

## **Preliminary Guide to the Benton MacKaye Trail in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

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This is a fast and basic guide to the Benton MacKaye Trail as it crosses the Smoky Mountains National Park as stipulated in the General Agreement between the National Park Service and the Benton MacKaye Trail Association dated 9/15/04. Several routings had been proposed in the past, but this is the current agreed route thru GSMNP. Plans are currently underway to blaze or mark the trail, which follows other trails in the Park. The basic and most helpful map is the "Great Smoky Mountains Trail Map", available at any Ranger Station in the Park and at all Back Country Registration Points. New printings will identify the Benton MacKaye Trail.

The BMT enters the Park at Twentymile Ranger Station on the southwestern side of the Park. It rises to cross the Appalachian Trail just north of Shuckstack at Sassafras Gap, then descends to the shore of Fontana Lake. It leaves the shoreline trail at Noland Creek, rising to meet the North Carolina Mountains to Sea Trail, which it follows for a few miles until it leaves and descends to cross Route 441 at Smokemont Campground. It then rises up the side of Hughes Ridge, descends to Straight Fork Road, then rises to Laurel Gap and Mount Sterling before descending to again meet the Appalachian Trail at Davenport Gap. Within the Park, the total mileage is almost 100 miles.

GSMNP Notes - You MUST have a Backcountry Permit in your possession while camping in the backcountry. These are easily obtained at the Ranger Stations in the Park. Some campsites and the sole shelter on the BMTA are rationed. This means that you MUST make a reservation through the Backcountry Registration Office at 865-436-1231 for the campsite and date(s) you request. You can stay up to three nights at a campsite, but only one night at a shelter. Tenting is not allowed at the Shelter on the BMTA within GSMNP. The reverse of the Trail Map gives the information necessary to have a safe and proper hike. Please take the time to read it.

On the BMT, there are three Self Registration Stations, Twentymile Ranger Station, Smokemont Campground Office and at Big Creek Ranger Station, just a short distance from the Appalachian Trail at Davenport Gap. These sites will have the Trail Map and blank Backcountry Camping Permit Forms, however, on the BMT east of Smokemont Campground, there is only one non-rationed campsite, so advance reservations are strongly advised. On the BMT west of Smokemont, there are adequate non-rationed campsites for spur-of-the-moment trips. Fill out the Permit and leave one copy in the locked box at the station, and carry the other copy with you. Currently, the best overall guide to hiking in the GSMNP is the book, "Hiking Trails of the Smokies", available at the Visitor Centers and at [www.smokiesstore.org](http://www.smokiesstore.org). If you need further information that what is presented here, please consult that book.

Remember that the backcountry is just that. You may find that trails signs are misleading or missing, trails may be indistinct, etc. The majority of the trail is joint Hiker/Horse Trail, although Horse usage is fairly low, but permissible as shown on the map. You need to be experienced with map reading and compass skills to ensure following the correct trails. In many areas, cell phones are not usable, so it is a real wilderness experience. If you are not prepared for that, we suggest that you take other trails for experience before tackling the BMT. Rescues in the GSMNP are difficult and lengthy. Preparation is the best prevention.

The routing below shows the BMT from Twentymile Ranger Station to Davenport Gap, detailing the Trail Names, distances, campsites and a few comments. Campsites that are rationed are noted in red.

<u>Location / Feature</u>	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>	<u>Elevation</u>	<u>Comments</u>
20 Mile Ranger Station / Enter Park	0.0	0.0	1300	Parking & Back Country Permits
Wolf Ridge Trail Jct.	0.5	0.5	1500	
Campsite 93	1.2	1.7	1800	
Long Hungry Trail Jct.	1.4	3.1	2350	
Lost Cove Trail Jct. / Sassafras Gap	1.9	5.0	3600	Meets Appalachian Trail
Campsite 91	2.0	7.0	2000	
Lakeshore Trail Jct.	0.7	7.7	1800	
Campsite 90	0.5	8.2	1600	
Eagle Creek Trail	0.5	8.7	1700	
Hazel Creek Trail	4.2	12.9	1700	Ferry from Fontana Marina
Campsite 86	0.1	13.0	1700	
Welch Ridge	1.6	14.6	2300	
Campsite 81	1.7	16.3	1800	
Campsite 77	4.2	20.5	1800	
Campsite 76	4.6	25.1	1800	
Campsite 98	2.5	27.6	1900	
Campsite 74	6.5	34.1	1800	
Tunnel	2.9	37.0	1900	Parking
Lakeview Drive	0.1	37.1	1900	
Noland Creek Trail Jct.	0.5	37.6	1800	
Campsite 65	1.3	38.9	2000	
Campsite 64	2.7	41.6	2500	
Campsite 63	1.4	43.0	2800	
Campsite 62	1.3	44.3	3200	
Campsite 61 (RATIONED)	1.5	45.8	3500	
Pole Creek Road Jct/Upper Sassafras Gap	1.0	46.8	4200	
Deep Creek Trail Jct.	3.3	50.1	2500	Joins Mountains to Sea Trail
Campsite 56	0.3	50.4	2400	
Martins Gap Trail Jct. Camp 57 (RATIONED)	0.4	50.8	2600	
Sunkota Ridge Trail Jct.	1.5	52.3	3400	
Thomas Divide Trail Jct.	4.9	57.2	4700	
Newton Bald Trail Jct.	0.4	57.6	5000	
Campsite 52	0.5	58.1	5100	Joins Mountains to Sea Trail
Newfound Gap Road Jct.	4.8	62.9	2200	
Smokemont Campground	0.3	63.2	2200	Parking & Back Country Permits
Bradley Fork Trail Jct.	1.0	64.2	2200	
Chasteen Creek Trail Jct.	1.2	65.4	2300	
Campsite 50 (RATIONED)	0.1	65.5	2300	
Campsite 48	2.0	67.5	3300	
Hughes Ridge Trail Jct.	1.9	69.4	4700	
Enloe Creek Trail Jct.	0.4	69.8	4800	
Campsite 47 (RATIONED)	2.5	72.3	3600	
Hyatt Ridge Trail Jct.	1.1	73.4	4400	
Beech Gap Trail Jct.	1.7	75.1	4900	
Straight Fork Road Jct.	2.8	77.9	3100	Parking at Round Bottom
Beech Gap Trail Jct.	0.3	78.2	3100	
Balsam Mt. Trail Jct.	2.5	80.7	5100	
Laurel Gap Shelter (RATIONED)	1.7	82.4	5400	
Mt. Sterling Ridge Trail Jct.	0.3	82.7	5500	
Mt. Sterling Trail Jct.	5.3	88.0	5700	
Baxter Creek Trail Jct.Camp38 (RATIONED)	0.3	88.3	5800	
Big Creek Road Jct.	6.1	94.4	1700	Parking & Back Country Permits
Davenport Gap / Exit Nat'l Park	1.8	96.2	2000	Meets Appalachian Trail