

Meet Brenda Worley, Chair of the Hiking Committee (and much more)

By Danny Bernstein



Brenda Worley has been an active member of Carolina Mountain Club for over 20 years. Her ancestors have been in the area a lot longer.

"Some of my relatives may have been here since the Revolutionary War," Brenda says.

"I was born in Hendersonville. Though I moved out of the state with my parents for a while, I graduated from T.C. Roberson High School in Asheville and have lived in the area ever since."

Brenda played basketball in high school but admits to being on the bench most of the time because she was so short. "I don't watch basketball now but I did when my son played. I look forward to watching my grandson, Joseph, playing, but he's only four years old now."

"I wanted to be a secretary after high school so I went to [St. Genevieve School](#) for a year for secretarial studies. I couldn't afford to *find myself*. I had to support myself from the beginning," Brenda says. St. Genevieve, a Catholic girls' school, merged with a boys' school and eventually was folded into Carolina Day School.

Brenda's first job was at [CTS](#), the now polluted Superfund site located in Skyland. The plant manufactured electronic components used in automotive parts and hearing aids, which included electroplating components with heavy metals.

"When you went to the back of the plant, you could smell this strong, caustic smell. When I left, I was the secretary to the plant manager. However, I could tell the plant was deteriorating. I left in 1974." The plant eventually closed in 1986.

"I went to work for NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) as a clerk, then move to the Social Security office in Hendersonville, where I started as a receptionist. I took a pay cut for that job."

You were the secretary to the plant manager. Why take a pay cut for another job?

"If you could go to work with the Federal government, it was a much better job in this area. I got benefits such as a retirement plan. It was a good move."

Brenda married Luther Worley, also a native of the area, in 1970. Luther, a retired electrician, has always been a big golfer. The Worleys visit Hilton Head and Myrtle Beach every year.

Though Brenda started at the bottom of the job ladder at Social Security, she kept moving up that ladder. She was sent for extensive training in Florida.

"I looked into any situations that the claims representatives couldn't deal with. I delved into problems. I'm very proud of Social Security." Brenda retired in 2005 as a technical expert.

Their son, Tracy, is in the logging business. Their daughter-in-law, Jill, is now building a successful career at the same office as Brenda. "I knew there was an opening in Social Security. I could get her in the door but she did the rest."

"My grandmother took care of my son while I worked; she was a young grandmother. I even knew my great-grandmother who had been a cook in a logging camp. She'd tell me stories of *painters* (panthers) around her cabin. She talked about living in Little Egypt, around Rosman. She was 93 when she died forty years ago.

How did you get into hiking?

My family wasn't into the outdoors. When I was about 40 and our son no longer required constant supervision, I started going out into Pisgah Forest. I asked friends to come along but I kept getting lost. So pretty soon, nobody would go with me."

Then Brenda saw an ad for CMC in a newspaper and showed up for a half-day hike. She remembers that it was from Pisgah Inn to US 276.

In those days, CMC had requirements before you could join as a full-fledged member. You had to go on a half-day hike and a trail maintenance trip. You then had to get a card signed by three CMC members who vouched that you could hike.

Is this a good idea? Should we revive these requirements?

"We'll get more members without these requirements."

While Brenda worked, she hiked on Sundays but not now. She started leading hikes once she retired and is a regular on Wednesday hikes. She's now one of two Wednesday schedulers, along with Ann Gleason. She chairs the CMC hiking committee and is the hiking councilor on the CMC council. "I guess I'm a late bloomer," Brenda says.

What is the difference between Wednesday and Sunday hikers?

"On Wednesdays, you can determine who will show up by the length of the hike. The shorter the hike, the more people. We also have subgroups on Wednesdays. Barth leads a group and so does Jack Fitzgerald. It's good. People should have the hikes they want."

"The hiking committee has approved the concept of Wednesday half-day hikes but we haven't scheduled any yet."

Where do you like to hike?

"I like to go all over. South Carolina in the winter, the A.T., Yellow Mountain."

"I look at the Sunday schedule to get ideas about hikes. We have a good pool of strong hikers. We have people who only hike on Wednesday or Saturday for various reasons. They want to be with family on Sunday or go to church."

How did you get to be the Wednesday Scheduler?

"I was at the hike leaders' dinner. Charlie Ferguson was about to give up scheduling and I volunteered. It's not hard compared to working with people at Social Security."

"People step right up and sometimes take all the days. I wait to see what Wednesdays are left over and volunteer for that hike. I do the same with Ann's schedule. Sometimes I lead two hikes a quarter."

And you travel out of the area?

"Recently I went on a [Road Scholar](#) bike trip on the C&O canal. I rode 185 miles in a week. Only another man and I finished the ride. They lent us a mountain bike and it was rough. One woman lost control of her bike and fell in the canal."

Brenda has been to the Grand Canyon with Elderhostel and Glacier with an informal CMC group. Now she has her eye on a Yukon paddling trip. She likes different activities.

Now that you're retired, what do you do besides hiking and volunteering for CMC?

"I work in a bible school. I volunteer at the Fletcher Elementary School. I'm also available to take care of my grandson."

If you had visitors and could only take them on one hike (regardless of difficulty), where would you take them?

"I would take them to Cold Mountain. It's beautiful up there, the wildest place in the area. There are not too many people on the trail. I love the rime ice in March. It's something you don't see every day."

So why do you hike?

"When I walk on a trail and trees close in, I feel comfortable, nourished. It's beautiful any time of the year. It makes me calm and happy."