

## **MST in a Day!**

by Kate Dixon

It may not be unusual for the sections of the MST maintained by the Carolina Mountain Club to be hiked in a single day, especially on a wildflower-rich spring weekend, or on a fall weekend where the high peaks explode in color. But to have the whole 1,175 miles from Great Smokies to Outer Banks hiked in one day? Including the nearly 500 miles temporarily routed on country roads? Now that's unusual.

And it happened!

On September 9, three years of thought and planning came to fruition when we successfully pulled off Mountains-to-Sea Trail in a Day, our effort to have boots on every inch of the statewide trail in one 24-hour period. The idea was the brainchild of Friends of the MST board member Jerry Barker. For two years, Jerry pushed the idea; finally, last year we said, "Why not?" and the planning began.

As any hike leader knows, simply planning a hike can be a challenge. You've got the start time, the estimated hiking time, describing the trail to the unfamiliar, assessing its difficulty, trying to get people to the trailhead. Now, imagine scheduling 300 hikes, all in the same day. To achieve our goal we broke the trail into 300 bite-size (for the most part) legs, averaging from 3 to 5 miles. Then our volunteer "Segment Leaders" got to work encouraging people to sign up for legs in their segments. In CMC's area, those leaders were Barbara Morgan for Segment 2 (Waterrock Knob to the Pisgah Inn) and Greg Bechtel for Segment 3 (Pisgah Inn to Black Mountain Campground).

Thanks to segment leaders like Barbara and Greg, by end of day on September 8, we had at least one person signed up for all 300 legs, even those on-road.

And we managed to get 297 of the legs hiked and paddled. The only three not completed were paddle legs on the Neuse River, claimed by people who were suddenly called to help with preparations for Hurricane Irma. 100% of the hiking route was complete!

Our success was due in part to a stroke of weather luck across North Carolina: the skies statewide were sunny, the temperatures fall-like, in the 70s and lower 80s. Who wouldn't want to hike on a day like that?

In the end, we had 1,861 hikers hike — and paddle — the MST in a day. They started at midnight on Falls Lake in the Triangle; they hiked after the sun had set that evening. One hiker, Jason Taylor, hiked 34.3 miles — from the Devil's Garden Overlook off the Blue Ridge Parkway east to the Elkin Recreation Center. Bill Chatham paddled 28 miles on the MST's river option on the Yadkin River. Three generations hiked together, new hiking friendships were formed, and there was a full-circle element to the day, as Howard Lee, the man who came up with the idea for the trail 40 years earlier to the day, hiked 5 miles in the Coastal Plain.

Hikers submitted hundreds of photos capturing the day, from Clingman's Dome to Jockey's Ridge. You can see the photos, organized by trail segment, on the Friends of MST flickr page: [www.flickr.com/photos/mountains-to-sea-trail/albums](http://www.flickr.com/photos/mountains-to-sea-trail/albums)

According to the American Hiking Society, it was the first they'd heard of one of the nation's long paths being successfully hiked in its entirety in a single day.

MST in a Day was one way we've been celebrating the trail's 40th anniversary. It's likely been the most visible way, as well. Judging from the comments we've seen on Facebook, on Instagram and on our website, the day was a huge success in meeting its main objective: exposing the MST to folks who hadn't heard of the trail or were only vaguely aware of it.

Thanks for the hard work you've done in blazing, maintaining and promoting our statewide trail. We hope to build on the success of September 9 by making every day MST in a Day.

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Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail