

Tesnatee Gap (Ga. 348) to Neels Gap (U.S. 19/129)

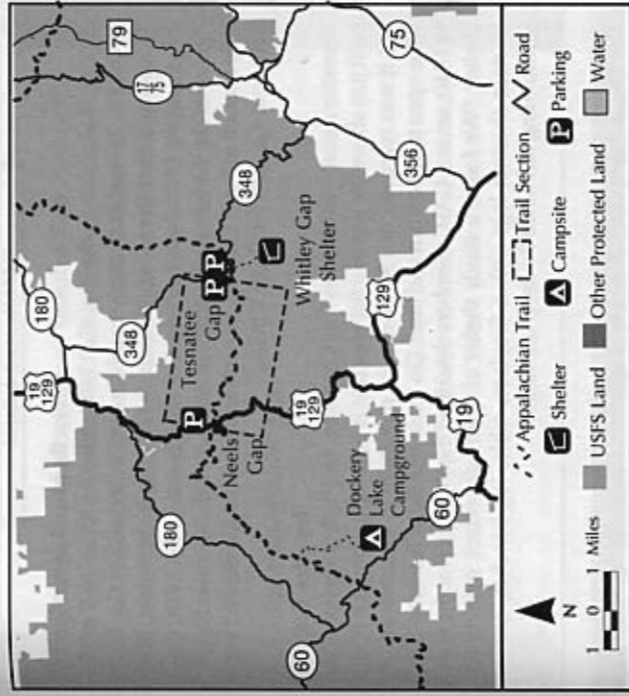
5.5 MILES

The A.T. in this section follows broad, rocky ridgetops offering excellent viewpoints, including rock outcroppings on Cowrock Mountain, Wolf Laurel Top, and Levelland Mountain. Before Ga. 348 was built in 1966, this area was considered the most remote on the Georgia Trail, and Trail builders called Tesnatee Gap "a delightful locality ... deeply entrenched in a beautiful hardwood forest." The section of Trail between Unicoi Gap (see Section Thirteen) and Neels Gap (mile 5.5/0.0 below) was the longest section of the A.T. in Georgia not crossed by a paved highway. The Georgia A.T. Club and interested others fought the building of the "road to nowhere," but to no avail. The road displaced the A.T. between Tesnatee and Hog Pen gaps, and the Trail was rerouted to cross Wildcat Mountain. The longest climbs are on the north sides of Cowrock and Levelland mountains. The entire section is within the Raven Cliffs wilderness area.

Road Approaches—Both ends of the section are accessible by vehicle.

Maps—ATC Chattahoochee National Forest map (with this guide); USGS Neels Gap and Cowrock quadrangles.

Shelters and campsites—This section has no shelters. Popular campsites are at Baggs Creek Gap (mile 1.3/4.2) and at Bull Gap (mile 4.4/1.1). The Trail corridor in this section lies within the Chattahoochee National Forest, and camping is permitted except where noted otherwise. Campfires should be attended at all times and completely extinguished when you leave a campsite.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Northern end of section → Parking is available in the gap. Ga. 348 leads east about 10.5 miles to Ga. Alt. 75 near Robertstown and almost 5 miles west to Ga. 180. To reach gap from the south, go north on Ga. 75 in Robertstown, turn left across the Chattahoochee onto Ga. Alt. 75, and, in 2.5 miles, turn right onto Ga. 348. From the north, go south on U.S. 129 from Blairsville about 8 miles to Ga. 180, turn left and go about 1 mile, and turn right onto Ga. 348 for about 5 miles.

Tesnatee Gap → *Tesnatee* meant “wild turkey” in Cherokee. In 1938, a shelter was built just above the gap in a flat area that is now right along the Trail, but it was removed in 1975 when its proximity to the road left it wide open to vandalism and litter. On a winter hike to Tesnatee Gap in 1940, several GATC members described their first look at the new shelter: “We found a sturdy shelter of open adirondack style, built of stout chestnut logs with a fireplace, table, log benches, and a surrounding rail fence (to keep out hogs).”

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

0.0

Northern end of section at Tesnatee Gap (elev. 3,138 feet) and Richard Russell Scenic Highway (Ga. 348), at northern boundary of Raven Cliffs Wilderness area. ■ SOUTHBOUND hikers cross parking area to continue on Trail, and ascend. (see Section Thirteen). ■ NORTHBOUND hikers ascend up switchbacks toward crest of Wildcat Mountain.

0.4

Pass through small gap.

5.5

5.1

N-S

S-N

The Logan Turnpike—The abandoned road entering Tesnatee Gap from east of the Trail was called the Logan Turnpike—one of the first toll roads. It was originally an Indian trail leading up Town Creek Valley through the mountain pass. First called the Union Turnpike, the road was constructed in 1821 and provided a “lifeline for commerce and transportation” between Gainesville and Blairsville, Georgia. The discovery of gold in the area played an important role in the development of both the Union Turnpike and the Unicoi Turnpike, as gold was hauled across the mountains to a mint in North Carolina. After the Cherokee were expelled in the mid-1800s, Major Willis Logan purchased extensive lands on the south slope of the mountains, which included the turnpike. The name of the road was changed to Logan Turnpike, and the route extended from Loudsville over Tesnatee Gap to Choestoe, a length of 7.5 miles. A toll gate and stagecoach stop/hotel were established at the Logan

homeplace. Toll charges varied according to the type of vehicle, the purpose of travel, and the number of livestock used to pull the vehicle. A stagecoach line, as well as wagon trains carrying merchandise back and forth, made regular trips across the gap. The road was used by mail carriers, “pleasure vehicles,” cattle drovers, wagon trains, as well as individual covered wagons. In 1917, the first automobile—a “snappy gray roadster” with red wire wheels—was driven over it by a woman from Atlanta. The Logan Turnpike officially closed in 1925, when U.S. 129 was opened through Neels Gap, but four-wheel drive vehicles still traveled the road until 1981, when the Forest Service barricaded it. The Richard Russell Highway was built over a portion of the turnpike north of Tesnatee Gap. Today, the piles of rocks and boulders along the sides of the road are reminders of those who kept the road open and passable by constantly removing the obstructing stones.

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Cowrock Mountain → The view from the rock overlook near the summit of Cowrock shows the valley of Town Creek gorge below, bound by the north-south ridges of Cowrock itself and Wildcat Mountain to the east. The view to the southeast includes the steep rock face of Yonah Mountain; to the north, Brasstown Bald, the state's highest mountain, with its lookout tower.

Neels Gap → Although it is now referred to as Neels Gap, the gap was officially named Neel Gap, in honor of the engineer who built the highway, W.R. Neel. Before 1925, it was called Walasi-yi Gap or Frogtown Gap. The highway was completed in 1925, "a 20-foot graded road with a ten-foot paved strip," considered at the time to be an engineering marvel and the first paved road over the Georgia Blue Ridge. It was repaved and widened to two lanes in 1949.

U.S. 19/129 → U.S. 19 leads 1,386 miles from Erie, Pennsylvania, to Memphis, Florida, generally following the Appalachians. The A.T. crosses it in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. U.S. 129 leads 582 miles between Knoxville, Tennessee, and Chiefland, Florida.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

N-S

- 0.8** Cross open rock face just north of summit of **Cowrock Mountain**, with good views of valley below and Wildcat Ridge. ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers turn sharply to right and ascend briefly to summit (elev. 3,842 feet). ■ **NORTHBOUND** hikers turn sharply to left and descend.
- 1.3** Cross through Baggs Creek Gap (elev. 3,591 feet), not a distinctive gap. A spring is located down an overgrown road to west.
- 2.1** Trail crosses Wolf Laurel Top (elev. 3,766 feet). An open rock face east of the Trail offers excellent views.
- 2.7** Pass to west of Rock Spring Top (elev. 3,526 feet). Spring to west of Trail.
- 3.4** Descend to Swaim Gap (elev. 3,450 feet).
- 3.8** Cross open rocky area on crest of Levelland Mountain.
- 4.0** Cross wooded summit of Levelland Mountain (elev. 3,942 feet). ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers begin 1.5-mile, 817-foot descent to **Neels Gap** and **U.S. 19/129**. ■ **NORTHBOUND** hikers follow crest of mountain.
- 4.4** Reach **Bull Gap** (elev. 3,644 feet). Blue-blazed trail to west leads downhill about 200 yards to spring.

S-N

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Vogel State Park →
See Section Fourteen.

Walasi-Yi Center →
Arguably the only building on the A.T. that the Trail actually passes through. The smaller building, to the west of the covered walkway that the Trail goes through, was originally a wooden structure built by the Pfister-Vogel Land Company, which conducted logging and tanning operations there in the early 1900s. The house was used as a tea room and for lodging. During 1933–34, the Civilian Conservation Corps built the main building at Walasi-Yi and venerated the older building with rock. They also built two log cabins behind the structure, added a 10,000-gallon, spring-fed reservoir and sewage system, and “developed” Walasi-Yi Inn, as it was called. The inn has been over the years a restaurant, an inn, a gift shop, and a hiker hostel. The state of Georgia owns the building and surrounding land (a gift to the state from the Vogel family in 1927) and leases it to concessionaires. As of early 2004, it is operated by Mountain Crossings at Walasi-Yi as a hiking store and a hostel.

Southern end of section →
U.S. 19/129 through Neels Gap leads east (compass-south) 19.0 miles to Cleveland, Georgia (on U.S. 129), and 22.0 miles to Dahlonega, Georgia (on U.S. 19). Cabins and a store are 0.3 mile east from Neels Gap. To the west (compass-north), it is 14.0 miles to Blairsville and 3 miles to Vogel State Park, where cabins, tentsites, showers, laundry service, and a supply concession are located (fee charged). Cabins are located 0.5 mile beyond Vogel Park. Mountain Crossings at Walasi-Yi offers showers, rooms, laundry, and other hiker services and excellent hiker equipment and supplies. For more information, call (706) 745-6095. Hiker parking is available 0.3 mile west of Neels Gap on U.S. 129 at the Byron Reece Memorial (fee charged). Hikers may either walk back to Neels Gap along the highway or reach the A.T. by way of a blue-blazed trail leading from the parking area to the Trail on Blood Mountain.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION



Walasi-Yi Center breezeway

5.5

0.0

Reach **southern end of section** and of Raven Cliffs Wilderness area at U.S. 19/129 at Neels Gap (elev. 3,125 feet) and the **Walasi-Yi Center**. **Vogel State Park** is 3.0 west (compass-north) by road. ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers cross highway and begin ascent of Blood Mountain (see Section Fifteen). ■ **NORTHBOUND** hikers pass through breezeway of Walasi-Yi building and enter woods, beginning 1.5-mile, 817-foot ascent of Levelland Mountain.

S-N