

Benton MacKaye Trail - Section 6

Shallowford Bridge (Aska Road) to Weaver Creek Road

9.5 miles

General

This section of trail runs west along Stanley Creek before turning north along the northern reaches of the Rich Mountain Range. Elevations range from 1774' at Shallowford Bridge to 3260' near Davenport Mountain. This section begins with road walking along the Toccoa River and Stanley Creek. It then ascends along footpaths on Forest Service lands past Fall Branch Falls to intersect the Stanley Gap Trail (formerly the Rich Mountain Trail). The combined Stanley Gap Trail / Benton MacKaye Trail skirts the east side of Rocky Mountain. After leaving the SGT, the BMT follows the Tennessee Valley Divide northwest to Scroggin Knob. From there it begins a long descent to the Weaver Creek Valley and Weaver Creek Road. This section is rated as "More Difficult" (moderate) for its length and several long, steady climbs (in each direction).

Access

There are two access points to the BMT along this section as well as unlimited access to the trail between Shallowford Bridge and Fall Branch. At either end of the footpath segment is an unpaved road, accessible year round with the exception of periods of severe ice and snow or immediately after heavy rains.

- Shallowford Bridge: The paved county maintained Aska Road intersects the trail at the east (south) end of this section.
- Fall Branch: The unpaved Stanley Creek Road leads to the crossing at Fall Branch. This road is known as Rock Creek Road west of Stanley Gap.
- Weaver Creek Road (Fannin County Road #31): The unpaved Weaver Creek Road intersects the trail at the west (north) end of this section.

Directions

Start from the intersection of the 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); turn right if traveling east, turn left if traveling west; go 0.1 mile to Old U.S. 76; turn left; in 0.2 mile, turn right on Aska Road; after 0.8 mile, turn right on Weaver Creek Road; pavement ends after 2.0 miles; 3.7 miles from Aska Road, reach Weaver Creek trailhead (Total Distance: 4.8 miles). Parking is either side of the road just before it narrows into Laurel Creek Road.

OR:

Continue on Aska Road for 7.9 miles from Old U.S. 76; turn right on unpaved Stanley Creek Road (store and restaurant on left); go 3.1 miles to Fall Branch (Total Distance: 11.3 miles). Limited parking is on the right beyond the bridge. Additional parking is in the graveled area 0.2 to the west.

OR:

Continue on Aska Road for 8.2 miles from Old U.S. 76; 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.

Shelters, Campsites, and Water

There are no shelters along this section of the BMT.

Campsites are not officially designated along the trail and in this part of the National Forest, camping is permitted anywhere that is not otherwise posted against camping. No camping is permitted on the private property, which makes up the easternmost 3.4 mi. of this section. There are no suitable sites along Fall Branch although one may find evidence of previous campers near Stanley Creek Road. Flat sections of ridgeline at 4.3 mi. and 5.1 mi. west (north) of Shallowford Bridge offer tent sites but no water. There is a good campsite at the old house site 0.9 mi. east (south) of Scroggin Knob with water 0.4 miles away. Likewise, the gap at 0.4 mi. provides a campsite with water 0.2 mi. away. The summit of Scroggin Knob is suitable for camping, particularly at north end of the summit. A good campsite with water is near the crossing of the north fork of Laurel Creek, 0.1 mi. east (south) of Weaver Creek Road. This site should be used before entering Section 7, as there is currently no camping allowed on that section of the BMT.

Water is available at the following points: the Riverside Restaurant and Grocery (0.3 mi. west of Shallowford Bridge) during hours of operation; from Fall Branch (below the falls, 3.6 mi. west of Shallowford Bridge, 5.9 mi. east of Weaver Creek Road); 400 feet east along a side trail (7.6 mi. west of Shallowford Bridge, 1.9 miles east of Weaver Creek Road); and at the north fork of Laurel Creek (9.4 mi. west of Shallowford Bridge, 0.1 mi. east of Weaver Creek Road).

In addition, Riverside Restaurant and Grocery (0.3 mi. west of Shallowford Bridge) at the junction of Aska Road and Stanley Creek Road offers a full menu in the restaurant and limited camping supplies in the store.

Points of Interest

Toccoa River (1774'): The walk along Aska Road offers a good view of the Toccoa River, a stream popular with floaters.

Fall Branch Falls (2200'): A two-tiered drop on a small stream is best viewed from the viewing platform at the base of the falls. Viewing after rainy periods increases the dramatic impact of the falls.

Rocky Mountain (3400'): Though the trail passes 200 feet below the summit, this wooded mountain is the most prominent peak north of Stanley Gap. The steep slope on the west side of the mountain offers wintertime views of Cherrylog 2000 ft. below. The BMT returns to the Tennessee Valley Divide and the western rim of the Blue Ridge just south of this mountain.

Scroggin Knob (2770'): This is the last high peak before the western Blue Ridge drops into the Hayesville Fault region. A good year-round view of Lake Blue Ridge is to the northeast.

Trail Description - South to North

Mileage	Description
0.0	From the south end of Shallowford Bridge (1774'), where Shallowford Bridge Road intersects Aska Road, follow Aska Road west (downriver).
0.3	Turn left on the paved Stanley Creek Road, in front of the Riverside Restaurant and Grocery. Ascend briefly, then descend.
0.9	Cross Stanley Creek. Continue on a generally westward course with Stanley Creek nearby to the left.
3.2	Pass between the barn and house of Warden Stanley where Stanley Creek Road narrows and chickens occupy much of road. Cross the wooden bridge at Warden Stanley's.
3.4	Cross bridge over Fall Branch (2000'). WARNING: Immediately turn right onto trail after crossing Fall Branch. Follow trail in dense forest with Fall Branch on right. Ascend trail, which is at times steep.

Mileage	Description
3.6	Intersect side trail, which leads right 200 feet to an observation platform at the base of Fall Branch Falls. CAUTION: This is the best vantage point for the falls. DO NOT try to climb around the sides of the falls. Water is available here. Next water is 4 mi. away.
3.7	Reach switchback. WARNING: The BMT turns hard left while an old road leads straight ahead. Follow graded trail.
3.9	Attain crest of ridge. Turn sharp right along ridgeline with views to left over old timber cut of the Rich Mountain Wilderness. Ascend steeply. Reach top of rise, descend briefly, and reenter hardwood forest. Climb steadily along ridge.
4.5	Intersect the Stanley Gap Trail. The SGT leads left 0.75 mi. to Stanley Creek Road and Rock Creek Road in Stanley Gap. Continue on the combined BMT / SGT by turning right. Skirt the north side of the ridge.
4.8	Reach the crest of the Blue Ridge in saddle. Ascend along graded trail on west (left) side of ridge to return to saddle on ridgeline.
5.1	Leave ridgeline, skirting east side of Rocky Mountain. Ascend steadily.
5.8	Cross Bellcamp Ridge. Turn west on trail along the steep north slope of Rocky Mountain.
6.0	Reach the high point (3200') of the trail where it rejoins the crest of the Blue Ridge. The wooded summit of Rocky Mountain (3440') is 500 feet to the south. Descend along narrow ridge crest.
6.4	Reach low point (3130') in saddle.
6.6	Reach the intersection of the Rich Mountain Trail. The RMT leads right 2.5 miles to Aska Road at Deep Gap. Proceed straight ahead on the Benton MacKaye Trail, ascending.
6.7	Cross high point (3260'). Descend, swing hard left on graded trail through cove, and return to ridge crest. Follow broad, poorly defined ridge through immature forest.
7.2	Reach old road at old home site (2880'). Turn left. Follow gentle grade of old road before descending.
7.6	Turn sharp right where side trail leads left 400 feet to water. Continue descent.
7.8	Enter gap (2630'). Old roads lead right and left out of gap. Ascend along ridgeline trail. Cross high point, make brief steep descent, and resume climb.
8.2	Reach wooded summit of Scroggin Knob (2770'). You will pass view to right of Lake Blue Ridge.
8.3	Leave ridgeline, skirting east and north sides of mountain and descending along graded trail. Return to ridgeline briefly on western spur of mountain.
8.5	Swing hard left, descending by switchbacks. Enter area of 1988 fire and cross point of side ridge. Note good views to left of Laurel Creek, Cherrylog Creek, and Boardtown Creek valleys with the Blue Ridge beyond. Continue long descent along graded trail.
9.0	Swing right from south to west side of mountain
9.3	Cross streambed in cove.
9.4	Cross the north fork of Laurel Creek and enter young pine forest. This is the last good water source before the valley crossing in Section 7.
9.5	Reach Weaver Creek Road (1920'). Weaver Creek Road (unpaved, Fannin County Road #31) leads right 4.3 miles to Aska Road at a point 1.5 miles southeast of Blue Ridge, GA; the washed-out Laurel Creek Road (Gilmer County Road #157) leads left 2.4 miles to U.S. 76 / GA 2, 5, and 515 at Cherrylog Baptist Church. This road is not recommended for passenger vehicles.

Trail Description - North to South

Mileage	Description
0.0	The Benton MacKaye Trail leaves Weaver Creek Road (unpaved, Fannin County Road #31) on the southeast side of a Forest Service property corner (1920'). Pass through young pine forest and turn left at top of slope.
0.1	Cross the north fork of Laurel Creek. This is a good water source. Begin a long steady climb of Scroggin Knob that continues virtually uninterrupted for the next 1.3 mile.
0.3	Cross streambed.
0.6	Swing left from west side to south side of mountain. Enter area burned by 1988 fire. Note the view to right and behind of the Laurel Creek, Cherrylog Creek, and Boardtown Creek valleys with the Blue Ridge beyond. Leave burned area and ascend by switchbacks.
1.1	Swing hard right onto flat ridge spur. Skirt north and east sides of mountain on graded trail.
1.3	Reach ridge crest with view to left of Lake Blue Ridge. Continue along flat ridge crest.
1.4	Reach summit of Scroggin Knob (2770'). Descend along ridge crest, reach low point, make brief steep ascent and then continue descent.
1.8	Reach gap. Old roads lead left and right out of gap. Ascend along old road, skirting south side of ridge. Avoid old road that forks to left.
1.9	Turn sharp left uphill where side trail straight ahead leads 400 feet to water. Ascend steeply along old road then follow gentle grades.
2.3	Reach old home site. CAUTION: Turn right off road and ascend through immature hardwoods along broad, poorly defined ridge crest. Follow graded trail that skirts the north side of the mountain through cove and then swing hard right onto ridge crest.
2.9	Reach high point (3260'). Descend.
3.0	Intersect the Stanley Gap Trail. The SGT leads left 2.5 mi. to Aska Road at Deep Gap. Continue to descend along narrow ridge crest on the combined BMT / RMT.
3.2	Reach the low point in a saddle.
3.6	Leave the ridge crest, swinging left to skirt the north side of Rocky Mountain. From this point (3200'), the wooded summit of Rocky Mountain (3440') is 500 feet to the south. Descend along graded trail.
3.7	Cross Bellcamp Ridge and swing right to the east side of the mountain.
4.4	Return to the crest of the Blue Ridge in a saddle. Descend along graded trail on right side of ridge to reach saddle and then leave the Blue Ridge for the last time until Big Stamp Gap (Section 1). Skirt the north side of the ridge.
5.0	Reach the intersection of the SGT. The SGT leads straight ahead 0.8 mi. to Stanley Creek Road and Rock Creek Road in Stanley Gap. (Sign may still refer to Rich Mountain Trail). Turn left to continue on the BMT. Make a gradual descent along the ridgeline trail. Reach low point and enter young pine forest. Ascend briefly then make long descent.
5.7	Turn sharp left onto graded trail. View Rich Mountain Wilderness to the right.
5.8	Reach old road. Turn sharp right and descend.
5.9	Pass side trail to left, which leads 200 feet to an observation platform at the base of Fall Branch Falls. WARNING: DO NOT attempt to climb around the sides of the falls as the platform offers the best vantage point. Water is available here. Descend through dense forest with Fall Branch on the left.
6.1	Intersect Stanley Creek Road (2000'). Turn left and cross wooden bridge over Fall Branch. The BMT follows public roads for the next 3.4 mi. Cross second wooden bridge on narrow unpaved road.
6.3	Pass between house and barn of Warden Stanley. Scatter chickens from road as you go. Continue along paved road with Stanley Creek at various distances to right.
8.7	Cross Stanley Creek (1780'). Curve left, reach high point, and descend.
9.2	Reach intersection of Stanley Creek Road and the paved Aska Road. Directly across from intersection is the Riverside Restaurant and Grocery. Aska Road leads left to Blue Ridge, GA. Turn right on Aska Road and proceed upstream with the Toccoa River to the left.

Mileage	Description
9.5	Reach Shallowford Bridge (1774') at intersection of Shallowford Bridge Road and Aska Road.