

## Benton MacKaye Trail - Section 9

### Dyer Gap to Watson Gap

**4.5 miles**

#### **General**

This section of Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) is the shortest in Georgia. The BMT descends from the western rim of the Blue Ridge to follow the South Fork of the Jacks River. The elevation on this section varies from 2500' to 2960'. Beginning at Dyer Gap, the trail leads northwest to the South Fork Trail (SFT), passing through several areas of timber harvest activity. Following the SFT for 1.6 mi., the BMT encounters only slight changes in elevation along the east side of the river. A long, steady climb to the northeast returns the trail to the Blue Ridge. The descent into Watson Gap completes this section. Management of this area by the Forest Service puts it in the "general forest" classification, and is thus subject to multiple uses. The BMT lies wholly within the Cohutta Wildlife Management Area. This section is rated as "Easiest" with the most strenuous climb near Watson Gap.

#### **Access**

There are four access points to the Benton MacKaye Trail along this section. Two are directly via Forest Service system roads, which while unpaved, are passable in all seasons with an automobile. The remaining two are indirect via the South Fork Trail. The access points are as follows:

Dyer Gap: BMT intersects Forest Service Road #64 (FS 64) at the south end of this section.

South Fork Trail from Jacks River Fields: BMT intersects SFT 0.5 mi. north of SFT trailhead on FS 64 at bridge over South Fork of Jacks River.

South Fork Trail from Jones Community: BMT intersects SFT 0.8 mi. south of SFT trailhead on FS 126.

Watson Gap: BMT intersects FS 64, FS 126, and FS 22 at the north end of this section.

#### **Directions from Blue Ridge, GA**

Start from the intersection of the Appalachian Highway (U.S. 76, GA 2 and 515) and GA 5 (at McDonald's); proceed north on GA 5 for 3.7 miles; turn left (at top of hill) on Old GA 2; follow Old 2 for 9.4 winding miles to the end of the pavement; continue on steep ascent for another 1.0 mile to reach Watson Gap (Total Distance: 14.1 miles). Parking is on either side of the road.

OR:

Continue from Watson Gap by taking the left fork, uphill; follow FS 64 for 3.2 miles along the Blue Ridge to reach Dyer Gap (Total Distance: 17.3 miles). Parking is on the right side of the road beyond the cemetery.

#### **Shelters, Campsites, and Water**

There are no shelters on this section of the BMT. The meeting ground at Dyer Gap Cemetery has an open sided shelter that can be used temporarily in an emergency. Here, emergency is defined as illness or injury; heavy snow, hail, or rain; or nearby and frequent lightning.

Areas not otherwise posted against camping are open for camping. Opportunities for camping abound along this section. The major restriction is the proximity of water to the prospective campsite.

Some known year-round water sources are as follows: stream 20 feet north of trail (0.5 mi. from Dyer Gap, 4.0 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (0.9 mi. from Dyer Gap, 3.6 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (1.1 mi. from Dyer Gap, 3.4 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (1.3 mi. from Dyer Gap, 3.2 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (1.7 mi. from Dyer Gap, 2.8 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (1.9 mi. from Dyer Gap, 2.6 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (2.0 mi. from Dyer Gap, 2.5 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (2.1 mi. from Dyer Gap, 2.4 mi. from Watson Gap); stream crossing (3.1 mi. from Dyer Gap, 1.4 mi. from Watson Gap); and stream crossing (3.4 mi. from Dyer Gap, 1.1 mi. from Watson Gap).

**Points of Interest:**

South Fork of Jacks River: The BMT follows the SFT along the east side of the river for 1.6 mi. This river goes through a variety of phases along this course. A pair of falls, each approximately 20 feet in height, are 0.25 mi. south of the BMT. The river has deep pools, beaver ponds, idle meanders, and swift, narrow courses along its length. For the most part, the river is just out of sight of the trail, but rarely out of earshot.

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

<b>Mileage</b>	<b>Description</b>
0.0	From the intersection of FS 64 and 64A in Dyer Gap (2870'), follow FS 64 west.
0.1	Turn right from road onto trail along broad ridge crest.
0.2	Swing hard left onto graded trail and descend.
0.3	Switchback hard right into cove.
0.5	Turn left, with stream to right. Pass good campsite.
0.6	Intersect the South Fork Trail (2630'). (The SFT leads left 0.5 mi. to FS 64 at the bridge over South Fork of Jacks River and the Jacks River Field primitive campground). Turn right on the BMT / SFT and immediately cross stream. Enter area of young forest growth.
0.9	Cross stream.
1.1	Reenter mature forest and cross stream. Briefly skirt edge of clear-cut.
1.3	Cross stream.
1.4	Cross streambed. Enter young forest growth in extensively logged area.
1.7	Reenter mature forest and cross stream. Circle through cove.
1.9	Cross stream.
2.0	Cross stream.
2.1	Skirt edge of clear-cut and cross stream (2500').
2.2	Intersect SFT. (The SFT continues straight ahead 0.8 mi. to FS 126, crossing the South Fork of Jacks River at 0.2 mi. and the West Fork of Jacks River at 0.7 mi.) Turn right on BMT, meandering through woods for 175 feet. Intersect old road and turn right. Ascend gradually along old road in cove.
2.6	Turn left on another old road, circle through cove, and ascend more steeply. Enter clear-cut with occasional views to left (west) of Cohutta Mountain. Climb along ridge, then skirt right side of ridge.
2.9	Enter gap (2740') on ridgeline. Continue on old road, skirting left side of ridge and reentering woods.
3.1	Circle through cove, crossing stream. Enter large clear-cut with views to north and west.
3.3	Leave clear-cut, cross ridgeline (2860'), and descend. Circle through cove and cross stream. Skirt edge of clear-cut.
3.6	Cross ridgeline and descend. Resume easy climb along old road.
3.8	WARNING: Turn left off old road onto graded trail. (Old road continues 300 feet to FS 64).
3.9	Descend to low point, then begin gradual ascent. Turn right. Shortly thereafter turn left onto crest of the Blue Ridge.
4.2	Reach summit (2960') of unnamed knob. Turn sharp left and descend. Curve hard right and descend steadily along graded trail on left (west) side of ridge.

<b>Mileage</b>	<b>Description</b>
4.5	Intersect FS 64. Turn left, follow road, and reach intersection of FS 126, 22, and 64 in Watson Gap (2700'). FS 126 (dead end) leads left to the Jones Community. FS 22 leads straight ahead to Dally Gap and the Tumbling Creek Community in Tennessee. FS 64 leads directly behind to Dyer Gap and to right 14.1 mi. to Blue Ridge.

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

<b>Mileage</b>	<b>Description</b>
0.0	From the intersection of FS 64, 22, and 126 in Watson Gap (2700'), follow FS 64 south. In 150 feet, turn right onto graded trail. Ascend steadily.
0.3	Turn sharp left. Reach summit (2960') of unnamed knob. Turn sharp right and descend along ridge crest.
0.4	Turn right, leaving crest of the Blue Ridge. Shortly thereafter, turn left and follow graded trail. Cross low point and make brief ascent.
0.7	Intersect old logging road. (To left, 300 feet, is FS 64). Turn right onto road and descend slightly.
0.9	Cross ridgeline and skirt clear-cut.
1.1	Leave clear-cut, circle through cove, and cross stream.
1.2	Cross ridgeline (2860') and descend into large clear-cut with views of Cohutta Mountain to west and the Jacks River valley to north.
1.4	Exit clear-cut and cross stream.
1.6	Cross ridgeline to skirt left side of ridge. Descend steadily through clear-cut with view to right (west) of Cohutta Mountain. Curve left on old road to enter cove.
1.9	WARNING: Turn right onto faint old woods road. Follow old road in cove with several descents and ascents on gentle grades.
2.1	Curve right crossing ridgeline. Turn left off old road and meander through woods.
2.3	Intersect SFT. (The SFT leads right 0.8 mi. to FS 126, crossing the South Fork of Jacks River at 0.2 mi. and the West Fork of Jacks River at 0.7 mi.). Turn left on the BMT / SFT.
2.4	Cross stream (2500'). Skirt clear-cut.
2.5	Cross stream.
2.6	Cross stream and circle through cove.
2.8	Cross stream and enter clear-cut.
3.1	Leave clear-cut and cross streambed.
3.2	Cross stream and skirt clear-cut.
3.4	Cross stream piped under trail and enter young forest growth.
3.6	Cross streambed then stream.
3.9	Cross stream (2630') and reach intersection of SFT. (The SFT leads straight ahead 0.5 mi. to FS 64 at the bridge over South Fork of Jacks River and the Jacks River Field primitive campground.). Turn left on BMT with stream to left of trail.
4.0	Turn right to ascend cove.
4.2	Switchback left and continue ascent on graded trail.
4.3	Swing right onto broad ridgeline.
4.4	Intersect FS 64. Turn left and follow FS 64.
4.5	Reach Dyer Gap (2870') at the intersection of FS 64 and 64A. FS 64 leads left (north) 3.2 mi. to Watson Gap and 14 .1 mi. on to Blue Ridge, GA. FS 64A leads right to Flat Top Mountain (dead end). Directly behind, FS 64 leads west to Jacks River Fields, the south side of Cohutta Wilderness, and Lake Conasauga.