



# Woody Gap (Ga. 60) to Hightower Gap

## Section Sixteen

### 11.9 Miles

#### Brief Description of Section

This is one of the most interesting sections along the Georgia A.T. Here, the Blue Ridge is richly wooded, consisting of long ridges that break gently to the north, more steeply to the south. The Trail follows graded trails and woods roads throughout the section.

North to south, the Trail skirts Black Mountain on a contour and continues with relatively minor elevation change to Gooch Gap and USFS 42 (the Cooper Gap-Suches Road). Beyond Gooch Gap, the Trail follows the crest of Horseshoe Ridge, then follows abandoned logging roads through a deep valley known as Devil's Kitchen (2,500 feet). It then climbs Justus Mountain (3,224 feet) and descends to Cooper Gap and USFS 42. Beyond, the A.T. follows ridgecrests through the Blue Ridge Wildlife Management Area to Hightower Gap (2,854 feet).

#### Points of Interest

Although not on the A.T., the outstanding peak in this section is Black Mountain (3,742 feet), near Woody Gap. Rock outcrops on several peaks offer fine views to the south.

#### Road Approaches

The northern end of this section is on Ga. 60 at Woody Gap, about 5.6 miles north of Stone Pile Gap, the junction of Ga. 60 and U.S. 19, and 15 miles north of Dahlonega (on U.S. 19/Ga. 60).

The southern end, Hightower Gap, is located on USFS 42. This road is an unpaved, all-weather road that extends from Ga. 60 at Suches (1.6 miles north of Woody Gap) some 30 miles west to the Doublehead Gap Road east of Ellijay. The Trail crosses USFS 42 in four locations: Gooch Gap, Cooper Gap, Hightower Gap, and near Springer Mountain. The distance from Suches to Hightower Gap is

11.9 miles; to Cooper Gap, 8.8 miles; and to Gooch Gap, 2.7 miles; limited parking is available in the gaps.

At the junction of USFS 42 and 80 in Cooper Gap (Hightower Gap-to-Suches direction), a right turn onto USFS 80 leads about 2.7 miles to a paved highway and a U.S. Army Ranger training installation. A left turn onto paved road leads about nine miles to U.S. 19 just north of Dahlonega.

#### Maps

USGS Noontootla and Suches quadrangles, and ATC Chattahoochee National Forest map.

#### Shelters, Campsites, and Water

This section has one shelter, the Gooch Gap Shelter, located just off the Trail on a blue-blazed side trail about 3.6 miles from Woody Gap and 0.3 mile from Gooch Gap (north to south). A spring is approximately 0.2 mile south of the shelter, directly on the Trail. A second spring is located about 100 yards before Gooch Gap (north to south), off the Trail on a blue-blazed trail. Between Gooch Gap and Cooper Gap are several streams.

#### Public Accommodations and Supplies

No public accommodations are available at either end of this section. At the junction of Ga. 60 and Ga. 180 (about two miles north of Woody Gap on Ga. 60) in Suches is a store with a limited selection of supplies. Next to the store on Ga. 60 is the Suches post office.

No public transportation operates through Woody Gap.

#### Precautions

November and December are deer-hunting months in the Blue Ridge Wildlife Management Area. Hikers should exercise caution and wear blaze orange.

The Army Rangers use much of the Chattahoochee National Forest for training maneuvers. Hikers might occasionally see or

hear evidence of such maneuvers. Army Rangers are under orders not to interfere with hikers.

### Trail Description, North to South

Miles	Data
0.0	Cross highway (Ga. 60) at Woody Gap (3,150 feet), passing through picnic area on western side of highway; parking available; \$2.00 parking fee required (1998). Follow graded trail along steep, heavily wooded southern side of Black Mountain.
1.0	Enter Tritt Gap (3,050 feet). Continue just below ridgecrest. Ascend.
1.4	Reach crest of Ramrock Mountain (3,200 feet), with views to the south. Descend by switchbacks.
1.5	Reach Jacks Gap (3,000 feet). Begin long ascent. Reach top with views to south. Descend gradually, then more steeply.
2.1	Watch for Trail relocation between here and mile 3.0. Pass Liss Gap (2,952 feet), overgrown with poplars. Bear right around northern side of ridge.
2.6	Cross abandoned, eroded road. Ascend, bear left, and cross to left side of ridge.
3.0	Reach ridgetop, and begin gradual descent to Gooch Gap. About 100 yards before Gooch Gap is blue-blazed trail on left that leads about 200 yards to spring.
3.6	Reach unpaved forest road (USFS 42) in Gooch Gap (2,784 feet). To right, road leads about 2.7 miles to Suches, with supplies and a post office (left about 0.4 mile on Ga. 60). To left, road leads 6.1 miles to Cooper Gap and beyond. Cross road, and, in a few yards, reach blue-blazed loop trail that leads straight ahead to <b>Gooch Gap Shelter</b> (built by USFS in 1959). Side trail rejoins A.T. in about 0.3 mile. On Trail, bear right through open area.
3.9	Pass blue-blazed loop trail from the <b>Gooch Gap Shelter</b> . Spring directly on Trail here. Ascend, and swing around right side of the mountain.
4.6	Reach shallow gap (2,950 feet). Ascend slightly, and follow ridgetop.

5.0	Reach high point of Horseshoe Ridge. Bear right, descending. Leave ridgetop, and follow stream downhill.
5.4	Cross stream. Bear left at bottom of hill, and continue above old pastureland on right.
5.7	Cross Blackwell Creek on footbridge. Continue uphill through rhododendron.
6.2	Cross small stream.
6.4	Cross Justus Creek on footbridge.
6.5	Cross old logging road. To left on this road, it is about 0.5 mile to USFS 42. Begin ascent of Justus Mountain.
7.2	Cross over Phyllis Spur (3,081 feet), and descend.
7.5	Reach saddle (2,900 feet). Beyond, ascent is steep.
7.8	Reach summit of Justus Mountain (3,224 feet). Bear left along ridge, and begin descent by switchbacks. Viewpoint on left of Trail below summit.
8.4	Reach junction of forest roads in Cooper Gap (2,828 feet). Road downhill to left is Cooper Gap Road, USFS 80, which leads 2.7 miles to Army Ranger camp and 14 miles to Dahlonega. Road to sharp left, USFS 42, leads through Gooch Gap to Suches. Road ahead, also USFS 42, leads to Hightower Gap and beyond. Road to immediate right, USFS 15, leads to the Gaddistown settlement. Cross USFS 42, and begin climb.
9.0	Reach summit of Sassafras Mountain (3,336 feet). Continue along ridgetop, then descend.
10.0	Follow Trail through Horse Gap (2,673 feet). USFS 42 is visible to right. Climb to ridgetop. Follow along or near ridgecrest, which generally parallels USFS 42. Good views to south in winter.
11.7	Begin descent to Hightower Gap.
11.9	Reach road junction in Hightower Gap (2,854 feet). USFS 42 to immediate right leads back to Cooper Gap; straight ahead, it leads to Winding Stair Gap and beyond. USFS 69, between those two, leads about two miles to Rock Creek Lake, then to Ga. 60, about 15 miles.

### Trail Description, South to North

Miles	Data
0.0	From Hightower Gap (2,854 feet), cross USFS 42. (To immediate left, USFS 42 leads to Cooper Gap; behind to right, it leads to Winding Stair Gap; USFS 69, behind to left, leads about two miles to Rock Creek Lake.) Enter woods, and ascend. Follow ridgeline, which generally parallels USFS 42.
1.9	Reach Horse Gap (2,673 feet). USFS 42 is visible to left. Cross gap, and ascend.
2.9	Reach summit of Sassafras Mountain (3,336 feet), and descend.
3.5	Reach forest-road junction in Cooper Gap (2,828 feet). To immediate left, USFS 42 leads back to Hightower Gap; USFS 80, downhill to right, leads 14 miles to Dahlonega. Ahead, USFS 42 leads through Gooch Gap to Suches, about 8.8 miles. Road to far left, USFS 15, leads to Gaddistown settlement. Cross USFS 42, and enter woods to left of road. Begin ascent of Justus Mountain by switchbacks.
4.1	Reach top of Justus Mountain (3,224 feet). Continue on ridge. Descend to saddle.
4.4	Cross saddle (2,900 feet), and continue over Phyllis Spur (3,081 feet). Descend.
5.4	Reach old logging road. To right on this road, it is about 0.5 mile to USFS 42. Cross logging road onto another old road.
5.5	Cross Justus Creek on footbridge (built by GATC), and bear right.
5.9	Cross small stream. Climb slightly to top of small ridge. Descend.
6.2	Cross Blackwell Creek on footbridge (built by GATC). Continue above old pastureland on left.
6.5	Bear right, and cross small stream, then ascend with stream on right.
6.7	Reach crest of Horseshoe Ridge, and bear right, ascending.
6.9	Reach peak of ridge (3,004 feet). Follow ridgecrest.

7.3	Reach shallow gap (2,950 feet). Bear left around northern side of Gooch Mountain.
7.8	Bear left, and descend.
8.0	Reach spring directly on Trail and blue-blazed loop trail to <b>Gooch Gap Shelter</b> (up log steps) that rejoins A.T. in about 0.3 mile.
8.3	Pass blue-blazed loop trail from the <b>Gooch Gap Shelter</b> , and, in a few yards, enter Gooch Gap (2,784 feet). To left, USFS 42 leads 2.7 miles to Suches, which has supplies and a post office (left 0.4 mile on Ga. 60). To right, it is 6.1 miles back to Cooper Gap. Cross road, and enter wooded area. To right of Trail, about 200 yards down a blue-blazed trail, is a spring. Continue along gradually ascending ridge.
8.9	Watch for Trail relocation between here and mile 9.8. Bear to right of crest, soon turn left, and descend around northern side of ridge.
9.3	Cross abandoned, eroded road. Climb gradually back to ridgecrest.
9.8	Reach Liss Gap (2,952 feet), with stand of large poplar trees. Ascend along ridge. Reach top with views to the south. Descend.
10.4	Reach Jacks Gap (3,000 feet).
10.5	Reach top of Ramrock Mountain (3,200 feet), with views to south. Descent is steep. Continue just below ridgecrest. Ascend.
10.9	Reach Tritt Gap (3,050 feet). Continue on Trail around southern side of Black Mountain.
11.9	Reach Ga. 60 in Woody Gap (3,150 feet).

# Hightower Gap to Springer Mountain

## Section Seventeen

### 8.1 Miles

#### Brief Description of Section

The Appalachian Trail begins, or ends, depending upon one's point of view, at Springer Mountain. Prior to 1958, the terminus was Mt. Oglethorpe, but commercial development necessitated the relocation to a site within the Chattahoochee National Forest.

This section is within the Blue Ridge Wildlife Management Area, where hikers should exercise caution and wear blaze orange during deer-hunting season (November to December). Army Rangers use this section, as well as much of the rest of the Chattahoochee National Forest, for training maneuvers. Hikers may sometimes see or hear evidence of those maneuvers.

From north to south, beginning at Hightower Gap (2,854 feet), the Trail ascends Hawk Mountain but does not cross its summit. From there, it follows ridgelines, descending alongside Long Creek to Three Forks, where three mountain streams converge to form Noontootla Creek. From Three Forks, the Trail follows an abandoned road along Stover Creek through a magnificent stand of what are believed to be the only virgin hemlocks between Georgia and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

From the hemlocks, the Trail leaves the old logging road and crosses Stover Creek, then ascends to the summit of Springer Mountain, the southern terminus of the 14-state footpath.

#### Points of Interest

Outstanding features of this section are Springer Mountain, the southern terminus of the A.T.; the stand of hemlocks along Stover Creek; the rushing mountain streams that converge in the area called Three Forks; and Long Creek Falls, just off the Trail about 0.9 mile north of Three Forks. In addition, this section has profuse mountain laurel and rhododendron, which bloom in June and July.

Embedded in rock on the summit of Springer Mountain is a bronze plaque of a hiker, with pack on his back, ascending a mountain. This plaque was made by a member of the GATC in 1933, using another GATC member as a model. It was installed on Springer Mountain in 1959 by GATC after the A.T. terminus was moved from Mt. Oglethorpe. Two other plaques, which were installed in the early days of the GATC, are at Neels Gap and Unicoi Gap. The rock overlook on Springer Mountain allows a panoramic view of the Blue Ridge as it crosses Rich Mountain into the Cohutta Mountains to the northwest.

#### Road Approaches

The northern end of this section is Hightower Gap, at the junction of USFS 42 and USFS 69. USFS 42 is an all-weather road that can be reached from Dahlonega *via* the Cooper Gap Road (USFS 80). Drive north on U.S. 19/Ga. 60 about two miles from Dahlonega to a sign that reads, "Camp Frank D. Merrill." Turn left on paved road, which ends at about the cumulative 10.4-mile point at the Ranger camp. Turn sharply right uphill on graveled road (USFS 80) to Cooper Gap, at about 14.8 miles. In Cooper Gap, turn sharply left onto USFS 42, and continue to Hightower Gap, at 17.0 miles. (Caution: Those forest roads are generally passable, except sometimes in winter, but can be very rough in places.)

A longer all-weather route is *via* Woody Gap and Suches. Drive north from Dahlonega on U.S. 19 to junction with Ga. 60 at Stone Pile Gap, approximately 9.4 miles. Here, bear left on Ga. 60, cross mountain and A.T. in Woody Gap, and descend to Suches at 16.6-mile point. Turn left at former store on USFS 42, pass Gooch Gap, and cross the A.T. at 19.4 miles. Reach Cooper Gap and another crossing of the A.T. at 25.5 miles. Continue straight through gap to Hightower Gap, at 29.3 total miles from Dahlonega.

The southern end of the section, the summit of Springer Mountain, may be reached *via* two approaches from the south and one from the north. For directions, see "Approaches to the Southern Terminus of the Appalachian Trail," which follows this section. Limited parking is available at both ends.

## Maps

USGS Noontootla quadrangle and ATC Chattahoochee National Forest map.

## Shelters, Campsites, and Water

This section has three shelters. Hawk Mountain Shelter is located on the side of Hawk Mountain, about 0.5 mile south of Hightower Gap. The second is the Stover Creek Shelter, about 5.6 miles south of Hightower Gap and 2.5 miles north of Springer Mountain. The third is the Springer Mountain Shelter, located on the summit of Springer Mountain, about 250 yards down a blue-blazed and signed side trail. All three shelters have water sources nearby, but water on Springer Mountain might be scarce in times of drought.

Campsites along this section are available near the shelter on Springer Mountain.

## Public Accommodations

The northern end of this section, Hightower Gap, is located at the junction of USFS 42 and 69. It is well within the Chattahoochee National Forest and has no public facilities. Springer Mountain, the southern end of the section and of the A.T., is accessible only by foot.

## Trail Description, North to South

### Miles

### Data

- 0.0 Leave USFS 42 in Hightower Gap (2,854 feet) at junction with USFS 69. Enter forest, and ascend on graded trail. (USFS 42 leads back to Cooper Gap, Gooch Gap, and Suches; to left, road leads to Winding Stair Gap. USFS 69, on immediate right, leads to Rock Creek and then to Ga. 60, about 15 miles.)

- 0.5 Reach side trail leading about 0.2 mile to Hawk Mountain Shelter. Water is about 400 yards behind shelter. On Trail, water is down slope from flat area, or 0.1 mile south.
- 0.6 Stream crosses Trail. Continue on Trail along northern side of Hawk Mountain.
- 1.2 Reach and follow ridgecrest. (Watch for Trail relocation in this area.) Descend.
- 2.3 Reach gravel logging road. To left is Hickory Flats Cemetery Road, which leads back to USFS 58 near Three Forks. (Down this road about 25 yards, at left turn in gravel road, turn right along dirt road for about 50 yards to reach cemetery. Pavilion and picnic tables at cemetery may be used by hikers.) Cross road, and continue descent on graded trail.
- 2.6 At bottom of descent, Trail turns left onto old logging road.
- 3.0 The Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT), marked with white diamond blazes, and the Duncan Ridge Trail (DRT), marked with blue blazes, enter from the right. For the next mile, the three trails share the same route.
- 3.1 Reach blue-blazed trail to right leading to Long Creek Falls, a spectacular waterfall. Continue on Trail, which parallels Long Creek.
- 4.0 Reach USFS 58 and area called Three Forks, the convergence of three mountain streams to form Noontootla River. To left, USFS 58 leads 2.6 miles to Winding Stair Gap and USFS 42, which heads left to Hightower Gap. Cross road, and, in a few yards, cross Chester Creek. *Note:* The Duncan Ridge Trail ends at Three Forks; the Benton MacKaye Trail continues along with the A.T. a few hundred yards and turns left up Rich Mountain, recrossing A.T. in about 2.3 miles.
- 4.5 Cross Stover Creek, and turn left on Trail, which follows abandoned logging road and parallels Stover Creek. For next mile, observe the hemlocks, which may be a virgin stand.
- 5.5 Turn left off logging road, and descend briefly, crossing stream. Ascend log steps.
- 5.6 Reach old logging road; Stover Creek Shelter is approximately 200 feet to right. Turn left on logging road for about

25 feet, then climb series of log steps on right, and reach another old road. Turn left on this road for about 0.2 mile. Turn right up third set of steps, and ascend around northern slope of Rich Mountain.

- 6.0 Cross small stream.
- 6.3 Reach ridgetop, cross Benton MacKaye Trail, and descend gradually.
- 6.6 Cross small tributary, and, in a few yards, cross Davis Creek. Ascend.
- 6.9 Cross Benton MacKaye Trail again.
- 7.2 Reach parking area at USFS 42. Bear around upper (east and then northern) side of parking area, and follow gravel ramp onto USFS 42. To left, road leads 2.6 miles to Winding Stair Gap and continues to Hightower Gap. To right, road leads about 7 miles to Doublehead Gap Road and then to Ellijay. Cross road, and begin ascent of Springer Mountain.
- 7.9 Come to junction of A.T. with Benton MacKaye Trail. Approximately 20 yards farther is blue-blazed side trail to left leading to Springer Mountain Shelter (built in 1993) and spring. Water may be scarce during dry weather. Midway along shelter trail, side trail to right leads about 100 yards to large, open area with campsites. (Camping is prohibited on the summit.) Side trail opposite campsite leads to water and shelter.
- 8.1 Reach summit of Springer Mountain (3,782 feet) and junction of A.T. with blue-blazed Approach Trail from Amicalola Falls State Park. The rock overlook provides an excellent view of the Blue Ridge range as it crosses Rich Mountain and heads to the Cohuttas in northwest Georgia. In the rock at the overlook is a bronze plaque of a hiker, with pack on his back, climbing a mountain. This was installed by the GATC in 1959. On the edge of the rock overlook (above Trail register embedded in rock) is a plaque installed in 1993 by USFS identifying Springer Mountain as the southern terminus of the A.T.

## Trail Description, South to North

Miles	Data
0.0	The northbound A.T. begins at the summit of Springer Mountain (3,782 feet), at the junction with the blue-blazed Approach Trail from Amicalola Falls State Park. To the left at the summit is overlook with excellent views of the western range of the Blue Ridge as it crosses Rich Mountain and heads to the Cohuttas to northwest. Embedded in rock is a bronze plaque, approximately 14 inches by 16 inches, depicting a hiker with pack on his back, climbing a mountain. This plaque was made by a member of the GATC in 1933 and installed here in 1959. On the edge of rock overlook (above Trail register embedded in rock) is a plaque installed in 1993 by USFS noting Springer Mountain as the southern terminus of the A.T. Because of overuse and resource damage, camping is prohibited on the summit area. Continue on the Trail along northern slope of mountain, descending gradually.
0.2	Reach blue-blazed trail on right to Springer Mountain Shelter (built in 1993), with water available. Water might be scarce in dry weather. Midway along shelter trail, side trail to right leads about 100 yards to open area with campsites. Side trail opposite campsite leads to water and shelter. On A.T., about 20 yards beyond shelter trail, reach junction of A.T. with Benton MacKaye Trail (marked with off-white diamond blazes).
0.9	Reach USFS 42; to right, road leads 2.6 miles back to Winding Stair Gap and continues to Hightower Gap; to left, road leads about seven miles to Doublehead Gap and to Ellijay. To continue on A.T., cross road, and climb steps to gravel parking area. Bear left, passing information board, and bear right above parking area. Enter woods, swinging around southern, then eastern, side of knob on level trail.
1.2	Cross Benton MacKaye Trail.
1.5	Reach Davis Creek. In a few yards, cross a small tributary.

- 1.8 Reach ridgecrest where A.T. again crosses Benton MacKaye Trail. Begin descent along northern slope of Rich Mountain.
- 2.1 Reach stream. Soon, descend several steps, and turn left on old road for about 0.2 mile.
- 2.5 Descend series of log steps, and reach another old logging road. **Stover Creek Shelter** is located approximately 200 feet to the left on roadbed. Descend additional log steps, cross stream, and ascend slightly.
- 2.6 Turn sharply right onto old logging road. Within the next mile, ancient hemlocks might be a virgin stand. Continue on Trail along Stover Creek.
- 3.6 Make right turn, and cross Stover Creek.
- 3.9 The BMT rejoins the A.T. and follows the route of the A.T. for approximately one mile. Between Three Forks and the turnoff of the BMT, the Duncan Ridge Trail (DRT) also shares the same route. The DRT is marked with two-by-six-inch blue blazes.
- 4.0 Cross log bridge over Chester Creek.
- 4.1 Reach USFS 58 and area called Three Forks, the convergence of three mountain streams to form Noontootla Creek. To right, USFS 58 leads about 2.6 miles back to Winding Stair Gap and junction with USFS 42, which leads left back to Hightower Gap. Cross road, and continue on Trail up abandoned logging road, barricaded to vehicular traffic. This old road parallels Long Creek.
- 5.0 Reach blue-blazed trail to Long Creek Falls, a spectacular waterfall, to left of the Trail. In about 0.1 mile, the Benton MacKaye Trail and the Duncan Ridge Trail turn left off old road while A.T. continues (Watch for Trail relocation in this area.).
- 5.5 Cross small stream, and turn right, uphill, off old road through rhododendron thickets. Cross two old logging roads.
- 5.8 Reach graveled logging road. (Along this road to the right, bear right again off gravel road, and reach Hickory Flats Cemetery. Pavilion and picnic tables located here may be

- used by hikers.) Cross road, and ascend along ridge, following crest.
- 6.9 Bear left off ridgecrest, and skirt northern side of Hawk Mountain.
- 7.5 Cross stream, a water source for shelter ahead; however, stream may be dry during dry months.
- 7.6 Come to side trail leading about 0.2 mile to **Hawk Mountain Shelter**. Water can be found about 400 yards behind shelter. Continue on Trail, descending gradually.
- 8.1 Descend into Hightower Gap (2,854 feet) and junction of USFS 42 with USFS 69. (USFS 42 leads ahead to Cooper Gap, Gooch Gap, and Suches; to right, road leads back to Winding Stair Gap. USFS 69, on immediate left, leads to Rock Creek.) To continue on A.T., cross USFS 42, and enter woods.