

# The Appalachian Trail in North Georgia

The 2,190 mile Appalachian Trail (A.T.) is the product of the vision, hard work, and dedication of thousands of people who have conceived, built, maintained and protected this internationally famous footpath. This display describes the history of the A.T. with special emphasis on the roles residents and places in north Georgia have had in its creation.

## National Events

## North Georgia Events

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Benton MacKaye

Benton MacKaye proposed "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning" as a long trail or footpath the full length of the Appalachian mountain range as "a . . . refuge from civilization." An Appalachian Trail Committee was formed in Washington D.C. to further MacKaye's ideas.

Georgia Representative Bonnell Stone of Blairsville proposed construction of US Highway 129 through Neel Gap, opening the areas of north Georgia and western North Carolina to more commerce and tourism.

The highway, started in 1923 with mule teams and manual labor, was finished and paved in 1931. It was significant because it provided access to the base of Blood Mountain, the highest point in Georgia on the A.T.

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The Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC) was formed in Washington, D.C., and a constitution adopted.



Roy Ozmer

The ATC enlisted Roy Ozmer to scout the southern section of the trail up to Virginia.

Everett (Eddie) Stone, Assistant State Forester, and his assistant Charlie Elliott worked with Ozmer to propose a trail route in Georgia that began at Mt. Oglethorpe, near Tate, and ended at the North Carolina line.

October 29, 1929—The U.S. Stock Market collapsed, leading to the Great Depression.

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Myron Avery

At the 4th meeting of the ATC, Ozmer presented the proposed route and Japanese landscape photographer George Masa displayed images, resulting in unanimous approval of the route through Georgia from Mt. Oglethorpe.

Myron Avery was elected chairman of the ATC in 1930 at the age of 31, holding the office until his death in 1952.

To promote the trail, Elliott enlisted three Gainesville Boy Scouts to hike the entire Georgia section of the AT from the North Carolina line to Mt. Oglethorpe. The boys took 13 days to complete the task. The resulting publicity was a great success.



GATC members prepare to climb Blood Mountain

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) was formed at a meeting in Dahlonega. Eddie Stone was selected acting president. He defined the purpose of the club: "To interest the public in nature . . . and to construct, maintain, and . . . preserve [the A.T.] as a retreat from civilization."

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The 5th ATC Conference met in June in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, with over 200 people attending, building friendship and cooperation among the southern A.T. maintaining clubs.

The first annual meeting of the GATC was held in November in Helen, Georgia, at Greear's Lodge, operated by Caroline and John Greear. Over 70 people attended, feasting and dancing, and electing Warner Hall president. Caroline became a long-time member of GATC.

The first A.T. shelter was built at Amicalola Falls at a cost of \$57. It was surrounded by split-rail fencing to keep feral pigs out.

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The worsening Depression put millions of people out of work and into despair and suffering. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was elected President, promising a New Deal for the American people.

Warner Hall, GATC president, 1932-1935, led with an enthusiasm that spread to the club's membership. Hall strengthened friendships with the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club. His leadership also protected the old growth trees now known as the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest.

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Roosevelt's inauguration, March 4, 1933

In his inauguration speech, FDR stated, "Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously . . ." He immediately began plans for legislation that led to the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).



Bonnell H. Stone



Local men build the road through Neel Gap



Eddie Stone blazing the A.T.



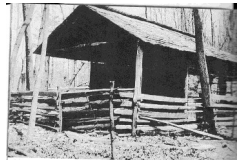
Elliott family of Union County on newly-built US/129 at Neel Gap



Boy Scouts on the trail



1st annual GATC meeting, 1931



Amicalola Falls shelter



Benton MacKaye and Warner Hall



This history was made possible through a grant from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, public donations through Mountain Crossings, and the cooperation of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, the US Forest Service, and dedicated volunteers.



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*"Ours is a friendship of the trails that lead to faraway places"*

## National Events



CCC postcard

In Georgia, CCC enrollment from 1933-1942 totaled 78,630 men in an estimated 127 camps. They are credited with planting some 25,000,000 trees, reforesting mountainsides denuded by unsustainable tree harvesting, and controlling erosion where poor farming practices had degraded soil quality.

Under Warner Hall's leadership, the GATC took many excursions to hard-to-reach places in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, often traveling by bus from meeting places like Greear's Lodge to trail heads.

Hall was also influential in the design of the emblem of the GATC, and was the model for the plaques now seen at Neel Gap, Springer Mountain, and Unicoi Gap, and the official logo of the GATC.

Virginia Stutesman became the first woman to hike the entire Georgia section of the A.T., accompanied by her thirteen-year-old son.



Tea room and overnight cabin, from a CCC report March '36

The men of Camp Enotah (CCC Co. 431 SP2) built Vogel State Park. They also built a tea room and two overnight cabins at Neel Gap, known as the Walasi-yi Inn (now Mountain Crossings). When the tea room was later expanded, it became the only place on the entire A.T. where the trail passes through a building.

Men of Camp Enotah and several other camps constructed the shelter at the top of Blood Mountain as well as other shelters and portions of the A.T. The Blood Mountain shelter is the only remaining CCC-built shelter in Georgia.



Walasi-yi, ca. 1939

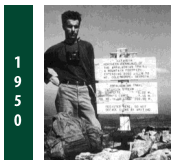
Women served in important leadership roles in the early days of the GATC, and the club adopted a rule that membership should not be dominated by either sex. Cynthia Ward was elected as club president, the first of many women to serve as GATC president.



Cynthia Ward

The start of WWII resulted in enlistment of ATC and GATC members. Hiking and maintenance activity on the A.T. ceased as all national resources focused on the war effort.

GATC member Lawrence Freeman returned from military service and played a major role as club president in revitalizing the GATC, rescheduling hiking activity and re-opening the neglected A.T. route in Georgia.



Earl Schaffer

Earl Schaffer became the first person to hike the entire Appalachian Trail. A WWII veteran, he accomplished the feat to "walk off the war."

Eugene Espy became the second person and the first Georgian to thru-hike the A.T., completing his hike September 30 at Mount Katahdin in Maine. He joined GATC that October and has been a member for over 65 years.



Eugene Espy



Emma Gatewood

Emma Gatewood, at age 67, became the first woman to thru-hike the A.T. She later went on to complete two more thru-hikes in Keds tennis shoes and minimal gear.

Due to commercial development issues along the trail corridor near Mt. Oglethorpe, the GATC recommended and ATC approved moving the start of the A.T. from Mt. Oglethorpe to Springer Mountain, within the protected boundaries of the Chattahoochee National Forest.



Road construction crew under Bud Akins at Tesnatee Gap, 1968

Congress authorized construction of the Richard B. Russell Scenic Highway through Tesnatee and Hog Pen Gaps. Originally opposed by the GATC and ATC, the highway has proved to be an asset attracting tourists and providing access to the A.T. for hikers and those who maintain it.

The Wilderness Act was passed and signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, protecting 109.5 million acres of wild lands.

Congress authorized the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP) extension, and passed the National Trails System Act, which designated the A.T. the first "National Scenic Trail." The BRP extension was opposed by both GATC and the ATC.

An amendment to the National Scenic Trails Act was signed by President Jimmy Carter, accelerating land acquisition that helped protect the A.T. corridor.

Congress deauthorized the extension of the Blue Ridge Parkway that had been contested by the GATC.

The route of the A.T. from Georgia to Maine was officially entered into the Federal Register.

## North Georgia Events



GATC members hire a bus for a hike from Woody Gap to Neel Gap



Neel Gap Plaque



Blood Mountain shelter, 2010, by Van Hill



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# The Appalachian Trail in North Georgia

*"A footpath for those who seek fellowship with the wilderness"*

## National Events

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- 1978 - 1993 The National Park Service (NPS) delegated responsibility for maintenance and management of the A.T. to the ATC and local maintaining clubs in 1984.
- 1980s and 1990s, approximately 40 miles of the A.T. in Georgia were incorporated into Federally Designated Wilderness Areas, effectively blocking plans to extend GA Highway 400 through Neel Gap.
- 1993 A proposal to extend US Highway 76 through Dick's Creek Gap was opposed by the GATC and ATC and ultimately defeated.

The Len Foote Hike Inn was opened in 1998 by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in collaboration with GATC as a backwoods facility for education and recreation. Five miles from the top of Amicalola Falls, it provides bunk beds and family-style dining.



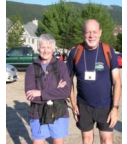
GATC members and youth at the Len Foote Hike Inn



Jay Dement leads an outreach group

A GATC Youth Outreach Program was initiated, focusing on inner city youth, later expanded to schools and organizations in mountain communities.

Marianne Skeen and Herb Daniel, initiators of the GATC Youth Outreach Program



- 2005 The Appalachian Trail Conference officially changed its name to Appalachian Trail Conservancy, better reflecting the role of the ATC in protecting the A.T.



Army rangers carry bear-proof food boxes

The U.S. Forest Service issued a rule requiring overnight hikers to use "bear canisters" for storing food while in the Blood Mountain Wilderness.

Blairsville/Union County, Dahlonega, Hiwassee, Helen, and Gilmer County were designated by ATC as A.T. Communities in Georgia.



The Blood Mountain Shelter was repaired and restored to reflect its original design based on an architectural review by USFS. The work was done entirely with hand tools and materials hauled to the site by mule and horse. The shelter was added to the National Register of Historical Places.



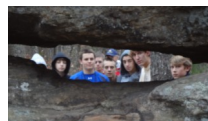
Possum the mule



The shelter roof was replaced

- 2012 The Chattahoochee National Forest, USFS, launched the CoTrails program to engage user groups in stewardship of recreational trails.

A "Kids in the Woods" initiative to provide outdoor recreation for children in urban settings was started in a cooperative program of the USFS Blue Ridge Ranger District, the GATC Outreach Program, the Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center of Blairsville, the Greening Youth Foundation, the ATC, and Cabela's Inc.



"Kids in the Woods"



- 2015 Release of a movie based on Bill Bryson's book, "A Walk in the Woods," resulted in increased use of the A.T. by novice thru-hikers and day-hikers. The ATC initiated a voluntary thru-hiker registration program.



Popularity of the A.T. in Georgia caused overuse problems. In response, GATC and ATC increased the number of "Ridge Runners" in Georgia and the USFS Blue Ridge Ranger District added personnel. GATC started a "Trail Ambassador's Program" to counsel hikers on Leave No Trace ethics and provide advice to novice hikers. GATC began experimenting with biological agents to speed waste decomposition in privies and new camping pads were constructed near Hawk Mountain to help alleviate problems due to overuse near shelters.



GATC members put the finishing touches on a new composting privy near Hawk Mountain

Cooperation between the US Forest Service and the National Park Service, with the long-term commitments of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the volunteers of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club ensure that this national treasure will be protected for the enjoyment of generations to come.



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