

Appalachian Trail

National Scenic Trail/Maine to Georgia
National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior



Cover photo by Dr. James Hark Horak

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is a public footpath following more than 2,100 miles of Appalachian Mountain ridgelines between Maine and Georgia. Roads that cross it at varying intervals give ready access. The Trail is protected along more than 99 percent of its course by federal or state ownership of the land itself or by rights-of-way. It was designed, constructed, and marked in the 1920s and 1930s by volunteer hiking clubs joined together by the Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC). Formed in 1925 and now a nonprofit organization based in Harpers Ferry, W. Va., ATC has worked with the National Park Service (NPS), USDA Forest Service (USFS), states, and local communities as active partners in the Trail project from the beginning. A "super trail" had been much talked about in New England hiking circles at the turn of the 20th century. The "A.T." evolved from the 1921 proposals of Massachusetts regional planner Benton MacKaye to preserve the Appalachian crests as an accessible, multipurpose wilderness belt—a retreat from eastern urban life. (Two-thirds of the Nation's population lives within 550 miles of the

trail.) The old clubs that united behind MacKaye, plus the new clubs formed specifically to advance the A.T. idea, concentrated on the hiking aspects of his vision under the leadership of Myron H. Avery, ATC chairman from 1931 to 1952. The clubs, the two federal agencies, states, and the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps combined forces to open a continuous trail by August 1937. Hurricanes, highway construction, and the demands of World War II undid those efforts until 1951 saw all sections finally relocated, opened, and marked for hikers and nature lovers. The 1968 National Trails System Act made the A.T. a linear national park and authorized funds for the NPS, USFS, and states to protect the entire route with public lands. The goal is to maintain the entire Trail environment as a place for everyone to hike, backpack, or otherwise enjoy the Appalachian mountains and wildlands, while at the same time conserving the natural, scenic, historical, and cultural resources of this one-of-a-kind park.

The Appalachian Trail by States

A Footpath in Nature

Between Maine's Mount Katahdin and Georgia's Springer Mountain, this footpath winds through the scenic, wooded, pastoral, wild, and culturally resonant lands of the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachian Trail is primarily used for walks and day hikes by all manner of nature enthusiasts, from birders to wildflower photographers. Backpackers make weekend escapes to it from heavily urbanized areas or take long-distance "thru-hikes" for months at a time. The ancient, worn-down, and forested Appalachians stretch from Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula in Canada to Alabama's northern mountains. Along their backbones, arctic plants—paper birch and black spruce—penetrate deeply into southern ecosystems.

Maine In its 281 miles across Maine, the Trail, marked throughout with vertical white-paint blazes, passes through an extensive wilderness at a great distance from towns and cities. The Katahdin region at the northern terminus is outstanding. The Trail in Maine may be roughly divided into three segments: The 118-mile eastern segment from Katahdin to Monson is characterized by disconnected mountains, lakes, ponds, streams, and pleasing forest growth. Easy to

New Hampshire Much frequented and well known, the White Mountain region is the main feature of the Trail in New Hampshire. Trails of the Appalachian Mountain Club are followed for the most part. Parts of the trail are above timberline, where temperatures may change suddenly. A trip here requires intelligent planning, and you

travel, it is the most isolated, except at the termini. The second segment, from Blanchard to Bigelow Mountain, is of historic interest. The first part involves more exertion, but the remainder affords the easiest travel in Maine. The third, western segment is an area of rugged, steep, 4,000-foot mountains with many ascents and descents. Opportunities for canoeing and swimming are features of the Trail in Maine.

should allow ample time. The connecting link between the Green and White mountains, maintained by the Dartmouth Outing Club, passes through broken terrain of the Connecticut River Valley.

Vermont West of the Connecticut River to the Green Mountains, the route is through high, rugged country of abandoned and overgrown farmlands and woodlands. From "Maine Junction" south, the Trail follows

the lower 104.7 miles of the Green Mountain Club's famed Long Trail along the crest of the Green Mountains.

Massachusetts The Trail here leads through a series of wooded areas and valleys in the Berkshire Hills. Mts. Greylock and

Everett are outstanding Trail features in Massachusetts.

Connecticut The route through Connecticut meanders among the worn-down remnants of a much loftier mountain range and

presents greatly varied scenery. Main features are the Housatonic Valley and the Taconic Range.



National Scenic Trails System

Commercial development threats to the Appalachian Trail and concern for outdoor recreation opportunities prompted Congress to pass the National Trails System Act in 1968. The National Trails System now includes eight national scenic trails and eight national historic trails (not shown here). Generally, the scenic trails are hiking trails and historic trails are roads. Many are far from complete. National Recreation Trails, also in the system, are named trails within states and are managed locally.

National Scenic Trails and approximate mileages: (1) Appalachian Trail, 2,170; (2) Pacific Crest Trail, 2,600; (3) Continental Divide Trail, 3,100; (4) North Country Trail, 3,200; (5) Ice Age Trail, 1,000; (6) Potomac Heritage Trail, 700; (7) Natchez Trace Trail, 700; and (8) Florida Trail, 1,300. *National Historic Trails and approximate mileages:* Iditarod Trail, 2,000; Oregon Trail, 2,000; Lewis and Clark Trail, 3,700; Mormon Pioneer Trail, 1,300; Overmountain Victory Trail, 270; Cherokee Trail of Tears, 800; Nez Percé Trail, 1,170; and Santa Fe Trail, 780.

A footbridge takes hikers over this stream west of the Taconic Parkway of New York. Mike Warren

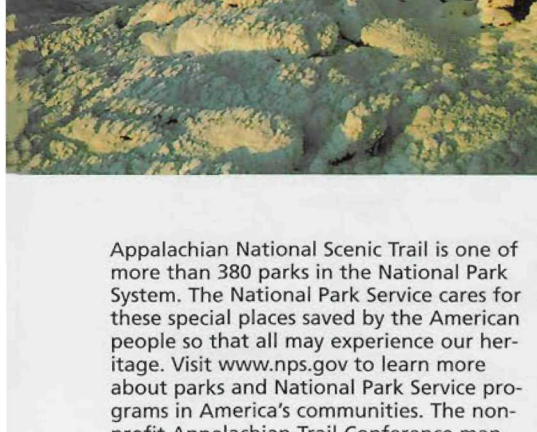
Below: Winter can come early and stay late in New Hampshire's Presidential Range. Albie Pokrobo

Catawba rhododendron brightens spring hikes in the Trail's southern reaches. Mike Warren

Below: Fresh fruit! A hiker picks wild strawberries at roadside in Vermont. Allen de Hart

Hikers enjoy moments of reverie on Charles Bunion in the Great Smoky Mountains. V.C. Chew

Below: Fall foliage in New York frames a Trail rock formation called the Lemon Squeezer. Mike Warren



Appalachian National Scenic Trail is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities. The nonprofit Appalachian Trail Conference manages the Trail's day-to-day operations under a special agreement with the National Park Service.

Leave No Trace

The Appalachian Trail Conference, in partnership with Leave No Trace, asks you to help take care of the Appalachian Trail and the wild country it passes through. Please do your part by following the seven Leave No Trace principles of low-impact use while in the backcountry:

1. Plan ahead and prepare.
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly.
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfire impacts.
6. Respect wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.

Please travel in groups of 10 or fewer if backpacking; 25 or fewer on day trips. By leaving little or no trace of your presence, you help preserve the Trail for future enjoyment. And remember: millions of hours have been donated by volunteers to build and maintain the Trail. Visit the Leave No Trace website (www.lnt.org).

"Thru-Hiker's Lament"

Some days I get lost in thinking while my legs walk steadily on. Other times I soar with my spirit and my feet quietly tag along. But today all I am is a body hauling this big heavy pack. And although I keep trying there just ain't no denying that go pounds sit on my back!

—Walk on, A Cosmic Yankee



Frank Logue

Maryland The 40 miles of the Trail in Maryland are characterized by a 38-mile walk along the ridge crest of South Mountain. This offers a good choice for a three- or

four-day trip with good views that is never too far from towns and highways. The Trail joins the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal towpath at the Potomac River.

West Virginia The Trail crosses the Potomac River into West Virginia at Harpers Ferry on a footbridge built onto a railroad bridge. ATC headquarters is at the corner of Washington Street and Storer College Place, uphill from

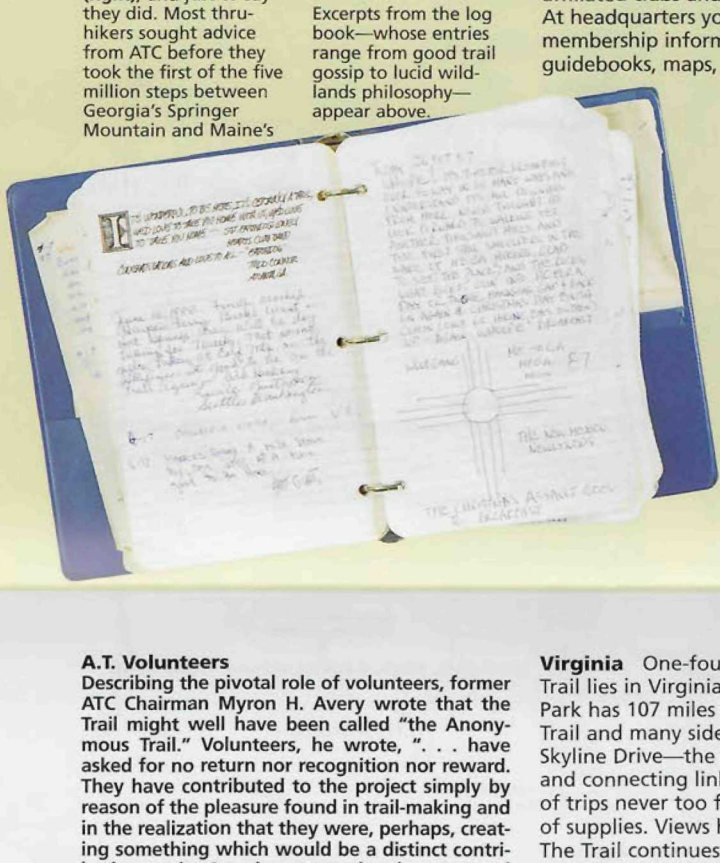
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The Trail soon leaves West Virginia across the Shenandoah River opposite Harpers Ferry. It will follow this state line again near Pearisburg, Va., for almost 20 miles.

A.T. Hikers' Stop

ATC headquarters in Harpers Ferry, W. Va., has a log book (below), to have their picture taken (right), and just to say they did. Most thru-hikers sought advice from ATC before they took the first of the five million steps between Georgia's Springer Mountain and Maine's

Katahdin. They hope to be back in touch before long to report completing the entire Trail—and that they now qualify as "2,000 milers."

Excerpts from the log book—whose entries range from good trail gossip to lucid wildlands philosophy—appear above.



Who could hike four to six months and not develop a nickname? From the A.T. log book: Tenderfoot, The Dynamic Duo, The Happy Feet, Hungry Dave, Stonefish Jumpstart, Willie from WISCO, The Umbrella Lady, The Jersey Devil, and the Crusin' Canadian, and Dee Bloody Gimpster.

Appalachian Trail Park Office

The Appalachian Trail Park Office of the National Park Service is also located in Harpers Ferry. ATPO is responsible for the Trail's overall administration and oversees its operations and land acquisition program.

A.T. Volunteers

Describing the pivotal role of volunteers, former ATC Chairman Myron H. Avery wrote that the Trail might well have been called "The Anonymous Trail." Volunteers, he wrote, "... have asked for no return nor recognition nor reward. They have contributed to the project simply by reason of the pleasure found in trail-making and in the realization that they were, perhaps, creating something which would be a distinct contribution to the American recreational system and the training of the American people." Today's volunteers monitor and maintain the Trail and its shelters and help with day-to-day operations at headquarters. Most volunteers are associated with one of the 31 ATC-member organizations—hiking, mountain, and outdoor clubs—that have been assigned responsibility for specific sections of the Trail. For information about volunteering on the Trail, contact Appalachian Trail Conference, P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, 304-535-6331; www.appalachiantrail.org.



A.T. shelters are spaced roughly a day's hike apart along the Trail for the convenience of overnight hikers. Sam Abell/National Geographic Society

Hiker Security Guidelines

1. Don't hike alone. A partner reduces the potential for harassment. If you hike alone, say you are with a larger group. Even with a partner, heed your instincts about strangers.
2. Leave your trip itinerary with family or friends. 3. Don't reveal your itinerary to strangers or leave it on your vehicle. Do not describe the whereabouts of fellow hikers. 4. Dress conservatively—to avoid unwelcome attention. 5. Avoid provocation. 6. Be cautious with strangers. 7. Camp away from roads. Harassment is most likely in areas accessible to motor vehicles. 8. Don't carry firearms. 9. Discourage theft. Don't leave your pack unattended. Don't leave cash, cameras, or expensive camping equipment in cars parked at remote trailheads. 10. If you witness or are the victim of harassment, promptly report the incident to local law enforcement authorities and to ATC.

Tennessee and North Carolina

From Damascus, Va., the Trail follows segments of mountain ranges in Cherokee National Forest to the North Carolina-Tennessee line and over famous Roan Mountain, noted for its rhododendron gardens and far-ranging views. From here along the two states' boundary and beyond through Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina, the Trail provides a most rewarding introduction to the majesty of the southern Appalachians. Great Smoky Mountains National Park, with 70 crest-line Trail miles crossed by only one road, is the highest section of the entire route. Beyond the Great Smokies come the Yellow Creek-Wauchuca-Chocoma Mountain areas, which

Virginia

One-fourth of the Appalachian Trail lies in Virginia. Shenandoah National Park has 107 miles of graded Appalachian Trail and many side trails. The proximity of Skyline Drive—the Trail crosses it 32 times—and connecting links offer endless varieties of trips never too far from a potential base of supplies. Views here are extraordinary. The Trail continues roughly parallel to, but generally many miles removed from, the Blue Ridge Parkway. It crosses the parkway two times in one 70-mile stretch. It is then close to it, with several crossings, for a short distance in Jefferson National Forest. This is a section of mature timber and wilderness



Blue flag (wild iris) Mike Warren

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Administration of the Trail

The National Park Service has overall responsibility for the Trail through its Appalachian Trail Park Office. Actual operations affecting use of the Trail are shared responsibilities, as described above. Private citizens have built and maintained the Trail since its beginnings, and the principle of cooperative management has linked private clubs, federal agencies, and state governments for 60 years. Recognizing this, in 1984 the National Park Service delegated to ATC the day-to-day responsibility for managing the lands through which the Trail is routed. The nonprofit ATC, formed in 1925, includes a private land trust to acquire and protect additional land adjacent to the publicly purchased Trail corridor. ATC does all this from four field offices and its headquarters in Harpers Ferry, W. Va.

For information and a list of publications, contact: Appalachian Trail Conference, P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0807; 304-535-6331; info@appalachian-trail.org; www.appalachiantrail.org

Trail Markers The Appalachian Trail is marked with two-inch by six-inch vertical white paint blazes. A double blaze—one above the other—is placed before turns, junctions, or other areas that require hikers to be alert. Blue blazes mark A.T. side trails. Usually, these lead to shelters, water supplies, or special viewpoints.

Motor Vehicles, Horses, and Dogs Motor vehicles are illegal on all sections of the Trail. Horses are prohibited except where expressly permitted. Dogs are prohibited in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Maine's Baxter State Park and must be leashed on all National Park Service lands. Dogs can get you into trouble with bears and other hikers. If you take one, keep it on a leash.

Safety Observe these safety precautions: • Walk with at least one companion. If a mishap occurs, one of you can go for help. • Poisonous snakes live along

the Trail but avoid human contact if they can. • Black bears in search of food may bother hikers, particularly in Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks and New Jersey. • Purify all water.

Permits You do not need a permit to walk the A.T., but overnight camping permits are necessary in Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks, Baxter State Park, and parts of White Mountain National Forest. For information on permits and camping regulations, contact: Shenandoah National Park, Luray, VA 22835, www.nps.gov/shen; Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Gatlinburg, TN 37733, www.nps.gov/grsm; Baxter State Park, 64 Balsam Dr., Millinocket, ME 04462, and White Mountain National Forest, 719 No. Main St., Laconia, NH 03246-2772, www.fs.fed.us/r9/white.

For the National Park Service Trail office, contact: Appalachian Trail Park Office, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Harpers Ferry Center, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425 304-535-6278 www.nps.gov/appa

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