



Ouachita National Recreational Trail Audit: 11-14

Posted on December 1, 2014 by blea48

Conducted by Bo Lea, FoOT President; November 3rd to November 18th, 2014. West to East thru hike of the Ouachita National Recreational Trail.

Methodology: **Green Condition** – trail is clear or has no major impediments, can contain some step overs and normal grass growth.

Yellow Condition – trail has no major impediments but is more difficult to traverse due to heavier vegetation growth and more tree issues including some walk a rounds.

Red Condition – trail has impediments that slow and restrict travel mainly heavy vegetation growth with vines / briars and / or trees blocking parts of the trail.

Overview: The overall condition of the Ouachita Trail is good. Having just completed a thru hike of the entire trail with a backpack, I found the trail to be easy to hike from a trail conditions standpoint with a few exceptions. Of the 223 miles of trail, I have placed 27 miles in the red condition. One area I labeled as an emergency red. This is the 2.5 miles from Queen Wilhelmina State Park east to the scenic drive. Most of the red conditions can be corrected with normal chainsaw work and weeding. The exceptions are the top of the ridges of Wilton, Rich and Fouche Mountains. **Note:** Five of the five area designated below as red are now green after being addressed by FoOT volunteer teams.

A specific plan needs to be prepared to address the mountain ridges. These open ridges allow heavy vegetation to develop, normally with vines and briars. A long term solution needs to be developed. Fighting these ridges year to year will be difficult.

Step overs of fallen trees are not a problem unless in an area used by mountain bikers. While doing needed chainsaw work they would be removed. Some walk-a-rounds would fit in the same category. Moderate grass on the trail is not an impediment in my evaluation, so long as it does not conceal the trail or impede movement.

Priority Areas: Itemized below are those areas identified as red and having priority for FoOT to address.

(1) MM#29 Rock glacier above Cedar Creek has 3 large trees blocking the trail. One is east of the glacier and two are just west. Much loping is needed near the glacier, especially on the west side. This area has been burned out leaving dead trees and no canopy. While working this area if possible, clear trail from Big Cedar Creek (MM#30.3) **Note:** This area is now green. Bill & Ryan Sears worked this area, November 26th, 2014.

(2) MM#51.6 – 54.1 Queen Wilhelmina Lodge east to scenic drive. All 2.5 miles needs work, including weeding, blazing, chainsaw cutting, and working on the tread. The trail has almost been lost in this short stretch. I called it a double red, the worst area of the OT audit. This area



is scheduled to be worked on January 2, 2015. Contact FoOT if you wish to join in. **Note:** A trail crew led by VP Maintenance, Ron Mayfield worked this section on January 5, 2015. All trees have been removed from last year's ice storm. The red section is now green. Still needs some blazing but no problem to follow.

(3) MM#72.1 – 74.1 OT leaves old road to the right up Fouche Mountain to Tan-A-Hill Gap. Many trees are down from last winter's ice storm. Most are small to moderate in size. Several trees down and bunched up just west of the gap blocking the trail. **Note:** Area is now green. It was worked January 26th, 2015 by FoOT volunteers — Ron, Thomas, Bill & Ryan.

(4) MM#128.8 – 133 Iron Fork Creek east to MM#133 just west of FR#78. This is an area FoOT has fought for years after it burned out and bugs got in most of the trees that survived. Falling dead timber has slowed greatly but still several are down. The main need to weed eat this section. Very overgrown obscuring the trail in several places. The west end of this area has the greatest need. **Note:** Area is now green. It was worked on November 25th, 2014 by FoOT volunteer crew led by Ron Mayfield.

(5) MM#153 – 155 FR#107 east crossing to Hoot Owl Gap. Blow down has lots of trees on the trail. Would be good to just walk on thru to FR#122 since it is at MM#157. Tread is in good shape, only real loping needed is the hairy pines on the west side of the vista at MM#156 and at Hoot Owl Gap. **Note:** Area is now green. It was worked on December 17th, 2014 by a FoOT Volunteer crew led by Glenn Wortham.

(6) The mountain ridges of Wilton, Rich, and Fouche are yellow but close to the red status. These areas should improve this winter after some hard freezes. Rain, ice, sleet, and snow will beat the vegetation down some this winter.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE REPORT – OUACHITA TRAIL – NOVEMBER, 2014

MM 0 – MM 8 Trail in excellent shape all the way to Deadman's Gap. Some sage grass present at two small open areas but not a problem plus the views are great. Two minor walk overs. Harold the camp host at the Talimena State Park works on this section a lot.

MM 8 – MM 9.4 From Deadman's Gap to Rock Garden Shelter was good, actually better than expected. Some minor step overs. Call section green with a note it needs some loping but no trouble backpacking. Trail appears to be getting some descent usage, which helps. Trail journal in shelter had lots of positive comments.

MM 9.4 – MM 16.8 Rock Garden Shelter to Holson Valley Shelter Trail is yellow from Rock Garden Shelter to just past Cedar Creek. Needs some loping and minor chainsaw work. A few step overs and a couple of minor walk a rounds from just past Cedar Creek to Holson Valley Shelter. This section was good (green) needing just some minor loping. Rocks in the trail will always make it tough, especially from Deadman's Gap to Horsethief Springs. An entry road up



from the south off Holson Valley Road intersecting the OT at approximately MM#12.3 is an access for maintenance.

MM16.8 – MM 29.8 Holson Valley Shelter to Big Cedar camp site Holson Valley Shelter to Horsethief Springs (MM#19.9) is yellow but not too bad. Needs some grass trimmed. Horsethief Springs to FR#6014 (MM#21.7) is green but needs some trimming. One large tree not too far west of FR#6014 on trail. Easy access for maintenance in this area. FR#6014 to Windingstair Campground (MM#23.7) is green. Trail remains green to shelter at MM#25. Conditions remain green to Red Springs (MM#28.4) but has some heavy grass with no briars east of the shelter prior to the multiple switchbacks and 4 pine walk overs just before Red Springs. A red area exists just before rock glacier at MM#29 with two large trees blocking the trail. **Note:** Red area now green, worked 11-26-14 by District Captain, Bill Sears and Ryan Sears. Also heavy growth in the same area needs to be loped. Also just past the glacier is a very large pine blocking the trail. It would be good to just work the trail from Big Cedar Creek to Red Springs. This is another area that has been lost its canopy due to burning.

MM 29.8 – MM 45 Big Cedar Camp Site to Kiamichi River #14 Trail from Big Cedar past Pashubbe Shelter up Wilton Mountain to the false summit at the briar patch (MM#35.8) is green. Trail remains green to the top needing some loping. On the top of Wilton Mountain at the primitive camp site to the east rock ledge crossing (MM#37.8) is yellow due to heavy growth on the ridgeline. Trail is green down to the Kiamichi Trailhead (MM#39.2). From the trailhead to the Kiamichi River crossing #14 (MM#45) is yellow. Condition is due to over growth of small trees and bushes. Several step over trees exist. Some grass also needs to be cut back. Currently it is still easy to transverse but another growth season or two will make it more difficult. From the Pashubbe Trailhead to the AR,/OK. State line is in the Kiamichi Wilderness area and restricts the use of mechanized equipment.

MM 45 – MM 46.3 Kiamichi River to the Arkansas / Oklahoma State Line Mostly green but top of first climb from river needs some weeding & loping. Start of final climb has 3 small / medium trees down. Final approximate 3/8 mile from top has some heavy weeds and borders on a yellow condition.

MM 46.3 – MM 54.1 Stateline to Talimena Drive, east of Lodge Trail is green from the state line to FR#514 (MM#47.8). It has recently had weed eater work. From FR#514 to the boundary of Queen Wilhelmina State Park is yellow due to lots of high weeds and few downed trees. Green conditions thru the state park to the lodge. From the lodge (MM#51.6) east to the Talimena Scenic Drive (MM#54.1) is a double red. The area needs chainsaw work, weeding, blazing, and some tread work. Needs to be a priority for correction. **Note:** The double red section is now green. A FoOT trail crew work this area out on January 5, 2015.

MM 54.1 – MM 56.7 Talimena Drive to Black Fork Trailhead / Hwy. 270 North side of scenic drive down to Highway 270 is green. Near the top where the trail goes parallel to the scenic drive could use some weeding and a few step overs are on the trail. Easy access from the scenic drive on both ends. Very well maintained from the last switchback to Highway 270.

MM 56.7 – MM 68.1 Blackfork Trailhead to Foran Gap / Hwy. 71 Trail is green from the Blackfork Trailhead past Eagle Gap (MM#58.5) to rocky ridgeline on Fouche Mountain at



MM#62.9. Trail on the ridgeline is red due to heavy growth with vines and briars. Trail turns yellow as it comes down to MM#65 where it becomes green to Foran Gap / Hwy. 71.

MM68.1 -MM 85 Foran Gap / Hwy. 71 to FR#76 west Trail is green from Foran Gap past the new shelter to where the trail becomes single track to the right off the old log road (FR#278) at MM#72.1. From this point to Tan-A-Hill Gap is red but still passable. **Note:** Area now green, worked 1-27-15 by FoOT volunteers. Tread is good just trees down from ice storm. Several trees are in a big mess just west of Tan-A-Hill Gap. Gap to the ridgeline east is green. From here to MM#77 approximately the trail is yellow with growth of briars and weeds. Some trees are down but not a major issue. Chainsaw work had been done up to about MM#77. From there to Turner Gap (MM#79.9) is green. Trail remains green up to FR#76 west, needing a little chainsaw work.

MM 85 – MM 94.5 FR#76 west to Big Brushy Campground Green conditions for this section. Needs weed eating on both sides of radio tower road where the reroute crosses. Excellent conditions from FR#48 (MM#88.2) to Big Brushy with only a couple of step overs.

MM 94.5 – MM 128.8 Big Brushy Trailhead to Iron Fork Creek Green across Blowout and Chalybeate Mountains. Five trees down on Blowout and reported to Robert Cavanaugh. These trees were no problems for hikers but a couple would hinder bikers. Chalybeate had a couple of step overs. A big pine is down between Rainy and Harris Creek and is easy to get to off the FR. Suck Mountain was great with work recently done on it. It appeared someone had mowed from the bottom to the top. Going east from Suck Mountain had also been worked. Looked good. Green condition continues to Story & Muddy Creeks to Highway 27. Trail east of Hwy. 27 is green all the way to Iron Fork Creek. The John Archer Shelter area had been worked on both sides of the mountain and has never looked better. A burn area on the downhill side (east) had been weeded recently. The top of Sandlick Mountain was a little grassy but not too bad.

MM 128.8 – MM 147 Iron Fork Creek to Ouachita Pinnacle Iron Fork Creek to MM#133 is red. **Note:** Area now green, worked by FoOT trail crew on November 25, 2014. This is an old burned over area that has been very difficult to maintain. The number of falling dead trees has slowed greatly but still several are across the trail. The biggest problem is heavy growth that is obscuring the trail. The west end of this trouble area has the most problems. From MM#133 to FR#78 is a perfect green. Trail from FR#78 to Highway 298 is green but could use some weed work at about MM#134.5. Green conditions from Hwy. 298 to Ouachita Pinnacle but a couple of briar patches just west of the Blue Mountain Shelter (MM#143.2).

MM 147 – MM 160.4 Ouachita Pinnacle to Highway 7 Trail is green to FR#107 but needs 3 trees removed just west of FR#107. **Note:** Three trees removed December 17th, 2014. From there to Big Bear Shelter is green. The turn at MM#149.2 off the old road to the left needs some blazing. Big Bear Shelter (MM#150.8) to MM#152 is yellow with several trees down, on to the 2nd crossing of FR#107 is green. FR#107 east for 2 miles is red with lots of trees down. **Note:** Red area now green after FoOT crew work on it December 17th, 2014. Hoot



Owl Gap & Rock Vista west could use some loping but green down to FR#122. When working the red 2 miles it would make sense to just walk on thru to FR#122. **Note:** Hoot Owl Gap to FR 122 also worked on. From FR#122 to Highway 7 is green with only a couple of step overs going up the mountain.

MM 160.4 – MM 191.8 Highway 7 to Highway 9 Green conditions to Oar Mountain Shelter, just needs some weed work under the transmission line (MM#164.3) back west to Sugar Creek only about 1/4 mile. There is a tree blocking the trail at MM#166.5, a small trail saw could clear it up enough to step over. The 1.4 miles from Oak Mtn. Shelter (MM#167.4) to FR#124 (MM#168.8) is yellow. Does not appear to have been worked in sometime. Not in terrible shape but needs a good overall cleaning. Flatside Wilderness is green but has a few trees down on the west end. One at the very beginning off FR#124 is blocking the trail and needs to be worked. From Flatside Pinnacle to Brown Creek Shelter is green. Green from the shelter to highway 9. A couple of trees that would be easy to reach are down on both sides of the spur trail that goes up to the Forest Service Road at the North Fork Pinnacle.

MM 191.8 – MM 202 Highway 9 to Highway 10 Trail is green with a few step overs. Trail could use some weed work in the Maumelle bottoms near MM#199. Pipeline reroute looks good. Big scary bridge is almost done. Some pier work and the western approach is still being worked on. Was able to walk across. Long time coming but very nice. Small metal bridge has been replaced and also is nice.

MM 202 – MM 222.5 Highway 10 to Pinnacle State Park Green conditions to the end. Reroute of trail that was reopened by Central Arkansas Water in the tornado damaged area is working well. Could use just a little tread work but is very functional.

Summary: Although there are details in this report, it does not try to capture every tree down or small problem on the OT. It was great to hike through those areas our FoOT volunteers had been working on. Considering a trail of 223 miles, the OT overall is in good shape with certain areas that have been mentioned that needs our attention. Look forward to working with VP of Maintenance, Ron Mayfield and the FoOT District Captains to address these needs. To each and every one who gives of their time and labor to help maintain the OT – – A big **THANKS!!** I wish you could have seen the beauty of the entire Ouachita Trail which I experienced during my thru hike with the fantastic fall foliage. The OT is truly a natural resource that must be preserved for those who will come after us.



President's. Message 10-30-14

Posted on [October 30, 2014](#) by [blea48](#)

FoOT will host its annual meeting this Saturday, Nov. 1st at 3:30 p.m. at the Forest Lake Club House in Hot Springs. Contact me at 501-622-8809 if you wish to come and I will give you the details.

Central Arkansas Water has opened the Ouachita Trail from mile marker 216-218. This area was heavily damaged by the deadly tornado this past spring. FoOT volunteers did chain saw work and flagged a reroute through the area. The OT had been completely destroyed.

This year has been a tough year for the OT, with ice storms in the west and a tornado on the east end. Add to that several additional high wind events and a wet growing season, the trail needs some help. I appreciate all the work that has been done over the past several months, especially the chain saw teams. We will be forming some response teams to address those particular areas that need special attention. Please help when the call goes out.

Looking forward to moving forward with the FoOT Legacy Foundation in the new year. The goal is to establish a perpetual source of funding to maintain the OT & area trails. Already \$475,00 has been pledged even before the formal campaign is conducted. You will be seeing details soon.

Please check the shelter project page. The State Line shelter is now complete. FoOT has completed 7 of the proposed 12 new shelters.

Appreciate the work of all our volunteers. We need to expand our base. Encourage someone to get involved with FoOT. Thanks!!

Bo Lea
FOOT President



FoOT President Message

Posted on July 19, 2014 by blea48

As President of Friends of the Ouachita Trail let me welcome you to the FoOT Website. We are currently in the process of updating this site to make it more convenient and practicable for trail users.

FoOT is entering its second decade of service maintaining and enhancing the Ouachita Trail. Ice storms this past winter and wind storms this spring have added greatly to the work load of maintaining the OT. Plans are being made to clean up the last major damaged section east of Foran Gap (Hwy 71). Approximately 90% of the 223 miles of the OT is adopted. FoOT always needs volunteer trail adopters to cover the areas not adopted and/or to assist adopters with large sections to maintain.

FoOT continues to work on the trail shelter project. This project consist of building 12 new shelters on the west end of the OT. To date 6 shelters have been completed. An additional shelter will be build this October. You can find details of this project on the FoOT website. FoOT is currently trying to raise the necessary funds to complete the last 5 shelters. An additional \$25,000 is needed to supplement existing funds to make completion of the shelter project a reality. If you wish to contribute to this effort or know of a funding source, please contact myself or any member of FoOT.

FoOT is moving toward the establishment of an endowment for the future of the Ouachita Trail as well as other trails in the Ouachita Mountains. The majority of the funds will come through estate planning. A campaign will be conducted this fall known as the Legacy Program. Be thinking if your love of the trail would lead you to be a part of this effort. We already have \$300,000 being committed to the Legacy Program. We would like to raise \$750,000 in commitments with a stretch goal of \$1,000,000. Think of FoOT when you revisit your estate planning. FoOT is a 501C3 non-profit.

As you can tell FoOT enters its second decade as a strong, viable organization to carry out its mission of maintaining and enhancing the Ouachita National Recreation Trail. FoOT has an outstanding Board and District Trail Captains, who not only contribute leadership but donate numerous volunteer hours to all our efforts on the OT. I must add, FoOT's partnership with the Ouachita National Forest remains strong and we appreciate their support.



While Friends of the Ouachita Trail always needs additional funds, the most important resource is the time and effort of our volunteers. To all of you that have and continue to support FoOT, Thanks!!

Bo Lea
President of FoOT
bolea66@gmail.com