

## Woody Gap (Ga. 60) to Hightower Gap (USFS 42)

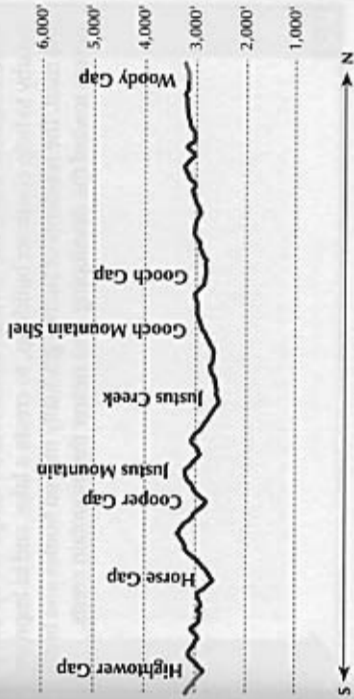
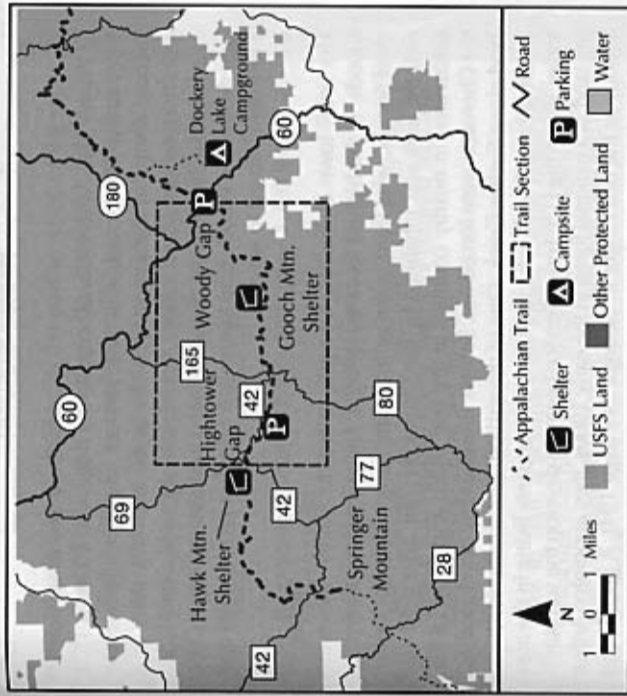
11.8 MILES

This section is, on average, the lowest on the Georgia Trail. It consists of long ridges that break gently to the north (or west) and more steeply to the south (or east). Almost all of the section south of Gooch Gap has been relocated over the years to remove it from a forest road that was built on top of the Trail in the early 1930s. Part of the present route, completed some twenty-five years ago, takes the Trail into a valley known as the "Devil's Kitchen" that once was the location of farms and communities. Part takes it to ridgetops that offer fine views. USFS 42, which parallels the A.T. for most of the section, affords access to the Trail at several points.

**Road Approaches**—Both ends of the section are accessible by vehicle, as are Gooch Gap, Cooper Gap, and Horse Gap. All except Woody Gap are reached by way of a sometimes rough forest road.

**Maps**—ATC Chattahoochee National Forest map (with this guide); USGS Suches and Noontootla quadrangles.

**Shelters and Campsites**—The one shelter on this section is Gooch Mountain Shelter at mile 5.0/6.8 south of Woody Gap. Camping is available at Gooch Gap at mile 3.6/8.2 south of Woody Gap and at Gooch Mountain Shelter, where there are tent pads. 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.



11.8 MILES

## SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

**Northern end of section** → At Woody Gap, where Ga. 60 crosses the ridge. Ga. 60 leads 15.0 miles east to Dahlonega, with most services, and 2.0 miles west to Suches, where, at the intersection of Ga. 60 and 180, there is a grocery store and a post office. A commercial campground is located near Suches. Parking (for small fee) is available in the gap. The gap, designated Woody Gap Recreation Area, has picnic tables and a restroom (closed in winter).

**Suches** → The small town of Suches, Georgia, called the Valley Above the Clouds, is the highest town in Georgia. It is named for Cherokee chief Suches, who lived in the valley in the early 1800s. For centuries, the area was inhabited by the Cherokees, but, after gold was discovered in nearby counties in the late 1820s and early 1830s, the Cherokee were forced out. Settlers subsequently developed flat land along Suches Creek. One of the earliest inhabitants was John, or Johnathan, Woody, who has many descendants living in the area today. When the U.S. Forest Service began to develop the surrounding land as a national forest in the early 1900s, they appointed Arthur Woody as the first ranger in Georgia (see page 194). A gravel road was built a few miles from the Suches settlement, and a ranger station was constructed on the road. Electricity and telephone lines were installed. Later, the Civilian Conservation Corps set up camp nearby to help construct buildings, to create a lake, and to improve the road. The residents of Suches gradually moved homes and businesses toward the developing area nearer the mountain crests.

## TRAIL DESCRIPTION

- N-S**
- 0.0** Woody Gap (3,150 feet) is the **northern end of the section**, 2.0 miles west of Suches. ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers leave small parking lot on south side of highway and continue around eastern slope of Black Mountain. ■ **NORTHBOUND** hikers leave parking lot on north side of highway and begin 1.0-mile, 587-foot ascent to Big Cedar Mountain.
- 1.0** Reach Tritt Gap (elev. 3,050 feet). **10.8**
- 1.4** Follow crest of Ramrock Mountain (elev. 3,200 feet), with views to south. **10.4**
- 1.5** Reach Jacks Gap (elev. 3,000 feet). **10.3**
- 2.1** Pass through Liss Gap, with large stand of poplar trees. ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers, watch for planned Trail relocation between here and mile 3.0. **9.7**
- 2.6** Cross abandoned old road. **9.2**
- 3.0** Turn in Trail. ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers regain ridgecrest. ■ **NORTHBOUND** hikers bear around western side of ridge; watch for planned Trail relocation between here and mile 9.7 above. **8.8**

## SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

**Gooch Gap** → Unpaved USFS 42 leads west 2.7 miles to Suches, via Ga. 60, with supplies and post office (0.4 mile to left on Ga. 60). To the west, USFS 42 leads 6.1 miles to Cooper Gap on the A.T. This gap is a popular area for camping. Water is located about 100 yards north of the gap on the Trail, east down a blue-blazed trail about 200 yards.

**USFS 42** → Until 1949, the A.T. generally followed USFS 42 to Cooper Gap but was relocated at that time to the more remote area away from the increasingly busy road. USFS 42 extends from Ga. 60 at Suches, 1.6 miles north of Woody Gap, some 30 miles west to the Doublehead Gap Road, which connects with Ga. 52 east of Ellijay. The Trail crosses USFS 42 in four locations: Gooch Gap, Cooper Gap, Hightower Gap, and at the foot of Springer Mountain. From Ga. 60, the distance to Springer by this road is approximately 20 miles; to Hightower Gap, 11.9 miles; to Cooper Gap, 8.8 miles; and to Gooch Gap, 2.7 miles; limited parking is available in the gaps.

**Gooch Mountain Shelter** → Constructed in 2001 by the Georgia A.T. Club, the shelter has a loft and picnic table. It accommodates fourteen. A privy is located behind the shelter along a blue-blazed trail. Water is also down a trail behind the shelter at a spring. Tent pads constructed in the area to the side of the shelter offer more privacy to hikers and help to protect the shelter area from abuse. This shelter replaces one built near Gooch Gap in 1960. Funds for the shelter were donated by the family of Kurt vonSeggern, a hiker who died at age 40. His sister, Dolly Hawkins, was the architect for the shelter. Next shelter: south 7.3 miles (Hawk Mountain); north 12.0 miles (Woods Hole).

## TRAIL DESCRIPTION

- N-S**
- 3.6 Reach **Gooch Gap** and unpaved **USFS 42**. Cross road, and continue. 8.2
- 3.9 Pass spring along Trail. 7.9
- 4.6 Reach shallow gap at north end of Horseshoe Ridge. 7.2
- 5.0 Blue-blazed trail to west leads about 130 yards to **Gooch Mountain Shelter**. 6.8
- 5.3 Cross Blackwell Creek (elev. 2,600 feet). 6.5
- 5.8 Reach crest of small ridge. 6.0
- 5.9 Cross small stream. 5.9
- 6.3 Cross Justus Creek on footbridge. 5.5
- 6.4 Cross old logging road. 5.4
- 7.1 Reach top of Phyllis Spur (elev. 3,081 feet). 4.7
- 7.4 Pass through small gap. 4.4



Gooch Mountain Shelter

## SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

**USFS 42** → See mile 3.6/8.2 above. To the north, USFS 15 leads about 6.0 miles to Gaddistown.

**USFS 80** → Leads 2.7 miles east into a restricted area surrounding U.S. Army Camp Frank D. Merrill, and from there about 10.0 miles to Dahlonega. Camp Merrill is home to the 5th Ranger Training Battalion and the mountain phase of the U.S. Army Ranger School, where small unit leaders are instructed in combat techniques and procedures used to move swiftly over all types of terrain, including mountains. The Special Forces camp, which has operated since 1959, was officially designated Camp Frank D. Merrill in honor of the commander, a major general, of Merrill's Marauders during Burma operations of World War II. The 2nd Ranger Company was reorganized and redesignated in 1988 as the 5th Ranger Training Battalion. A.T. hikers may encounter Rangers training in the woods above Camp Merrill.

**Hightower Gap** → In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Hightower Gap was "the center of hunting and fishing activities" in the Blue Ridge Game Management Area. A 20,000-acre game refuge, as well as a fish hatchery, was located just down USFS 69 from the gap, and a forest ranger station was in or near the gap.

**Southern end of section** → USFS 42 passes through Hightower Gap. To the east, it leads about 4.0 miles to Winding Stair Gap and about 7.0 miles to the foot of Springer Mountain. To the west, it leads about 3.0 miles to Cooper Gap. USFS 69 leads west, downhill about 2.0 miles to Rock Creek Lake, then about 15.0 miles to Ga. 60. No services are available at the Trailhead.

## N-S

## TRAIL DESCRIPTION

- 7.7** Reach summit of Justus Mountain (elev. 3,224 feet).
- 8.3** Forest roads **USFS 42** and **USFS 80** intersect in Cooper Gap (elev. 2,828 feet). Cross through gap, and ascend in either direction.
- 8.9** Summit of Sassafras Mountain (elev. 3,336 feet). ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers begin 1.0-mile, 663-foot descent.
- 9.9** Follow Trail through Horse Gap (2,673 feet). USFS 42 is visible to west. ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers follow gradually climbing ridgecrest. ■ **NORTHBOUND** hikers begin 1.0-mile, 663-foot ascent of Sassafras Mountain.
- 11.8** Reach **Hightower Gap** (elev. 2,854 feet) and **southern end of section** at USFS 42. ■ **SOUTHBOUND** hikers ascend, skirting north side of Hawk Mountain (see Section Seventeen). ■ **NORTHBOUND** hikers follow ridgecrest and ascend.



Trail near Hightower Gap