

SUNDAY BEST
HIKING THE APPALCHIAN TRAIL

A hiker climbs Mount Katahdin in Maine in 2014 with the wilderness of Baxter State Park in the background. Katahdin is nearly a mile high, the tallest mountain in Maine, and its peak is the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail.

BETH J. HARPAZ,
The Associated Press



MAINE: 281.4 miles; overall rating: 9 (range: 2-10)

VERMONT: 149.8 miles; overall rating: 5 (range: 1-6)

NEW HAMPSHIRE: 160.9 miles; overall rating: 8 (range: 1-9)

MASSACHUSETTS: 90.2 miles; overall rating: 6 (range: 1-7)

CONNECTICUT: 51.6 miles; overall rating: 6 (range: 1-7)

NEW JERSEY: 72.2 miles; overall rating: 5 (range: 1-6)

MARYLAND: 40.9 miles; overall rating: 2 (range: 1-6)

NEW YORK: 88.4 miles; overall rating: 6 (range: 2-8)

PENNSYLVANIA: 229.6 miles; overall rating: 3 (range: 1-9)

WEST VIRGINIA: 4 miles; overall rating: 3 (range: 1-5)

VIRGINIA: 550.3 miles; rating range: 2-8

TENNESSEE: 287.9 miles; overall rating: 6 (range: 1-7)

NORTH CAROLINA: 95.5 miles; overall rating: 5 (range: 3-7)

GEORGIA: 76.4 miles; overall rating: 5 (range: 3-7)

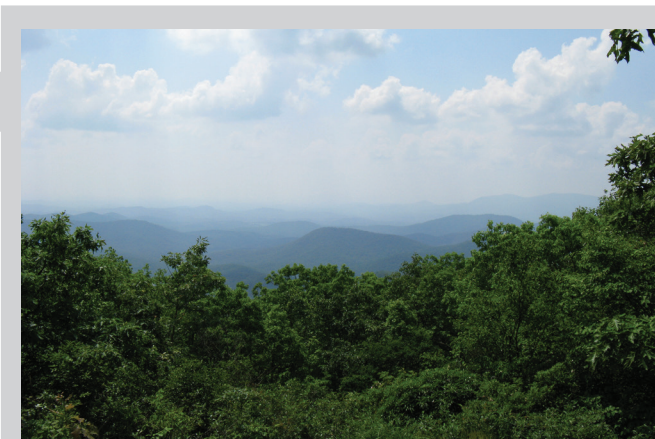
STATE
by **STATE**

Here's how far you'll travel in each state on the Appalachian Trail and the difficulty rating. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy rates sections of the trail on a scale of 1 (flat and smooth) to 10 (not recommended for those with fear of heights and not in good physical condition).

THRU-HIKING

- » **NORTH TO SOUTH:** Start at Mount Katahdin, Maine, and head south to Springer Mountain, Ga. Hikers on this route generally start in June or July and finish in December.
- » **SOUTH TO NORTH:** Start at Springer Mountain, Ga., and head north to Mount Katahdin, Maine. Hikers on this route generally start in March or April and finish in September.
- » **FLIP-FLOP:** Start in the middle, such as in Harpers Ferry, W.Va., and head north or south to a terminus. Then, return to the start or to the opposite terminus and hike the remaining section.
- » For other thru-hiking options and itineraries or more information about the AT, visit www.appalachiantrail.org.

— Source: Appalachian Trail Conservancy



The view from the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail on Springer Mountain in Georgia.

Courtesy of Flickr user Andrew Kalat

WHAT TO TAKE

FOR DAY HIKES

- » Warm clothing, preferably synthetic fabrics, acrylic blends, wool or silk, that you can layer
- » Shoes that fit well and are broken in
- » Map, compass and the knowledge to use them
- » At least 1 quart water (2 to 3 quarts for longer hikes in hot weather)
- » Rain gear and a hat
- » Food (including extra high-energy snacks)
- » Trowel to bury human waste and toilet paper
- » First-aid kit with blister treatments
- » Whistle (three blasts is the international signal for help)
- » Garbage bag to carry out trash
- » Sunglasses and sunscreen
- » Blaze-orange vest or hat during hunting season

FOR LONGER HIKES

- Take the above items, plus:
- » Flashlight with extra batteries and bulb
 - » Heavy-duty garbage bag for an emergency tarp or for insulating a hypothermia victim
 - » Sharp knife
 - » Fire starter and waterproof matches

FOR OVERNIGHT HIKES

- Take the above items, plus:
- » Medium-sized backpack
 - » Method of treating water or a water filter
 - » Shelter, such as a tarp or tent
 - » Lightweight pot and cooking utensils
 - » Stove and fuel
 - » Pack cover or plastic bag for rain protection
 - » Sleeping pad
 - » Sleeping bag appropriate for the season
 - » Extra food and clothing
 - » 50 feet of rope or cord for hanging food at night

— Source: Appalachian Trail Conservancy



AS INTEREST GROWS, HIKERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO 'LEAVE NO TRACE'

From staff and wire reports

A new series of videos titled "Don't Be That Guy — Appalachian Trail — Leave No Trace" aim to teach visitors how to reduce their imprint on the AT and all trails.

The videos are part of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's preemptive response to the anticipated surge of hikers on the trail thanks to the new movie "A Walk in the Woods," based on the 1998 Bill Bryson by the same name and starring Robert Redford and Nick Nolte. "We have to be vigilant," said Sarah Jones Decker, a creative consultant, actor in the videos and former AT thru-hiker. "Our duty is to take care of the Appalachian Trail. As the trail becomes more popular, we need to make sure that we are working diligently to spread the 'Leave No Trace' message."

With an interest in outdoor activities growing, the number of people on the AT has exploded. But officials say the increasing traffic has an ugly side effect: more people than ever causing problems.

At Maine's Baxter State Park, home to the trail's final summit on Mount Katahdin, officials say thru-hikers are flouting park rules by openly using drugs and drinking alcohol, camping where they aren't supposed to and trying to pass their pets off as service dogs. In Pennsylvania, misbehaving hikers contributed to Palmerton's recent decision to shutter the sleeping quarters it had offered for decades in the basement of its municipal building.

At Baxter, where the number of registered long-distance hikers grew from 359 in 1991 to more than 2,000 in 2014, the growing number of hikers is becoming a management nightmare.

830

people completed the 2,180-mile hike last year, up from just 182 in 1990, according to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, based in Harpers Ferry, W.Va.

PRINCIPLES OF 'LEAVE NO TRACE'

- » Plan ahead and prepare.
- » Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- » Dispose of waste properly.
- » Leave what you find.
- » Minimize campfire impacts.
- » Respect wildlife.
- » Be considerate of other visitors.

A video on the seven principles of the "Leave No Trace" principles is viewable on the YouTube channel Appalachian Trail Leave No Trace.

The ATC, which turned 90 this year, also has launched an online, voluntary registration system to spread hikers out along the trail and through different seasons to try to reduce major damage caused by large groups of hikers; a Trail Karma program to use pay-it-forward programs; incentives and social media to encourage responsible use of the trail; an expanded ridgerunner program to put more boots on the ground along the trail to interact with the public; and promotion of alternative routes to the traditional Georgia-to-Maine thru-hike route.

Ron Tipton, ATC executive director, said the vast majority of thru-hikers are respectful and on the trail for the right reasons. He said he believes that the sharp increase in hikers has simply made it more challenging to deal with the behavior of a few.