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Benton MacKaye Trail



(Photo: sshepard/Getty Images)

The [287-mile Benton MacKaye Trail](#), named after the visionary behind the Appalachian Trail, traverses 81.8 miles in Georgia and 205.8 miles in Tennessee and North Carolina. This includes 93 miles in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making it the longest trail in the Smokies. The BMT has about 58,000 feet of vertical gain and loss. Though it essentially shadows the AT, there are few resupply points and it is considered by many to be what the AT used to be before the thru-hiking hordes descended. The BMT has some of the most varied and abundant wildflowers of any temperate forest in the world.

Time to complete: 21 to 24 days

Infrastructure: The [BMT](#) is one of the best marked and maintained long-distance trails in the Southeast, but it is short on trail shelters and designated campsites.

Permits: They're only necessary for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park section.

Best memory: "I was lying back in my hammock at Holloway Gap in the Cohutta Wilderness. I had the rainfly off and the full moon rose behind my toes as I lay there. I stayed awake half the

night watching the moon rise. It was a truly ethereal experience that I think about often.” —
Richard Evans, past president of the [Benton MacKaye Trail Association](#) and 2012 BMT thru-hiker