

Appalachian Trail

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Scenic Trail
Maine to Georgia



The Trail atop Moxie Bald in Maine offers spectacular views.
© ALEXANDRA C. DALEY-CLARK

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) is a public footpath that follows over 2,100 miles of Appalachian Mountain ridgelines from Maine to Georgia. Roads that cross it at varying intervals give ready access. The Trail is protected along over 99 percent of its course by federal or state ownership or rights-of-way. It was designed, constructed, and marked in the 1920s and 1930s by volunteer hiking clubs brought together by the volunteer-based, nonprofit Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). Formed in 1925 and based in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, ATC works in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, states, and local communities.

A "super trail" had been talked about in New England hiking circles in the early 1900s. The A.T. evolved from the 1921 proposals of Massachusetts regional planner Benton MacKaye to preserve the Appalachian crests as a wilderness

belt—a retreat from urban life. The old clubs that united behind MacKaye, plus new clubs formed specifically to advance the A.T. idea, concentrated on the hiking aspects of his vision under the leadership of Myron Avery, ATC chairman from 1931 to 1952. The clubs, two federal agencies, states, and the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) combined forces to open a continuous trail by August 1937. Hurricanes, highway construction, and World War II demands undid those efforts until 1951, when all sections were finally relocated, opened, and marked for hikers.

The 1968 National Trails System Act made the A.T. a linear national park area and authorized funds for the NPS, USDA Forest Service, and states to protect the entire route with public lands. The goal is to preserve the Trail and provide for visitors' enjoyment of the varied scenic, historical, natural, and cultural features of this one-of-a-kind park.

A Footpath in Nature

Between Maine's Mount Katahdin (northern terminus) and Georgia's Springer Mountain (southern terminus) this footpath winds through scenic, wooded, pastoral, wild, and culturally resonant lands of the Appalachian Mountains. Ancient, worn, and forested, the Appalachians stretch from Canada's Gaspé Peninsula to Alabama's northern mountains.

The Appalachian Trail is used for walks and day hikes by all manner of nature enthusiasts, from birders to wildflower photographers. Backpackers take weekend escapes from urbanized areas or long-distance thru-hikes for months at a time.



National Trails System

Threats of commercial development and concerns for recreational opportunities prompted Congress to pass the National Trails System Act in 1968. The system includes 11 national scenic trails, 19 national historic trails, and over 900 national recreation trails.

National Scenic Trails (*map above*):

- (1) Appalachian Trail, (2) Pacific Crest Trail, (3) Continental Divide Trail, (4) North Country Trail, (5) Ice Age Trail, (6) Potomac Heritage Trail, (7) Natchez Trace Trail, (8) Florida Trail, (9) Arizona Trail, (10) New England Trail, and (11) Pacific Northwest Trail.

For more information about the National Trails System and a list of all national and historic trails visit www.nps.gov/nts.



White blazes mark the route of the Appalachian Trail (top).
NPS / MIKE WARREN

Thomas Knob shelter is near Mount Rogers in Virginia (above).
NPS / SEAN FOLMER



Rattlesnake
NPS / SEAN FOLMER

Leave No Trace

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy 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 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 when backpacking; 25 or fewer on day trips. Volunteers have donated millions of hours to build and maintain the Trail. By practicing Leave No Trace principles you help preserve the Trail for future enjoyment. Learn more about Leave No Trace at www.lnt.org.

The Appalachian Trail by States

Maine In its 281 miles across Maine, the A.T., 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. Katahdin comes from the Native American name Kette-Adene meaning Greatest Mountain. Farther south the rugged Mahoosuc Range stretches into New Hampshire. Opportunities for canoeing and swimming are features of the A.T. in Maine.

New Hampshire The much-frequented White Mountains region is the Trail's main feature in New Hampshire. Parts of the A.T. are above the treeline, where temperatures can change suddenly. A trip here requires detailed planning, and you should allow ample time. The link between the Green and White mountains is 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 Killington south the Trail follows the lower 104.7 miles of the famed Long Trail along the crest of the Green Mountains.

Massachusetts Here the A.T. leads through a series of wooded areas and valleys in the Berkshire Hills. Mount Greylock and Everett are outstanding features in Massachusetts.

Connecticut The route this state meanders among the worn remnants of a loftier mountain range and presents greatly varied scenery. Main features are the Housatonic Valley and the Taconic Range.

May 8—"Reflection on my A.T. Experience."
Way back in May 1978, I began my first-ever A.T. backpacking trip at Delaware Water Gap, heading north in a pouring rain. Five cold[,] wet days later, I limped off the Trail near Greenwood Lake, NY, aching and discouraged. But something about the A.T. kept luring me back, and now—nine long years later—I have just completed the entire A.T.!

The Trail has given me some of the best experiences of my life. I have enjoyed some spectacular views, met many really great people, had a few close animal encounters, and saw so much of the beauty of nature.

Even though my long-awaited goal of completing the A.T. is now reached, I will return. The A.T. has brought me riches that no amount of money could ever buy. Many thanks to the ATC, to all the clubs and individuals who maintain the Trail, and to everyone who has been a part of my A.T. experience.

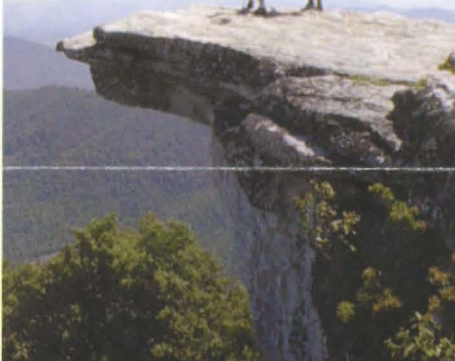
—M.B., A.T., 1978–87



NPS / DAVID REUS

Appalachian National Scenic Trail is one of over 400 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. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

The nonprofit Appalachian Trail Conservancy manages the Trail's day-to-day operations under an agreement with the National Park Service and works in partnership with the USDA Forest Service. For more information visit www.appalachiantrail.org and www.fs.fed.us.



Views from McAfee Knob in Virginia are worth the climb.
ALL IMAGES—NPS UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED



Red-tailed hawks migrate in fall (top).
© JOYCE GROSS

A hiker crosses a stream near Pawling, New York (above).
NPS / JOHN FLETCHER

New York and New Jersey From Connecticut to Kittatinny Mountain in New Jersey, the Trail terrain is less wild. Bear Mountain-Harriman State Park is much-frequented. Along Kittatinny Mountain the A.T. is rugged and more remote than elsewhere in these states.

Pennsylvania The A.T. in Pennsylvania follows ridges east of the Allegheny Mountains as far west as the Susquehanna River. About 10 miles beyond the Susquehanna, it crosses the Cumberland Valley and follows the northernmost extension of the Blue Ridge.

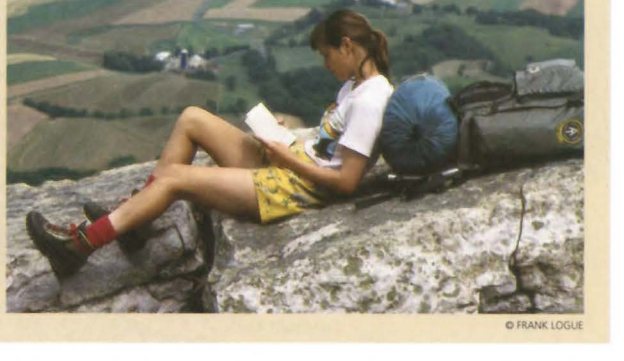
Maryland A 38-mile walk along the ridge crest of South Mountain characterizes the 40 Trail miles in Maryland. A three- or four-day trip with views is never too far from towns and highways. At the Potomac River the A.T. joins the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park towpath.

West Virginia The A.T. 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 A.T. leaves West Virginia across the Shenandoah River. It follows the state line again near Pearisburg, Virginia, for about 20 miles.

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 40 pounds sit on my back!

—WALK ON, A COSMIC YANKEE



© FRANK COLLIE

Trail Headquarters Thru-hikers stop at ATC headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, near the Trail's halfway point, to write in the log book and take pictures (below). Entries

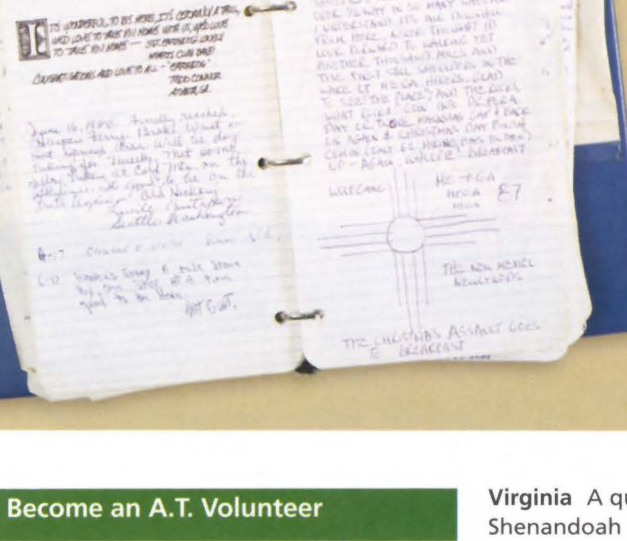
range from Trail gossip to wildlands philosophy. Most seek advice from ATC before taking the first of five million steps between Georgia's Springer Mountain and

Maine's Mount Katahdin. They hope to be back in touch to report that they completed the entire Trail and now qualify as 2,000-milers.

At headquarters get Trail and ATC membership information. Buy maps, guidebooks, and other publications. Ask about volunteering too!

Headquarters is where ATC coordinates Trail maintenance through 30 affiliated clubs and four ATC offices.

Appalachian Trail Park Office (ATPO) The National Park Service ATPO in Harpers Ferry is responsible for the Trail's overall administration. It oversees Trail operations and the land acquisition program.



What's in a Name? Names from the A.T. log book include Tenderfoot, The Dynamic Duo, Willie

from WISCO, The Happy Feet, Stonerish Jumpstart, The Umbrella Lady, The Crusin' Canadian, Hungry

Dave, The Jersey Devil, The Lost Wagon, and Dee Bloody Gimping Marsh-mallow Monster Hiker.

Become an A.T. Volunteer

A former ATC chairman wrote that volunteers "have asked for no return or 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." As a volunteer, you can monitor and maintain the Trail and its shelters and help with operations at headquarters. Opportunities range from one-day work trips to weeklong trail crews. Contact:

Appalachian Trail Conservancy
PO Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
304-535-6331
info@appalachiantrail.org
www.appalachiantrail.org



Volunteers repair a section of trail in Maryland.

Hiker Security Guidelines

Emergencies call 911. Report non-emergency incidents to local law enforcement and ATC. Note that cell phone reception is not available in all Trail areas. • Do not hike alone. Having a partner reduces the potential for harassment. Even with a partner, heed your instincts about strangers. If alone, say you're with a group. If someone is making you feel uneasy, get away from them. • Leave your trip itinerary with family or friends. Do not reveal it to strangers or leave it on your vehicle. Do not describe the whereabouts of fellow hikers. • Camp away from roads. Harassment is most likely in areas vehicles can access. • Discourage theft. Do not leave cash, cameras, or camping equipment in cars parked at remote trailheads.

Virginia A quarter of the A.T. is in Virginia. Shenandoah National Park has 107 miles of graded A.T. and many side trails. The Trail crosses Skyline Drive 32 times and offers side trips never too far from a base of supplies. Hikes are extraordinary. The A.T. continues roughly parallel—but is generally many miles from—the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Trail crosses the parkway nine times in 90 miles, four of those in a 10-mile stretch of parkway, including through a section of mature forest and wilderness with high summits as impressive as any region south of New England. From here the A.T. heads west across the Shenandoah Valley. The southwest Virginia portion affords a splendid wilderness trip. In the George Washington and Jefferson national forests catch a beautiful display of rhododendron and azalea in June and July.

Tennessee and North Carolina From Damascus, Virginia, the Trail follows segments of mountain ranges in Cherokee National Forest over the North Carolina-Tennessee border and Roan Mountain, noted for its rhododendrons and far-ranging views. From here, along the states' boundary and through Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina, the Trail provides a rewarding introduction to the majesty of the southern Appalachians. The highest section of the route is at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, with 70 crest-line Trail miles crossed by only one road. Beyond the Smokies come the Yellow Creek and Cheoah mountain areas. Next is the Nantahala section, with rewarding views from 4,000-foot gaps and 5,000-foot peaks, culminating in Standing Indian, the Grandstand of the Southern Appalachians. The variety of forest growth, the beauty of the flowering shrubs, and spectacular views make the Trail from the Virginia border an outstanding area to hike.

Motor Vehicles, Horses, and Dogs Motor vehicles are illegal on all Trail sections. • 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 a dog, keep it on a leash.

Georgia The Trail in Georgia lies entirely within Chattahoochee National Forest. The wildness, elevation, and ruggedness of the area are decidedly unexpected. Because highways cross the Blue Ridge at intervals of a moderate day's journey, the A.T. here is readily reached and offers many options for splendid trips. Springer Mountain marks the southern terminus of the Trail.

A footpath for those who seek fellowship with the wilderness.

These words adorn this metal 50-pound plaque that measures 12 by 20 inches. Mounted at the Trail's southern terminus at Georgia's Springer Mountain, it is a photograph by thru-hikers, whether aspiring or finishing.



A clearing mist reveals an expanse of the Great Smoky Mountains (top).
Smoky Mountains (top).
White blazes mark the Trail at Walker Mountain, Virginia (above).
White blazes mark the Trail at Walker Mountain, Virginia (above).



Rhododendrons bloom at Mount Rogers in Virginia.
© NPS / CLAUDE BLACKLEY



A family hikes at Charles Bunion in Tennessee (top).
NPS / LEO HOUDES



A hiker pauses at Humphreys Peak, Arkansas (above).
© NPS / CLAUDE BLACKLEY

Plan Your Visit

Trail Administration The National Park Service has overall responsibility for the Trail through its Appalachian Trail Park Office. Operations affecting Trail use are shared responsibilities (described above). Private persons have land and maintained the Trail since its beginning. Cooperative management has linked hiking clubs and federal and state governments for over 60 years. In 1984 the National Park Service delegated to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (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 land adjacent to the publicly purchased Trail corridor. ATC does this from four field offices and its headquarters in Harpers Ferry.

Publications ATC is the clearinghouse for information on the Appalachian Trail. It publishes or distributes guidebooks and maps covering every section of the Trail, manuals to help volunteers with maintenance and design, educational brochures for users, a newsletter for workers, and a magazine for members. For information and a list of publications contact ATC.

Permits You do not need a permit to walk the A.T., but overnight camping permits are required in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina and Tennessee. www.nps.gov/govshen; Baxter State Park, Maine, www.baxterstatepark.org; and parts of White Mountain National Forest, New Hampshire, www.fs.usda.gov/whitemountain.

Trail Blazes The A.T. is marked with 2-inch by 6-inch vertical, white-paint blazes. A double blaze (one above the other) is placed before turns, junctions, and other areas requiring hikers to be alert. Blue blazes mark A.T. side trails; these lead to shelters, water supplies, or views.

Safety and Regulations Walk the Trail with at least one companion. If a black bear occurs, one can go for help. • Venomous snakes live along the Trail; do not approach them. • A mishap or population are active along the entire Trail. Use bear-safe food storage. • Purify all water. • Carry equipment to spend an unexpected night outside. • For firearms regulations check the park website. • **EMERGENCIES CALL 911** where service is available.

More Information Appalachian Trail Park Office
Appalachian National Scenic Trail
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
304-535-6278
www.nps.gov/appa
Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.
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