



## The AT/DRT/BMT Connection

-- Joy Forehand

Between Rhodes Mountain and Three Forks, the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) shares the treadway with the Duncan Ridge Trail (DRT), a trail with a rather unique history.

In the 1960s, when it seemed inevitable that the Blue Ridge Parkway would displace some sections of the Appalachian Trail (AT) in Georgia, a replacement trail for those sections, known today as the DRT, was built and even carried the name of the AT for a few years.

The initial proposal to survey potential routes that would extend the Parkway from Beech Gap, NC, to Marietta GA, was made in 1961. The purpose of the 190-mile extension was to promote visitation in the vicinity of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

As support for the extension grew, concern mounted among conservation enthusiasts. Supporters of the AT argued “the extension would run through

forests and disrupt the Appalachian Trail in Georgia". At the same time, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club initiated plans and then began construction for a new route for the AT in Georgia -- a route that later would become the DRT.

In 1968, both houses of Congress approved a budget of \$87.5 million for the Parkway's extension into Georgia. By 1970, plans for the proposed roadway were in disarray. Negotiations between businesses, the government and environmentalists to save the project failed. The cancellation of the Parkway's Georgia extension was announced in an article in the Durham Morning Herald dated September 11, 1985. Negative impacts on the AT and adjacent forests were given as one of the main reasons for the project's cancellation.

Because government action had allowed the AT to move the trail to the DRT, the DRT continued to carry the name of the AT. In the early 1990s, government action officially de-authorized the Parkway's extension, clearing the way for the "old AT" route to be re-instated and the DRT became a separate trail.

The DRT's northern terminus is 2.8 miles south of Neels Gap. The southern terminus is at Three Forks. Today, the three trails (AT/BMT/DRT) form the route for the Georgia Loop, a grueling 60.3-mile hike popular with backpackers.



Benton MacKaye Trail Association  
PO Box 6  
Cherry Log, GA 30522