

Benton MacKaye Trail - Section 3

GA 60 at Little Skeenah Creek to Skeenah Gap

5.6 miles

General

This section of trail, while relatively short, is the most difficult for its length because of the repeated long ascents and descents. Its entire length earns it a "Most Difficult" rating. Three peaks with elevations over 3000' comprise this section. Wallalah Mountain, Licklog Mountain, and Rhodes Mountain all require significant climbing. The Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) runs concurrent with the Duncan Ridge National Recreation Trail (DRT) as far as Rhodes Mountain. Here the blue, rectangular blazed DRT turns east while the white, diamond blazed BMT turns northwest. This area lies mostly within the Cooper Creek Wildlife Management Area.

Access

There are two access points to the BMT at either end of this section. Each is a paved road, accessible year round with the exception of periods of severe ice and snow.

Little Skeenah Creek: GA 60 crosses the BMT at the south end of this section.

Directions from Dahlonega, GA: Proceed north on U.S. 19 / GA 60 for 9 miles; bear left on GA 60 where U.S. 19 turns right, and go 7 miles to Suches, GA. From the intersection of GA 180 and GA 60 in Suches, continue north on GA 60; go 14.8 miles to the GA 60 trailhead (Total Distance: 30.8 miles). Parking is along the right side of the road just beyond the trail crossing.

Skeenah Gap: Skeenah Gap Road (county maintained) crosses the BMT at the north end of this section.

Directions from Dahlonega, GA: Proceed north on U.S. 19 / GA 60 for 9 miles; bear left on GA 60 where U.S. 19 turns right, and go 7 miles to Suches, GA. From the intersection of GA 180 and GA 60 in Suches, continue north on GA 60; go 15.5 miles and turn right onto Skeenah Gap Road; follow this road for 3.4 miles to Skeenah Gap (Total Distance: 34.9 miles). Parking is along the right side of the road at the trail crossing.

Shelters, Campsites, and Water

There are no shelters along this section of the BMT.

Some good campsites are as follows: the summit of Wallalah Mountain, the summit of Licklog Mountain (particularly good due to the long, broad, flat summit area), and the summit of Rhodes Mountain. Camping opportunities elsewhere are extremely limited because of steep slopes.

The only known year-round water source is the spring just north of Licklog Mountain (3.55 miles north of Georgia Highway 60, 2.09 miles south of Skeenah Gap). This spring is about 100 yards east of the trail. Northbound hikers should re-supply here, as the next water source along the trail is 8 miles away. DO NOT take water from Little Skeenah Creek, as there is significant development upstream. If water is urgently needed here, proceed to the store 0.3 mile east of the trail crossing. Cold drinks, snacks, and limited supplies are also available at this store.

In a true emergency (which we define as a severe ice, snow, or thunderstorm; personal injury or hypothermia), the picnic shelter on the south side of the church 0.25-mile south of Skeenah Gap will provide limited protection from the elements. If you use this shelter in a non-emergency situation, you may find yourself doing a lot of explaining to the church members who live nearby.

Points of Interest

Wallalah Mountain (3100'): This is a prominent point rising 1000' above the surrounding valleys. A large, open rock outcrop 0.3 mile south of the summit provides an excellent year-round view to the south.

Licklog Mountain (3472'): This is the highest point on this section of the BMT. It has a long nearly flat summit, which the trail crosses diagonally.

Rhodes Mountain (3380'): Just below this rocky summit the BMT and the DRT diverge (or converge, depending on your direction of travel). There is a view to the west from the rock outcrops near the summit and views to the east from a clearing below the summit. In the winter, the lights of Blairsville, GA are visible to the northeast.

Trail Description - South to North

Mileage	Description
0.0	From GA 60 (2028'), proceed north 100 feet to cross Little Skeenah Creek on a bridge constructed by the USFS and the BMTA in 1989. 200 feet beyond the bridge, cross an old logging road, then a second old road, and ascend steeply.
0.3	Ascend more gradually along a ridgeline for 200 feet, and then descend slightly through a cove. Skirt the south and east sides of the ridgeline.
0.5	Descend steeply into another cove. Ascend from this cove.
0.8	Cross an old logging road. Ascend more steeply.
1.0	Intersect the same old road and turn right. DO NOT trespass on the private property to left of the old road (boundary marked by red paint).
1.2	Turn sharp right off the road. Climb gradually at first before climbing steeply (average grade: 24 percent) near the ridgeline. WARNING: the upper reaches of this area along the exposed rock can become very treacherous when wet, icy, or shortly after leaf fall.
1.4	Reach open rock outcrop with excellent year-round views to the south. Continue around south and east sides of ridge.
1.5	Come onto the flat ridgeline. Briefly ascend.
1.7	Reach the wooded summit of Wallalah Mountain (3100'). There are several flat areas suitable for camping though there is no water within a reasonable distance. Beware of prolific poison ivy. (Please note that the gaudy looking ammo boxes with numbers painted on them are for the benefit of the U.S. Army Rangers. These boxes may appear from time to time along the trail. Please do not disturb them.) Continue northeast from the summit of Wallalah Mountain, descending at first gradually, then more steeply. Swing slightly southeast of the ridgeline briefly.
2.1	Enter a gap (2730'). Ascend briefly, and then descend.
2.3	Cross an overgrown old road in a gap (2740'). Begin the ascent of Licklog Mountain. Ascend first gradually, then steeply for an extended distance. Catch your breath on the slight descent.
2.8	End gradual ascent. Ascend very steeply (27 percent grade).
3.0	End steep ascent.
3.2	Reach the summit of Licklog Mountain (3472'). Campsites are available along the flat summit. A spring is 0.35 mile to the north. From the summit bear left and continue north, descending gradually along graded trail on the east, or right, side of the mountain.
3.6	A side trail leads right 100 yards to a spring. Shortly thereafter, return to a level part of the ridgeline. Descend.
3.8	Pass through gap (3140'). Ascend briefly, descend into saddle, and then ascend once again.

Mileage	Description
4.2	Reach the trail intersection. Here, the blue-blazed DRT continues 500 feet to the summit of Rhodes Mountain (with good views E and SW) where it turns sharply to the east. The DRT proceeds nearly due east from Rhodes Mountain past Fish Gap, Mulky Gap (FS 4), Coosa Bald, Wolfpen Gap (Georgia Highway 180), and Slaughter Mountain to intersect the AT at Slaughter Gap. The summit of Rhodes Mountain (3380') offers a year-round westerly view as well as camping opportunities (despite the distance to water).
4.4	To continue on the BMT from its intersection with DRT, bear left and skirt below the rock outcrops of Rhodes Mountain on a minimal descent of the southwest slope. Return to the ridgeline (route of BMT prior to 1992) and descend steeply, then more gradually.
4.8	Come into saddle. Pass through white pine forest on a nearly level grade, then curve right (north) and descend.
5.0	Intersect an old logging road. Turn left onto road and continue gradual descent. Enter old clear-cut area (c. 1984).
5.3	Return to ridgeline. Reach road cut in Skeenah Gap (2380') and turn left along top of cut. Turn right at the end of the cut to cross a ditch.
5.6	Reach the paved Skeenah Gap Road. Skeenah Gap Road leads left 3.4 mi. to GA 60 and 19.3 mi. to Blue Ridge; to right it leads 4.6 mi. to Old US 76 and 12.3 mi. to Blairsville.

Trail Description - North to South

Mileage	Description
0.0	From Skeenah Gap Road in Skeenah Gap (2380'), cross a ditch and turn left at the southwest end of the road cut. Ascend along the road cut for 100 feet and turn right to continue ascent along the ridgeline through an old clear-cut area (c. 1984).
0.3	Leave the clear-cut and the ridgeline to skirt the north side of ridge on an old logging road.
0.6	CAUTION: Turn sharply to the right and uphill off the old road. Level off to pass through a white pine forest.
0.9	Reach saddle on ridge. Ascend at first gradually, then steeply along the ridgeline.
1.2	Turn right at a 45-degree angle to leave ridgeline (route of BMT prior to 1992). Follow graded trail on minimal ascent along southwest slope of Rhodes Mountain. Pass beneath rock outcrops.
1.5	Reach ridgeline and intersection with Duncan Ridge National Recreation Trail. The summit of Rhodes Mountain (3380') is 500 feet to the left along the DRT. Camping (no water) and a westerly view are at the top of the mountain. Beyond Rhodes Mountain, the DRT leads almost due east past Fish Gap, Mulky Gap (FS 4), Coosa Bald, Wolfpen Gap (GA 180), and Slaughter Mountain to intersect the Appalachian Trail at Slaughter Gap. Continue on BMT by turning right to follow the combined BMT / DRT. Descend into saddle and ascend briefly.
1.9	Reach gap (3140'). Ascend briefly, then level out and skirt the east side of the ridge.
2.1	A side trail leads left (east) 100 yards to spring. Ascend gradually.
2.4	Reach the long flat summit of Licklog Mountain (3472'). There are numerous good campsites along the summit. Cross the summit of Licklog Mountain diagonally, bear right at high point, and descend.
2.7	Begin a very steep descent (27 percent grade). WARNING: This descent can be dangerous as rough trail affords poor footing.
2.9	Cross saddle on ridge (2980'), and then ascend briefly before continuing descent.
3.3	Pass through gap (2740'). An overgrown logging road crosses in this gap. Ascend across point on ridge, descend to saddle, and then skirt south side of ridge on steep ascent of Wallalah Mountain. Return to ridgeline.

Mileage	Description
4.0	Reach summit of Wallalah Mountain (3100'). The ammo box with a number (found in various locations along the trail) is for the use of the U.S. Army Rangers and should not be disturbed. A small campsite exists on the top of the mountain. From the summit of Wallalah Mountain, descend gradually along the ridgeline, and then briefly follow a flat section of the ridge. This flat area is also suitable for camping. Bear left off the ridgeline and skirt the east and south sides of the ridge.
4.3	Reach a rock outcrop. Good, year-round views to south include Toonowee Mountain, Toccoa River Valley, John Dick Mountains, and the Blue Ridge Mountains in the vicinity of Springer Mountain. WARNING: the descent from this area can be very slippery when wet, icy, or covered with leaves. Descend steeply near ridgeline, then more gradually.
4.5	Turn left on old road, descending. DO NOT trespass on private property to the right (west) of the trail. The boundary is marked by red paint.
4.6	CAUTION: Turn left again off old road.
4.9	Descend to cross this same road. Continue descent.
5.1	Make a short but steep ascent, then follow graded trail around the side of the ridge with no change in elevation. Make a slight descent into cove, come onto a ridgeline, and continue to descend.
5.4	Turn right off ridgeline and descend steeply. Cross old logging road, soon cross a second old road, then cross Little Skeenah Creek on a bridge built by the USFS and the BMTA in 1989.
5.6	Reach GA 60 (2028'). GA 60 leads left 30.8 mi. to Dahlonega and right 16.6 mi. to Blue Ridge.