

IN 1948, EARL SHAFFER STARTED AN EPIC JOURNEY TO THRU-HIKE

the Appalachian Trail in order to “walk off the war.” Sixty-five years later, other war veterans are starting the same journey. On March 17, 13 veterans made their way to the Appalachian Trail to begin a six-month thru-hike of the Trail as part of the Warrior Hike’s “Walk off the War” program. The Walk off the War program is designed to support wounded veterans transitioning from military service by hiking the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy, in partnership with Warrior

Hike, Operation Military Embrace, the Military Family Lifestyle Charitable Foundation, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association, is supporting this hike. The hike will provide 13 military veterans the opportunity to reconnect with the United States in a uniquely physical and psychological way — a fully funded scholarship to hike the Appalachian Trail.

The purpose of the hike is to provide these veterans a self-directed, self-paced journey along the estimated 2,180 miles of the A.T. There is not a requirement or a goal to complete the entire length of the Trail. The goal for these hikers is to experience the physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits of the Appalachian Trail. The true objective is the opportunity to eliminate the negative effects of the war, through walking in nature, engaging with other hikers, and experiencing the hospitality of the Trail towns along the A.T.

Trail maintaining clubs along the A.T. and veterans’ groups in various “Trail towns” will provide the veterans, who may travel alone or in small groups, with ancillary support services. This may include hosting a hiker or arranging transportation. Many American

Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts are teaming up with local Trail clubs to welcome the hikers.

Two of the driving forces behind this initiative are Captains Sean Gobin and Mark Silvers, two Marines who, upon returning from Afghanistan in 2012, hiked the A.T. to help purchase adapted vehicles for seriously wounded veterans. They are also the co-founders of Warrior Hike, a non-profit organization geared to raise funds for wounded veterans.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is proud to partner with Warrior Hike to offer this incredible experience to our military veterans. Our best wishes for a successful hike. 🏔️

J. Robert Almand | *Chair*

Mark J. Wenger | *Executive Director/CEO*



The 13 veterans, and service dog, Cooper, at Amicalola Falls State Park in Georgia before beginning their hike on the A.T. Photo by Heather “Gypsy Sole” Stobie