

Benton MacKaye Trail - Section 5

Wilscot Gap (Georgia Highway 60) to Shallowford Bridge

7.6 miles

General

This section of trail runs east and west along the Wilscot Mountain Range. Elevations range from 3147' on Tipton Mountain to 1774' at Shallowford Bridge on the Toccoa River. Five peaks dominate this section, of which the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) crosses two: Tipton Mountain and Brawley Mountain. The westernmost half-mile follows an unpaved county road along the banks of the Toccoa River. The difficulty of the hike along this section is "More Difficult". The land is dominated by hardwood forest with occasional stands of white pine. It is managed as a general forest area and is subject to timbering.

Access

There are three access points to the BMT along this section. At either end is a paved road, accessible year round with the exception of periods of severe ice and snow. An unpaved, county maintained road crosses the trail near the western end of the section and is suitable for year-round travel.

- Wilscot Gap: Georgia Highway 60 crosses the BMT at the east (south) end of this section. See Section 4 Description.
- Dial Road: This unpaved road crosses the trail 1.8 miles east of Shallowford Bridge at a point that is informally known as "Free Gap".
- Shallowford Bridge: The paved county maintained Aska Road intersects the trail at the west (north) end of this section.

Directions from Blue Ridge

Start from the intersection of the four-lane Appalachian Highway (US 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); turn right if traveling east, turn left if traveling west; go 0.1 mile to Old U.S. Highway 76; turn left; in 0.2 mile, turn right on Aska Road; continue on Aska Road for 8.2 miles; turn left across one-lane Shallowford Bridge to cross the Toccoa River; turn right on unpaved road at the end of the bridge; proceed 0.5 mile to the Shallowford Bridge trailhead (Total Distance: 9.0 miles). Parking is to right of road, between road and river. Campers may occupy this area in the summer.

OR:

Continue on unpaved beyond the Shallowford Bridge trailhead for 0.8 miles to reach the trail crossing at Dial Road (Total Distance: 9.8 miles). Parking is under the power line to the right and along the road.

Shelters, Campsites, and Water

There are no shelters along this section of the BMT.

The summit of Tipton Mountain has a large flat area suitable for camping but water must be brought from the springs either 0.42 mi. east (south) or 0.69 miles west (north) of the summit. An unnamed gap between Tipton Mountain and Bald Top (1.96 miles from Wilscot Gap, 5.64 miles from Shallowford Bridge) has a good campsite with water down the north slope. Brawley Mountain has a flat, open area directly under the fire tower but does not have water nearby. Garland Gap has a good campsite with

water 500 feet to the north, but it also is the crossing of an All-Terrain Vehicle trail. If you don't mind motorcycles coming through your tent, then this is a good place to camp. There is an open area at the high point on the east slope of Free Knob that is suitable for camping, but water is some distance away. The half-mile road walk to Shallowford Bridge contains numerous campsites between the road and the river, but some are on private property and thus should be avoided. These sites are popular with "car campers" during the summer and may be occupied.

Water is available at the following points: cove on west side of trail, (Tipton Mountain, 0.87 west (north) of Wilscot Gap, 6.73 miles east (south) of Shallowford Bridge); cove north of unnamed gap (1.96 miles west of Wilscot Gap, 5.64 miles east of Shallowford Bridge); in cove 500 feet north of Garland Gap (4.23 miles west of Wilscot Gap, 3.37 miles east of Shallowford Bridge). In each of these cases, one may have to follow streambed downhill to find water during dry periods.

Points of Interest

Tipton Mountain (3147'): The coves of the north and east slopes hold a multitude of botanical species. The summit is unique in that it is broad and virtually flat for over a quarter mile while being the highest point in the Wilscot Range. There are good year-round views of Brawley Mountain and the upper reaches of Blue Ridge Lake from the rocky western slope of the mountain.

Brawley Mountain (3027'): Another point of interest is the fire tower at Brawley Mountain. This is the only fire tower still in existence along the BMT although they were formerly located on Flat Top Mountain (Section 8) and Hemp Top (Section 10) along with numerous sites in Tennessee.

A good view of the Toccoa River is at 0.50 mi. east of Dial Road in an area damaged by a 1988 fire.

Free Knob (though not readily apparent from the trail) is almost completely encircled by the Toccoa River. The half-mile road walk along the Toccoa River gives the hiker a good opportunity to be as close as possible to the river without actually getting wet!

Trail Description - South to North

Mileage	Description
0.0	From GA 60 in Wilscot Gap (2450'), proceed to the north end of the highway cut on the west side of the road (right side of cut across road). Cross a culvert for an old logging road and immediately turn left, uphill, into the woods. Continue under power line and skirt north side of ridge. Climb gradually.
0.4	Reach old logging road. Turn right and follow old road along easy grade on east slope of Tipton Mountain.
0.6	Take left fork (uphill).
0.7	Take left fork (uphill). Begin steep climb.
0.9	Old road narrows into trail in cove. Intermittent spring is 50 feet to right. Continue up cove. Swing left out of cove to skirt northeast slope of Tipton Mountain.
1.1	Reach broad ridge crest and continue on level trail. TURN SHARP RIGHT
1.3	Reach the high point of Tipton Mountain (3147'). Straight ahead at this point is a good campsite on the broad, flat summit of Tipton Mountain (no water). Swing right, leaving ridge crest, to skirt north face of mountain. Descend gradually along graded trail, which swings around the west side of the mountain. At rocky area along this slope pass a good year-round view of Brawley Mountain with better winter views of Lake Blue Ridge.
2.0	Pass through cove and cross old logging road below gap (2800'). A grassy clearing is to the left and uphill from the trail as is FS 45 (gated). Continue, ascending slightly. An intermittent spring is in the cove, downhill and to the right of the trail. If water is not found at the point nearest the trail, continue downhill. Skirt the north side of Bald Top and begin a short but steep descent.

Mileage	Description
2.3	Enter Ledford Gap (2620'). From small grassy clearing in Ledford Gap, turn right on FS 45. CAUTION: Turn right off FS 45 after 100 feet. This turn is at the corner of the grassy area and connects to an old roadbed after 200 feet. Climb along old road.
2.6	Reach high point (2760') where old road turns left, uphill. Continue straight ahead coming into a second old road after 200 feet. Follow old road, first swinging left into a broad cove, then right.
2.8	Cross a low ridgeline. Turn left, crossing an old logging road, which generally parallels the ridgeline. Continue to ascend along the northwest side of the mountain.
3.1	A shallow gap (2900') is 100 feet to the left of the trail. FS 45 is just to the south of this gap. Climb steeply.
3.2	Reach a clearing on the summit of Brawley Mountain (3027'). The fire tower is not open to the public. Views from the small clearing are limited due to surrounding vegetation. Camping is permissible here, but there is no water nearby. Continue on fire tower road to right of tower (FS 45). CAUTION: After 175 feet, turn right off fire tower road along top of ridge. Follow trail leading west, bearing left to south side of the ridge crest.
3.5	Begin steep descent along narrow ridge crest. Reach saddle on ridge crest, skirt left side of ridgeline and then swing right across ridgeline.
3.9	Cross level area on the mountainside near the base of cliffs. Swing back to the left and descend on graded trail.
4.2	Reach Garland Gap (2420'). There is an opportunity for camping in the gap with water 600 feet to the north. An All-Terrain-Vehicle/Motorcycle trail crosses the ridge in Garland Gap. This may make the campsite less desirable. Ascend on graded trail along north side of Garland Mountain.
4.6	Reach the high point (2640') of the trail on a northern spur of the mountain. Just beyond, turn right onto a woods road along the ridge. Continue along on nearly level trail for 800 feet, turn left (west) and descend steeply. At saddle on ridgeline, take left fork onto graded trail skirting the south side of the ridge. Soon enter an area damaged by a 1988 fire. This provides good views of the Toccoa River and the Blue Ridge to the south. Enter a young stand of dense white pine and follow old logging road downhill. Continue on a level course for 700 feet.
5.8	Reach the gap at Dial Road (1881'). Dial Road is a dirt road leading left to the community of Dial on the Toccoa River and thence to GA 60 south of Wilscot Gap. To the right, Dial Road leads to GA 60 near Morganton, GA. Straight ahead, Shallowford Bridge Road, also unpaved, leads 1.8 mi. to Aska Road at Shallowford Bridge. Follow Shallowford Bridge Road for 100 feet, passing under power line. In 100 feet, where the road curves left, turn right, uphill, onto trail. In 400 feet, cross logging road diagonally.
6.1	Leave ridgeline to skirt the left (south) side of the mountain. Climb gradually.
6.3	Regain ridgeline.
6.4	Cross the high point (2140') of the trail on the east side of Free Knob. Continue along level ridge crest.
6.5	Enter small, open area, and re-cross overgrown logging road. CAUTION: Leave the ridgeline at far end of open area, bearing left and following an old woods road on the south side of Free Knob. Continue to descend gradually along old road. Trail briefly leaves the road to follow a ridgeline before switching back to reenter the road at a lower elevation. Turn sharp left upon returning to the woods road. Follow this road downhill.

Mileage	Description
7.1	Reach intersection with Shallowford Bridge Road (1800') at the Toccoa River. Turn sharp right onto Shallowford Bridge Road. This road follows the Toccoa River downstream for the next 0.5 mi. with several good campsites between the road and the river. Be advised that the land on either side of road is private property beginning 0.1 mi. west of where the trail enters Shallowford Bridge Road. Camping (on Forest Service Property) is best done near where the trail intersects Shallowford Bridge Road. Follow Shallowford Bridge Road west to the northwest end of Shallowford Bridge (1774'). At the bridge, where a road continues straight along the river, turn left and cross the bridge (one lane, lattice truss, wooden deck).
7.6	At the south end of the bridge, reach Aska Road. Aska Road (paved, county maintained) leads left to Newport Road just south of the community of Dial; it leads right 8.5 mi. to Blue Ridge.

Trail Description - North to South

Mileage	Description
0.0	Leave Aska Road (paved, county maintained) at its intersection with Shallowford Bridge Road at the south end of Shallowford Bridge (1774'). Cross the bridge and turn right along unpaved road at the northwest end of the bridge. Follow road upstream along river for the next 0.5 mi. There are several good campsites between the road and the river. Private property bounds the road up until 0.4 mi. from the bridge. For this reason, camping is suggested near the point where the trail leaves the road.
0.5	CAUTION: Turn sharp left into woods, leaving road (1800'). Climb along old woods road.
0.6	CAUTION: Turn sharp right off old road. Climb along ridgeline and reenter road. Skirt the south side of Free Knob, ascending gradually.
1.1	CAUTION: Enter small clearing; bear right through clearing and cross logging road. Trail runs parallel to logging road, and enters woods just to the left of the road.
1.3	Reach the high point (2140') of the trail on the east side of Free Knob. Descend gradually along ridgeline.
1.4	Swing right onto graded trail, which skirts south of the ridge.
1.5	Regain the ridgeline. Re-cross the logging road diagonally, and in 400 feet enter Shallowford Bridge Road.
1.9	Turn left to follow this road under power line in gap (1881') to its intersection with Dial Road. Dial Road (unpaved) leads left to GA 60 near Morganton and right to the community of Dial and beyond to GA 60 south of Wilscot Gap. Enter woods on east side of Dial Road. Follow old woods road on level grade for 700 feet.
2.0	Begin ascent and take right fork. Climb along old road through dense, young stand of white pines. Turn right off road and enter area damaged by 1988 fire. Ascend along graded trail with good views of the Toccoa River and the Blue Ridge to the south. Reach ridgeline in saddle and ascend steeply.
2.8	Turn right on old woods road near level ridge crest.
3.0	CAUTION: Turn left from road and ridge crest and reach high point (2640') on the north side of Garland Mountain.
3.4	Descend on graded trail to Garland Gap (2420'). There is a good campsite in Garland Gap with water 600 feet north. The All-Terrain-Vehicle / Motorcycle Trail through Garland Gap may make the campsite less desirable to some. Ascend along ridgeline and then skirt the left side of the ridge on graded trail.
3.7	Reach level section on mountainside near base of cliffs. Cross ridgeline and continue ascent.
4.0	Enter ridgeline in saddle and ascend. Skirt just south of ridge on easy ascent of Brawley Mountain. Enter Brawley Mountain Firetower Road (FS 45) and turn left. Follow road 170 feet.

Mileage	Description
4.4	Reach base of fire tower on Brawley Mountain (3027'). There is a small clearing near the tower (no view). The tower is not open to the public. Camping in the clearing is permissible but there is no water nearby. At the east end of the clearing, enter woods and descend steeply along ridgeline. Swing left away from ridge near shallow gap (2900') in ridgeline. FS 45 (gated) is just to the south of the ridge at this point. Trail skirts the mountainside on a gradual descent. Cross old logging road, which generally parallels a low ridge. Turn right onto old woods road and follow it through a broad cove. Ascend, take right fork and then continue straight ahead on old logging road, which comes in from the right (uphill).
5.0	Reach high point (2760'). Descend gradually. With grassy gap visible below to left, turn left from old road, and follow trail 200 feet to FS 45 at edge of grassy clearing. Turn left along road for 100 feet.
5.3	Reach Ledford Gap (2620'). CAUTION: Turn left off FS 45 in gap and proceed along on level area through grassy clearing. Avoid old logging road out of clearing which leads to left of the trail and downhill. Ascend on graded trail. Begin steep ascent along the north side of Bald Top. Level out and then begin short descent. Here, in cove to left of trail, is an intermittent spring. If water is not at point closest to trail, try farther down the cove. Continue on trail into cove just below gap in ridgeline (2800'). A grassy clearing is just above the trail with FS 45 to south of this clearing.
5.6	Cross old logging road. Ascend gradually on graded trail, skirting the west side of Tipton Mountain. Good year-round views of Brawley Mountain with wintertime views of Lake Blue Ridge are at several spots along this rocky slope. Circle to the north side of the mountain.
6.2	Come onto the broad ridge crest. A good campsite is to the right and behind at this point.
6.3	Reach the summit of Tipton Mountain (3147'). Descend slightly along broad flat ridge crest.
6.5	CAUTION: Trail turns sharply left off ridge. Follow graded trail that descends gradually along slope. Enter cove and swing right, parallel to streambed.
6.7	Enter old logging road. A spring is 50 feet to the left at this point. Descend steeply along old road.
6.9	The descent becomes much more gentle where old road comes in from left
7.2	CAUTION: Turn left off old road, using steps. Descend along north slope of ridge. Cross under power line. Exit woods at north end of highway cut, cross culvert and turn right.
7.6	Reach GA 60 at Wilscot Gap (2450'). Parking is on the east side of the highway. GA 60 leads right 34.9 mi. to Dahlonega and left 12.5 mi. to Blue Ridge.