The Appalachian Trail: Bridging the Cultural Gap
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2493

> Realizing that it would be poor policy indeed to brush upon the moonshiners unawares, I began singing in a very loud voice and unmusical voice...Suddenly I rounded a large holly tree and found myself almost in the midst of a huge distilling plant. Before me appeared kegs and barrels… Not a soul in sight. My ruse had worked and the moonshiners had discreetly cleared out…..I stepped boldly up to the still and placed a few fagots on the fire...by that act I had become equally guilty with them in making the liquor and could not report what I had seen...A hundred yards later, I called out ´That's all right fellows. You needn't worry about me.´ Somewhere down the ridge below me a cheerful voice answered: ´OK stranger, no harm done.[1]

In 1929, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) hired Roy Ozmer to find the route for the Appalachian Trail from Washington D.C. to Georgia. Although the northern route of the Appalachian Trail was assembled from pre-established local trails and maintained by eager volunteers, each inch of the southern trail from Washington D.C. had to be plotted and blazed. There were numerous challenges - physical and cultural. Ozmer's account of encountering moonshiners illustrates there were distinct cultural differences between northerners and southerners about how land should be used - should the land be used for business or pleasure - and who should be able to use it. Over the course of the next 8 years, efforts to build the southern route of the Appalachian Trail would be delayed by numerous cultural differences between northern urban outdoor recreational enthusiasts and rural southerners. The completion of the Appalachian trail in 1937 required trust building and cultural compromises between northerners and southerners.

The idea for the Appalachian Trail came from Benton Mackaye, who wanted to create a hiking trail stretching from Maine to Georgia to connect the northern and

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[1] Mittlefehldt, Sarah. *Tangled roots: the Appalachian trail and American environmental politics*. University of Washington Press, 2013, 51

southern halves of the country. He believed land preservation would help people living in rural communities, the environment, and people living in urban areas.

He proposed the idea for a trail during the Great Depression and as place to volunteer and relax, in the hope that it would boost the morale of the people living in the neighboring areas during the depression.[2] He also presented a hand drawn map of where the trail would be located (See Appendix 1). A trail would bring people together, "cooperation replaces antagonism, trust replaces suspicion, emulation replaces competition"[3] Although Mackaye had the idea, the Appalachian trail was created and run entirely by a network of trail clubs. In 1925, local clubs were organized under the Appalachian Trail Club (ATC) to provide for the development and maintenance of the trail. In 1968, the National Trail Act made the Appalachian Trail part of the National Parks Service, but a large portion of trail maintenance still comes from the ATC and the local clubs today.

In the 1920's, the people who were involved in establishing the Appalachian Trail had conflicting perspectives on the role of nature. Urban northerners saw nature as a place to relax from the stress of the city. Rural southerners saw nature as a place to live and work. Outdoor recreation activities, including hiking, were a past time of the wealthy upper class living in cities like New York.[4] Some of these urban dwellers owned several rural properties and their own hiking clubs. In the New York metropolitan area

[2] Maher, Neil M. *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2008. 47
[3] Mittlefehldt, Sarah. *Tangled roots: the Appalachian trail and American environmental politics*. University of Washington Press, 2013, 14
[4] Mittlefehldt, Sarah. *Tangled roots: the Appalachian trail and American environmental politics*. University of Washington Press, 2013, 16

alone, there were 75 different hiking clubs.[5] "There was a group of working class Germans who called themselves Naturfreunde and "practiced a mild form of Socialism". In the Bronx, the Young Men's Hebrew Association started its own hiking club for Jewish members. In Greenwich Village, a communist hiking club called the All-Tramp Soviet formed.[6] Hiking was an important activity for a diverse and wide ranging group of people in the urban northeast.

In the northeast, people saw rural areas as a place to recreate but in the rural southeast, rural areas were places people lived and worked. Southerners living along the path of the Appalachian Trail had an economic relationship with the mountains, rather than a recreational relationship.[7] As a result they were more cautious when allowing people to use their land. The Appalachian south had a higher amount of poverty compared to the wealthier north and contributed to a general distrust (See Appendix 2). There was, and still is, a different culture in the South. These economic and cultural differences caused conflict when building the trail.

The conflict became apparent when people from the north headed south to build the trail. In the north, landowners had a good relationship with local hiking clubs and were generally willing to let the occasional hiker go through their land. In the north, "Private volunteers with the Appalachian trail conference relied on oral "handshake" agreements with landowners. Because trail use was minimal and relatively local, most

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[5] New York-New Jersey trail conference, Vistas and Visions: *A History of the New York-New Jersey trail conference* (New York: New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, 1995), 2.
[6] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 6
[7] Mittlefehldt, Sarah. *Tangled roots: the Appalachian trail and American environmental politics*. University of Washington Press, 2013, 5

landowners were willing to have a few weekend adventurers cross their property."[8] The

volunteers knew the landowners, and knew the terms of the agreement. When the ATC

proposed a formal establishment of the Appalachian Trail, there was trust between the

landowners and the trail builders. Landowners knew that their wishes would be

respected and that their land would not be taken away from them. This strategy worked

well in the north, however, when northerners tried to bring this method into the south, it

was ineffective.

In some cases, it was because of the superior attitude of northerners. Since the

Civil War, people in the North saw themselves as better than the people in the South,

and considered themselves more wealthy or better educated. People from the North

thought they that knew about what the land should be used for and that they knew how

to create the best trail. This attitude did not please the southerners, and created further

distrust between the South and the North. An example of this attitude is seen in an

anecdote about northern trail volunteer and advocate Judge Perkins. According to the

pastor of the University Baptist church in Brookhaven, Georgia, who led an outing with

Perkins during his trip, "perhaps it was Perkins general attitude toward all things

southern that caused our little friction. He realized HE was from the North and HE was

rich… I tried to retain our southern hospitality."[9]

The differing cultural perspectives about the role of nature and differing social

and cultural norms between the volunteers from the North and landowners from the

South caused conflict while building the Appalachian Trail.

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[8] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 5
[9] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 49

In addition to the differing cultural attitudes that made building the trail difficult, the expanded role of the federal government throughout the south during the Great Depression created conflicts and complications when building a walking trail from Maine to Georgia.

Two New Deal era programs - the Civilian Conservation Corp and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) - radically changed the role of government in the lives of southern people. These two massive federal programs were not well received and led southerners to view the federal government negatively. Southerners resisted the creation of the Appalachian Trail because they incorrectly viewed the efforts to build the trail as a federal government program like the CCC or the TVA.

The Civil Conservation Corps (CCC), was one of Roosevelt's biggest New Deal programs, and arguably one of the most successful programs.[10] The CCC program built national parks, improved recreational land usage, created camps and planted trees. Roosevelt believed that the CCC would get poor city boys into the country, teach them skills that would help them get a job, and send home a paycheck.[11] It would also help the nation, giving people somewhere to recreate, and experience nature. Roosevelt set qualifications to participate in the program, as a way to help the people who needed it most. "Limit enrollment in the program to young men between the ages of 18 and 25

[10] Maher, Neil M. *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2008. 3

[11] Maher, Neil M. *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2008. 15

who were willing to send 25 dollars of their 30 dollar paycheck home to their families, all of which had to be listed on state relief registers."[12]

CCC camps were built in county, state and national forests. When a CCC camp was near the building site of the Appalachian trail, camp workers helped volunteers build the Appalachian Trail. The illustration in Appendix 3 shows a relationship between the location of CCC camps and the Appalachian trail. However, the CCC could only help build the trail in government owned forest, and not on private property, even if the CCC got permission from owners. Roosevelt did not want to show favoritism to some people over others.[13] Although the CCC and the government helped build parts of the trail, the presence of the CCC led to conflict later when ATC volunteers met with landowners to establish the trail on private property.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was another New Deal program. This program brought jobs to the region and provided electricity to the entire Tennessee River Valley. Like the CCC program, it also led to conflict when finalizing the Appalachian Trail.

In 1940, six rural towns were acquired and flooded to create Fontana Dam and Fontana Lake in North Carolina (See Appendix 4). The dam provided a source of electricity to residents in the Southern Appalachians and to the U.S. government for the

[12] Maher, Neil M. *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2008, 19

[13] Maher, Neil M. *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2008. 21

war effort. However, it took away the homes of the people living in the area. Nearly 1,300 families were displaced and 70,000 acres of land were taken.[14]

Another impact of the the TVA project and the CCC was to remove taxable land from economically depressed areas. "In places such as Swain County, Tennessee, home of the Fontana Dam, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the federal government purchased approximately 80 percent of the land base."[15] This contributed to many people in this area being distrustful of the government.

The CCC and the TVA created distrust between the local community and the federal government. When volunteers working to build the Appalachian Trail asked local people to allow them to build the trail through their property, local people resisted. They were afraid of their land being taken, but at this point the Appalachian Trail had no formal association with the government. The perception of an association led to distrust and was a barrier for those building the trail.

The conflicts involved in completing the Appalachian Trail came from a strong distrust the southerners felt toward northern volunteers and the the federal government. There were three main ways that the volunteers overcame this conflict. The first was to use hiking clubs and personal relationships to bridge the gap, the second was to convince southerners they were not a part of the government, and the third was working with local authority figures to gain trust. All of these methods were a compromise to the original tactics used by the Appalachian Trail Club.

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[14] "Fontana Dam." *Digital Heritage*, Western California University , 27 Oct. 2016, digitalheritage.org/2010/08/fontana-dam/.
[15] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 54

One compromise was to use existing hiking groups to talk to landowners. Hiking clubs in the North talked to clubs in the South and helped establish new clubs. This happened several times, and new hiking clubs were established along the length of the trail (See Appendix 5). This worked because people could relate to one common thing: hiking. The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club had a meeting with the Lynchburg Lions in Lynchburg, Virginia. After this meeting the Lynchburg Lions created a new trail club, the Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail club. This club was a success."The group became responsible for trail development from Rockfish Gap, across the Peaks of Otter and down through southwestern Virginia. In total, the new club was responsible for approximately three hundred miles of trail in Virginia."[16] This club and compromise helped build a large section of the trail (See Appendix 6), and they continued to work closely with the Potomac club. The Lynchburg Lions were a powerful local group that people trusted, and that helped to gain the trust of many landowners, and concerned citizens.

Another way compromise overcame conflict was to demonstrate separation from the government. Northern trail advocates needed to show that the trail was not going to harm the southern way of life. One way this was done was through scenic easements. A scenic easement allows the creation of a walking path but allows the owners to use the land for other uses like farming or hunting. When the Appalachian Trail Club was first created, they purchased easements in the north and used this tactic in the south.

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[16] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 44

People trusted that they owned their land, and that it could not be taken away from them.

Another compromise was building trust with well respected local authorities. In Swine County, near the Fontana Dam, there was violence and vandalism when the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) started to build shelters, and to mark the trail. The club reported it to the authorities, who were "reluctant to arrest local citizens on the complaints of non residents."[17] After another incident of rock throwing by gangs, the PATC resorted to local help. A "tough guy" by the name of Charlie Sisk was hired to help scare away the vandals. "Sisk was not only a talented mason, he was also well known in the area for recently killing a man in a drunken fight."[18] When the gang came back, they saw Charlie and a member of the PATC unloading their tools, "Mortar, trowels, and a couple of shotguns."[19] This scared the gang, and the PATC was not bothered again.

The PATC and the ATC used this technique several more times with success and was one of the most common ways to overcome conflict. The local connection built a positive perception of the trail. They also made connections with local leaders. ¨Avery worked with Judge Perkins to actively recruit interest in the trail from members of existing influential organizations - that could help champion the cause."[20] These two methods built trust and resolved this conflict.

[17] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 55
[18] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 55
[19] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 55
[20] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 64

Creating a walking path stretching over fourteen states required overcoming conflicts through compromise and gaining trust from local residents and governments. In some places, compromise was harder to reach, because of previous government action, or because of class and cultural differences. The key to compromise was building trust. Everyone building the trail had to gain the trust of people living in the surrounding areas, in both the North and South. Despite cultural and economic differences and division, northerners and southerners worked together towards one common goal. The story of the Appalachian trail shows that people can set aside their differences to complete a huge task, something that should be remembered today in our era of political division. All of this work was put in by volunteers, donating their own time to make the trail possible. The Appalachian Trail is one of few projects this large completed entirely by volunteers, and this hard work and dedication can be seen throughout the history of the trail. "The Appalachian Trail maintainer had to be one third trail worker, one third organizer of other trail workers, but three-fourths diplomat among the landowners."[21]

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[21] Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots,* University of Washington Press, 2013, 38

Works Cited

Primary sources

Goph, Earl. "Community Developments Investments (November 2013) - Appalachian Regional Commission: Improving Economies and Lives in 13 States." *OCC: Community Developments Investments - Appalachian Regional Commission: Improving Economies and Lives in 13 States*, United States Department of the Treasury , 13 Nov. 2013, www.occ.gov/publications/publications-by-type/other-publications-reports/cdi-newsletter/rural-development-nov-2013/rural-development-ezine-article-2-appalachian.html.

This article contained the map of the high poverty counties in the Appalachian region, and showed the contrast between north and south very effectively.

Lazarski, Beatrice B, and Sarah Mittlefehldt. "Interview with Author of Tangled Roots." 10 Jan. 2017.

This interview was extremely helpful to me, and Professor Mittlefehldt explained the history of the trail really well, and helped to explain the scenic easements. She really helped me to understand the history, and while I did not use her quotes in my paper, she made sure that everything was correct. She wrote the book Tangled Roots: the Appalachian trail and American Environmental Politics, where I got most of my information, so it was really helpful to talk to her and hear her explain it.

"Learn About Trail Clubs." *Appalachian Trail Conservancy*, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, www.appalachiantrail.org/home/volunteer/learn-about-trail-club

This site was helpful to me throughout my research, but the main thing I used it for was for the map of the different trail clubs along the Appalachian Trail. The ATC is the organization that fixes the trail, and their website has a lot of information about what the trail is like today. The website is mostly geared towards perspective hikers, but I used it to gain more background knowledge about the trail.

Secondary Sources

"Boating in Swain County." *Bryson City, North Carolina* , Swain County Chamber of Commerce, www.greatsmokies.com/boating.php.
I used this website to get the map of Swain County, with Fontana Dam on it to help illustrate how large the dam's effect was. This website is the tourist website for Bryson City.

"Fontana Dam." *Digital Heritage*, Western California University , 27 Oct. 2016, digitalheritage.org/2010/08/fontana-dam/.

This website gave really helpful information about the Fontana dam, and its causes, and effects. It also gave insight on why the government decided to build it. I used this source when writing that section of my paper.

Maher, Neil M. *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2008.

This book gave helpful information about the CCC, and the TVA. It provided a lot of interesting information about how the CCC affected the way the nation viewed nature. It also provided insight into the way that the program was set up, and Roosevelt's goals for it. This is where I got the map of the CCC camps along the Appalachian Trail.

Mittlefehldt, Sarah. *Tangled roots: the Appalachian trail and American environmental politics*. University of Washington Press, 2013.

This book is where I gathered most of my information, because she had mostly primary sources, and had walked the trail as well. She had good information about how the trail was created, and about conflict and compromise. She had the most in depth research out of any of my sources. This is also where I got the original Benton Mackaye map of the Appalachian Trail.

Bryson, Bill, and Jackie Aher. *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail*. Anchor Books, a Division of Random House, Inc, 2016.
I used this book to gain background information about the trail, and the people living alongside it.

Montgomery, Ben. *Grandma Gatewood's Walk: The Inspiring Story of the Woman who Saved the Appalachian Trail*. Chicago Review Press, 2014.

This book was the one that started my project. I read it and thought that there were some interesting conflicts and compromises here, and so I used this book as a starting point for my research. I also used the resources that he used when writing the book.

"Virginia Appalachian Trail." *AppalachianTrailTravelGuide.com*, Blue Ridge Travel Group, appalachiantrailtravelguide.com/appalachian-trail-information/va/.

This website is where I got the map of the Appalachian Trail through the state of Virginia. I had to make edits to this map to show the part that was significant to my paper. This website is geared towards hikers and has books, maps, and difficulty ratings.

Appendix

Figure 1
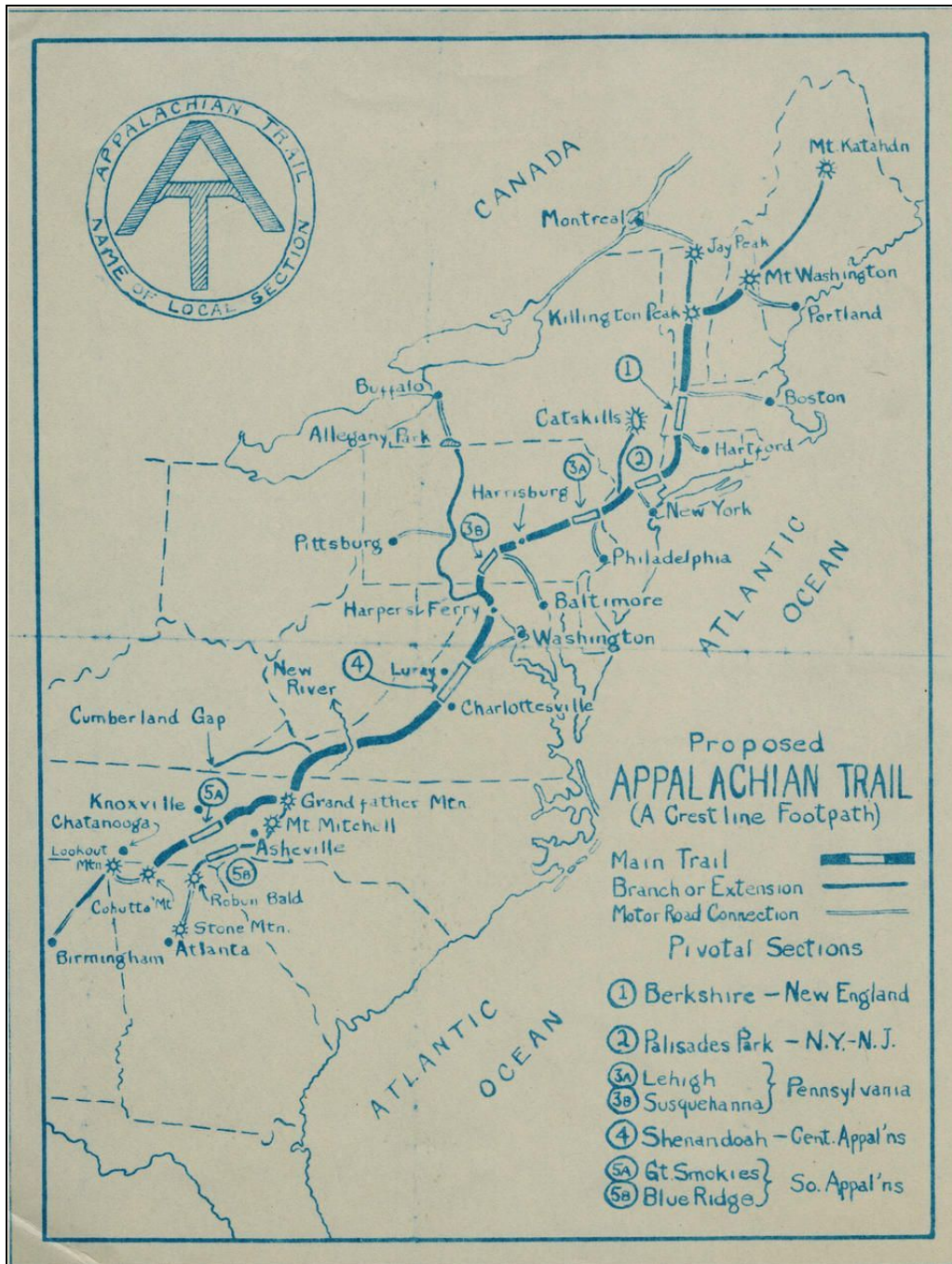
Figure 2

High-Poverty Counties in the Appalachian Region
(Counties with Poverty Rates At Least 1.5 Times the U.S. Average)

1960
295 High-Poverty Counties

2006–2010
110 High-Poverty Counties
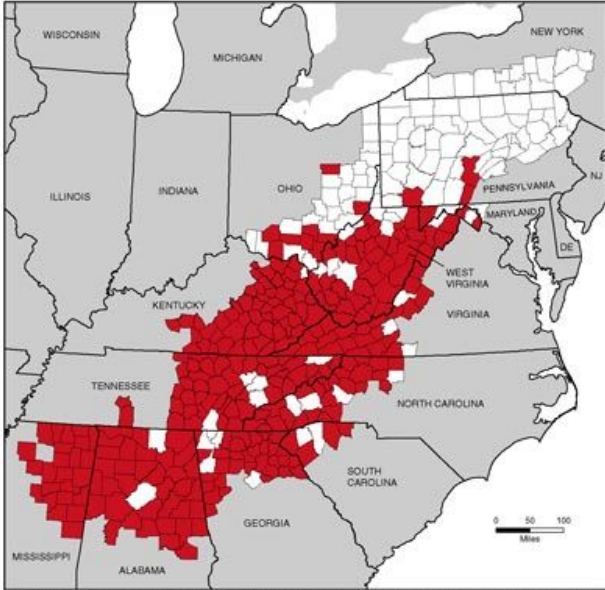
Data Source: Office of Economic Opportunity data from U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 1960.
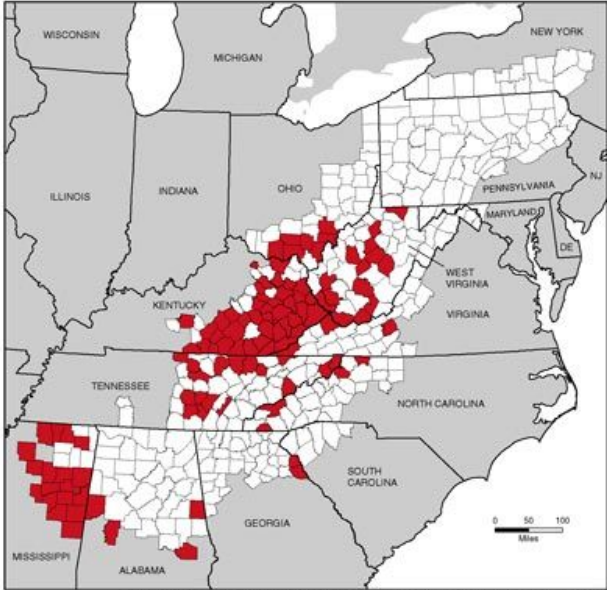
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2006–2010.

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6 (Potomac is north of maps end)

POTOMAC

WINCHESTER

Ashby Gap
Sky Meadows State Park
G.R. Thompson State
Wildlife Management Area
Linden

Prince William
Forest Park

George Washington
Birthplace NM

Fort Necessity NB

Friendship
Hill NHS

PENNSYLVANIA
WEST VIRGINIA
MARYLAND

Front Royal

Fredericksburg
Fredericksburg and
Spotsylvania NMP

MORGANTOWN

Luray
Skyland
Big Meadows

Shenandoah
National
Park

RICHMOND

CLARKSBURG

Harrisonburg

Skyline
Drive

Calf Mtn
2974ft
906m

CHARLOTTESVILLE

Waynesboro

Rockfish Gap

OLD DOMINION APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

STAUNTON

Reeds
Gap

TIDEWATER APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

WEST
VIRGINIA

The Priest
4063ft
1238m

Appomattox
Court House NHP
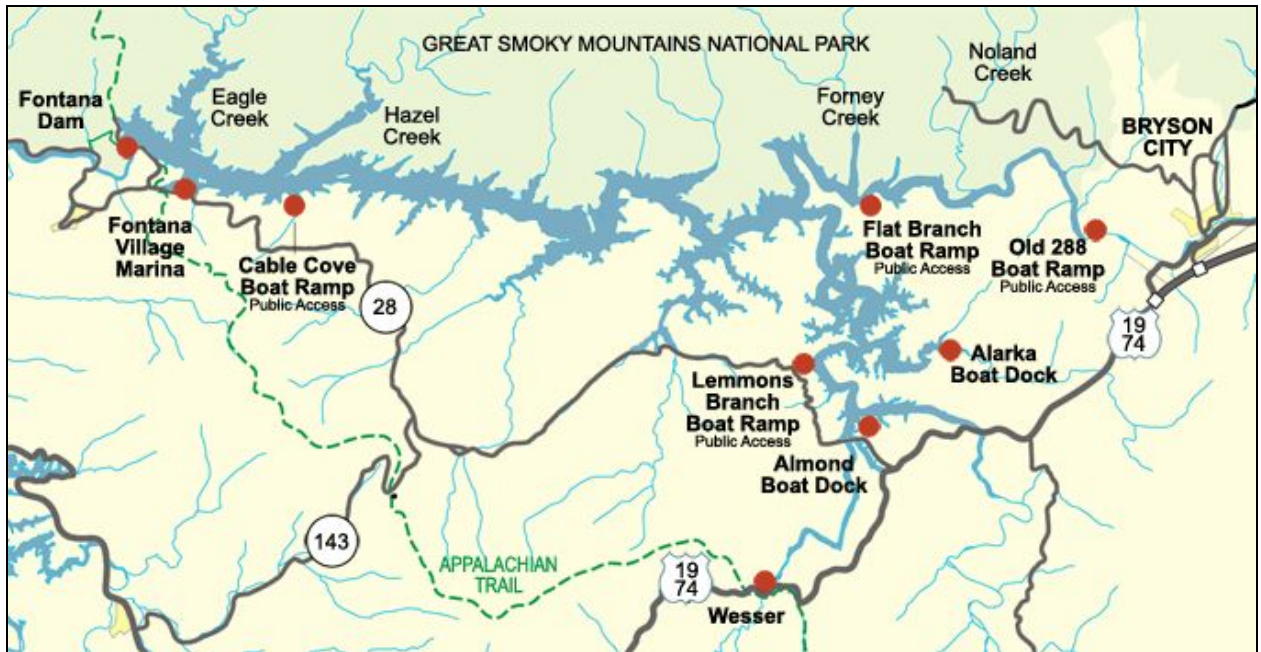
NATURAL BRIDGE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Lexington

Glasgow

LYNCHBURG

Lynchburg Lions hiking Club

Covington

Peaks of
Otter

GEORGE WASHINGTON NF

JEFFERSON NF

VIRGINIA

Blackhorse Gap

Daleville

Smith
Mountain
Lake

Gauley River NRA

New Castle

McAfee Knob
3197ft
974m

ROANOKE

Booker T. Washington NM

New River
Gorge
National River

CHARLESTON

ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

DANVILLE

Newport
BLACKSBURG

Bluestone
Lake

OUTDOOR CLUB AT VIRGINIA TECH

Bluestone
NSR

Pearisburg

ROANOKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Claytor
Lake
State
Park

BURLINGTON

OUTDOOR CLUB AT VIRGINIA TECH

Crandon

Bastian

PIEDMONT APPALACHIAN TRAIL HIKERS

Bland

OUTDOOR CLUB AT VIRGINIA TECH

Burkes
Garden

Wytheville

GREENSBORO

WINSTON-SALEM

HIGH
POINT

PIEDMONT APPALACHIAN TRAIL HIKERS

Atkins

Groseclose

Guilford Courthouse NMP

Marion

MT. ROGERS APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

Mt Rogers
5729ft
1746m

Grayson
Highlands
State Park

High Rock
Lake

KENTUCKY

Damascus

Blue Ridge Parkway

NORTH
CAROLINA

Boone

Statesville