

APPALACHIAN TRAIL THROUGH TENNESSEE

Long Distance YRE – 2022/Y2446, Rated 4D

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THE BASICS – HOW TO HIKE THE A.T. IN TENNESSEE

This is a “long distance” YRE which may be done, over multiple days, over the entire distance of the Appalachian Trail through Tennessee. There are 94 miles (151.6 km) of the A.T. uniquely in Tennessee. However, the A.T. runs along the Tennessee/North Carolina border for 160 additional miles (258.1 km) for which you can take credit through this YRE. Other sources indicate different distances.

NOTE: A parking tag (permit) is required for parking anywhere in the Smoky Mountains National Park. The tag is available online and at park visitor centers. Tags can be purchased for a day, a week, or a year.

You must register and pay for IVV credit separately for each day walked. Each day's walk will give you one event credit and whatever distance that you cover that day. You must hike a minimum of 5 km distance on the A.T. to receive credit for the YRE. However, since in most cases you will have to hike considerable distance from a trailhead to the A.T., that distance can also be logged for credit.

The A.T. was completed in 1937 as a national trail and, with this long history there are many guidebooks and maps available. Given that you can join and leave the A.T. in Tennessee at many points, we are not providing any detailed walk directions. You may walk the trail from any start point, for any length (with a minimum of 5 km on the A.T. itself), and you will qualify for the IVV Event Stamp and whatever total distance you cover. There are a number of options from “through hiking” (starting at the first trailhead on the A.T. in Tennessee and hiking until you reach the last trailhead in Tennessee), hike “out-and-back” from one trailhead in Tennessee, do a loop (hike an access trail from a trailhead to the A.T., hike along the A.T. to another access trail which takes you back to your original start point – note: there are very few opportunities like this in Tennessee), or do a “car shuttle” (either position one car at the trailhead as the end of your planned hike and drive the second car to the trailhead for the start of your hike or hire a shuttle service to take you from your car at the end of your planned hike to the trailhead where you will start the hike).

For specific instructions on how to best break up the A.T. into reasonable day hikes, we recommend the book [Exploring the Appalachian Trail: Hikes in the Southern Appalachians – Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee](#) by Doris Gove. The hikes in this guide book indicate which direction the author believes will make the easiest hike and are done through car shuttles (either two cars or a shuttle service). Of course, you can always make any of these hikes an out-and-back. In addition, in some cases there will be a point on the trail that is indicated as an “early exit” that will take you to another trailhead/parking area for a shortened hike.

The trail actually enters Tennessee from North Carolina atop Doe Knob and exits Tennessee into Virginia atop Holston Mountain. Hiking the first section of the A.T. from North Carolina is an example of the challenge of doing the A.T. in Tennessee. Per the recommended guide book, you would hike up the Gregory Ridge and Gregory Bald trails (6.9 miles) to reach the A.T., hike 7.5 miles on the A.T. to then exit down Bote Mountain and Anthony Creek trails (5.2 miles). In other words, you will hike a total of 19.6 miles with only 7.5 miles on the A.T. Of course, you also will have to have transportation for both ends of the hike. All of this distance would be logged as part of this YRE.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE A.T. IN TENNESSEE

Different resources indicate different distances for the A.T. in Tennessee. Wikipedia says Tennessee has 287.9 mile (463.3 km) of the trail with more than 200 of those miles (320 km) along or near the North Carolina border.

You will be doing some serious up-and-down hiking along the A.T. in Tennessee with the *Appalachian Trail Conservancy* rating the hike from easy to challenging with elevation range from 1326 to 6625 feet (highest point on the A.T., Clingmans Dome). Having personally hiked these trails, I can attest that this is a challenge, but well worth the effort.

One option that was not mentioned previously is backpacking. By backpacking you can put in more miles on the A.T. without having to add in as many extra miles of access trails and car shuttles. However, if you are planning to backpack, you will need an advance permit for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In addition, unlike much of the A.T., all backpackers are required to camp at designated sites while within the national park.

GENERAL HIKING GUIDELINES:

1. The A.T. is marked with 2 X 6 inch white blazes on trees and rocks. Over the entire A.T. there are an estimated 165,000 white blazes. The A.T. white blaze is the only blaze permitted in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Note that two blazes on one tree or rock will indicate a turn.
2. This is serious hiking in the backcountry. You will encounter rocks, roots, mud, snow, or ice depending on the weather. **Hiking boots and hiking poles are very strongly suggested. If you have problems with your balance or with heights (narrow trails and steep drop-offs), then this might not be for you.**
3. **Do NOT hike alone.** This is a safety issue and can be a life-saver.
4. **Check the weather before you hike.** Remember that you will be hiking at higher altitudes where the weather can be significantly worse than in the valleys. Also, be extremely aware of the potential for winter storms. The ice and snow can build up rapidly in the mountains, and hikers have been known to be trapped for days before they could hike out or be rescued. Be sure you know that you will have plenty of time to safely complete your hike within daylight hours. This can

be tough hiking which will take much longer than you may be used to with “flat-land” walking.

5. **Winter hiking in this area is not recommended unless you are experienced, have adequate winter hiking equipment, and pay strict attention to the weather forecast.**
6. It is possible that you will cross paths with a number of different animals while on the trail. Be most cautious when encountering rattlesnakes and bears. Give them both wide berths. Bears will likely run when they hear you, but be especially watchful when there are bear cubs around. You do not want to get between a mother bear and her cub. Recommend you read the information provided by the NPS on Black Bears
<https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/nature/black-bears.htm>]
7. Trails and roads in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park can occasionally be closed due to weather conditions or bear activity. You should check the Park's feed on Twitter [<https://twitter.com/smokiesroadsnps>] for the latest road and facility closures. For temporary road and facility closures due to weather and bears, also check <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/temproadclose.htm>
8. **Be sure to practice both Leave No Trace and safe wilderness procedures.** Take rain protection, map and/or trail guidebook, compass (and know how to use it), food, plenty of water (or means to filter/sanitize water from springs and streams), first aid supplies, sunscreen, bug spray, and cell phone. Note that none of the water along the trail should be consumed without first filtering/sanitizing. **You run a very great risk of illness if you fail to properly treat water before you drink it.** While a cell phone may be of use in case of emergency, be aware that **along much of this trail you will be beyond the reach of a cell tower.**
9. Have a “**safety net**” by letting someone know where you are hiking (access and exit trail), when you expect to start, and when you expect to be off the trail. Agree on the point at which your “safety net” will try to contact you and if unsuccessful, contact emergency services to begin a search. Once off the trail, be sure to advise your “safety net” that you are indeed safe.
10. **In case of emergency, call 9-1-1. You can also contact the POC, David Bonewitz, at 865-742-6882.** Of course, this is only if you can get a cell signal. This is why we recommend you not hike alone and have a “safety-net” established.
11. **The information in this document are intended to be used only in conjunction with a signed American Volkssport Association athletic waiver. All other uses are prohibited.**

RECOMMENDED TRAIL OPTION:

For those who are looking to accomplish an A.T. hike without a lot of extra planning and extra trail miles, Newfound Gap is the place to go. Start by parking anywhere in the large Newfound Gap parking area (GPS: 35.61062, -83.42599). The A.T. actually crosses through the parking lot. See page 6 for directions, map, and trail profile.

Another advantage to this trail is that there are bathrooms just off the parking lot which you won't find at other trailheads.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with one foot in Tennessee and one foot in North Carolina dedicated the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at Newfound Gap on September 2, 1940. The park was established in 1934, but urgent political issues delayed the dedication. World events almost caused the dedication to not happen. The trail you will walk roughly parallels Clingmans Dome Road. You will also have one foot in Tennessee and one foot in North Carolina along this trail.

1. Carefully cross US441 at the crosswalk to the follow the trail. **LOOK CAREFULLY BOTH WAYS BEFORE CROSSING US441. IN SPITE OF THE LAW, DO NOT EXPECT CARS TO STOP FOR YOU.**
2. Once across US441, look for the AT trail sign (Elev. 5,045'). You are hiking in the direction of the highest point in the Smoky Mountains and along the A.T. (Clingmans Dome, 6,643'), but don't worry as you don't have to go that far.
3. At Mingus Ridge (Elev. 5,457') the trail will cross two fences that exclude wild hogs from a square of beech forest. You can walk up the style made of grating, *but the hogs with their sharp hooves can't.*
4. **5K Route:** Turn around when you come to the intersection with Road Prong Trail (Elev. 5,283') and walk back to your car.
5. **13K Route:** Continue along the A.T. toward Clingmans Dome. Keep a careful watch for the trail sign indicating the intersection with Fork Ridge Trail (Elev. 5,892'), at that point turn around and head back to your car. If you miss that turnaround point, the next trail you cross will be Sugarland Mountain Trail. If you miss that one as well, the next point on the trail will be Clingmans Dome Tower.

AFTER YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR HIKE:

Log back into the OSB to "finish/complete" the registration process.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Another excellent trail guide for the portion of the A.T. that passes through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the book Hiking Trails of the Smokies which is known by local hikers as "The Brown Book." It is published by the Great Smoky Mountains Association.

An additional guide book that can help in planning a day hike is the Day Hiker's Guide to All the Trails in the Smoky Mountains by Elizabeth Etnier. While we highly recommend this book, it may be currently out of print as it appears to be offered on Amazon at ridiculously high prices. While it is primarily aimed at reaching the goal of hiking all the trails in the Smoky Mountains National Park, the A.T. is part of those trails.

Maps are available from a number of sources including the Appalachian Trail Conversancy.

The POC has hiked all of the trails in the Smoky Mountains National Park which includes all of the A.T. in Tennessee and may be able to provide some information to help in planning a hike. Feel free to contact by e-mail at dbonewitz@gmail.com or cell phone at 865-742-6882. If the stars align and conditions are right, the POC might be able to hike with you if you like.

DIRECTIONS TO RECOMMENDED TRAIL OPTION: [35.61076, -83.42599]

START/FINISH POINT: Newfound Gap Parking Area, Great Smoky Mountains National Park From the North (Knoxville) take US 441 S through Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. Continue on US 441 S into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Parking area for Newfound Gap will be on your left. From the West (Maryville area) take US 321 N to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. At Sugarlands Visitor Center, turn right onto US 441 S. Parking area for Newfound Gap will be on your left. From Cherokee, NC, take US 441 N. Newfound Gap Parking Area will be on your right.

DON'T FORGET TO PURCHASE A PARKING TAG!