

# Benton MacKaye Trail ready for 2023 hikers

**From staff reports**

Some of the best hiking weather is just around the corner and one of the premier hiking trails in the vicinity of Graham County – and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park – is the Benton MacKaye Trail.

Approximately 141 miles of the 288-mile-long Benton MacKaye Trail are in North Carolina. This includes 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making it the longest trail in the Smokies.

The trail also includes 20.7 miles that follow the Tennessee/North Carolina State Line. Here, a hiker literally has one foot in Tennessee and one foot in North Carolina as he hikes the trail.

“Whether you’re out for a short hike with the kids; are interested in a leisurely stroll through the woods; or if you want a more challenging six- 10-mile hike, the BMT has a great day hike for you,” said Benton MacKaye Trail Association Hike Director Kelly Motter. “For those who prefer hiking with a group, BMTA offers several guided hikes every month. “To find the hike that’s right for you and to RSVP for the activity, go to [bmta.org](http://bmta.org).”

Some of the most popular hikes within easy driving distance of the Graham County area are:

■ **Hike to Bob Bald with The Hangover.** This is a moderately-easy hike, except for the brief, steep hike from Cold Springs Gap to Bob Stratton Bald –



Photo courtesy of Kathy Anderson

The Benton MacKaye Trail covers a wide variety of terrain in Graham County – including this breathtaking view of Fontana Lake.

a special backpacking spot where sunrises, moon rises and dark sky viewing will keep you coming back. Make it a two “nighter” and spend day two on the moderately difficult round-trip hike to The Hangover, a 5,160-foot pinnacle with 360-degree views, including a dramatic, one of a kind look at the southern end of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Hangover is rivaled only by the Smokies’ Mount Cammerer fire-tower lookout, noted for its high, unobstructed panoramic views.

■ **Old Field Gap Road to Tapoco Lodge.** For a

less-rigorous route on this 2-mile hike, begin at the Old Field Gap Road Trailhead heading south towards Tapoco Lodge. The trail features several scenic overlooks of mountains in the distance and the valley far below.

■ **Fontana Village to Fontana Marina.** This is an easy 2.9-mile hike with occasional views of Lake Fontana.

■ **Fontana Village to Lookout Rock.** The trek is a wonderful 1.5-mile round trip day hike, but it is strenuous – a portion of the climb is aptly named the Stairway to Heaven! But the views from Look-

out Rock are incredible and well worth the effort.

**National park**

■ **Lakeshore Trail.** One of the best places to pick up the Lakeshore Trail is shortly after you cross the impressive 480-foot-tall Fontana Dam and head into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It’s a beautiful trail that winds its way through the forest above Fontana Lake. The length of the hike is your choice ... just keep in mind this needs to be an “in-and-out” excursion.

■ **Tunnel on the Road to Nowhere** – Enjoy a 6-mile scenic byway to

arrive at the tunnel. The ¼-mile long passageway was to be part of a relocated route to Deals Gap for residents of Swain County displaced by the then-new Fontana Lake. Environmental issues prevented the rest of the route from being completed. Once you pass through the tunnel, enjoy a hike on the Benton MacKaye Trail. Your trek can be short and leisurely, or you can embark on a longer, more challenging excursion all the way to Smokemont (26.5 miles).

The choice is yours, but it will need to be an in-and-out hike.

■ **For hikers who prefer the challenge** of a long-distance trek, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association offers patches/rockers for a section or thru hike of the Benton MacKaye Trail, completion of the Benton MacKaye Trail/Appalachian Trail 500-Mile Loop (a figure-eight), and the 1,000-Mile Challenge, which includes the Appalachian, Benton MacKaye and Pinhoti National Recreation trails.

For details, go to [bmta.org](http://bmta.org), or email Benton MacKaye Trail Association’s Hike Director Kelly Motter, [hikeleader@bmta-mail.org](mailto:hikeleader@bmta-mail.org).

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