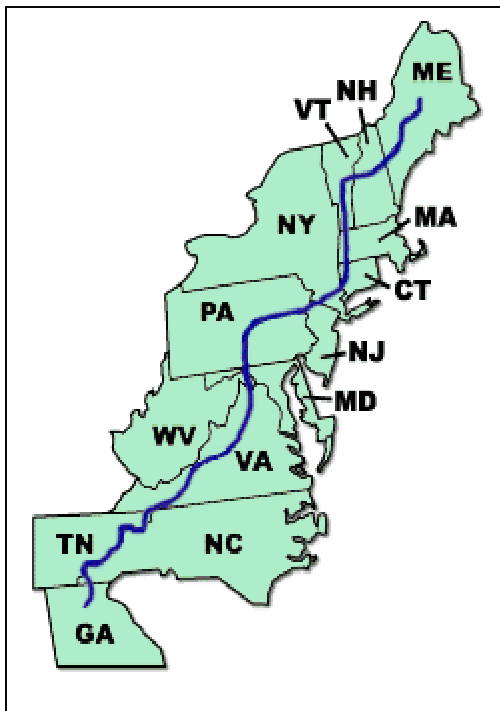


# Appalachian Trail

Want to do some serious hiking this summer? Then head for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The trail is 2,174 miles long. It runs along the ridge of the Appalachian Mountains from central Maine to northern Georgia and passes through 12 states: New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. It also crosses eight national forests, six national parks, and lots of state and local parks.

The Appalachian Trail opened to hikers in 1937. It was created to protect the natural, scenic, historical, and cultural resources of the Appalachian Mountains. Volunteers designed, built, and marked the trail. In 1968 it became the first National Scenic Trail in the United States. More than four million people use the trail every year. Most people hike only part of it, but each year about 2,500 tough hikers tackle the whole trail in one trip. It usually takes them five to six months!



Three hundred miles of the Appalachian Trail are in North Carolina along the mountain range that forms the Tennessee border. The trail is steep and difficult but beautiful. It reaches its highest point on Clingman's Dome, a 6,643-foot-high mountain in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It also goes through the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, state parks, and Fontana Dam and Lake. Hikers can swim, fish, camp, picnic, watch wildlife, look for wildflowers, and enjoy the scenery along the way.

On this part of the trail you might see white-tailed deer, mice, moles, shrews, spotted skunks, coyotes, bats, wild turkeys, red wolves, and—beware!—timber rattlesnakes, copperheads, mountain lions, bobcats, and black bears. As you travel you can learn about the past. You'll pass old iron mines, abandoned railroad tracks and logging roads, and cemeteries. You'll see historic towns such as Hot Springs in Madison County. And you'll walk in the footsteps of American Indians from long ago as well as Daniel Boone and other early explorers.

You can also learn about the trail's myths and legends. One legend explains why there are bald mountains on the trail. No one knows for sure why these mountains have no trees, but the Cherokee had this explanation. A giant wasp called Ulagu began flying into a Cherokee village and stealing the children. The Cherokee watched the mountains carefully to discover Ulagu's hiding place. When they found the gigantic insect, they

killed it. This made the Great Spirit happy. And so the Great Spirit kept the mountains free of trees to make it easier to see other Ulagus.

If you hike part of the Appalachian Trail (or all of it!), be prepared, be careful, and have fun. And be sure to look for the bald mountains. Maybe you can figure out where all the trees went!