

# Benton MacKaye Trail - Section 4

## Skeenah Gap to Wilscot Gap (GA 60)

5.3 miles

### General

This section of trail runs northwest along the Union-Fannin County line before turning west along the crest of Wilscot Mountain. The difficulty of the hike along this section is "More Difficult". The land is dominated by hardwood forest with occasional stands of white pine. The area is managed as a general forest area and is subject to timbering.

### Access

There are two access points to the Benton MacKaye Trail at either end of this section. Each is a paved road, accessible year round with the exception of periods of severe ice and snow. A Forest Service road crosses the trail near the middle of the section, but this road is closed during winter months and is not recommended even when it is open.

***Skeenah Gap: Skeenah Gap Road (county maintained) 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 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.

***Wilscot Gap: GA 60 crosses the BMT at the north end of this section.***

Directions from Blue Ridge, GA: Start from the intersection of the four-lane Appalachian Highway (U.S. 76, GA 2 and 515) and the Windy Ridge Connector (just east of Windy Ridge Road overpass and 0.8 mile east of McDonald's); follow the Appalachian Highway east for 3.3 miles to the junction of GA 60 (traffic light); turn right on 60 and go 0.3 mile to a stop sign; turn left (still on 60); go 1.5 miles to Morganton, GA; turn right with GA 60 in Morganton; proceed 7.4 miles to Wilscot Gap (Total Distance: 12.5 miles). Ample parking is to the left of the road.

### Shelters, Campsites, and Water

There are no shelters along this section of the BMT.

Payne Gap is the only site that can be described as a good campsite. There is spring located 600 feet north of the gap. Camping opportunities elsewhere are extremely limited because of steep slopes, vegetation, and lack of water.

Water is not available from any known source at a reasonable distance from the trail other than Payne Gap. Please bring adequate supplies of water before entering this section. Coming from the south, the only known year-round source is the spring just north of Licklog Mountain (2.09 miles south of Skeenah Gap). This spring is about 100 yards east of the trail.

Southbound hikers should re-supply at the spring on the east side of Tipton Mountain (Section 5) or at Wilscot Spring (0.4 mile south of Wilscot Gap on Georgia Highway 60).

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 miles southwest 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**

Good views exist at two points. A view across a clear-cut of areas in North Carolina and Tennessee to the north is just east of Payne Gap. On the west side of Wilscot Mountain (3030'), a view across a clear-cut gives a great panorama of Rhodes, Licklog, and Wallalah Mountains to the east, and the Noontootla Creek watershed and the Blue Ridge to the south.

### ***Trail Description - South to North***

<b>Mileage</b>	<b>Description</b>
0.0	From Skeenah Gap Road in Skeenah Gap (2380'), climb steps on northwest side of the road. Climb steeply for one hundred yards and come onto level section of trail along ridgeline. Continue to climb gradually along broad ridge crest.
0.3	Reach high point. Swing right along edge of immature forest, turn left, and descend on graded trail. Continue, skirting east side of ridge, ascending and descending.
0.8	Reach a low point on the ridgeline and begin a sustained climb.
1.1	Reach high point. Descend into saddle on the ridge. Climb steeply for the next 0.2 mi.
1.4	Turn left, leaving the ridgeline and the Union-Fannin County line. Descend along graded trail.
1.5	Reach old roadbed. Turn right and follow old road, uphill.
1.6	At high point the trail's compass direction becomes primarily westerly rather than northerly and stays that way for the next 34 mi. Descend.
1.7	Pass through gap, passing along the south side of a timber harvest area. Climb through woods.
1.9	Reach high point. Just beyond begins a timber clear-cut on the right side of the trail, which provides distant views of North Carolina and Tennessee (Angelico Mountains). Switchback to the south side of the ridge and continue to descend.
2.1	Come into Payne Gap (2650'). Here is a small, grassy area suitable for camping with a spring 600 feet to the north (right). Continue from Payne Gap by climbing along the edge of the clear-cut. Cross two small knobs.
2.5	Leave clear-cut near low point. Avoid the old road that forks to right and leads 50 feet to FS 645. Climb through woods.
2.7	High point (2857'). Briefly pass along edge of timber clear-cut.
3.0	Reach gap (2700'). FS 640A passes through the gap leading northwest and southwest. FS 645 leads northeast from here. Continue directly across FS 640A. Climb along graded trail, then switchback left to the ridgeline. Cross over two knobs.
3.6	Reach wooded summit of Wilscot Mountain (3030'). Descend to northwest, then circle left along west side of mountain. Return to trail along ridgeline.
3.9	Reach end of old road. Switchback left, following old road.
4.0	Switchback right in cove, staying on road. Continue steady descent. Pass along north edge of timber clear-cut with good views to south and east. Descend more steeply.
4.4	Pass through gap (2580'). FS 644 ends to the left of the trail. Avoid the woods road leading downhill to the right. Climb along old woods road, leaving edge of clear-cut.
4.6	Reach high point (2750') as road crosses side ridge. Continue a long, steady descent along the old road. Skirt the south side of the ridge for the remainder of this section.
5.1	Pass through gap (2500').
5.3	Reach GA 60 in Wilscot Gap (2450'). GA 60 leads left 34.9 mi. to Dahlonega and right 12.5 mi. to Blue Ridge.

## ***Trail Description - North to South***

<b>Mileage</b>	<b>Description</b>
0.0	From GA 60 in Wilscot Gap (2450'), climb along an old logging road on the south side of the ridge.
0.2	Reach gap (2500'), then continue to skirt south side of ridge.
0.7	Reach high point (2750') on road as it crosses a side ridge. Follow the north edge of a timber clear-cut with great views beyond of Rhodes, Licklog, and Wallallah Mountains.
0.9	CAUTION: Take right fork off old road and descend bank to reach gap (2580'). Avoid the road leading northeast, downhill to the left, as well as the road leading southeast through the clear-cut (FS 644). Climb gradually along old road with views to the south of the Noontootla Creek Basin and the Blue Ridge. Enter woods on a less steep grade.
1.3	Switchback hard left in cove.
1.4	Switchback right onto ridge where the old road ends. Leave ridge to skirt west side of mountain and then circle right.
1.7	Reach the summit of Wilscot Mountain (3030'). Continue along the ridgeline, crossing two wooded knobs. Descend along ridgeline, then switchback right onto graded trail.
2.3	Reach FS 640A in gap (2700'). FS 640A leads northwest and southwest from the gap. FS 645 begins in the gap and leads northeast. Continue by crossing FS 640A and climbing trail along ridge. Briefly pass along edge of timber clear-cut
2.6	Come to high point (2857'). Enter woods and descend.
2.8	Reach low point (2700'). A large timber clear-cut begins along the left side of the trail. Cross two small knobs and descend.
3.2	Reach Payne Gap (2650'). A small grassy area provides an adequate spot for camping, with a spring 600 feet to the north (left). CAUTION: Avoid road leading southeast (right) along the contour from Payne Gap. Climb along ridgeline, follow graded trail on south side of ridge, then switchback left to regain ridgeline. Good views beyond clear-cut to northwest are of Angelico Mountains along North Carolina/Tennessee border.
3.4	Leave clear-cut near high point. Descend to enter smaller timber harvest area near low point.
3.7	Enter woods near high point. Here, the trail makes a transition from an easterly track to one that is primarily southerly. Follow old road, downhill, along easy grade.
3.8	Turn left onto graded trail and climb to ridgeline. Continue along ridgeline (the Union-Fannin County line), descending.
4.1	From low point make a short, gradual ascent, before beginning a long descent.
4.5	Reach a low point on the ridgeline. Ascend, descend and then ascend again on graded trail, which skirts the north side of the ridge.
4.8	Begin steep ascent on graded trail. Ascend more gradually and swing right.
5.0	Reach a high point. Immature forest appears briefly on the right side of the trail here. Turn left from the high point, entering white pine forest. Descend along broad ridge crest. Soon after passing saddle on the ridgeline, turn left and descend steeply. Descend road bank on steps.
5.3	Reach Skeenah Gap Road in Skeenah Gap (2380'). Skeenah Gap Road leads left 4.6 mi. to Old U.S. 76 and 12.3 mi. to Blairsville; it leads right 3.4 mi. to GA 60 and 19.3 mi to Blue Ridge.