

Benton MacKaye Trail - Section 11

Double Spring Gap to Ocoee River (US Hwy 64/74)

11.2 miles

General

This section of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) lies primarily within the Big Frog Wilderness in Tennessee. When hiked with Section 10 in Georgia through the Cohutta Wilderness, 13 miles of continuous wilderness travel are possible, 15.7 miles of hiking without crossing a road. The BMT follows the western rim of the Blue Ridge to the summit of Big Frog Mountain via the Hemp Top Trail (HTT).^{*} From near the peak, it descends northward along the Big Frog (BFT) and Fork Ridge (FRT) trails intersecting the Rough Creek Trail (RCT) where it turns west and descends to the West Fork of Rough Creek. After crossing the wilderness boundary, the trail ascends and crosses FS 221 then descends along Old FS 45. After intersecting the current FS 45, the trail leads to a cove on the edge of the Ocoee River Gorge. Descending through this cove to the bank of the Ocoee River, the trail continues upstream through Thunder Rock Campground (USFS) and by Ocoee #3 Powerhouse (TVA). Here it crosses the road bridge over the river to reach US Hwy 64/74. Elevations on this section range from 4224' on Big Frog Mountain to 1120' along the Ocoee River. The climb to Big Frog Mountain from the south is quite abrupt. Travel in the opposite direction is through a long gradual ascent. This section is rated as "Most Difficult".

^{*}This document incorporates recent changes to several trail designations in the Big Frog Wilderness.

Access

There are three access points to the BMT along this section. One is US 64/74, a major highway. The other two are via Forest Service system roads which, while unpaved, are passable in all seasons with an automobile. Numerous side trails leading from FS 221 intersect the BMT. (Double Spring Gap is in the midst of designated wilderness and is not accessible by car.) Direct access points are as follows:

- US Hwy 64/74, 18.6 miles east of Ocoee, TN; 8.0 miles west of Ducktown, TN
- FS 45
- FS 221 at Old FS 45

Directions from Cleveland, TN

Follow US Hwy 64/74 east. From the intersection of US 64/74 and US 411, proceed 18.6 mi to the transition from 2-lane road to 4-lane. Turn right on bridge over Ocoee River. In 0.1 mi, pass Ocoee #3 Powerhouse to reach intersection on FS 45. Then:

- Turn right into Thunder Rock Campground and park in trailhead parking area (free).
OR:
- Turn left and go 1.0 mi on FS 45 to trail crossing.
OR:
- Turn left and go 2.8 mi on FS 45 to intersection with FS 221. Turn left and proceed 0.4 mi to trail crossing.

Shelters, Campsites and Water

There are no shelters on this section of the BMT but opportunities for camping abound. Due to the management policy for designated wilderness, no campsites can be identified or described in this text. Maintenance policy seeks to destroy and scatter visible remnants of past campsites so as to maintain a pristine character for the wilderness. Please practice 'Leave No Trace' principles.

Some water sources are as follows (**seasonal): spring 300 feet east of Double Spring Gap; spring 300 feet west of Double Spring Gap; **spring on Big Frog Mountain (1.2 mi from Double Spring Gap, 10.0 mi from Ocoee River); West Fork of Rough Creek (5.5 mi from Double Spring Gap, 5.7 mi from Ocoee River); stream crossing (6.9 mi from Double Spring Gap, 4.3 mi from Ocoee River); **stream crossing (9.1 mi from Double Spring Gap, 2.1 mi from Ocoee River); **stream in cove (10.6 mi from Double Spring Gap, 0.6 mi from Ocoee River); and **water valves in campground, available April-October (10.9 mi from Double Spring Gap, 0.3 mi from Ocoee River). Water sources in designated wilderness are not signed.

Points of Interest

Big Frog Mountain (4224'): Highest point in the Cohutta Wilderness and Big Frog Wilderness. Summit with view just beyond is on a short side trail.

Long Rhododendron Tunnel (3860'): A local landmark located on north side of 'frog head'.

Chimneytop (3740'): Narrow ridges north and south of this knob have good year-round views. From the 2-foot rock step overlook, Blood Mountain (AT crosses in GA) is framed in a gap to the east.

West Fork of Rough Creek (1840'): Remote; heavily forested with hemlock, white pine, and rhododendron.

Ocoee River and Gorge (1120'): The river is dammed in three places as it cuts through the western Blue Ridge. The BMT follows the river for a short distance. The trail then climbs the steep gorge walls to the highlands above the river.

Trail Description - South to North

Mileage	Description
0.0	Begin from Cherokee National Forest sign in Double Spring Gap (3190'). Follow the Hemp Top Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #145) north, ascending along ridge at first gradually, then very steeply. This climb is continuous for 0.7 mi.
0.8	Intersect Licklog Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #65) at its terminus. (Licklog Trail leads right 5.4 mi to FS 221.) Turn left to continue on BMT/HTT and ascend along easy grade.
0.9	Cross high point (4080') north of ridgeline.
1.0	Enter saddle (4030') on ridgeline. Ascend and skirt north side of ridgeline.
1.2	Pass spring to left of trail. Return to ridgeline and continue ascent.
1.3	Intersect Big Frog Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #64). The summit of Big Frog Mountain (4224') with overlook just beyond, is 100 feet on a side trail. (The HTT continues straight ahead 1.9 mi to the Wolf Ridge Trail (#66) or 3.7 mi to the HTT trailhead on FS 62.) Turn right and follow the BMT/BFT descending gradually along broad ridgecrest.
1.9	Begin steeper descent and swing to west, or left, side of ridge,
2.1	Switchback hard right. Pass through rhododendron tunnel.
2.3	Return to sharp, narrow ridgecrest (3760'). Just ahead at 2-foot rock step, see views.

Mileage	Description
2.5	Intersect Big Creek Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #68). (Big Creek Trail leads left 4.2 mi to FS 221.) Good views to the east and northeast are had from this part of the ridgecrest. Continue north on BMT/BFT skirting west, or left, side of Chimneytop. Briefly return to ridgeline, then skirt east, or right, side of ridge.
3.2	Intersect Fork Ridge Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #69). (The Big Frog Trail turns hard left here and leads 3.6 mi to FS 221.) Continue straight ahead along ridge on the BMT/FRT. Skirt west, or left, side of ridge on gradual descent. Circle through two small coves and regain ridgeline.
4.1	Enter saddle (2830') on ridge. Cross to east, or right, side of ridge and continue with little or no change in elevation.
4.2	Resume long, gradual descent along graded trail.
4.9	Return to ridgeline.
5.0	Intersect Rough Creek Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #70) at saddle (2260') on ridgeline. (The RCT leads right to the Licklog Trail and left to the BFT.) Turn left on the BMT/RCT and descend. Switchback left, circle through cove and cross stream bed.
5.5	Cross small stream. Just beyond, cross West Fork of Rough Creek (1840').
5.6	Intersect West Fork Trail. (To left, WFT leads to a dead end.) Turn right and follow BMT/WFT along old roadbed. (100 feet beyond, RCT turns sharply left, upslope, at rock cairn.) Continue straight ahead on old road with long easy descent.
6.2	Cross over West Fork of Rough Creek near remains of old culvert.
6.3	Recross West Fork of Rough Creek near old culvert leaving Big Frog wilderness. Continue gradual descent.
6.9	Cross stream (1670'). CAUTION: Immediately beyond, BMT turns left off old roadbed. Climb along graded trail through dense forest.
7.3	Intersect and continue on old road in saddle (1820') on ridgeline. Ascend, skirting east, or right, side of ridge.
7.8	Reach FS 221 (1900'). (FS 221 leads left 0.4 mi to FS 45, to Big Frog Trailhead, and to Big Creek Trailhead and right 3.0 mi to the Licklog Trailhead, 6.6 mi to Tumbling Creek Campground, and 16.8 mi to Dally Gap.) Cross FS 221 and continue behind gate on roadbed of Old FS 45. Descend through numerous coves.
9.1	Reach low point (1410'). Ascend into cove, cross stream and switchback hard right.
9.5	Reach FS 45 (1500'). (FS 45 leads left 1.8 mi to FS 221 and right 1.0 mi to Ocoee #3 Powerhouse at the Ocoee River.) Continue directly across road in point of switchback. Follow graded trail along easy ascent.
9.7	Enter old road and descend.
9.8	Enter saddle on ridge. With logging road to left and old woods road leading straight up ridge, skirt east, or right, side of ridge on graded trail.
9.9	Reenter old road on ridge. Continue on old road uphill. Cross high point and descend.
10.0	Enter saddle (1460'). CAUTION: Turn right off old road. Descend along graded trail into cove. Sides of cove get progressively steeper with descent.
10.2	Curve hard right where second cove comes in from left. Follow trail on level grade through dense forest of hemlock, white pine, and rhododendron. Begin gradual descent with stream far below at bottom of cove.

Mileage	Description
10.4	Begin series of short switchbacks at the face of the Ocoee River Gorge. View Ocoee #2 Lake below with the rafting put-in ahead and to left.
10.6	Reach south bank of Ocoee River (1120'). Follow trail along riverbank, upstream.
10.8	Enter Thunder Rock Campground at the end of campground loop road. Follow road past bathhouse (locked in winter) and comfort stations.
11.0	Bear right and ascend on road to intersect FS 45. Turn left, cross Little Gassaway Creek on small bridge, pass behind Ocoee #3 Powerhouse, and cross Ocoee River on road bridge.
11.2	Reach US 64/74 near point where divided four lanes begin (or end). Highway leads left 27 mi to Cleveland, TN or right 8 mi to Ducktown, TN.

Trail Description - North to South

Mileage	Description
0.0	From US 64/74 near point where divided four lanes begin (or end), cross road bridge over Ocoee River, pass behind Ocoee #3 Powerhouse and cross small bridge over Little Gassaway Creek.
0.1	Turn right and descend along road into Thunder Rock Campground. Follow campground loop road past bathhouse (locked in winter) and comfort stations.
0.4	Reach end of campground loop road and follow trail into woods. Continue along the south bank of the Ocoee River, downstream.
0.6	Curve left away from river. Reach base of slope and begin ascent out of Ocoee River Gorge on a series of short switchbacks.
0.8	Reach last switchback near rim of gorge. View Ocoee #2 Lake below with rafting put-in beyond (downstream). Continue gradual ascent with stream to left at bottom of cove. Follow level trail through dense forest of hemlock, white pine, and rhododendron.
1.0	Curve sharp left into cove and resume ascent.
1.2	Enter saddle (1460') and follow old woods road to left. Cross high point.
1.3	Enter saddle. CAUTION: Avoid old woods road which leads straight ahead. Follow graded trail which skirts the east, or left, side of ridge.
1.4	Reenter old woods road in saddle with logging road to right. Ascend.
1.5	CAUTION: Turn left off old road. Follow graded trail on easy descent.
1.7	Reach FS 45 (1500'). (FS 45 leads left 1.0 mi to Ocoee #3 Powerhouse and right 1.8 mi to FS 221.) Cross FS 45 and descend to right along Old FS 45.
1.9	Switchback hard left in cove.
2.1	Reach low point (1410'). Ascend along old road through numerous coves.
3.4	Reach FS 221 (1900'). (FS 221 leads left 3.0 mi to the Licklog Trailhead, 6.6 mi to Tumbling Creek Campground, and 16.8 mi to Dally Gap; it leads right 0.4 mi to FS 45, to Big Frog Trailhead and to the Big Creek Trailhead.) Cross FS 221 and descend along old road.

Mileage	Description
3.8	Enter saddle (1820') on ridgeline. Turn right off old road and continue descent along graded trail. Pass through dense forest with stream to right.
4.3	Intersect West Fork Trail. (WFT leads left 0.5 mi to parking area at the forks of Rough Creek.) Turn right and follow BMT/WFT. Cross stream.
5.0	Cross West Fork of Rough Creek near old culvert and enter Big Frog Wilderness.
5.1	Recross West Fork of Rough Creek near remains of old culvert. Continue with creek on left.
5.6	Intersect Rough Creek Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #70). (RCT ascends sharply on right and connects to Big Frog Trail.) Follow BMT/RCT straight ahead for 100 feet then turn left off of old roadbed. Cross West Fork of Rough Creek. Cross stream. Follow trail into cove and ascend. Swing left through cove. Curve right at ridgeline and begin steeper ascent.
6.2	Intersect Fork Ridge Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #69) in saddle (2260'). (RCT leads straight ahead to the Licklog Trail.) Turn right on BMT/FRT. Ascend along ridgeline for short distance, then skirt east, or left, side of ridge. Continue steady ascent.
7.0	Begin level grade into saddle (2830') on ridgeline. Follow broad crest of ridgeline then skirt west, or right, side of ridge. Ascend, circling through two coves.
8.0	Intersect Big Frog Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #64). (BFT leads right 3.6 mi to FS 221.) Continue straight ahead on BMT/BFT. Skirt east, or left, side of ridge. Come on to ridgeline before skirting west, or right, side of Chimneytop.
8.7	Intersect Big Creek Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #68). (The Big Creek Trail leads right 4.2 mi to FS 221.) Good views to the east and northeast are had from this part of the ridgecrest. Continue straight ahead on BMT/BFT. Ascend along narrow ridgecrest. At 2-foot rock step, see views.
8.9	Skirt west, or right, side of ridge. Continue ascent. Pass through rhododendron tunnel.
9.1	Switchback left. Return to broad ridgecrest and follow trail with little change in elevation. Ascend briefly skirting east, or left, side of ridge.
9.9	Intersect Hemp Top Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #145) at the terminus of the BFT. The summit of Big Frog Mountain (4224') with overlook just beyond, is 100 feet on a side trail. (The HTT leads right 1.9 mi to the Wolf Ridge Trail (#66) intersection or 3.7 mi to the HTT trailhead on FS 62.) Turn left and follow BMT/HTT descending along the ridgeline (which is the boundary between Big Frog Wilderness on left and Cohutta Wilderness on right).
10.0	Pass spring to right of trail. Descend to saddle on ridgeline. Skirt north, or left side of ridge.
10.4	Intersect Licklog Trail (Cherokee NF Trail #65). (The LT leads straight ahead 5.4 mi to FS 221.) Turn right on BMT/HTT. Begin long steep descent.
11.2	Enter Double Spring Gap (3190'). This is the Tennessee-Georgia state line as well as the boundary between the Cherokee National Forest and the Chattahoochee National Forest. A spring is 300 feet to the left. Another spring is 300 feet to the right. The BMT continues straight ahead. Dally Gap, 5.4 mi ahead, is the closest vehicular access to Double Spring Gap.