

On Wednesday May 20, 2021, I was on a six-mile hike with other members of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, one of the many weekly hikes offered by them and other hiking groups for the Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina areas of this beautiful mountainous area of the Southeastern United States. On this hike in the Talking Rock Nature Preserve, Georgia I got to experience the loud chirping of one of Gods insect creatures which was really beautiful to my ears. It reminded me of God's Word that He gives us **Eyes to See** and **Ears to Hear** (Mat 13:16). On this hike I saw thousands of holes burrowed into the hiking trail representative of the **Cicadas** cycle of reproduction. God also teaches us that all of His creatures have a purpose (Gen 1:24-25). The **Cicadas** have a unique place in Gods Kingdom. The life cycle of **Cicadas** is a mystery to entomologists. Periodical **Cicadas** require either **13 or 17 years** in the nymph stage, developing underground, and mature very slowly. They are synchronized to emerge en-masse, every 13 or 17 years. Their 17-year life span makes them the longest-lived insect known. This 17-year brood is expected to appear in Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C., but could extend to neighboring states in some cases. Periodical **Cicadas** are black with orange wing veins and red eyes, approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, and appear from May to July. These **Cicadas** were last seen 17 years ago, in 2004, and have been maturing underground for nearly two decades. The **Cicada** nymphs will scale trees after emerging from the ground, latching on and then metamorphosizing into their adult form. The 17-year **Cicada** emerges in different geographic areas on differing schedules, and they are found nowhere else in the World except the Eastern United States.

**Cicadas** are often mistakenly referred to as locusts. Locusts are members of the grasshopper family, which have chewing mouthparts; **Cicadas** have sucking mouthparts and do not chew. Periodical **Cicadas** will not bite. They have been known to land on people, but they cause no harm. Even though adult **Cicadas** suck on plants for nutrition, they feed very little as adults. Nymphs emerge from the ground when soil temperatures warm to approximately 64° F, usually sometime in May. They usually emerge from the ground after sunset, leaving behind very visible exit holes, and quickly crawl to any nearby vertical structure, preferably a tree or shrub. They shed their skins as they molt into adults, leaving behind their empty shells. Shortly after molting, their wings unfurl, and their yellow-white skin darkens as their exoskeleton completely hardens. Adults begin mating after they have completely matured, usually within a few days, and remain alive for approximately three to four weeks. Shortly after mating, females climb to living trunks, branches, and twigs, where they split the bark and deposit between 24 and 48 eggs. Adult females mate many times and are capable of laying up to 600 eggs during their lifetimes. Approximately six to ten weeks after eggs are laid, ant-like juveniles hatch and drop to the ground, where they burrow from a few inches to more than a foot into the soil. They remain underground as nymphs, feeding on tree and shrub roots for years. Male **Cicadas** will call females to mate by vibrating their tymbals, which are two rigid, drum-like membranes on the undersides of their abdomens. Different species of **Cicada** produce different songs. Males respond to the calls of other males, creating a chorus of 'singing' **Cicadas** that can be deafening. Females do not have tymbals and are incapable of producing the same sounds. Damage to woody plants occurs primarily when females split the bark on small-diameter limbs and branches for egg laying. Healthy and larger-diameter trees and shrubs can easily heal the  $\frac{1}{2}$ - to 1-inch slits; smaller ones often wilt and die.

**Thanks to the Chicago Botanic Garden for these facts about the Cicadas.**

Today May 29, 2021, and then many days before while walking my two-mile daily trek or reading a book on the front porch of my home in Blairsville, Georgia, I was again very aware of the songs of the **Cicadas** very loud and deserving of notice as one of Gods purposes. These insects in their winged form are all over

this area in their destiny of 13 or 17 years of reproduction. I further was reminded of back on April 12, 2021, as Spring was blossoming here in the mountains, I witnessed the beauty of **Gods Spring Season** of tree and plant blooms while on a 7.5-mile hike in the **Ocoee River Gorge of Eastern Tennessee**. Previously I completed a 5.25-mile hike in the **Rich Mountains East of Ellijay, Georgia**. To me this is an experience of the outdoors in these mountains of much beauty of God's creation and local history as well as a way to get exercise and knowledge of the area in which I live. Most people do not know the history of the United States in even the area where they live. Even further the real history of the past is being scrubbed from history books. Thankfully local organizations are able to at least keep local history active as I previously discussed in the Post on the **Cherokee Indians** which inhabited this area of the United States to be uprooted and forced to Oklahoma on the **Trail of Tears**. Following is a review of the **Ocoee River and Gorge** hike and some of the history of the area:

The **Ocoee River** and the three **TVA hydroelectric power plants** on this 22-mile gorge through the mountain provides an awesome review of local history. The Caney Creek Village that we went to with 12 other seasoned hikers was our destination. We traveled one hour by trucks on rough rock roads across mountains leaving from the southside of the river - there is a concrete one-way bridge from Hwy 64 on the northside of the Ocoee River to the southside where the No. 3 Powerhouse is positioned. After this brutal body massage road, we hiked 3.75 miles across rugged mountain terrain and perilous cliffs, most on narrow footpaths where you look down and realize if you fell only trees could stop you before falling maybe 1000 feet. This path is maintained by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association to which I am now a member, this being my second hike since a 5.25-mile hike two weeks ago East of Ellijay, Georgia on totally less treacherous trails. This trail has not received any maintenance yet this year because few people take this hike and thus there were many trees felled across the path requiring a climb over or under to get passage. The path led us down the mountain to the northside of Caney Creek where after following the creek West on the rocks, we crossed the creek at a shallow area maybe 60 feet wide. Of course, my waterproof shoes were only good for a four-inch depth, so one of the men provided me with a pair of waders while he carried my boots and backpack to the other side. The water was probably halfway up to my knees and a complete rocky bottom. But oh, was that water beautiful being so clear and cold it was tempting to take a drink. We reached the Caney Creek Village ruins which were immediately on the southside of the Ocoee River. The ruins were overgrown by moss, trees, and underbrush. Only foundations of the hotel, 14 houses, spa, and structures of the electric light poles, water supply plant with galvanized piping and two used-to-be storage tanks, plus remnants of piping for water distribution and sewer discharge (probably to the river) including valve boxes. I surmised that before they got electric power after 1913 there had probably been a diesel pump to pump water up the mountain to a holding pond where the static pressure of the height provided a continuous supply and pressure to the facilities in the village. There was evidence of piping going up and down the mountain with a vertical vent pipe. We toured all the ruins for about an hour, ate lunch as a group, and then did a reverse hike of 3.75 miles back to the trucks. But now the worse part - we hiked down the mountain and now tired had to hike back up the mountain. The hardy experienced hikers all over 60 years of age except for one thirtyish lady just took it in stride. I had to stop regularly to catch my breath as some of these inclines were up to 60-degree angles. The temperature was 76 deg but at least with low humidity. My constant overseers on this hike provided safety, encouragement, and constant reminders to stay hydrated. Then came the one-hour drive back to my car with a road massage on a tired and stiff body. I was told that 83 years old (me) is the oldest hiker in the northern part of the association but there is another 83-year-old in the southern part near Atlanta. I want to build conditioning of my body and lungs. I was asked to join another hike the next day,

but I need to stick to my plan of every two weeks until I get toned up with my body. In between I will continue my habit of walking my two miles every day on roads in my neighborhood. So, time has passed and now pushing hard on 84 years of age, I hope to keep you advised of my physical progress and future beautiful hikes in the mountains, the foothills of the Appalachian mountains.