



Friends of the Forest

Meeman – Shelby Forest State Park

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First Quarter 2024 Newsletter

Trails Report - Wayne Simpson Lead

- Dismantled a bridge on the Chickasaw Bluff Trail that was destroyed by a tree.
- Built a makeshift bridge next to the one dismantled using the available lumber.
- Raked the hill at the CBT trail head..
- Completed the clearing of storm damage on the CBT between Beaver Creek and Jackson Hill Road.
- Rerouted a section of the CBT, moving it from the wetlands to higher ground.
- Built a boardwalk at the one mile crossover of the Woodland Trail
- Completed repairs on bridge WT13
- Built a short reroute on the WT between the Shelter and the Spine
- Inspected the bridges on the entire trail system and listed repairs needed. Materials needed to complete the repairs will be submitted for purchase by the Trail Pack Grant.
- Cleared fallen trees and limbs from all trails.
- Shortened the cable on the WT float-away bridge to make it easier to reset.
- Wayne purchased 500 WT maps and left them at the Visitor's Center to handout as needed.

Campground - Darrel Schierholz - Lead

- **Campground:** continued work there as needed.
- **Cemetery area** - clean up; cleared out all the brush and leaf litter, removed old fencing and trash.
- The Park hauled away the old boat and moved the shed off it's original location. Ranger Jeff Hill is waiting for approval from State to install fencing. Estimated one year project.
- Working with the church associated with the cemetery to see what they want.

Telling Full Stories at Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park By Park Ranger Jeffrey Hill

When people think of Park Rangers they typically think of someone who is caring for the natural resources of the park including plants and animals. A much less often thought of topic is the cultural resources Park Rangers are tasked with preserving. Tennessee State Parks has a state-wide project to bring more of these stories to our guests. The Telling Full Stories initiative has been a focal point of our interpretive offerings for the past two years, and promises to unearth and preserve many stories that until recently have gone untold.

I remember sitting in my first training on this new project and we were presented with the question of "what stories does your park have that involve women or minorities?" Being a relatively new Ranger at the time I shrugged and turned to my co-workers. At that moment in time, we did know of any stories that really focused on anyone outside of affluent white males. We were tasked with researching the history of the park and see if there were any stories that weren't being told and figure out how we could research them and preserve those stories in a way that the public can access them. A task that I felt I was ready to take head on.

Continued



Before and After Repairs on the "Walk Don't Run" Bridge.



Boardwalk near Pioneer Springs

Telling Full Stories at Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park Continued

A few months later I was looking through some old files and stumbled upon a large stack of field surveys from the Division of Archeology with dozens of sites from around our park. One survey that caught my eye was labeled St. Mathews M.B. Church and Cemetery. I was aware of a couple of gravesites behind the old Ranger residence near the visitor center but I never knew much about them. My initial goal for the project was to simply clean up the area of debris and overgrowth to get an inventory of what was on the site.

After a day or two of clearing brush and leaves I had established that there were 22 headstones in the area, more than I had originally thought. I was excited about the progress and felt that this would make a great area to teach the public about the history of the communities before the park was founded. As I continued to clear the area I came across some nondescript stones partially buried that seemed to form lines. I assumed this was the boundary of the cemetery as they generally surrounded the graves that I had cleaned up. It wasn't until I was contacted by one of the church members that I had learned how big my project was going to be.

I learned from my new contact that the cemetery is associated with a church that used to stand in the clearing where the Ranger residence was. When the church sold the land to government for the development of the park it had relocated several miles down the road. He also informed me that the stones I assumed were the border were in fact grave markers. My project quickly grew from what I thought was 22 graves to over one hundred. As I kept clearing that number quickly approached two hundred. I have yet to do a final detailed count documenting each stone, but the cemetery is now thought to have over two hundred graves. I have cleared what I believe is the entire area, and erected a split rail fence around the entrance to serve as a physical marker to the public.

In the near future I will be installing interpretive panels at the site to teach people about the church, cemetery, and a school house that stood on the site as well. The school has an interesting story of it's own which I will detail in another article. Until then, feel free to visit the cemetery in a respectful manner. It is located on the way to the campground, it is the first driveway on the right.



Beaver Creek Crossing



Before and After Bridge
Damage.



Friends of the Forest

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