



## The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest



The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest is actually two forests, The Oconee National Forest encompasses 115,000 acres in the Georgia Piedmont. The 749,689-acre Chattahoochee Forest resides in the North Georgia Mountains. It includes 10 Wilderness Areas as well as the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT).

The Chattahoochee National Forest derives its name from the Muscogee Indian words ... 'chatta' meaning stone and 'ho chee' meaning marked or flowered. These unique stones were in the Chattahoochee River near Columbus, GA. The North Georgia area also was home to the Cherokee and Creek Indians. They lived in harmony with the settlers until gold was discovered in Georgia -- ironically, the Spanish Conquistador Hernando de Soto had failed to find gold when he explored northern Georgia in 1540. Sadly, because of the quest for gold, the Indians were driven off their land during the "Trail of Tears" relocation to western reservations.

Gold mining proliferated throughout the area and almost every Georgia waterway suffered untold damage from hydraulic mining. When the gold rush was over, the timber companies moved in, bringing with them the railroads. Land went for as little as \$1.00/acre and the timber companies worked with a carnivorous efficiency – log out the parcel, sell the now bare land for a pittance and move on to the next tract of land.

Wildfires generated by out-of-control fires to clear farmland or from sparks from trains and skidders (a type of tractor) also took a toll on the once stately forest. Fortunately, Congress stepped in to stop the devastation. To protect the headwaters of navigable streams and ensure a

continuous supply of timber in the future, the Weeks Law authorized land purchases from willing sellers.

In 1911, the USFS purchased 31,000 acres in Fannin, Gilmer, Lumpkin and Union counties from the Gennett family for just \$7.00/acre. This tract of land became the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Initially The Chattahoochee was considered part of the Nantahala and Cherokee National Forests. In those days, ethical stewardship of the forests was difficult at best. Horses were the prevailing mode of transportation. Land examiners were expected to reside in primitive log cabins and tents. Few did -- the cabins and tents were so infested with bed bugs, most of the agents elected to sleep outside in the forest.

During the Great Depression, millions of trees were planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Forest Service was reorganized along state boundaries and the Chattahoochee was designated as a separate National Forest.

By the 1940s, the reclaimed forests produced not only lumber, but also paper, waxes and turpentine. After the war, outdoor recreational activities came to the forefront – hunting, fishing and camping.

To learn more about the wide array of day hiking, backpacking, thru hiking and camping opportunities the BMT offers in the Chattahoochee National Forest, go to [bmta.org](http://bmta.org).

--A History of Tellico Plains, TN by Charles Hall

--TN Department of Transportation Annual Average Daily Traffic



Benton MacKaye Trail Association

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