



Did you ever wonder where these signs that are found along the MST in the Western part of the state come from?

If so, you can thank Andres and Reyna Sarre, life-long hikers, Carolina Mountain Club members and lovers of the MST.

Andres and Reyna are from Mexico but have been visiting and hiking in western North Carolina for many years. But Andres love of hiking goes back to his early years looking at the mountains surrounding his childhood home in Mexico City and vowing to summit them one day.

At 18, Andres joined the Alpine Rescue Unit and after several months of training, was able to reach the summit of Popocatepetl, at 17,800 feet. That was just the beginning. As a solo climber, he climbed "Popo" 102 times, Iztaccíhuatl 22 times, and Citlaltepetl, the highest mountain in Mexico at 18,400 feet, three times. His favorite mountain, the dormant volcano Nevada de Toluca or Xinantecatli, is the fourth highest mountain in Mexico at 15,200 feet which contains two lakes inside its crater. After more climbs and more summits of many more majestic mountains, he became a high mountain guide, leading people through lava fields and dormant volcanoes. Andres has carried his love of hiking around the world to hike in Peru, Chile, Argentina, Italy and Alaska's Mount Denali.

Andres began visiting western North Carolina in the mid-80's where he discovered the Carolina Mountain Club and began hiking and doing some trail maintenance with the club. And even though our tallest mountains are only 1/3 the elevation the tallest peaks in Mexico, he and his wife, Reyna, fell in love with our beautiful mountains.

While hiking in Cinqueterre in Liguria, Italy, he and Reyna became lost because one of the trail blazes was missing and their hiking adventure turned into an overnight stay in the mountains! On returning to Asheville, they decided to check out the round white blazes of the Mountains to Sea Trail (MST). Starting at the Folk Art Center, they hiked west all the way to Bear Pen Gap access and found that in some places, the blazes were missing. This sparked the idea to design the new MST logos and make wooden cartouches. His woodcarving company in Mexico City has a CNC, a computer-aided machine, making it easy to carve out the designs. Each time they or a friend flew from Mexico City to North Carolina, they would bring 10 or 20 of the wooden plaques, getting smiles from customs agents who were hikers.

Andres and Reyna now live full-time in Brevard where Andres has installed equipment to make carthouches in his garage workshop. Andres does the carving and Reyna does the painting. (Reyna is a talented oil-paint artist herself!) The two of them are often seen out on the trail checking on the status of the plaques and replacing those that have become weather-worn. He also makes plaques for the Friends in a higher grade of NC grown wood to hand out as special occasion gifts and prizes.

Andres philosophizes that each hike is a wonderful and different experience. “Each trail curve gives us a surprise, a flower, a root, an animal, a lake, a creek, or another hiker for a chat.” And he appreciates the thousands of hours the volunteers spend maintaining our trails and their willingness to share their expert knowledge of the plants, trees, and minerals of the area. The greatest reward of trail maintenance, Andres says, comes from long-distance hikers, who “with much happiness, give us a big loud ‘Thank you so much’.” And we give a big “Thank you so much” to Andres for all that he has contributed to our beloved MST!

