

Find Seclusion on the Benton MacKaye Trail

Stretching roughly 290 miles from Springer Mountain, Ga., to Davenport Gap in the northeastern corner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the **Benton MacKaye Trail** (BMT) is a bit long for a weekend backpacking trip. But there are plenty of opportunities to section-hike this footpath, so long as you don't mind being alone.

"This trail doesn't see much traffic—I think I saw two backpackers during my time," says Tara Dower, a thru-hiker and ultra-runner who polished off the BMT last summer. "So, it can be overgrown in areas but the peaceful seclusion makes for a wonderful experience."



BMT Tunnel Road to Nowhere by Rob Burgess

If you're craving a few quiet days in the woods, travel six miles down Lakeview Drive near Bryson City, N.C. Also known as the Road to Nowhere, this scenic mountain highway was constructed to provide Swain County families displaced by the construction of Fontana Lake access to ancestral lands. But when environmental concerns cropped up in 1971, construction came to a screeching halt and never resumed.

Alas, the highway now abruptly ends at a quarter-mile-long tunnel. When you arrive at this eerily dark shaft, every particle of your being will scream "Let's just go home and doomscroll!" Ignore that little voice and enter anyway. You'll then follow the BMT south for 34.7 miles to the Fontana Dam.

According to Dower, this stretch of the trail can be pretty wiley. "Even though the elevation profile isn't crazy, there are a lot of blowdowns," she says. "It's tough."

When you finish your trek—which should take between three to four days—treat yourself to a "dam burger" at Wildwood Grill. Afterward, you can either snuggle into a warm, cozy bed at **Fontana Village Resort and Marina** or rent a camp spot along the Little Tennessee River.

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