



Interview with Paul Dickens

By Stuart English

Becky Smucker and Bill Newton formed a new maintenance crew in the spring of 2008. Since then it has evolved a great deal and Paul Dickens has become Becky's back up team leader and an important cog in the machinery. We thought the best way to update the progress of this innovative crew was to talk with Paul.

How did you get involved in trail maintenance and the CMC?

In summer of 2007, my wife and I hiked the Big Butt Trail near Mt Mitchell. Parts of that trail were terribly overgrown with blueberries, almost impassible. I found the CMC website and made a trail problem report. Shortly afterwards, I received an e-mail from the Asheville Friday Trail Crew asking if I would like to help them clear the blueberry mess. I took a day off from work, went out and helped clear the Big Butt Trail and really enjoyed it. That led to joining the CMC and then signing up as a section maintainer on the MST in the Middle Prong Wilderness.

How did you get involved in the CMC Wilderness Crew?

It was a confluence of opportunity and need. After I became the section maintainer of part of the MST through the Middle Prong Wilderness in 2007, I hiked other trails in the Middle Prong which were becoming overgrown and almost impassible from years of maintenance neglect. Something had to be done. I started by recruiting family members to help brush out the Green Mountain trail that connected to my section of the MST. At about the same time, Becky Smucker started the Saturday Wilderness Crew to meet two needs – provide an opportunity for CMC members who work weekdays to do trail maintenance on Saturday and to address the serious need for trail reclamation in the Middle Prong and Shining Rock Wilderness areas.

I met Becky and the Wilderness Crew in the fall of 2008 on a trip to brush out the Haywood Gap trail in the Middle Prong. I was hooked and have participated in the Wilderness Crew since then. Wilderness means hand tools only. No weed eaters or chain saws - we use hedge shears, swing blades, loppers, axes and cross cut saws. It is good physical and mental activity and an opportunity to give back and save Wilderness trails so that others can enjoy the Middle Prong and Shining Rock without having to wade through thick brush, fall on bad tread or climb over downed trees.

What about cross cut saws?

As the Wilderness Crew evolved, we worked with the Forest Service to understand their standards for Wilderness trails and also conform to Forest Service safety rules. Any use of axes or saws larger than a

pruning saw for trail maintenance work on Forest Service land requires training and certification. In the fall of 2009, a group of 4 Wilderness Crew members including myself participated in a 2-day Forest Service cross cut saw certification class. I was certified as a B cross cut sawyer and set out to learn how to restore and maintain the technology of these old saws that are used for Wilderness trail work. I have gotten to meet and work with other more experienced sawyers and have learned a lot of practical details to safely use these traditional tools for trail maintenance. In May 2012, I took off work to attend the Wilderness Skills Institute at the Pisgah Cradle of Forestry and achieved C certification as a cross cut saw trainer. CMC sponsored my participation in the C sawyer class.

What do you enjoy about the CMC Wilderness Crew?

The Wilderness Crew is great exercise and stress relief for both mind and body. There are technical aspects to trail work, especially around safe use of tools and conforming to Forest Service standards. There is sharing, learning and teaching with others. There can be long hikes in and out carrying tools to clear a downed tree or other problem. What I really like is seeing immediate results. Unlike my day job, on Wilderness Crew I can do a hard day's work and have the satisfaction of seeing a job done and a trail problem fixed. And there is a sense of stewardship – helping maintain sustainable trails into the important public resource of Wilderness.