

The Appalachian Trail

Part 2

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Northern Virginia: 50 miles

The Trail between the Park and the Potomac shares with some sections in Central VA the dubious distinction of being most likely to be overgrown. Its low elevation and the absence of mature woods in this part of N VA are part of the problem. Hot, damp summers and relatively early spring and late autumn compound it. The hiker is well advised to wear long trousers. Especially annoying is the concealment of blazes by the jungle-like growth of grape, Virginia creeper and poison ivy up the trees. I have had to peer through poison ivy foliage to find the double blaze that indicated a turn in the Trail.

The end of this section has some nice views from cliffs, overlooking the Potomac, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and Maryland Heights. The town of Harpers Ferry, well known for John Brown's raid in 1859, and of special interest to hikers as the location for the headquarters of the Appalachian Trail Conference, may be reached by a 2-mile blue-blazed trail that leaves the Trail about 2 miles W of the Potomac River bridge. *Maps, guidebooks, good advice and encouraging words are available at ATC headquarters!*

Maryland: 37 miles

The Trail in MD follows the crest of South Mountain. The first path along this route may have been used by fugitive slaves making their way N, a chain in the Underground Railway. Preservation of the trail route is a problem. Summer homes and other buildings are beginning to encroach on it.

The first mile of Trail follows the towpath of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. This 183-mile canal was built between 1824 and 1850 along the Potomac River from Washington to Cumberland, MD. The canal has not been used since 1924 but the whole length of the towpath, now a National Historic Monument, is open for hiking and biking. Washington Monument State Park, 15 miles N, is also on the Trail. Here there is a cannon-shaped tower built in honour of George Washington in 1827. This point of the ridge is on the autumn migration flyway for hawks and eagles; on a clear, cold day several different species may be observed migrating S. Other points of interest in MD include a bridge over an Interstate Highway built specially for Trail hikers; a

monument to news correspondents who covered the Civil War; and Mason-Dixon line milestone 91, erected in 1767, about 0.1 mile SE of the Trail where it enters PA.

Pennsylvania

Mason-Dixon Line to Susquehanna River: 80 miles

Susquehanna River to Delaware River: 140 miles

After following the crest of South Mountain for 55 miles, the Trail uses secondary roads to cross the Cumberland Valley. It then crosses the E-W ridge of Blue Mountain, ascends Cove Mountain, and follows this ridge NE to the Susquehanna. Much of the Trail along South Mountain is in State Forest land. It is a wide path with good footing. Close to the Trail in this region are the ruins of 2 furnaces used for ironworks: Pine Grove Ironworks were started about 1770; Caledonia, around 1837. Charcoal pits may often be seen near the Trail. A hiker trying to sleep under the stars in June in the region may 'enjoy' hearing the 'whip-poor-will' call at 3 second intervals for several hours as the bird swoops over him!

For 140 miles from Cove Mountain to the Delaware River, the Trail follows an almost continuous ridge, notorious among hikers for the rough footway. This terminal moraine has rocks of all shapes and sizes, many of which are in metastable equilibrium! One autumn when I was in good condition after strenuous hiking in the mountains of NH, I found it difficult to exceed one mph hiking along Cove Mountain.

In autumn, many hikers take a short detour, 70 miles E of the Susquehanna. Here a short trail leads up to a rocky summit from which there is an excellent view of migrating raptors. Accipiters, buteos, falcons, osprey, and golden or bald eagles may be seen; records are kept; the occasional sighting of a rare species (goshawk, golden eagle, or peregrine falcon) is a special thrill!

The descent to the Delaware River, about 60 miles E of Hawk Mountain, is spectacular. The Trail here was built in the late 19th century when Delaware Water Gap was a fashionable summer resort. It climbs steeply among rhododendrons, often close to the cliffs, with fine views down to the river 300m below.

New York and New Jersey

Delaware River to Hudson River: 100 miles

Peaceful rural roads, steep trail, quiet woodland paths and superb views lend variety to the Trail in NY and NJ. The 40 miles where the Trail follows the Kittatiny Ridge from the Delaware River to High Point State Park is mostly in woods or meadows. There are some good views, including those across the Delaware Water Gap to PA and from High Point Tower, 550m, the highest point in NJ. The last 35 miles W of the Hudson are for the most part along pleasant paths in the Hudson Highlands. For 2 miles the Trail follows open rocky ledges with good

views down to Greenwood Lake. The last 15 miles are through State Parks and lovely wooded hills. I remember a 'day' hike on the Trail here. Four of us, overtaken by the dark, had stopped, temporarily unsure where the Trail left a small hollow, when a scream, like a soul in torment rang out above our heads. Was it a barn owl, a bobcat, or even a cougar? We were not unhappy to locate the next blaze.

New York

Hudson River to Connecticut state line: 55 miles

There is beautiful country through Fahnestock State Park, not far from the Hudson, and again in the Taconic Mountains for 10 miles before entering CT. Much of the rest has been along secondary roads in residential areas. Recently land has been acquired for a major relocation away from these roads.

It is a region where once I approached within 20 feet of a woodcock, before noticing the bird, so well did its plumage match the ground cover it was sitting on. Yet, on a backpack in spring, when I was travelling along a gravel road, an overfriendly Great Dane bounced out and insisted on putting her front paws on my shoulders. She paid no attention to commands of 'Down!'; 'No!'; 'Stay!'. I could barely move forward. Finally, after what seemed like at least 5 minutes, she left me free to hurry on down the hill. Later that evening, at a lean-to in an isolated location, I lay in my sleeping bag watching the paschal moon rising across a part of the sky that was framed by the open side of the shelter. The next day, the ascent to Mt Schaghticoke on the state line was a delightful walk through pleasing forest growth.

Connecticut: 56 miles

The Trail enters New England in NW CT. As it crosses this corner of the state, it is seldom far from the Housatonic River. However, the first 3 ½ miles give the through hiker an introduction to the strenuous hiking that lies ahead in much of N New England. The ascent from Mt Schaghticoke to Mt Algo is over rugged ledges; the descent to the town of Kent follows the Grand Staircase, 'a jumble of ledges and spilled boulders'. When I was backpacking down this staircase, there were a few places where I preferred to sit and lower myself from one rock to another, rather than to risk leaping on to a potentially unstable boulder. Thereafter, with the exception of a steep descent from St Johns Ledges to the Housatonic, the path is much more gentle. For 5 miles it follows the peaceful river where Canada geese and other waterfowl may be seen. For the last 10 miles to the MA line, the Trail again becomes spectacular. There is a scramble over Prospect Mountain, descent through a splendid hemlock forest and ascent over Lion's Head to (Connecticut's) Bear Mountain, 700m, the highest point on the Trail since Shenandoah Park.

Massachusetts: 90 miles

The Trail through MA is similar to that in CT. It stays on the ridge for 10 miles, crossing the summit of Mt Everett, known to early settlers as the Dome of the Taconics. Dwarf trees along the ridge allow fine views from this rocky section until its precipitous descent down Jug End. The Trail crosses the Housatonic River S of Great Barrington and enters the Berkshire Hills. To the W is an area frequented summer and winter by vacationers from Boston and New York. Tanglewood, renowned for the summer concerts performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra for an audience seated on the lawn, is 10 miles N of Great Barrington. Nearby is Bousquet Ski Area, an area which installed rope tows for skiers in the 30s.

The Trail between Jug End and Cheshire occasionally follows secondary and woods roads. Mostly, it is in the woods. However, even at low altitudes the character of the forest is quite different from that of the S Appalachians. Mountain ash, shadbush, beech and some of the oaks and maples are found the length of the Trail. However, flame azaleas and some species of rhododendron are missing here, as are the tulip trees, black walnut, short leaf pine, and black locust. In their place are grey and paper (white) birch, quaking aspen, red and white pine, red and black spruce, and balsam. Throughout New England, from late September to mid-October the scarlet, maroon and gold foliage of the deciduous trees, mingled with the dark green of the conifers, transform the forest canopy into a Persian carpet.

Beyond Cheshire the last section of Trail in MA climbs over Jones Nose to the summit of Mt Greylock, 1070m, the highest point in the state. Like several other outstanding high points on the Trail, Wayah Bald in NC and Clingman's Dome in the Smokies, there is a tower on Greylock. This one is the MA War Memorial and Beacon, a large stone tower with a fine view. Near the summit is Bascom Lodge where overnight lodging may be obtainable. The Trail then descends 900m to the Hoosic Valley, near the site of Williams College. The last 4 miles, N of the Hoosic, are included in the Green Mountain Club *Guide Book of the Long Trail* in VT as it is the best access to the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail at the MA/VT line.

Northern Division

The 560 miles of the Trail in the Northern Division traverse an area that is as wild as, and for the most part more rugged than, the best of the Appalachians. High elevation and northern latitude combine to produce temperatures that even in summer are predominantly below 70° at night and sometimes in the low 40s. Snow has been recorded every month of the year on the 1900m summit of Mt Washington. Large sections of the trail in NH and ME are above timberline, exposed to gale force winds and driving rain or snow. Hikers who may have been hiking in shorts from GA through MA, find they need long trousers for the Green or

White Mountains. A wool shirt, thermal underwear, wool cap and mittens are essential for summer backpacking trips in these high, northern mountains.

In VT for 100 miles, the Trail follows the crest of the Green Mountains, sometimes through the Green Mountain National Forest, at others across privately owned land, to Sherburne Pass. It then descends to the E, reaching the Connecticut River in 40 miles.

After crossing the Connecticut, the Trail passes through the town of Hanover, NH, home of Dartmouth College, and for 43 miles follows the Connecticut Valley. The village of Glencliff (location for another of the small post offices on the Trail) is the start of the most rugged part of the Trail, 125 miles in the White Mountains of Central NH and the Mahoosucs of ME. For 60 of these miles from Lonesome Lake to Carter Notch, there is a chain of 8 huts maintained by the Appalachian Mountain Club, some built in the 19th century, some modern. These are closed structures with bunk rooms, where breakfast and supper is served by the hutkeepers. Backpackers may cook their own food or enjoy the luxury of meals prepared from fresh produce. Hot drinks, soup, and sweets may be purchased. The AMC also operates Pinkham Notch Camp, 75 miles beyond Glencliff, where the Trail crosses a state highway. The Camp provides lodging and meals, gives advice, and sells guidebooks and maps.

The 280 miles of Trail in ME is the second largest distance in a single state. Most of this is truly a footpath in the wilderness. The first 100 miles follow ridges, the Mahoosucs, Baldpates, Bemis Mountain, Saddlebacks, Crockett and Bigelows, with occasional descents to cross streams.

The next 20 miles, which traverse a swampy area, the Great Carrying Place, end at the Kennebec River. From Caratunk on the E bank of the Kennebec to the small town of Monson, there are 40 easy miles past ponds and over 2 low mountains. Monson, 114 miles from Katahdin, is the jumping off place for the 100 miles of 'wilderness lake' country, a part of the Trail from which there is no easy exit to 'civilisation'. Then 9 more miles along the W Branch of the Penobscot River, brings the hiker to the final strenuous ascent of Katahdin, 1250m in 5 miles, most of it in the first 3½ miles!

Vermont: 135 miles

Where the Trail follows the central ridgeline of the Green Mountains N, its route is that built by the Green Mountain Club between 1914 and 1917 as part of the Long Trail from MA to Canada. There are some steep ascents: a steady 400m in 2.5 miles on leaving the Hoosic Valley; a climb of 150m in 0.4 mile where it leaves the Bennington-Brattleboro highway; and 250m in 0.5 mile S of 1290m Killington Peak. For the most part the ridges are forest-covered. Some good viewpoints are to be found, the best by following a short side trail to the top of Killington

Peak.

There are also marshy areas along the Trail, some caused by many hikers walking on vegetation along the side of the Trail to avoid muddy spots and thus further widening the muddy spots; others by beaver, damming streams to form ponds for their lodges. In some places boards and squared-off logs have been laid along marshy areas of the Trail. These protect the flora by encouraging hikers to walk along the centre of the path. However, destruction of beaver dams seldom discourages these animals; they soon rebuild their dam. Beaver are nocturnal and seldom seen. Gnawed logs and stumps, ranging in size from saplings to 8-inch diameter trees, indicate their whereabouts. I feel some resentment when I slip and land on my knees in the mud near one of their ponds or have to bushwhack a long way around the edge of another where a fine white blaze on a tree in the middle of the water shows where the Trail used to be. Yet it is a thrill to know that there are some beavers left in New England!

There are other nocturnal nuisances. Mice can wreak havoc in a pack hung from the rafters of a lean-to. Porcupines, not uncommon in VT, have a fondness for salt; these spiny rodents will gnaw at axe handles, wooden toilet seats, or hiking boots, and it is interesting to watch them as they grunt and waddle past a shelter after the hikers have retired to bed.

The N part of the Trail in VT which descends from the Green Mountains to the Connecticut River, rolls across a series of wooded hills dotted with fields and pastures laced with abandoned roads and farms of an earlier era. It crosses a series of high transverse peaks. Hiking over the ridges and climbing over barbed-wire fences surrounding the pastures both require some exertion. However, it is easier to anticipate the peaks than the fences. Especially in wild strawberry season, hikers may have to take their packs off several times in a short distance if the succession of fences and berries comes at inconvenient intervals.

New Hampshire; 150 miles

The Trail enters NH by a bridge across the Connecticut and follows the road a steep $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the centre of Hanover. This lovely town is the home of Dartmouth College, the college whose Outing Club maintains 20 miles of the Trail W and 70 miles E of the Connecticut. The D.O.C. headquarters are a block from the centre, and Trail information and maps are available. South from the centre are shops, restaurants and a post office. Hiking boots and backpacking supplies are sold by the Dartmouth Co-op.

The first 43 miles of Trail in NH resembles the E part of the Trail in VT. It passes through a succession of pastures, cleared hills, patches of timber and ravines, skirts some pretty ponds, and ascends two 900m peaks, Mt Cube and Smarts Mountain.

The next 125 miles are a real test of the hiker's stamina and foresight.

For one who is prepared for extreme weather and can afford to take his time, the Trail sections in the White Mountains are some of the most rewarding. In good weather, views are superb, occasionally extending 70 miles to Mount Mansfield in N VT. Above 1400m a community of dwarf spruce and fir, called *krummholz*, may be found. Alpine plants—*diapensia*, Labrador tea, dwarf willow, pale laurel and mountain heath—occur at high elevations in the Presidential and Mahoosuc Ranges. Snowshoe hares in their summer brown or winter white camouflage are quite tame. Spruce grouse, occasionally with chicks, are often seen. The clear 4 or 5 notes of the white-throated sparrow and the rapid succession of trills and high notes of the winter wren ring out from the shrubs of the *krummholz* and re-echo through the ravines.

A few profiles of the Trail in the White Mountains: The easy graded path from 330m at Glenclyff to the summit of 1460m Mt Moosilauke is followed by a steep descent along Beaver Brook to 580m Kinsman Notch and a very steep ascent out of this Notch. The unexpectedly long traverse of Wolf Peak gives the impression that the wolf must have a large number of cubs. The climb up the ledges S of South Kinsman is a 100m ascent that requires all 4 hands and feet. Other memorable vignettes: watching beaver swim at dusk in Lonesome Lake; scrambling up 750m from Crawford Notch to Webster Cliffs for a 70-mile view toward the Green Mountains; following the cairns from the Lakes of the Clouds Hut to Mount Washington summit, when the whole ridge was in cloud; wishing for more time to go down into ravines; enjoying the scarlet and green of the bunchberry border of the Trail near Gentian Pond lean-to.

Maine: 280 miles

The Trail enters ME in a remote region at an elevation of 900m about 8 miles from the most difficult mile of Trail, Mahoosuc Notch in the Mahoosuc Range. The 22 miles from the NH line include the roughest terrain on the Trail, the total ascent in either direction being 2500m. There are box canyons and other very steep descents/ascents on either side of the notch, which is in a deep cleft. Giant boulders from the notch's sheer walls clog its floor, necessitating climbs over and under them. Packs must be removed and lowered down to, or hauled up by, the hiker's companion; in some places hikers must climb through caves, in the depths of which ice persists well into July.

The next 35 miles is easy by comparison. However, another ME speciality, plentiful rain, creates hazards—normally small streams that are in spate. Northern birds are much in evidence, for instance, at Squirrel Rock shelter, the resident bird was a hermit thrush. In this region, also, I distinctly heard the 'Hip, three cheers' call of an olive-sided flycatcher. The many ponds and swamps in this isolated region are good moose country. Moose are mostly seen far away with their heads

down browsing below the surface. Once, however, where the Trail was close to a large pond, a cow moose came charging from the far side directly towards me and seconds before collision was inevitable I sidled off to the right and she swerved left.

The next 50 miles take the Trail over 2 ranges, the Saddlebacks and the Bigelows, where there are several rocky peaks with elevations of 1200m, separated by streams at 350 to 450m. From Myron H. Avery lean-to, one of the highest shelters on the Trail, at 1200m, there may be spectacular panoramas at sunset or sunrise.

For the next 20 miles there is easy hiking through a boggy area, the Great Carrying Place. This is the region through which General Benedict Arnold in 1775 led a detachment of 1100 men to surprise the British at Quebec. His dwindling forces spent nearly 3 months slogging through the swamps, rivers, and bogs of this region in bitter, early winter weather. Most of their 200 bateaux were lost. The 600 remaining men who reached Quebec were unable to launch a successful assault on the city.

The Carry Ponds area of the Trail ends at the Kennebec River, the most difficult river to ford on the Trail. It is some 200m wide, with a swift current in the centre, chest-high on a tall hiker. Some make a raft for their pack and swim. Others take a chance on wading. Still others stop 3 miles W of the river, at the 'Pancake Place' and use the radio phone there and pay for a rowboat or canoe to come over from Caratunk and pick them up.

In fact, the Pancake Place and the Kennebec are 2 of the features most discussed by hikers the length of the Trail. For the river it is: 'How did you (do you plan to) cross it?' For the Pancake Place it is: 'Do you know you can get *all* the pancakes you can eat for breakfast there?' 'What's the record now for the most pancakes anyone has eaten?' The Pancake Place, more correctly known as The Carrying Place, is a camp for sportsmen, 18 miles by rough road from the nearest town. There are several of these camps not far from the Trail in ME. Many take a dim view of Trail hikers. However, Bud and Dory Williams, whose lodge is 300m from the Trail, enjoy providing backpackers with a change of pace. (Another camp where hikers may stay is West Branch Ponds Camp, 2 miles from the Trail, about 70 miles SW of Katahdin.)

From the little town of Caratunk on the E side of the Kennebec it is 44 relatively easy miles to the town of Monson. The Trail passes several large ponds, ascends 2 small mountains, Pleasant Pond Mountain and Moxie Bald, the latter with a rock summit and good view. The lean-to down by Bald Mountain pond is a pleasant place.

Monson, 114 miles from Katahdin, is the jumping off place for the 100 miles of wilderness lake country. The Monson Post Office is the last of the small town post offices and the post mistress takes a special interest in hikers. Her helpfulness is greatly appreciated!

The wilderness lake area has 4 parts: a 15-mile approach with some

road walking, some pleasant hiking through woods, and a short side trail to one of the highest waterfalls along the Trail; another 15 miles where the Trail traverses the Barren Chairbacks, a long bare rough ridge, that first climbs steeply up Barren Mountain, then oscillates up and down from passes to summits over Fourth Mountain, Third Mountain, Columbus and Chairback; about 10 miles along a very scenic route through Gulf Hagas where the W Branch of the Pleasant River is deeply entrenched in slate; and the last 56 miles, the wilderness lake area.

My 6-night backpack along the Trail in this area was not easy. A horrendous blowdown had to be crossed by climbing over large logs that had fallen on top of logs that had other logs beneath them. Root stumps the colour of the path caused me to fall several times, once a really hard fall flat on my face. To cross the 30m wide Pollywog Stream, I sat astride a huge log and hunched my way over. At the crossing of a much smaller stream, my pack shifted and I plopped into the water like a frog. Several days there were distances up to a mile where the footpath disappeared into black squashy mud, at times deeper than the tops of my boots. Increasingly heavy rain, from the edge of hurricane Belle turned the trail into a stream and converted the rocky ford of the East Branch Pleasant River into a swift-flowing, 1m deep, 10m wide stream. I might have been stuck for a long time within 4 miles of the end of my trip had not one tall man waded across. Nine of us cooperated, throwing a nylon line over to him and standing in the water to bucket-brigade the sleeping bags and packs to the far side. It was an hour-long operation before all of us were across.

It was, nonetheless, a pleasure to be travelling in this remote area. Red raspberries were plentiful. The campsites were beautifully located, beside large lakes or near waterfalls. The weird calls of loons that rang out in the evenings were the quintessence of the spirit of northern wilderness. I enjoy remembering this hike more often than any other along the whole Appalachian Trail.

In good weather the 9 miles to Katahdin stream is an easy walk up a beautiful stretch of the W Branch of the Penobscot. However, there are no easy trails up Baxter Peak, the summit of Katahdin. In 1953, I had climbed from the Great Basin, NE of the summit and looked SW down the Appalachian Trail from the A.T. signpost. By 1970, when I was thinking that if I were ever to see all the Trail I should do some of the more difficult parts before I was too old, I was back again. This time, I decided to come *down* the Appalachian Trail from Baxter a different way. Descending the Hunt Spur, which rises steeply on both sides, and goes down rocks, losing 600m in less than a mile, was even more of a thrill than climbing it would have been!

2000 miles on the Appalachian Trail is a long way. More than 800 hikers have seen it all, some in one continuous trip. I have taken more than 40 years to put it all together. There is so much to see and enjoy along the way that I recommend the leisurely approach!