

Spring Break Hiking

Hiking on the Appalachian Trail in March and April

September 2000

Weather. Be advised that March and April, traditional spring break months, are still very much winter in the southern Appalachians, and snow or freezing rain is a likely possibility. However, there are wide temperature swings, and you could encounter a relatively warm sunny day at low elevations (and with the leaves still off the trees you may even want sunscreen) followed by a snow or ice storm. It's not unusual to enjoy a high of 60 degrees one day by a low in the teens the following day.

Elevation is the big factor in deciding where to go. Elevation and latitude are the two primary factors in predicting weather and temperatures along the A.T., but keep in mind that weather in the mountains is never very predictable. On any given day at any location, there is a 50 degree or more range between the maximum high and the minimum low. The mildest weather on the entire A.T. typically occurs in the northern Virginia/Maryland section of A.T., and Georgia, which have the most favorable combinations of low elevation and/or a southerly latitude. The locations south of the Mason Dixon Line most likely to receive heavy snows are the Smokies, Roan Mountain in Tennessee, and the Mt. Rogers/Grayson Highland area of southwest Virginia.

Georgia. You are likely to encounter a fairly large number of people on the Trail in Georgia in March, between spring break hikers and prospective thru-hikers; in fact, the Trail could be crowded, with most shelters full early in the day. On Springer Mountain, as many as 50 people a day start hiking north on weekends in March and early April.

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Harpers Ferry, West Virginia makes a convenient starting or ending point for a hike. The Appalachian Trail goes right through the historic town, and ATC headquarters are located here. Train service from Washington is provided by Amtrak (800/USA-RAIL) and a commuter line (the MARC Brunswick line runs M-F only 800/325-RAIL or 410/859-7400) Parking is available at the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park Visitors Center for a \$5 one-time registration fee. Harpers Ferry offers a number of lodging options, including from a KOA campground, a hostel (2 1/2 miles away), and several motels & B&Bs. For more detailed information, see the *Appalachian Trail Guide to Maryland and Northern Virginia*, available from our catalog, and "Hiker's Guide to Harpers Ferry and Charlestown," available free from the ATC Information Center.

Maryland and Northern Virginia. The terrain in Maryland (north of Harpers Ferry) and northern Virginia (south of Harpers Ferry) is relatively easy—with significantly less elevation change than Georgia—although somewhat rocky in places. Maryland offers more views, is crossed by roads more frequently, and is more restrictive about camping (you must camp at designated shelter or campsites) than northern Virginia. For more detailed information, see the *Appalachian Trail Guide to Maryland and Northern Virginia*, available from our catalog.

More southern trails. If you would prefer hiking in a milder climate than what the A.T. has to offer, you might consider another trail further south, such as the Florida Trail, the Pinhoti Trail in Alabama, or a trail at lower elevations, such as the Pine Mountain Trail in Georgia or the more rugged Foothills Trail in North Carolina/South Carolina. If you don't mind the cold, but would prefer more solitude, you might interested in the Benton MacKaye Trail in north Georgia, which forms a figure eight with the A.T.

For further information on other spring break hiking opportunities, contact:

Alabama Trails Association (for information about **Pinhoti Trail**)

P.O. Box 371162, Birmingham, AL 35237-1162

<http://www.alabamatrails.com>

wild-flower@mindspring.com

At just over 100 miles, the Pinhoti is the longest trail in Alabama. Lots of solitude.

Benton MacKaye Trail Association

P.O. Box 53271, Atlanta, GA 30355-1271

<http://ngeorgia.com/trail/mackaye.shtml>

darcydo@aol.com

Darcy Douglas (770) 977-1530

250-mile trail in northern Georgia. Less crowded than the nearby A.T., but can be wintry in March.

Florida Trail Association

P.O. Box 13708, Gainesville, FL 32604-1708

<http://www.florida-trail.org/>

fta@florida-trail.org

(352) 378-8823 or (800) 343-1882

1,000+ miles of scenic trail, bordered by rivers, lakes, forests of palms, pines, cypress and moss-draped live oaks. Winter and spring are best hiking times.

Foothills Trail Conference

P.O. Box 3041, Greenville, SC 29602

<http://www.foothillstrail.org/>

(864) 467-9537

103-mile trail running from Oconee State Park to the Mountain Bridge State Natural Area along the South Carolina/North Carolina border. It crosses some of the most rugged, most beautiful terrain in the Carolinas.

Georgia Appalachian Trail Club

P.O. Box 654, Atlanta, GA 30301

<http://www.georgia-atclub.org>

(404) 634-6495 (voice mail)

Over 75 miles of the A.T. are located in northern Georgia. Be prepared for possible wintry conditions and large crowds in March.

Pine Mountain Trail Association

P.O. Box 5, Columbus, GA 31902

<http://www.pinemountaintrail.org/>

pmta@pinemountaintrail.org

23-mile footpath, following the Pine Mountain ridge in West Central Georgia, with numerous side trails and loop trails (four to nine miles in length) to overlooks and waterfalls. Highest elevation: 1263'. Weather in March is much milder than on the A.T.

Learn how to minimize the impact of your backcountry visits in the southeastern region of the United States by visiting the Leave No Trace website before you hit the trail:

<http://www.lnt.org/LNTSoutheastS&E.html>

Appalachian Trail Conference Information Center

799 Washington Street / P. O. Box 807 Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

www.appalachiantrail.org - info@appalachiantrail.org - (304) 535-6331