Any and all data are worthy

and will go a long way in building a case for conservation and restoration in the watershed. Add the iNaturalist app to your phone and post during the hike or add pictures via computer at a later date.

No restrooms. **Length:** 5 miles roundtrip. **Difficulty:** moderate. **Elevation change:** 700 ft. **Hike Leader:** Owen Carson.

### **Bradley Fork and Chasteen Creek Trails**

*Smokemont Campground off Newfound Gap Rd. (US 441), 3.1 miles north of the Oconaluftee Visitors Center north of Cherokee, NC*

Bradley Fork Trail begins at the far end of the Smokemont Campground on an old roadbed with a gentle ascent along a scenic stream. Through acidic cove forest and patches of rich cove and alluvial forests, the wide path is lined with an amazing diversity of wildflowers: multiple species of trillium and violet, Showy Orchis, Fringed Phacelia, both yellow and maroon Meadow-parsnips, Eastern Solomon's-plume, Solomon's-seal, Dwarf Crested Iris, Creeping Phlox, Wild Geranium, Golden Ragwort, Jack-in-the Pulpit, Foamflower, Toothwort, and many more.

After crossing a bridge at 1.2 miles, turn right onto Chasteen Creek Trail. After a second footbridge look for Brook Lettuce, Pink Lady's-slipper, Indian Cucumber-root, and Fraser's Sedge. At just under 2 miles (0.7 miles on Chasteen Creek Trail), take a left at a Y-junction, pass a horse-hitching post, and follow a short spur trail to a lovely 15 to 20-foot cascade surrounded by rhododendron and moss. You may find Yellow Lady's-slipper here. This could be the turnaround point on a leisure full-day hike (round trip of 4 miles). Becoming narrower and steeper, Chasteen Creek Trail continues another 3.7 miles while climbing about 2,000 feet to reach Hughes Ridge.

Although horses walk these trails, the path is not too smelly or buggy in the spring, but heavy rain can turn the softened dirt into mud in places.

Restrooms at the campground. **Length:** 4 miles roundtrip (longer if you continue past the cascade). **Difficulty:** easy (becomes moderate past the cascade). **Elevation change:** about 400 ft. **Hike Leader:** Gary Kauffman

### **Collins Creek Picnic Area and Quiet Walkways**

*Newfound Gap Rd. (US 441) North of the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Smokemont Campground*

Are you wondering if a day hike in the Smokies is a bit more than you want to tackle? Recent surgery, health concerns, or just want to slow down and enjoy the experience? Join some of our best plants people and botanists for a day of Quiet Walkways and native plant discussions.

The Quiet Walkways of Great Smoky Mountains National Park are the unsung heroes for those who are looking for a more accessible trail experience, and they prove that humble doesn't have to mean boring. They are short (approx. 1/4 mile to 1/2 mile in length one way) and relatively easy trails that lead directly from the road and plunge quickly into selected areas of natural beauty. There are around 14 of these special trails in the park, and each one is unique. We will visit several of them found in NC along Newfound Gap Rd, (US 441) north of Cherokee.

Starting at the Collins Creek Pavilion located at the Collins Creek Picnic Area you will find restrooms & picnic tables located in a wooded setting with the Pavilion at the back of the park, where we will gather, walk, eat your picnic lunch, discuss wildflowers of the Smokies, and go forth to explore other Quiet Walkways in the area. Our discussion will use the *Wildflowers of the Smokies* field guide and you will be given a copy of your own. Our first walkway is located here.

*Collins Creek Quiet Walkway* is a 0.5-mile trail. There is a gated gravel road left of the Pavilion with a simple brown "Quiet Walkway" sign. About 30 yards down the road the typical QW marker stands at the beginning of a dirt path. Once it enters the woods, the path follows Collins Creek curving along the base of a steep, unnamed mountain peak (4,564 ft) to the right. The richness of this QW in early May is nothing short of remarkable. Almost any trail in the Smokies will have wildflowers now, yet the diversity here is quite high and concentrated. Another plus is the easy accessibility. The trail is ample in width with smooth footing and a grade so slight, it isn't worth mentioning. At least seven different fern species, three trilliums including Large White Trillium and Painted Trillium, Fraser's Sedge, Alternate-leaved Dogwood, Showy Orchis, Bloodroot, and other spring-blooming plants are tucked among the usual slate of herbaceous and woody plants present in a rich cove.

*Kanati Fork Quiet Walkway* is a 0.2-mile trail found across the road from the Kanati Fork Trailhead. On the left side of the parking lot is the QW marker, and several stone steps lead down to a path crossing a wooden bridge. Here the path splits; turn left for a short meander through the woods to a dead-end or turn right to reach Beech Flats Prong. Mayflowers are in bud as the Painted Trilliums fade. They are joined by Trout Lily, Sweet White Violet, Indian Cucumber-root, Lady Fern, New York Fern, Hobblebush, Witch Hazel, Striped Maple, Yellow Birch, and a large colony of Buffalo-nut, among others.

*Quiet Walkway near Thomas Divide Trail* is known for its scenic views. We may travel to see this QW or the group may decide to visit the Oconaluftee Visitors Center and walk part of the river trail.

*Oconaluftee Visitors Center and River Trail* Late April is the best time for viewing wildflowers along the Oconaluftee River Trail. More than 40 species of wildflowers have been identified along this route. We may find several species of trillium and violets, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Purple Phacelia, Squirrel Corn, stonecrop, phlox, and Dwarf Crested Iris, among many other wildflowers.

Leaders: Lisa Gould & Lynda Waldrep

### ***Deep Creek Loop Trail & Waterfalls***

*W Deep Creek Rd, Bryson City, NC*

From the Deep Creek Trail parking lot, follow the sign to **Juney Whank Falls**, not to the Deep Creek Trail. Our clockwise loop begins at this 90-foot cascade and spray cliff. Before crossing the footbridge over the lower cascades, we may encounter Rue-anemone, Bloodroot, Solomon's-seal, Eastern Solomon's-plume, Robin's Plantain, and Showy Orchis. We will continue northward on the Deep Creek Horse Trail that takes us into an acidic cove forest, over a dry ridge, through laurel thickets, and down to Deep Creek as we pass by Flame Azalea, Pink Lady's-slipper, trilliums, Wild Geranium, and Wild Hydrangea.

At a T-junction (1.4 miles from start) take a left (north) onto Deep Creek Trail and follow it for 0.9 mile. After crossing the creek, we turn right to hike the Loop Trail that takes us across Sunkota Ridge (DO NOT take the Sunkota Ridge Trail) and connects us with the Indian Creek Trail (turn right). About 0.6 mile down Indian Creek Trail, a short spur trail leads to the 45-ft. **Indian Creek Falls** amongst Dwarf Crested Iris and Showy Orchis. You'll notice that Indian Creek Falls is more of a water slide than a true waterfall. Soon after returning to Indian Creek Falls Trail, we turn left onto the Deep Creek Trail and stop along the way to admire **Tom Branch Falls**, a multilevel 75-ft. cascade shrouded in rhododendron as it spills into Deep Creek by a large White Oak. We follow the creek back to the parking lot.

Watch the brief video [Deep Creek Waterfalls and Wildflowers](#) for an overview of the Deep Creek area. Restrooms at Deep Creek Campground Parking area, C #3 . **Length:** 5 miles roundtrip.

**Difficulty:** moderate. **Elevation change:** est. 575 ft. **Hike Leader:** Kelder Monar

<https://smokymountains.com/park/hikes/deep-creek-loop-trail/>

## ***Kanati Fork Trail***

*Newfound Gap Road, (US 441) North from Bryson City & Cherokee*

The Kanati Fork Trail is one of the leading hikes in Great Smoky Mountains National Park for forest wildflowers. It's a bit on the demanding side as you zigzag upstream within the Kanati Fork canyon, and long views are scarce. An invigorating mountain climb, the Kanati Fork Trail loosely follows one of the headwater branches of the Oconaluftee River from Newfound Gap Road to Thomas Ridge.

Our Saturday full-day hike will climb up the Kanati Fork Trail to the ridgeline and continue down the mountain on the Thomas Divide Trail where hikers will observe different plant communities. The morning portion of this hike is a continuous uphill trek due to its 2,100 or so feet of elevation gain across 2.9 miles. Do not choose this hike if you have physical difficulties. The Sunday hike will be a shorter out-and-back walk with fewer miles.

This is an exceptional site to see a lot of different species of spring ephemeral wildflowers, including Painted Trillium, Bluebead Lily, Foamflower, Indian Cucumber-root, Brook Lettuce, and Canada Mayflower, as well as many of the more common species in the park. The groundcover carpet includes trilliums, violets, Dutchman's Breeches, Rattlesnake Plantain, Trout Lily, Eastern Solomon's Plume, and many others.

Saturday hikers should park at the Thomas Divide Trailhead parking lot north of the Kanati trailhead on US 441 to have cars at the end of the day. We will shuttle hikers to the beginning Kanati Fork trailhead. Face masks are required inside the shuttle.

Restrooms are located at Collins Creek Pavilion on US 441 before the trailhead. **Length:** 4.7 miles Saturday. **Difficulty:** moderately difficult. **Elevation change:** 2,100 ft. to the ridge **Hike Leader:** Ken Bridle. <https://smokymountains.com/park/hikes/kanati-fork-trail/>

## **Thomas Divide Trailhead (Upper)**

*Newfound Gap Road, (US 441) North from Bryson City & Cherokee*

The Thomas Divide Trail begins at a hairpin curve on Newfound Gap Road where the road crosses over the divide. The trail starts on an easy course following the ridgeline. Our Saturday full-day hike will climb from the Thomas Divide Trailhead to the ridgeline and continue down the mountain on the Kanati Fork Trail. From the outset on Thomas Divide Trail, the track is even and soft underfoot. It remains as such for most of the trail's course through a northern hardwood forest, with American Beech, Yellow Birch, Sugar and Mountain maples, Red Oak, and serviceberry.

You will find the earliest-blooming spring flowers here due to the higher elevation (approaching 5,000 ft.), including Toothwort, Eastern Solomon's-plume, Wood Anemone, Foamflower, Thyme-leaved Bluets, Nodding Mandarin, Canada Mayflower, Star Chickweed, Indian Cucumber-root, Meadow-parsnip, Wood Betony, Mountain Bellwort, Dolls'-eyes, Wild Geranium, Mayapple, Vasey's Trillium, Rue-anemone, Bear Corn, and Solomon's-seal. Almost two miles from the trailhead, the Thomas Divide Trail eases into a dell on the ridgeline where it intersects the upper terminus of the Kanati Fork Trail. On Saturday we will climb to the ridgeline and continue down the mountain on the Kanati Fork Trail to give hikers exposure to different plant communities. Read about the Kanati Fork Trail as this portion of the hike in the afternoon is downhill and full of switchbacks.

To have cars at the end of the day, Saturday hikers will park at the Kanati Fork Trail parking lot on US 441 before the Thomas Divide trailhead. We will shuttle hikers to the beginning Thomas Divide trailhead. Face masks are required inside the shuttle. Sunday hikers will park in the Thomas Divide Trail parking lot for an out-and-back walk.

Restrooms are located at Collins Creek Pavilion on US 441 before the trailhead. **Length:** 4.7 miles Saturday. **Difficulty:** moderate. **Elevation Change:** 410 ft. to the ridge **Hike Leader:** Kathy Mathews.

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## **Collins Creek Picnic Area and Quiet Walkway**

*Newfound Gap Rd. (US 441) North of the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Smokemont Campground*

For hikers on the Kanati Fork or Thomas Divide Trails, this is a stopping point for restrooms as you go north.

## **Our Hike Leaders**

**Ken Bridle**, Ph. D., is a professional scientist of over 45 years. Ken was trained as a botanist with an emphasis on plant physiology and natural product chemistry. He has worked as a natural heritage and watershed inventory biologist, field ecologist, science museum exhibits director, and environmental consultant. He has been active with Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC) as a volunteer, consultant, board member, and staff member for over 25 years. He is currently Stewardship Director for PLC, responsible for easement monitoring and management of over 25,000

acres of land in more than 200 projects.

Ken is the author of several county Natural Heritage Inventories (1998–2002) as well as watershed assessments, wetland delineations, and rare plant and animal surveys. He is past Chair of the Wildlife Resources Commission, Nongame Wildlife Advisory Committee which helps to facilitate work and listing of rare animal species in this state. He is also past president of the NC Native Plant Society. He is a frequent leader of hikes and nature walks and a speaker on local conservation issues.

**Owen Carson** has worked with Equinox (Asheville) for the past decade to provide ecological and botanical expertise in support of environmental planning, design, and restoration projects in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. He loves to share his passion for and knowledge of plants and the ecosystems that contain them; montane rock outcroppings and bogs are two of his favorites! For the past four years, Owen has also devoted his time and knowledge in support of the NC Invasive Plant Council, where he is the current sitting President. Overall, he relishes the enjoyment of collaborating with individuals and organizations to develop unique solutions for complex problems. In his free time, Owen enjoys gardening, climbing, and exploring the outdoors with his wife, Sarah, and twins Hazel and Liam.

**Lisa Lofland Gould** grew up in Winston-Salem, NC in a family of nature lovers, so it is not surprising that she majored in Biology at UNC-G and went on to earn an MS in Zoology (ecology and behavior of birds) at the University of Rhode Island. Lisa taught biology at URI for many years, was a research associate in the Department of Natural Resources Science, and was a co-founder and first executive director of the RI Natural History Survey, a clearinghouse for ecological data in the state. She also initiated the RI Invasive Species Council and was a co-founder of the RI Wild Plant Society. Among other publications, she is co-author of *Vascular Flora of Rhode Island* and *Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* (UNC Press).

Now that she is back in North Carolina, she enjoys participating in activities with the Audubon Society of Forsyth County, the Piedmont Land Conservancy (currently serving as chair of the Management Committee for the Emily Allen Wildflower Preserve), and the NC Native Plant Society (currently serving as a Board member-at-large).

**Gary Kauffman** has been the botanist/ecologist program manager for the National Forests in NC since April of 2007. The National Forests in NC cover 1.2 million acres across 4 forests, the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests in the mountains, the Uwharrie NF in the Piedmont, and the Croatan NF in the Coastal Plain. Since 2002 Gary has coordinated the invasive plant program across the 4 forests. During the same time, he started as and continues to serve as the Forest Botanical Products Specialist. Other duties include planning revision at the forest level, restoration of rare plant populations and rare plant communities, and NEPA compliance for forest projects.

Gary has been with the USFS since 1992, previously filling the Nantahala NF botanist position from 1992 to 2000. Gary has a master's degree in botany/mycology. He is originally from Ohio having moved and lived in western NC for the past 33 years.

**Kathy Mathews, Ph. D.**, is a Professor of Biology at Western Carolina University. Her area of research specialization is plant systematics, which seeks to explain patterns of diversity in various plant groups. She studies problems in the taxonomy and evolutionary relationships of flowering

plant groups, such as members of the gentian and strychnos families. Her focus is on southeastern plants and current research seeks to understand rapid speciation and biogeography in the high-elevation rock outcrop species, such as saxifrage (*Micranthes*) and sand-myrtle (*Kalmia*), as well as hybridization in *Trillium*. Kathy is on the Steering Committee of the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference and has led hikes for multiple botanical groups.

**Kelder Monar** works with Mainspring Conservation Trust, the trust for conservation in the heart of the Southern Blue Ridge, as Stewardship Manager and is Mainspring's primary GIS technician and licensed pesticide applicator. On any given workday Kelder might find himself on a remote easement boundary, in a thicket of invasive plants, or at his desk making a map. He first joined the nonprofit part-time in 2013, assisting with easement monitoring and property stewardship, which became a full-time position in 2015.

Kelder grew up in Carrboro, North Carolina. He has earned a B.A. in Geography from the University of North Carolina and Masters in Biology from Western Carolina University. Kelder originally got involved with Mainspring as an intern while studying at the UNC Institute for the Environment field site in Highlands, North Carolina. Though he once worked as a seasonal botany technician and made a couple of road trips across the continent, Kelder has happily settled down in Sylva with his wife, Heather, and daughter, Alice.

**Lynda Waldrep** became interested in native plants when visiting friends in the mountains of NC. Following retirement from teaching, she participated in the Extension Master Gardener program in Guilford County for 10 years but also added volunteer work with the NC Native Plant Society, serving on the state board as secretary for two years and then five years as vice president, coordinating two state outings each year. For 10 years she was instrumental in organizing plant rescues in the Triad area, and for over 25 years she spent years botanizing in the Rich Mountain area near Boone. Lynda has been active as Triad Chapter Chair for the past three years. She completed her certificate in native plant studies at the Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill in 2018.

## **Saturday Night Speaker 7 pm**

*Appalachian Herbs: History and Sustainable Use*

(6 pm meet the author & book signing *Southeast Medicinal Plants*)

Payment for books directly to CoryPine, he accepts credit cards, cash, or checks

*United Methodist Church Bryson City Fellowship Hall*

*50 Academy Street, Bryson City, NC 28713*

**CoreyPine Shane** RH, (AHG), began studying herbal medicine in the late 1980s, identifying plants and learning about how the human body heals. He graduated from the Northeast School of Botanical Medicine and moved to Asheville in 1996. After studying with herbalist Michael Moore at the Southwest School of Botanical Medicine in Bisbee, Arizona, CoreyPine founded the Blue Ridge School of Herbal Medicine in 1999 <https://blueridgeschool.org/>. He has spent over 25 years helping clients and teaching people by artfully blending Chinese and Western herbal traditions with a focus on local plants.

CoreyPine (yes, that is his first name) is the author of the ebook *Herbs for Pain* and the recently published *Southeast Medicinal Plants*, which covers how to identify, ethically harvest, and use the wild plants of the Southeast. CoreyPine has taught across the United States and in Europe, at many national herb conferences, and is a Professional Member of the American Herbalists Guild. When not delving into tomes of herbal lore, CoreyPine can be found meandering through the woods, watching birds, and harvesting plants and mushrooms for dinner. He has also developed a passion for photography.