



**Carolina Mountain Club**

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## **New CMC crew “CMC Search and Rescue Support” is up and running.**

by Bill Sanderson

Early this year Haywood County Search and Rescue approached the Carolina Mountain Club via Haywood SAR team member and CMC maintainer Steve Kuni in the hopes that CMC members could be called upon to assist with search operations. Knowing that many CMC members are avid hikers and skillful outdoors persons familiar with Middle Prong, Shining Rock, Black Balsam, the eastern Smokies and other locations within Haywood County, it seemed only natural to tap into this significant source of knowledge and enthusiasm. Steve contacted CMCer Bill Sanderson, who agreed to join as co-director, and the idea for a CMC SAR team was hatched.

To date the team boasts a total of sixteen enthusiastic CMC members. Three all-day and several half-day training events have taken place for the purposes of getting the members ready to be deployed when called upon. Team members must demonstrate proficiency in the use of shelter materials, construction and maintenance of emergency campfires, and land navigation using both map-and-compass as well as phone-based apps. Several team members have also cross-trained with the Haywood SAR team at their monthly training events. Team members must also take a series of FEMA courses in emergency management, as well as hold certification in basic first aid. So far everyone (including the instructors!) is having a great time learning together, honing their skills, and preparing to be able to assist persons in need in our beautiful wilderness areas.

If you would like to know more about the CMC SAR crew, or perhaps would like to join, contact Bill ([recurvearcher57@charter.net](mailto:recurvearcher57@charter.net)) or Steve ([mffi184@aol.com](mailto:mffi184@aol.com)).

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# Mel Skiles Receives NPS-Blue Ridge Parkway Award

by Todd Evelyn

Blue Ridge Parkway Volunteer of the Year honorees are announced:

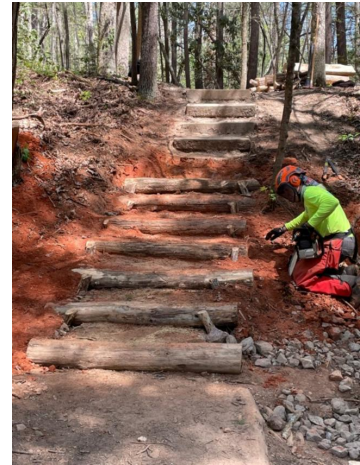
The National Park Service announced the 2021 Volunteer of the Year awards, honoring those who have made exemplary contributions to the preservation, protection, and enjoyment of the Blue Ridge Parkway during its first ever Virtual Volunteer Celebration Event.

The recipients of the 2021 Blue Ridge Parkway Volunteer awards include:

## Blue Ridge Parkway Individual Volunteer Award

Mel Skiles - Asheville Area Trail Maintenance Volunteer

Mel Skiles has served the Blue Ridge Parkway as a volunteer through the Carolina Mountain Club since 2012. Mel serves weekly as part of the “Thursday Crew” where he maintains the popular Mountain- to-Sea Trail through the Asheville area, contributing to the experiences of thousands of hikers annually. Beyond his work on the trail, Mel is an ambassador for stewardship and has recruited numerous others to take up the mantle of volunteering on the parkway.



Read CMC's recommendation:

### Mel Skiles – Pisgah District

#### **Brief Summary of Exceptional Accomplishments:**

Mel is one of our most active CMC trail maintenance volunteers since joining the club in 2012. Mel has maintained various sections of the MST including his most recent role as our maintainer for the most heavily trafficked section of the trail near Hendersonville Road. Mel has worked tirelessly to keep this 2 mile stretch clear of debris as well a safe and comfortable experience for hikers and runners alike. As a long time resident of Deerfield, Mel is well known among the hiking and running community and is often found providing directions, asking for feedback and recruiting new volunteers for the CMC. Mel is also an important member of the CMC Thursday and Section Rover Crews who help maintain the Visitor Center loop trail, Folk Art Center trail and over 40 miles of the MST from Devils Courthouse to the Folk Art Center.

**Magnitude of Work: What was the extent of the work accomplished? What made the work, project, contribution, or program exceptional? In what ways did the nominee demonstrate creativity or originality?**

Mel is among our top Carolina Mountain Club (CMC) members in total Volunteer hours logged and has been one of our top two volunteers working on the MST thru the years. One remarkable feat among many is the fact that in the past 52 weeks during Covid, Mel has volunteered 859 hours doing trail MST

trail work. As a certified Sawyer and Weed Trimmer, Mel has cut and removed many trees that were blocking the trail on the MST while keeping the trail clear of weeds, poisonous plants and safe for so many. He also has partnered with the Friends of BRP to assist with new trees and shrubs planted near Hendersonville road. In the past year Mel took upon himself with the help of the Thursday crew to remove the huge blowdown at the Hendersonville Road intersection and has removed the briar to improve the appearance. Finally Mel has helped Jimmy Burnette and the BRP maintenance team remove many of the trees and debris that have fallen onto the mowline in the Asheville corridor. Mel also has worked with Craig, Tom Weaver and the BRP foundation to layout the initial plans for new boardwalk to be added to a large muddy section of this trail. This project is awaiting NEPA and other environmental approvals but the Foundation has agreed to support this important project. Mel is also one of our best trainers for new volunteers. He has guided and instructed so many on sustainable methods for trail work always stressing safety first. Mel is diligent about doing it right the first time (quality vs quantity) so his work stands out as some of the best you will see on the MST.

**Meeting the Mission: How has the volunteer or group improved conditions for the park facilities or operations, resources and/or visitors? How did the nominee support the NPS mission?**

Mel is very committed to the trails in Western NC. His passion and love is the MST. He takes pride in ensuring the Asheville corridor and his large section is safe and enjoyable experience knowing his friends at Deerfield have different skill levels. One recent example was the new stairs he and the Thursday crew installed on his section where the trail drops and rises from a ravine. Mel carefully chose the right size logs and created a borrow to bring fill dirt in to ensure the rise and landings were within standards. This was a project that took many weeks to plan and execute but the final outcome was perfection. Many hikers and runners alike have commented on this huge improvement to the trail. Mel is always seeking feedback and strives to improve the trail each time he's working on the MST. Also to note that Mel is a retired radiologist and is one of our Safety champions on the Crew. He is constantly evaluating each work situation to ensure we are creating a safe working environment for our crew members. If Mel says its "no go" situation we will walk away and seek the help of USFS or BRP if needed.

**Challenges: Describe any challenges the nominee may have faced.**

Mel is a constant figure among the CMC volunteers. If there is a tree to remove or any other trail issue he is always willing to go to work to support our mission. He has worked in so many extreme weather situations and in terrain many volunteers will shy away from. Mel rarely misses a crew day and puts in as many as 2-3 days a week working on this section regardless of his tenure and physical ailments. I've seen him walk 3-4 miles with a chainsaw or weed eater to complete the work on the MST. He is truly an inspiration to all of us who admire his stamina and work ethic.

**Partnerships: How did the project or program build partnerships or boost public interest? Please explain.**

Mel is one of our most popular and visible CMC Volunteers. He is also among our most active trail maintainer recruiters and someone I consider an ambassador for the BRP offering visitors on the trail guidance, suggestions or just a friendly hello. He has actively partnered with both the Friends and BRP foundation thru the years. In addition Mel has been a generous donor to the CMC's trail Maintenance general funds which help support the Clubs trail maintenance mission for providing a safe and pleasure hiking experience for all.

**Testimonials included for Mel Skiles:**

1. As a board member of the Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail, I want to thank Mel for his years of dedication to the MST in the Asheville Corridor , not only on his adopted section, which set the standard of how the perfect trail can look, but also in helping his neighboring section maintainers. No one has ever been able to work as many hours on one section of the MST each year as Mel.

-Les Love, FMST Board Member and CMC Secondary Trails Coordinator

2. Mel is very knowledgeable about trail work and can come up with a solution to any situation he encounters. He is very meticulous about his trail and tools and after he works on the trail it looks perfect. He is also a great teammate and builds up those around him.

-Paul Curtin, CMC Crew Leader and AT Supervisor, trail runner.

3. Having been recruited by Mel and the Current Thursday Crew Leader and CMC Trails counselor I am proud to nominate Mel Skiles. He is one of the most admired and respected members of the CMC. His work is exemplary and his leadership among our crews is under appreciated. Mel's love of the BRP, the MST and Western NC shows up everyday in his tireless work on the trails and Parkway. Mel's focus on safety and making the work fun is an inspiration for all of us.

-Todd Eveland, CMC Crew Leader, Trails Counselor

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## Winter Hiking Challenge for Conservation

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy is hosting their second annual Virtual Winter Hiking Challenge this year. Do you need a little inspiration to get moving after the holiday season? Well, lucky for you, the SAHC Annual Virtual Hiking Challenge is back!

The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy Virtual Winter Hiking Challenge sets a goal for you to complete 60 miles in 60 days at your own pace.

Those can be miles you've walked, run, or hiked – in your neighborhood, on a flat walking track, up a rugged mountain trail, or meandering in fields and forests. Whatever works for your comfort and skill level, all you have to do is move 60 miles within the 60-day challenge period, running from January 1 to March 1. Registration is open now and ends on February 1.

Registration is \$25 and all participants will receive informative emails with details on some of our favorite places to hike across the mountains of NC and TN. This special email series will include recommendations to areas SAHC has protected and some of our other favorite trails and excursions. We all know that some of our favorite hiking places are experiencing overuse and suffering impacts from their popularity. We will try to share tidbits about some of the lesser-known trails and areas to enjoy the great outdoors, so you can help alleviate stress on fragile trail ecosystems. All participants who complete the challenge will receive a Hiking Challenge patch, coupons and will be entered into a raffle to win a certificate good for two to either cave, climb, or raft through USA Raft (after March 1). The registration fee will give participants access to the RunSignup.com portal throughout the Challenge.

Time spent outdoors and in nature can help with both mental and physical health. We hope this Challenge will inspire folks to explore places you may not have hiked before and rediscover the joy of nature in your own neighborhood. Please note, you DO NOT have to pay to hike public trails.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions. Thank you!

Pauline Heyne  
Director of Philanthropy  
[Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy](#)

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Carolina Mountain Club eNews is published on the first Friday of each month. Send your news to [eNews@carolinamountainclub.org](mailto:eNews@carolinamountainclub.org). Articles are due on the last Friday of the previous month. Please limit articles to no more than 1,000 words. You may send up to two photos as jpg attachments.

To join Carolina Mountain Club go to : [www.carolinamountainclub.org](http://www.carolinamountainclub.org). Click on "Join CMC" on the right side. Follow the instructions. For all address and email changes, log in, select "Modify Profile", make changes and click on "Update Member" or email Dennis Bass at [dbass3607@gmail.com](mailto:dbass3607@gmail.com). Your email changes will be automatically reflected in eNews delivery.

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