

BACKPACKER

THE OUTDOORS AT YOUR DOORSTEP

The top 36 hikes on America's Classic Trails

Don't have six months to thru-hike one of America's premier long-distance footpaths? Then do the next-best thing: Hit the highlights with our working stiff's guide to the most memorable adventures along the **Appalachian**, **Pacific Crest**, and **Continental Divide Trails**.

By Michael Lanza





BEST OF THE
— **Pacific Crest** —
Trail

Passing through six North American ecozones on its 2,650-mile journey from the searing deserts of Southern California to the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, the Pacific Crest Trail is the most diverse of our long trails. It is also, step for step, arguably the most scenic.

> [Read more](#)



BEST OF THE
— **Continental Divide** —
Trail

In 1966, in his mid-80s, the father of the Appalachian Trail went before Congress to call for a backcountry path tracing the spine of the Rockies from Canada to Mexico. Twelve years later, the 3,100-mile CDT was born—our most remote and difficult long trail.

> [Read more](#)



BEST OF THE
— **Appalachian** —
Trail

In 1921, when Benton MacKaye first imagined a hiking trail that would follow the crest of the East's dominant mountain range, he envisioned a people's path, a forever-wild corridor and refuge for the millions living in nearby urban centers.

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Photo credit(s): Stephen Matera

BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail

Passing through six North American ecozones on its 2,650-mile journey from the searing deserts of Southern California to the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, the Pacific Crest Trail is the most diverse of our long trails. It is also, step for step, arguably the most scenic. The roster of sights reads like an inventory of America's natural treasures: Sequoia & Kings Canyon, Yosemite, the John Muir Trail, Mt. Hood, Mt. Rainier, the North Cascades. And that's just a short list culled from the seven national parks, 24 national forests, and 34 wilderness areas it touches. Where to begin? Right here, with our sampler of the PCT's top hikes.

1 SCENERY WITH SOLITUDE: Pasayten Wilderness, WA

There's really no such thing as crowds on the PCT, but if you want to ditch every last bit of traffic, hike the northernmost 40 miles. On this leg from Harts Pass to Canada's Manning Provincial Park (where thru-hikers exit the trail), you'll enjoy a vista-to-backpacker ratio that borders on the ludicrous. What's more, the half-million-acre Pasayten is big and wild enough to harbor grizzlies and gray wolves that wander across the border from British Columbia, plus the largest concentration of lynx in the contiguous United States. And unlike sections farther south, where extreme

vertical topography pushes the path off the crest, the PCT stays high here, riding the Pasayten's broader ridges and open meadows. Go light on rain gear: This area sits in the Cascades' rain shadow, which means you'll get views of Mt. Baker, North Cascades National Park, and the needlelike Picket Range—without their sloppy weather.

Local Wisdom Best month: September. Summer's bugs are gone, nights are cool, and the larch and scrub maple turn a vibrant gold and red, respectively, contrasting photogenically with the deep green of the spruce.

The Way The southern endpoint is Harts Pass on FR 5400. Get there by turning north off WA 20 near milepost 179, then left onto Lost River Rd., which becomes FR 5400 and leads 18.7 miles to trailhead parking. The northern endpoint is at BC 3 in Manning Provincial Park. (See www.pcta.org/planning/before.asp for info on hiking across the border.)

Photo credit(s): Stephen Matera

BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail

2 **BEST WEEK:** Alpine Lakes Wilderness, WA

When we asked PCT veterans to name their favorite thing about the 75-mile trek from Snoqualmie to Stevens Pass, the responses were as varied as they were passionate. Which made us realize that what distinguishes this section—most of which lies within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness—is its uniform excellence.

You want mountain views? You get craggy peaks in Sierralike abundance, horizon-hoggers like Rainier and Glacier Peak, and neighborhood giants like 9,415-foot Mt. Stuart. Flora and fauna? There are mountain goats, black bears, and veritable herds of marmots whistling amid columbine, Indian paintbrush, and tiger lilies.

You've heard about the harsh Cascades weather? No promises here, of course, but with the trail lying largely east of the Cascade crest, bluebird days predominate from July through September. And lakeside camping? As the name implies, this wilderness is full of



water—rivers, creeks, and a constellation of 700 lakes, many of them blessed with superb tent sites and swimming. Our experts' pick for best post-hike dip: Mig Lake, a shallow beauty that warms up by midsummer.

Don't Miss Photo ops on the east side of Huckleberry Mountain, where goats frequent a verdant, creek-incised meadow beneath a full-on view of Rainier.

The Way Start from I-90 at Snoqualmie Pass. Finish at US 2 at Stevens Pass.

TOP WEEKEND: 3 Mount Hood, OR

High on everyone's list of the PCT's finest attributes are its incomparable views of the great Cascade peaks. This 16-mile trek around the port side of 11,235-foot Mt. Hood delivers those epic vistas—only on this hike, you're also exploring one of North America's largest volcanoes. You'll meander through meadows teeming with midsummer wildflowers—beargrass, lupine, Indian paintbrush—and across canyons of crumbling earth that dramatically illustrate the power of volcanic mudflows.

You'll pass beneath glaciers whose roaring, chocolate-colored meltwater rivers



Photo credit(s): George Wuerther, Tomas Kaspar

BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail

churn downhill with dangerous power. A bonus: The PCT drops a net 2,520 feet from Timberline Lodge to Lolo Pass, making this a relatively easy walk. Aggressive hikers can do it in one long day, but then they'd have to skip the side hike up Yocum Ridge. About 10 miles from Timberline, an unofficial trail climbs 2,000-plus feet up Yocum to colorful meadows so close to the Reid and Sandy Glaciers you'll feel the frosty breath emanating from their crevasses.

Don't Miss A 2.3-mile detour onto the old Oregon Skyline Trail. From the PCT heading northbound, turn right onto the OST just after crossing the upper Zigzag River's two forks. The OST climbs higher on Hood than the PCT does, and it's more scenic, joining Paradise Park Trail 778 and crossing wildflower meadows that offer views of the glaciated upper mountain. Trail 778 rejoins the PCT about 2 miles beyond where you left it.

The Way From US 26 east of Government Camp, turn north onto Timberline Rd. and follow it 5



miles to Timberline Lodge. The Timberline/PCT trailhead is behind the lodge. The hike ends at Lolo Pass, on FR 18 (Lolo Pass Rd.).

WEEKENDS: NORTH ★
William O. Douglas Wilderness,
WA

Hike A good pick for new backpackers and fit families, the 29.5-mile leg from White Pass north to Chinook Pass is almost as spectacular but not as challenging as the contiguous Goat Rocks stretch. Amid steadily improving views, the PCT traverses relatively flat, lake-dotted terrain in hemlock forest with a colorful ground cover of azalea, lupine, and huckleberry. North of Crag Lake (mile 17), the trail climbs back to the crest, and the show begins. You'll cross meadows of aster, spirea, and blueberries; in late summer, pick a pint as you linger over views of Mts. Adams, St. Helens, and—only 12 miles distant—a gargantuan Rainier.

Insider tip: Camp at quiet Anderson Lake; it's just inside Mt. Rainier National Park, yet no permit is required.

Drive South end: From Packwood, take US 12 E and turn left .5 mile past White Pass. Go .2 mile to the trailhead near Leech Lake. North end: Chinook Pass on WA 410.

Photo credit(s): Stephen Matera

BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail

★ Goat Rocks Crest, WA

Hike In a state that's hardly short on splendor, Goat Rocks may be the PCT's aesthetic high point. For half of the 30 miles between White Pass and Walupt Lake, the path straddles a 7,000-foot ridge, affording pinup-quality panoramas of Rainier, Adams, and St. Helens. The scenery closer at hand doesn't suck, either: You'll cross Cispus Basin, where streams plunge off cliffs amid fireweed, lupine, and pearly everlasting; and Snowgrass Flats, carpeted in its namesake puffy white flowers. For more waterfalls and wildflowers, camp at McCall Basin, .5 mile off the PCT via the old Cascade Crest Trail. Until mid-July, you might need an ice axe and crampons for snow crossings, especially on the Packwood Glacier.

Drive Start: On US 12, 1 mile east of White Pass. End: From US 12, turn south between mileposts 128 and 129 onto FR 21. Turn left onto FR 2160 after 20 miles. Go 5 miles; park at Walupt Lake. The PCT is 4.5 miles up the Nannie Ridge Trail.



Sky Lakes Wilderness, OR ★

Hike Hundreds of lakes dot a 6,000-foot plateau on this 33.4-mile leg between Sevenmile Trail 3703 and OR 140. While most of the route is in a quiet conifer forest, a few spots open up to head-spinning views. The best: the string of volcanoes visible from 9,495-foot Mt. McLoughlin (via a 3.5-mile side trail) and 7,582-foot Devils Peak (via a .5-mile spur). Ditch the PCT in two spots for more-scenic parallel trails. One is Red Lake Trail 987, which leads to secluded campsites above Island and Dee Lakes; the other is Sky Lakes Trail 3762. And add a day or two for a side loop on the Isherwood Trail to fish for rainbows at Lake Notasha, swim in Elizabeth and Isherwood Lakes, and camp above Heavenly Twin Lake. Late summer has fewer bugs and more ripe huckleberries.

Drive Sevenmile trailhead (1.8-mile hike to PCT): In Fort Klamath, go west on Nicholson Rd., then right 5.5 miles on FR 3334. End: Park on OR 140 east of Fish Lake.

4 BEST DAYHIKE: Sonora Pass, CA

Getting PCT cognoscenti to agree on the

Photo credit(s): Tomas Kaspar



BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail



5 **INSIDER TIPS**
1 2 3 4 5
Click number to view tip

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 Backpacker's Best of the Pacific Crest Trail (ISBN 978-1-57902-638-0) is available from Backpacker's Best at www.backpackersbest.com.
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trail's top dayhike might seem like a Sisyphean effort, but there's surprising consensus on the 8-mile walk from 9,628-foot Sonora Pass south to Leavitt Lake Pass. Here, the PCT straddles a windswept ridge high above treeline, with 100-mile Sierra views. In the foreground, shimmering alpine lakes dot glacial cirques among towering cliffs and hillsides bursting with lupine, green gentian, and other wildflowers. Gnarled whitebark pines claw the air in mute testimony to their own staying power. And off in the distance, in every direction, are regal stone giants. On a good day, you'll see Mts. Conness and Lyell in Yosemite. Cap off your hike with the half-mile scramble up 11,570-foot Leavitt Peak, leaving

the PCT at 10,880 feet on the peak's east shoulder. Then, to reach your car at Leavitt Lake, descend 1.7 miles on an old, closed jeep track called Horse Meadow Road, which is 8.1 miles south of Sonora Pass near 10,640-foot Leavitt Lake Pass.

Local Wisdom Create a shorter, partial loop back to Sonora Pass by linking Latopie, Koenig, and Leavitt Lakes via cross-country routes.

The Way Sonora Pass is 35 miles east of Pinecrest on CA 108. To leave a vehicle at Leavitt Lake, drive 3.8 miles east of Sonora Pass on CA 108, then turn right onto Leavitt Lake Rd., which climbs 3 steep, deeply rutted miles to the lake. (Walk or bike this last stretch if you don't have 4WD.)

BEST MONTH: **5**
High Sierra, CA

Some things are so inevitable there's no sense disputing them: death, taxes, and the unrivaled beauty of the Sierra. Which is why every hiker's life list should include the 270 miles between Mt. Whitney and Sonora Pass. Yes, it may take a month, but that's a trivial sacrifice to make for the most unrelenting wilderness eye candy you'll ever feast on. Following the John Muir Trail much of the way, the PCT rambles through dozens of scenes suitable for framing—13,000- and 14,000-foot granite skyscrapers, canyons a mile deep, and thousands of lakes in beds of polished rock. You'll walk the longest strip of roadless trail

Photo credit(s): William Neil & Larry Ulrich

BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail

in the nation and bump into civilization just twice. The best campsite is ... virtually anywhere, though an enduringly classic spot to pitch nylon is Vidette Meadow, below the soaring Kearsarge Pinnacles. If you absolutely can't spare more than a week, knock off the 76 miles from Tuolumne

Meadows to Sonora Pass; here, the PCT ventures beyond the popular JMT into remote northern Yosemite and the Emigrant Wilderness. And leave your umbrella at home: The Sierra in summer is reliably sunny and mild.

LOCAL WISDOM Flatlanders should hike this stretch north to south to acclimatize before reaching the higher elevations of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.

The Way Sonora Pass is 35 miles east of Pinecrest on CA 108. The Whitney Portal trailhead is at the end of Whitney Portal Rd., 13 miles west of US 395.

6 MOST DIVERSE:

San Jacinto Mountains, CA



The best place to experience the PCT's notorious elevation changes is on the 55-mile traverse of the San Jacintos. From the 10,804-foot top of Mt. San Jacinto, you'll descend almost 9,600 feet in about 20 miles, dropping through all six of California's life zones. In two or three days, you'll go from a barren alpine summit to forests of white fir, lodgepole pine, and western white pine to a scrubby desert of chaparral and shaggy Mojave yucca—the biotic equivalent to walking from Alaska to Death Valley. Following a long ridge, this traverse features high-mountain views of rugged side canyons, the cliffs of rock-climbing mecca Tahquitz Rock, Joshua Tree National Park, and Southern California's highest peak, 11,499-foot San Geronio. Tagging Mt. San Jacinto's summit requires a detour off the PCT via the Wellmans Cienega and San Jacinto Peak Trails (a distance comparable to the PCT stretch you'll miss). The payoff: views stretching into Nevada and Mexico, and to the Pacific..

Local Wisdom Hike northbound to knock 3,200

Photo credit(s): Thomas Hallstein

BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail

feet off your climb. The best campsites are on side trails: Cedar Spring, a mile north via Cedar Spring Trail 4E17; and Little Tahquitz Valley, .3 mile north on the Tahquitz Valley Trail.

The Way The endpoints are at Pines-to-Palms Highway (CA 74) just west of Santa Rosa Summit and Snow Canyon Road just south of I-10 near San Geronio Pass.

★ WEEKENDS: SOUTH Marble Mountain Wilderness, CA

Hike Sierra scenery without Sierra traffic is the lure of this 18-mile loop. Starting beneath Douglas fir and bigleaf maple on the Canyon Creek Trail, you'll climb into the very alpine Sky High Lakes Basin. Views expand as you approach the PCT junction, situated 7 miles from the trailhead on a ridgetop at 6,400 feet. Hike the PCT northbound, then turn northwest on the Marble Rim Trail, ascending an open ridge of light-colored marble for less than a mile. A short off-trail section brings you to Marble Mountain's

6,880-foot summit and exquisite views south from 1,000-foot cliffs to the Trinity Alps and north to the dark hulk of Black Mountain. Backtrack to the PCT and hike south 1.4 miles to the Shadow Lake Trail and the hike's most spectacular campsite—perched at cliff's edge hundreds of feet above Sky High Lakes Basin. Then it's just .3 mile south on the PCT to a left turn down Red Rock Valley to the trailhead.

Drive From Fort Jones on CA 3, turn west onto Scott River Rd. and follow it 13.4 miles to Indian Scotty Campground. Turn left onto FR 44N45, bear left at an immediate fork, and continue 6.8 miles to its end.

★ Mokelumne Wilderness, CA ★

Hike Yosemite this ain't. Here in the northern Sierra, you leave the ubiquitous granite behind for a surreal landscape of volcanic plugs, lava flows, and colorful pinnacles. The geologic peculiarities begin in Raymond Meadows, which is a few miles north of Ebbetts Pass, the starting point of this 17.7-mile, south-north traverse. You'll walk past innumerable bizarre formations scattered between 8,000 and 9,000 feet, across country intermittently vegetated with sagebrush or pine and hemlock. The often-faint trail enhances your sense of remoteness. The most soul-stirring scene:

Photo credit(s): Justin Bailie, Stephen Matera

BEST OF THE — Pacific Crest — Trail

From 8,650 feet on the ridge northeast of Reynolds Peak, you'll gaze north at a massive, perfectly symmetrical rock dome across the Eagle Creek Valley, and beyond it, cathedral-like Peak 9700. Camp at Raymond Lake, reached by a .7-mile spur midway through this hike, for a stunning show of dawn light.

Drive Start at CA 4 immediately east of Ebbetts Pass. End at Blue Lakes Rd. From CA 88 in Hope Valley, turn south onto Blue Lakes Rd. and follow it to the PCT, crossing just before the road descends to Lower Blue Lake.

★ Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, CA

Hike California's largest state park is hot, almost shadeless, and waterless for the entire 23.8-mile leg of the PCT that traverses the San Felipe Hills. But if you can handle

the difficulties—including an enormous load of water—the desert will reward your pack-mule toughness. The open terrain offers constantly changing views of the myriad ridges and gullies defining these hills.

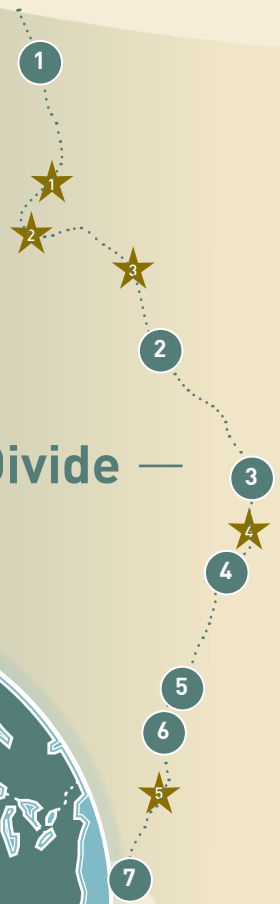
Beyond the sprawling 600,000 acre park, you'll see San Ysidro Mountain across the Montezuma Valley, and the higher, tantalizingly green Volcan Mountains. Look for elusive bighorn sheep, and be ready to encounter barrel cactus, agave, cholla, sparse scrub oak, juniper, dense chaparral, and "forests" of ocotillo shrubs, which grow in single stalks 10 to 15 feet tall and bloom in spring with flaming-red flowers. At elevations from 2,200 to 4,400 feet, this hike is best done from fall through early spring. Start the hot ascent of Grapevine Mountain at dawn. Wildflowers bloom from January through March.

Drive Start at CA 78 in the San Felipe Valley, immediately east of CA S2 and 12.5 miles east of Julian. End at Montezuma Valley Road S22, 4.5 miles west of Ranchita.



Photo credit(s): William Neil & Larry Ulrich, Thomas Hallstein

BEST OF THE
— Continental Divide —
Trail



Benton MacKaye just couldn't give it a rest. In 1966, in his mid-80s, the father of the Appalachian Trail went before Congress to call for a backcountry path tracing the spine of the Rockies from Canada to Mexico. Twelve years later, the 3,100-mile CDT was born. Our most remote and difficult long trail, it poses route-finding, elevation, and weather challenges, but the payoff is a backpacking experience of unrivaled beauty and purity.

1 MOST SCENIC:
**Glacier National Park and
Bob Marshall Wilderness, MT**

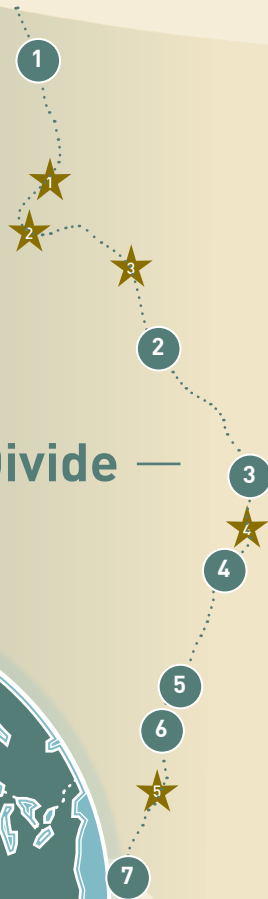
BACKPACKER readers consistently vote Glacier their favorite park, and they get no quibble from us. Fact is, there's no prettier length of the CDT than the 300-and-change miles through Glacier and the sprawling, irrepressibly wild Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. But beyond the eye candy, this hike may be the quintessential CDT experience. Among the few remaining intact ecosystems in the Lower 48, the Northern Rockies harbor a long list of mega fauna that includes grizzlies (yes, you're likely to see them), as well



as elk clomping through your campsite and mountain goats picking their way across precarious cliff faces. Then there's the area's fabled remoteness: You'll hike long stretches—including a 122.6-mile expanse in the Bob—without crossing a road. If you bite off the entire 300 miles, hire a local horse packer to resupply you at Gates Park, a vast meadow 44.6 miles north of the Benchmark/South Fork trailhead. Don't have a month to do it all? Our favorite week is the 54.3-mile stretch from Two Medicine Campground to Many Glacier—a sampler that takes in Glacier's splendid alpine scenery, solitude, and wildlife.

Local Wisdom Dense forest and a scarcity

BEST OF THE — Continental Divide — Trail



of flat ground make campsites hard to find in the Bob—look along the rivers.

The Way The monthlong hike's endpoints are Rogers Pass on MT 200 and Waterton Townsite in Waterton Lakes National Park, Canada. Reach the latter via MT 17 into Alberta, where it becomes AB 6; then head west on AB 5 into Waterton Park.

BEST WEEK: ② Wind River Range, WY

What backpacker hasn't dreamed of a range of soaring granite peaks cloaked in snowfields and azure skies, a place to hike from lake to alpine lake through endless meadows of bluebells, lupine, and purple gentian? Well, sometimes dreams come true—like on the 67-mile section between the Big Sandy and Green River Lakes trailheads. The path traverses the west side of the Wind Rivers, paralleling the 12,000- and 13,000-foot mountains forming the Continental Divide. Special thrills include the Sound-of-Music meadow of Fish Creek Park, the jagged peaks re-

flected in Mirror Lake, the views of spires from the CDT's highest point in Wyoming (11,120-foot Lester Pass)—but in truth, the entire stretch is so idyllic it might just redefine your vision of perfection.

Don't Miss Sandpoint Lake, a deep, forest-encircled gem with a sandy beach at its south end.

The Way Big Sandy trailhead: From Boulder, follow WY 353 for 18.5 miles. Turn left, go 9 miles. Turn left again, drive 7 miles, and turn left again. Pass the side roads to Sedgewick Meadows and Temple Creek summer homes, then take the right fork to the campground and trailhead.

Green River Lakes trailhead: Six miles north of Pinedale, turn off US 191 onto WY 352 and drive nearly 46 miles.

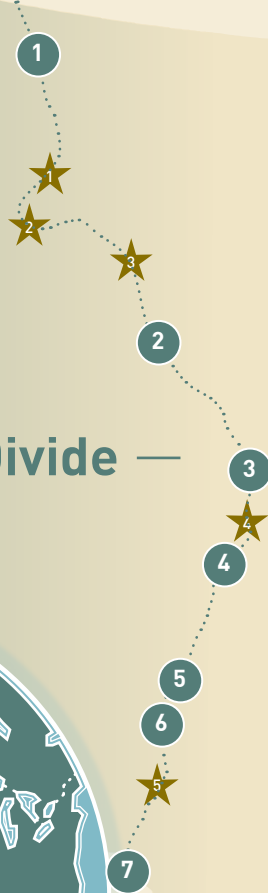
BEST WEEKEND ③ OVERALL: Rocky Mountain National Park, CO

The official CDT route bypasses this park—the National Park Service, concerned about hiker traffic, insisted—and that's a shame, because RMNP features one of the Divide's most breathtaking stretches. But a little-known alternate route on



Photo credit(s): Larry Ulrich

BEST OF THE — Continental Divide — Trail



the Tonahutu Creek and North Inlet Trails creates a stunning loop of about 25 miles on the park's less-traveled west side. Starting at Grand Lake, it leads through quiet lodgepole pine and meadows along Tonahutu Creek, climbs past waterfalls, then crests a broad alpine plateau above 11,000 feet. Here, the trail crosses a stark tundra of rock and wildflowers, with views of 14,255-foot Longs Peak and the long chain of mountains along the Divide. It reaches the continent's spine at 12,363-foot Ptarmigan Point and 12,324-foot Flattop Mountain, overlooking the deep, cliff-flanked glacial cirques on the Divide's east side. The trail then drops steeply into North Inlet's rugged canyon, crossing a bridge over the gorge at North Inlet Falls on its way back to your car.

Don't Miss The side hike off the North Inlet Trail to photogenic Lake Nanita, which reflects 12,000-footers Ptarmigan Mountain and Andrews Peak.



The Way From US 34, head toward Grand Lake on CO 278. Within .3 mile, take the left fork. Go .8 mile; turn left onto a dirt road. Parking at Tonahutu Creek (start) is a short distance; North Inlet (end) is 1.2 miles ahead.

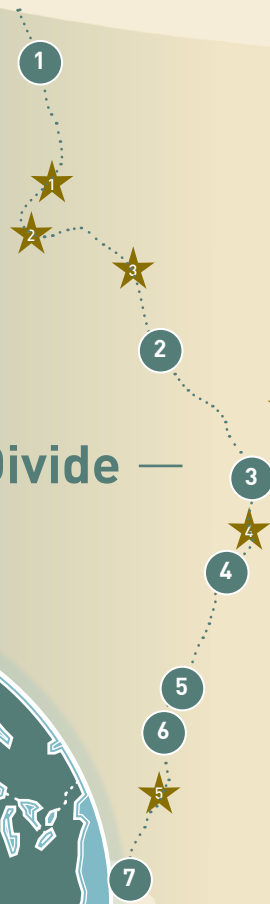
WEEKENDS: NORTH

Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness, MT ★

Hike Gold rushers should have looked here—during the last two weeks of September. That's when the larch turn golden, making the CDT's 38.5 miles from Middle Fork trailhead to Lower Seymour Lake a fall classic. It's also a great time and place to hear elk bugling. But you don't have to wait till summer's over to revel in the head-twisting views of the string of rocky 9,000- and 10,000-foot peaks along the Divide. Or to camp near the numerous alpine lakes nestled in rocky cirques. (Warren Lake, reflecting its namesake peak, may be the prettiest.) Or fish for trout, char, mountain whitefish, and arctic grayling. But plan wisely: Snow in the passes and mosquitoes can be thick until midsummer.

Photo credit(s): Scott Bischke

BEST OF THE
— Continental Divide —
Trail



Drive Start: From MT 38, take FR 5106 past Moose Lake. From the trailhead, follow Trails 29 and 111 for 5 miles to Johnson Lake and a junction with the CDT. End: Turn off MT 43, west of Wise River, onto MT 274. Go 4.5 miles, then take FR 934 past Lower Seymour Lake Campground to road's end.

★ **Beaverhead Mountains, MT-ID**

Hike Like few other spots, the 33-mile section from Bannack Pass to Morrison Lake retains the pristine character of the wilderness Lewis and Clark traversed. (The explorers crossed the Divide just north of here, at Lemhi Pass.) Credit the 11,000-foot ramparts and the abundant eagle, antelope, and elk populations. You'll also navigate a couple of miles cross-country to connect unfinished pieces of trail. Navigational distractions include views of Idaho's Lemhi and Lost River Ranges and Montana's Beaverhead and Centennial Mountains, and the densest concentration of trout streams along the CDT in Idaho and Montana.

Best time Post-snow, pre-cow days of late June.

Drive Start: Exit I-15 at Lima or Dell, MT, and follow Big Sheep Creek Rd. (FR 257) to FR 951, which becomes Bannack Pass Rd. (FR 280) in Idaho. End: From Big Sheep Creek Rd. near its junction with FR 951, turn onto FR 3920. High-clearance 4WD is required for both trailheads.

★ **Old Faithful to Summit Lake, Yellowstone National Park, WY**

Hike Call this out-and-back 21-miler a study in contrasts, beginning with the notable difference between the first mile through the Upper Geyser Basin and, well, the rest of the planet. The basin contains the world's largest concentration of active geysers. Besides Old Faithful, highlights include the polychromatic Morning Glory Pool and the Daisy Geyser and Lion Group geysers. Trails parallel both sides of the Firehole River; hike both sides to see all the geothermal flare-ups. The other contrast is between the hundreds of people you'll see in the first few miles and the solitude you'll enjoy

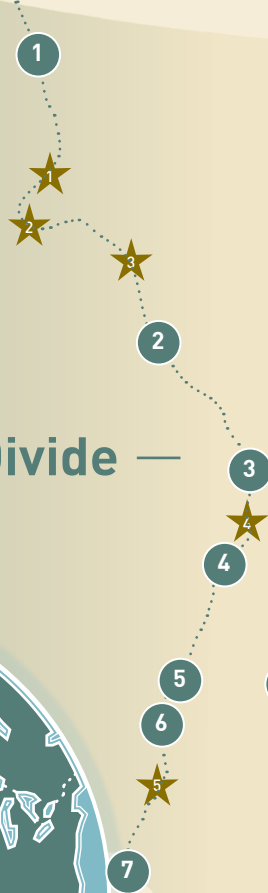


Photo credit(s): Larry Ulrich

BEST OF THE — Continental Divide — Trail



Photo credit(s): Mark Tittel



beyond the trail junction for Mystic Falls. The CDT grows more faint as it crosses a 1988 burn area, it sticks around long enough to reach a solitary campsite on the south shore of little-visited Summit Lake. If you rise early, you'll see elk. If you don't, and it's September, they might just bugle you out of your bag.

Drive Park at Old Faithful.

4 LONG AND HIGH: Weminuche Wilderness, CO

Conjure up a mental image of the CDT, and this classic high-peaks traverse is what you see. With valleys plunging thousands of feet below your toes, it's the archetypal skywalk along the continent's spine. In the 94.6 miles from Stony Pass to Wolf Creek Pass, you will only occasionally sample the richer air below 12,000 feet. Mostly above treeline, the path crosses alpine parklands of columbine and Indian paintbrush and passes dozens of cirque-protected lakes and creeks. And all around you, Colorado's largest wilderness (500,000 acres) hurls a tortured



topography of 13,000- and 14,000-foot spires and ridges at the sky. This section ranks among the CDT's most challenging, with over 16,000 feet of elevation gain, hard hiking at high altitude, dangerous afternoon thunderstorms, route-finding difficulties, and remoteness. Most exposed spot: the Knife Edge, where the CDT clings to a quarter-mile-long shelf on a shale cliff a thousand feet above West Trout Creek.

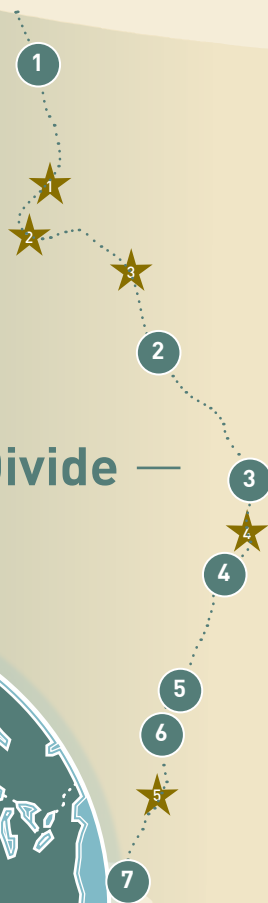
Don't Miss Good rainbow fishing at Williams and Trout Lakes, both reached via short side hikes off the CDT northwest of the Knife Edge.

The Way Start: From Creede, take CO 149 north for 20 miles, then turn west onto Rio Grande Reservoir Rd. (FR 520). Go .5 mile, bear left, and continue 19.5 miles to the first of several creek crossings. It's another 13 miles to Stony Pass; park in a pullout 50 yards beyond the CDT (high-clearance 4WD vehicle needed). End: Park just off US 160, 23 miles east of Pagosa Springs.

5 BEST DAYHIKE: Monarch Crest, CO

In the Colorado Rockies, you earn your views with grueling climbs

BEST OF THE — Continental Divide — Trail



at elevation ... except on the CDT's 11.5 miles from 11,312-foot Monarch Pass to 10,830-foot Marshall Pass. This spectacular dayhike starts high and stays that way, traversing a long, open ridge in the Sawatch Range and gaining less than 900 feet over the entire distance. Virtually the entire jaunt is above treeline—so you get constant panoramas of jigsaw ridges reaching to every horizon, including the Collegiate Peaks' Fourteeners to the north and the rolling Cochetopa Hills to the south. If you happen to enjoy your mountain odysseys on wheels, this may also be the best singletrack ride on the CDT, a nontechnical cruise known to mountain bikers as the Monarch Crest Trail.

Local Wisdom Most people—especially bikers—go north to south, from Monarch to Marshall, for a net drop in elevation. Start early and finish by midday to get off the exposed ridge before summer's almost-daily afternoon thunderstorms.

The Way Monarch Pass is on US 50, 18 miles west of Poncha Springs. To reach Marshall Pass from Poncha Springs, go 5 miles south

on US 285, turn west onto Marshall Pass Rd., and drive 13 miles.

6 BEST FOR SOLITUDE: South San Juan Wilderness, CO

Grizzlies in Colorado? Most experts doubt it, but a few true believers point to evidence—including findings of scat and hair—that they say suggests the big bears still roam this virtually unknown 165,000-acre wilderness of deep canyons and broad, flat ridges that frequently top 12,000 feet. Whether the bears are here or not, the 57 miles from Elwood Pass to Cumbres Pass is undoubtedly Colorado's loneliest and wildest CDT leg. Most of this traverse is above treeline, with



hundred-mile views largely free of the imprint of civilization. Despite the grizzly speculation, there's nothing debatable about the top-of-the-world feeling you get from stunning overlooks that yield views of deep side canyons and valleys, high lakes dabbled like splashes of blue paint amid deep green forests and meadows, the

Photo credit(s): Scott Bischke

BEST OF THE — Continental Divide — Trail



5 INSIDER TIPS
1 2 3 4 5
Click number to view tip

distant Weminuche’s jagged skyscape, and New Mexico spreading out far below.

Local Wisdom The CDT here is often faint and sometimes disappears; expert navigation skills are mandatory and GPS is recommended.

The Way This hike’s northern terminus is at Elwood Pass: From Pagosa Springs, take US 160 east 10.5 miles, then turn east onto East Fork Rd. for 19 miles. The southern terminus is .1 mile west of Cumbres Pass on CO 17.

**7 MOST PRIMITIVE:
Aldo Leopold Wil-
derness, NM**

If you could go back several hundred years, you’d be hard-pressed to find anything different about the nation’s first designated wilderness. Created in 1924, this 202,016-acre area is home to the roughest and least visited part of the CDT. Even the path disappears at times; expect remote, punishing country with difficult navigation on barely main-

BEFORE YOU TAKE ON SNOWSHOES

The CDT is a long, high-altitude trail (CO, NM, AZ) and it’s not for the faint of heart. It’s a long, high-altitude trail (CO, NM, AZ) and it’s not for the faint of heart. It’s a long, high-altitude trail (CO, NM, AZ) and it’s not for the faint of heart.

tained trail. For nearly 40 miles from FR 150 to FR 226A, the CDT follows the Divide through the dramatic Black Range. To either side, the earth falls away abruptly, with dropoffs of 1,000 feet to verdant valley bottoms where cottonwoods and willows trace the course of flowing water. You’ll walk through forests of juniper and piñon below 7,000 feet and fir, spruce, and aspen up higher, enjoying frequent views of canyons with ominous names like Deadman and Doubtful. The quiet belies the abundance of wild-

life: bears, coyotes, ringtails, bobcats, mountain lions, songbirds, lizards, and snakes. Water is scarce—carry plenty.

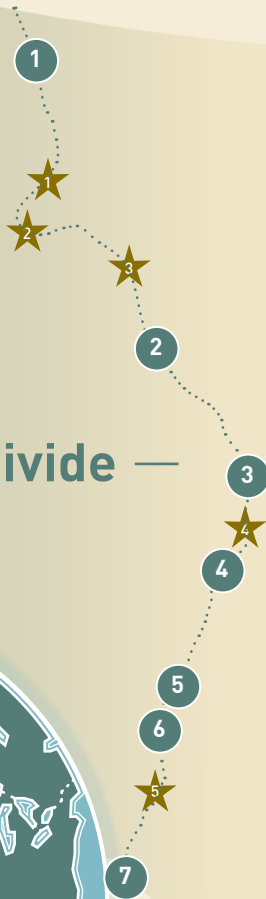
Don’t Miss Camping in Reeds Meadow, 3 miles north of Reeds Peak. Expect visits from deer, elk, and wild turkeys.

The Way Start: From NM 35, turn onto FR 150 and go 15 miles (the CDT is 2.5 miles beyond



Photo credit(s): Larry Ulrich

BEST OF THE — Continental Divide — Trail



Rocky Canyon Campground). End: From NM 59, turn south onto FR 226, 1.8 miles west of the Divide. Drive 5.2 miles, then turn onto FR 226A and continue 6.5 miles.

WEEKENDS: SOUTH

★ Vasquez Peak Wilderness, CO

Hike Colorado's CDT resembles a busy street in places; in fact, those sections open to bikes, horses, and ORVs can feel like a county fair. If you're hankering for a weekend hike with classic, way-up-there flavor, where you'll only see other hikers—but not many of them—check out the 19.4 miles from Berthoud Pass to Herman Gulch trailhead. Mostly within the Vasquez Peak Wilderness, where no bikes or motors are allowed, the path follows a rocky course too rugged for horses. It's a traverse that's pure high-country splendor: Much of it soars above 12,000 feet, and the apex is an unnamed, 13,000-plus-foot summit with views of the Gore and Holy Cross Ranges and Torreys Peak, the second-highest point on the Divide.

Drive Endpoints are Berthoud Pass on US 40, 14 miles west of I-70, and Herman Gulch

trailhead, at exit 218 off I-70.

★ El Malpais National Monument, NM

Hike Spanish explorers called this place *mal pais*, or "bad land." Decide for yourself: It's either a wasteland of razor-sharp lava, or a natural gallery of masterworks dating back a thousand to a million years. Lava tubes, cinder cones, and ice caves litter the area, along with Anasazi petroglyphs and centuries-old cairns built by the native Acoma and Zuni. Backcountry camping is out; the black lava bakes under the sun, and water is scarce. Stay at the park campground and dayhike its top three trails, the first two of which follow the CDT. The prehistoric, 7.5-mile Zuni-Acoma Trail explores the area's oldest lava and most extensive tubes. The obscure 14-mile trail through the Chain of Craters follows a line of 15 named cinder cones. And a 3-mile path leads to 165-foot-long La Ventana Arch, New Mexico's second biggest.

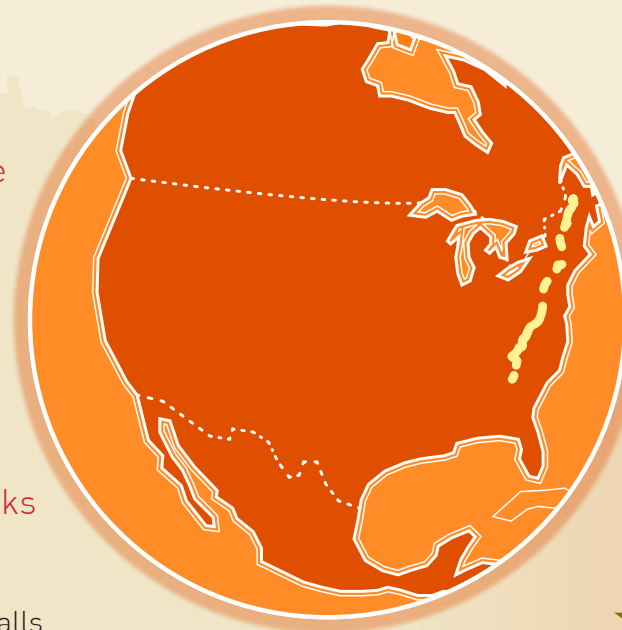
Drive EMNM is south of Grants.

In 1921, when Benton MacKaye first imagined a hiking trail that would follow the crest of the East's dominant mountain range, he envisioned a people's path, a forever-wild corridor and refuge for the millions living in nearby urban centers. Today, the trail's populist motto—"Open to all who walk"—appears on signs all along its 2,174.6 miles from Springer Mountain, Georgia, to Mt. Katahdin, Maine. And it is truly an escape hatch without peer, attracting an estimated three to four million hikers a year. In the following pages, we pay homage to MacKaye's vision with the top six hikes on the nation's first long-distance footpath, plus our picks for the best weekend in every region:

**1 BEST DAYHIKE:
Mt. Katahdin, ME**

Deep in the wilds of Maine, the AT reaches its northern terminus at a summit whose sheer cliffs seem to lend credence to the Flat Earth Society's claim that the earth does have edges. There you stand, at the brink of a 2,400-foot drop to Chimney Pond, a blue speck at the very bottom of one of the Northeast's most spectacular glacial cirques. There's simply no other precipice like it on the AT. Known to native Penobscot Indians as the "greatest mountain," Katahdin dominates its neighbors like Yao Ming in a kindergarten class. A mile up the AT from the Hunt Trail parking

lot, you reach Katahdin Stream Falls, a 50-foot wall of misting thunder. Climbing steadily, the trail emerges above treeline to follow a ridge of giant boulders where iron rungs are installed for scaling short cliffs. At about 3.5 miles, the stair-like ridge suddenly gives way to its topographical antithesis, the Table Land, a mile-wide, nearly flat alpine garden carpeted by midsummer in blooms—diapensia, Lapland rosebay, alpine azalea. One last uphill push brings you to the main summit, 5,267-foot Baxter Peak. There, breathless from exertion, you can gaze at the famous sign marking the



**BEST OF THE
— Appalachian —
Trail**



Photo credit(s):
George Wuether



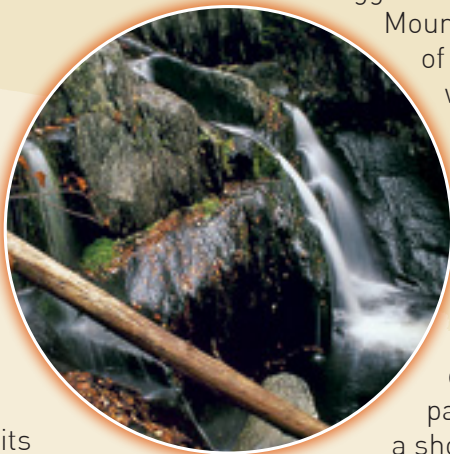
AT's northern terminus and feel a sliver of the satisfaction thru-hikers experience when they reach this landmark.

Local Wisdom On a popular weekend, get to the trailhead by 8 a.m.; once parking lots fill up, rangers close the trailhead. The park accepts campsite reservations 4 months in advance (207-723-5140, www.baxterstateparkauthority.com); make yours early, or you'll be camping 30 to 90 minutes away.

The Way From I-95 exit 56, follow ME 157 west to Millinocket, then signs to Baxter State Park. Just beyond the Togue Pond gatehouse, take the left fork of the gravel Tote Road and drive 8 miles to Katahdin Stream Campground and the Hunt/AT trailhead.

2 WILDEST MILES: Hundred Mile Wilderness, ME

Here's a cold truth about the AT: Though it often feels wild, every mile is within a half-day's drive of a megalopolis—except in Maine. Along this state's 281 miles, the trail shows its



teeth: bears, blackflies, moose, and some of the toughest (and most rewarding) hiking east of the Rockies. Consider the boulder-choked Mahoosuc Notch, known as "the hardest mile on the AT" because it sometimes reduces you to a belly crawl. Or the windswept balds of the Saddleback and Bigelow Ranges, with their long views of Maine's vast, uncivilized North Woods. Or the trail's true Big Lonely: the 99.4 miles from ME 15 north of Monson to the West Branch of the Penobscot River known as the Hundred Mile Wilderness. From the knee-pounding ruggedness of Barren

Mountain to the solitude of remote lakes where the only noises come from cackling loons, this leg is as out there as the AT gets. In August, include buffer time for gorging on blueberries—particularly on a short side trip up

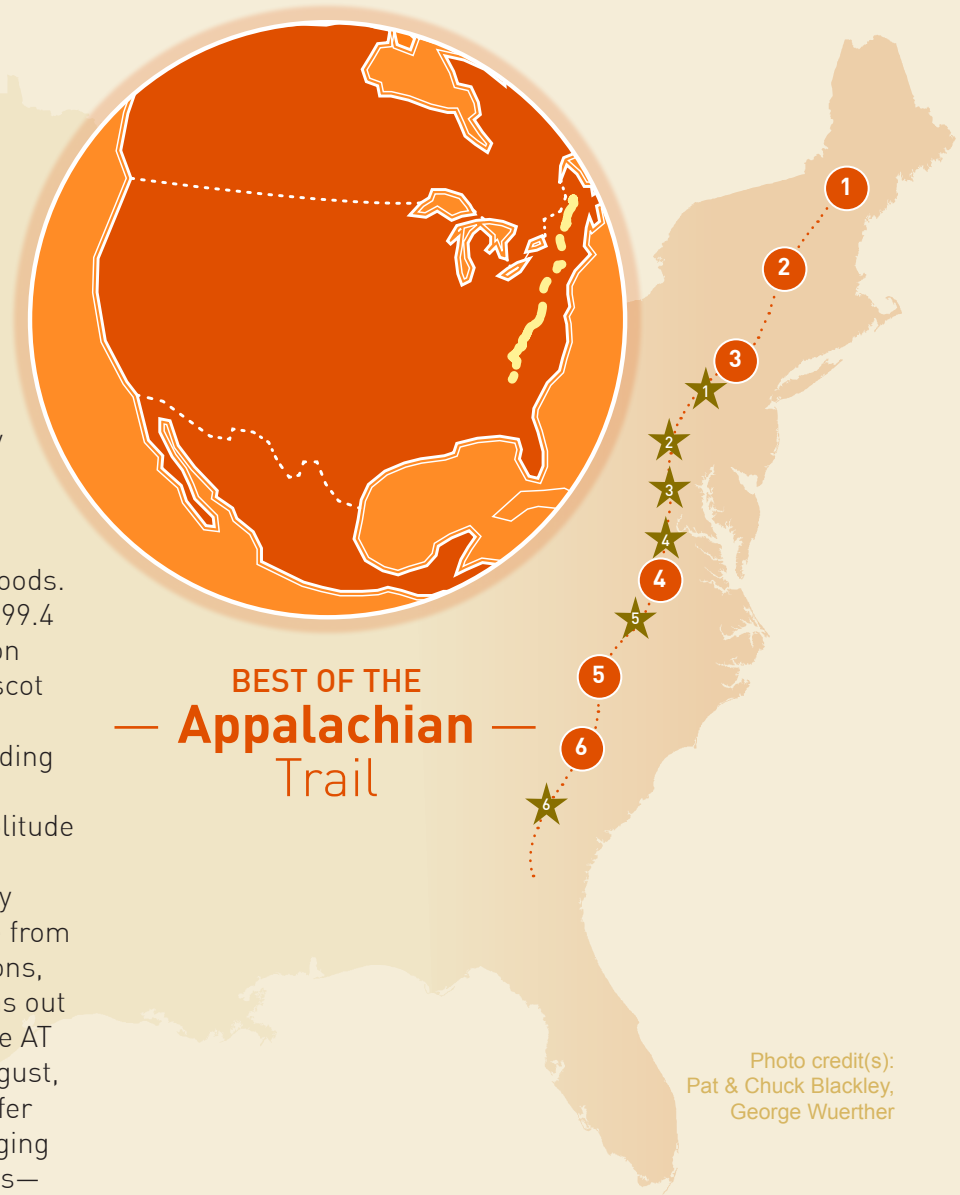


Photo credit(s):
Pat & Chuck Blackley,
George Wuerther

scenic Potaywadjo Ridge. Don't have 10 days? The best abridged version is a 27-miler to Gulf Hagas, only a bit hyperbolically called the "Grand Canyon of Maine" for its spectacular gorge along the West Branch Pleasant River.

Don't Miss The water slides and swimming holes below Screw Auger Falls on Gulf Hagas Brook, via side paths in the first .2 mile of the Gulf Hagas Trail.



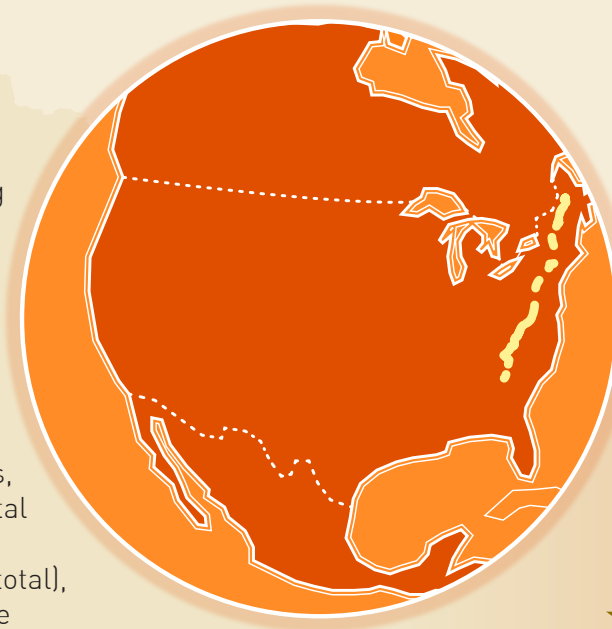
The Way The 27-mile Gulf Hagas hike starts on the gravel road to Katahdin Iron Works off ME 11, 5.5 miles north of Brownville Junction. To leave a car at the end, follow ME 11 south 15.5 miles from its junction with ME 157 and turn west onto gravel Jo-Mary Road. After 6 miles, bear left at a fork, go 2.6 miles, and bear right at another fork. The AT crossing is 14.6 miles from ME 11.

3 BEST WEEK:
White Mountains, NH

Pity the southbound thru-hiker, who

must suffer the letdown of leaving the trail's best scenery behind so early in the game. But don't waste tears on anyone making the 54-mile traverse from Franconia Notch to Pinkham Notch. It's a hard week, due to the trail's steepness, rockiness, and brutal elevation changes (about 14,000 feet total), but it packs in more majesty, stride for stride, than any comparable length of the AT. The drama begins immediately: The AT rides the spine of 4-mile-long

Franconia Ridge, with nonstop views of Vermont's Green Mountains and an endless north-country wilderness. Then come such landmarks as the deep, cliff-flanked gash of Zealand Notch, the precipitous Webster Cliffs high above Crawford Notch, and the meteorologically temperamental Presidential Range (shake the crowds by detouring 1 mile from Mt. Adams to Star Lake). One of the great



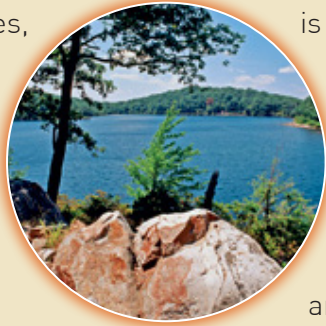
BEST OF THE
Appalachian
Trail



Photo credit(s):
Tim Seaver,
Chuck Summers

alpine walks in North America, this ridgeline traverse dazzles with 15 miles of above-treeline wildflower gardens, endless talus slopes, and nine of the state's highest peaks.

Don't Miss Even if you don't stay at an Appalachian Mountain Club hut, stop in after breakfast to polish off leftover pancakes.



The Way Start: AT/Whitehouse trailhead, at the Flume exit off I-93 in Franconia Notch. End: Tuckerman Ravine trailhead at the AMC Visitor Center on NH 16 in Pinkham Notch. The AMC runs a hiker shuttle between these and other trailheads (603-466-2727, www.outdoors.org/lodging/lodging-shuttle.cfm).

WEEKENDS: NORTH

★ Carter-Moriah Range, NH

Hike standing in the shadow of the Presidentials is like being Brad Pitt's brother Doug: You're pretty damn good-looking, but nobody's pointing a camera at you. Such is life for this range, which offers long stretches of ridgetop hiking with views into Maine and the best photo ops of the Prezies, bar none. This 20-mile leg

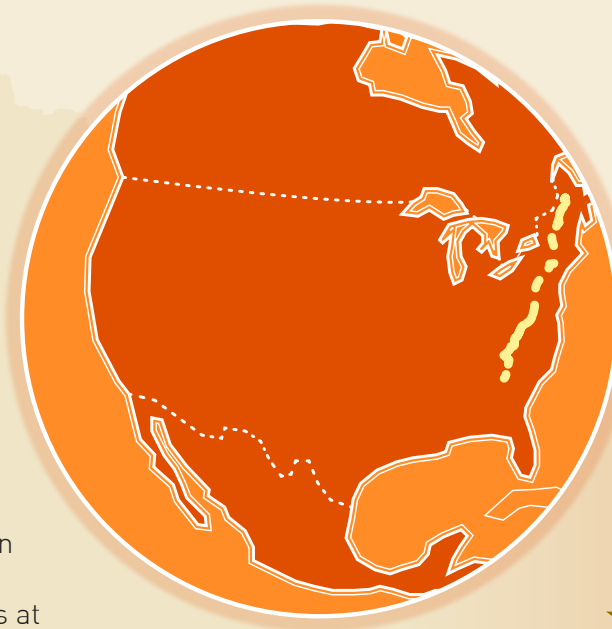
traverses eleven 4,000-footers (including Wildcat Mountain's five summits); the airiest is the rocky crown of 4,675-foot Mt. High. Spend a night at Carter Notch Hut (\$25-\$27 per night, www.outdoors.org) to give yourself time for gazing at the dawn and dusk reflections of Wildcat's cliffs in the tarns at the bottom of Carter Notch. And don't pass up the 5.4-mile side trip to the ledges of 3,735-foot Sherburne Moriah Mountain.

Tip: Sites fill up fast in summer; get one by midday.

Drive South end: AMC Visitor Center on NH 16 in Pinkham Notch. North end: 3.6 miles east of Gorham on US 2.

Southern Green Mountains, VT ★ 2

Hike Maybe you've heard the oft-repeated stat that two-thirds of all Americans live within a day's drive of the AT. Spend a summer weekend on the busiest stretches, and you might think they're all visiting at once. Which



BEST OF THE — Appalachian — Trail



Photo credit(s):
Michael P. Gadomski

makes the 17 miles between VT 11/30 and Danby-Landgrove Road (FR 10) such a great find. In a dozen-plus hikes in the area, we've never seen more than a handful of people. We think that's because the southern Greens lack the high-peak sex appeal of the Whites (they're also a bit more remote), but what these hills lack in sizzle and stature, they more than make up for in serenity. Sure, you'll find endless views from Bromley Mountain, but the beauty here tends to be more intimate, ranging from the dark, primordial forest on Styles and Peru Peaks to picture-perfect Griffith Lake to the babbling New England streams that slice through the Big Branch Wilderness.

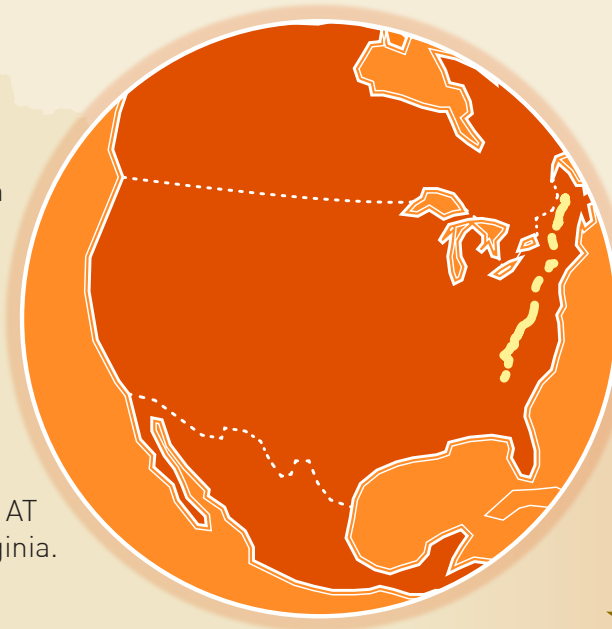
Drive South end: On VT 11/30, 6 miles east of Manchester Center. North end: FR 10 at Big Black Branch, 3.5 miles west of US 7 in Danby.

★ Riga Plateau, MA-CT

Hike Don't scoff if you hear locals refer to this 17-mile section as "our Presidential Range"—you'll

understand soon enough. While Riga doesn't rival its northern counterpart for ruggedness or elevation (its high point is 2,602-foot Mt. Everett), this ridgeline ranks as the most continuously scenic stretch of the AT between New Hampshire and Virginia. A great trip for new backpackers, it may also deliver the trail's best reward-to-effort ratio. From the ledges at Jug End, with their sweeping vista north to Mt. Greylock, the hike runs south over open terrain with long views of a Rockwellian landscape: vibrantly green hills, valleys speckled with meadows, and the occasional sturdy farmhouse. This is a popular hike in summer and early fall, but the trail often dries out in April and stays snow-free into November.

Drive North end: From MA 41 in S. Egremont, MA, turn west onto Mt. Washington Rd. Continue .8 mile; turn left on Avenue Rd. After .5 mile, bear left onto Jug End Rd.; parking is .3 mile ahead. South end: From Salisbury, CT, go .8 mile north on CT 41 from US 44.



BEST OF THE — Appalachian — Trail

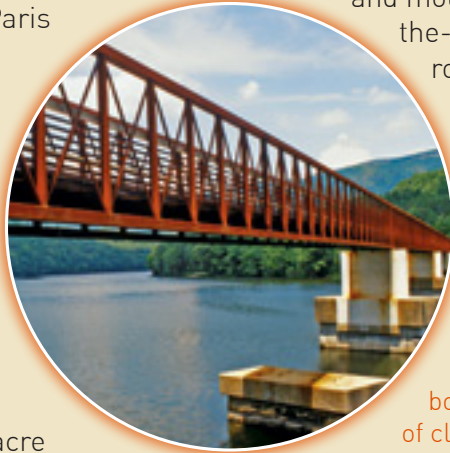


Photo credit(s):
Pat & Chuck Blackley

4 BEST UNKNOWN STRETCH:

James River Face Wilderness, VA

We know what you're thinking: There are fewer secret places left on the AT than on Paris Hilton's anatomy. But we've found one stretch that somehow escaped notice: the 28 miles from Parkers Gap Road to Punchbowl Mountain Crossing. The path passes through the 8,900-acre James River Face—one of the East's first designated wilderness areas. That the area remains so untrammled is a near miracle, given the slideshow-quality views of the Blue Ridge, Allegheny Mountains, Peaks of Otter, and James River Gorge (which is crossed by a 625-foot pedestrian bridge, the AT's longest). Not to mention highlights like the Guillotine, a huge boulder suspended over the trail, and the Devils Marblyard, 8 acres of fractured quartzite boulders reached on a 3-mile side hike. And



there's more: In spring and early summer, mountain laurel, rhododendron, and acres of wildflowers such as trillium and mountain lily-of-the-valley carpet the route. When you tire of all the beauty and solitude, take refuge in one of our favorite campsites, on a scenic saddle about a mile north of Highcock Knob.

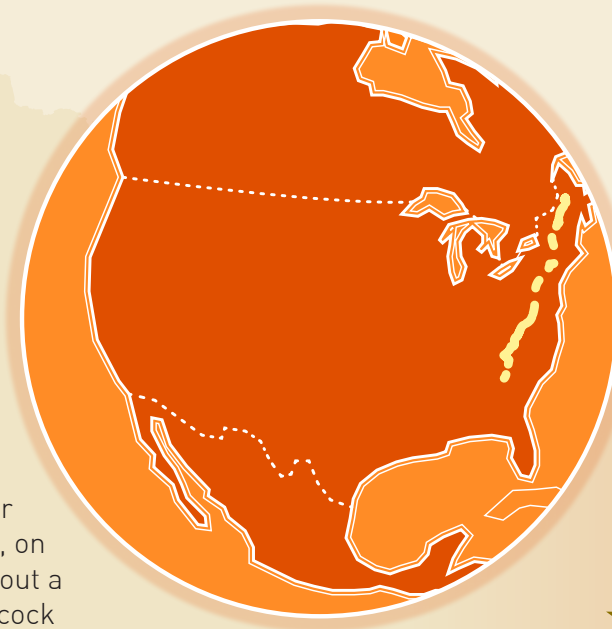
Local Wisdom Hike north-bound to save about 5,000 feet of climbing.

The Way Begin where the AT crosses Parkers Gap Road (FR 812), .3 mile from Sunset Field on the Blue Ridge Parkway (milepost 78.4), and finish at the large parking area at milepost 51.7, which is 12.2 miles north of US 501.

5 BEST WEEKEND OVERALL:

Grayson Highlands, VA

Picking the finest weekend hike on the AT is like finding the prettiest snowflake in a blizzard. But this 41-mile stretch gets our nod for its unmatched combination of altitude,



BEST OF THE — Appalachian — Trail

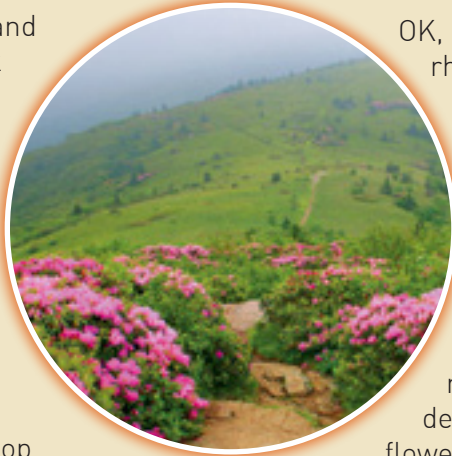


Photo credit(s):
Willie Johnson

scenery, flowers, and wildlife. From sprawling meadows above 5,000 feet, you'll enjoy some of the AT's most sustained mountain views of the Blue Ridge. You'll see wild ponies and early-summer explosions of rhododendrons and azaleas. You'll walk past outcroppings of pink and red volcanic crystals on Wilburn Ridge while climbing 5,729-foot Mt. Rogers, Virginia's highest peak (on a mile-long spur). You'll crane your neck to spot Whitetop Mountain's rare flying squirrels, plus hawks and peregrine falcons. In late summer, you'll stuff your face with blueberries. And you'll finish in Damascus, Virginia, justifiably known as "the friendliest town on the AT."

Don't Miss *Sunrises through the Highlands' famous morning mist.*

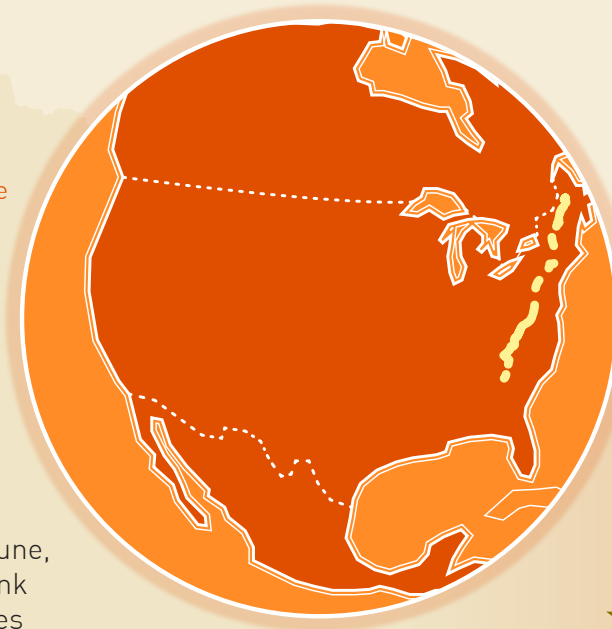
The Way *Begin where the AT crosses Parkers Gap Road (FR 812), .3 mile from Sunset Field on the Blue Ridge Parkway*



(milepost 78.4), and finish at the large parking area at milepost 51.7, which is 12.2 miles north of US 501.

6 **BEST FLOWER SHOW:** Roan Mountain, TN-NC

OK, Roan's Catawba rhododendrons are technically shrubs. But when these bushes bloom in June, the profusion of pink and lavender makes this 17-mile section the most stunningly colorful hike on the AT. Do the math: A mature rhododendron can produce 100 flowers, and hundreds of thousands of the shrubs blanket this peak—which happens to be the largest of southern Appalachia's grassy balds. Roan also boasts more rare or endangered plants than the Smokies, the highest shelter and some of the highest ground on the entire trail, and the oldest AT rock (1.8 billion years). Start with a dash up 6,285-foot Roan High Knob from Carver's Gap (3 miles round-trip). Then surround yourself in pink by traversing the 13.7 miles



BEST OF THE — Appalachian — Trail

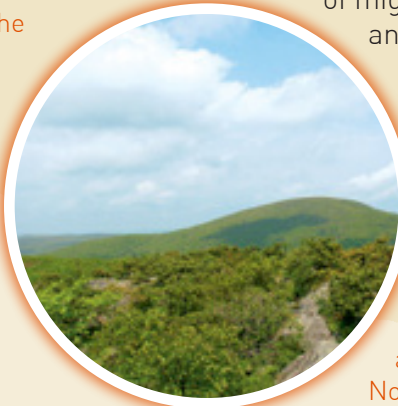


Photo credit(s):
Pat & Chuck Blackley

of trail from Carvers Gap to US 19E; hike north to south to cut your uphill gain in half. With numerous panoramic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains from meadows at and above 5,000 feet, it's widely considered one of the trail's most scenic sections.

Local Wisdom To get the most colorful rhododendron photos, put your camera and wide-angle lens on a tripod inches above the closest flowers (but angled up so you have a deep background of mountains), shoot when the sun's low, and expose at 1/15 second in a breeze to get some interesting blur. Shoot at f16 or higher to get detail in the mountains.

The Way Start: Carvers Gap is on NC 261/TN 143, south of the town of Roan Mountain, TN. End: Where the AT crosses US 19E south-east of Roan Mountain and north of Elk Park, NC.

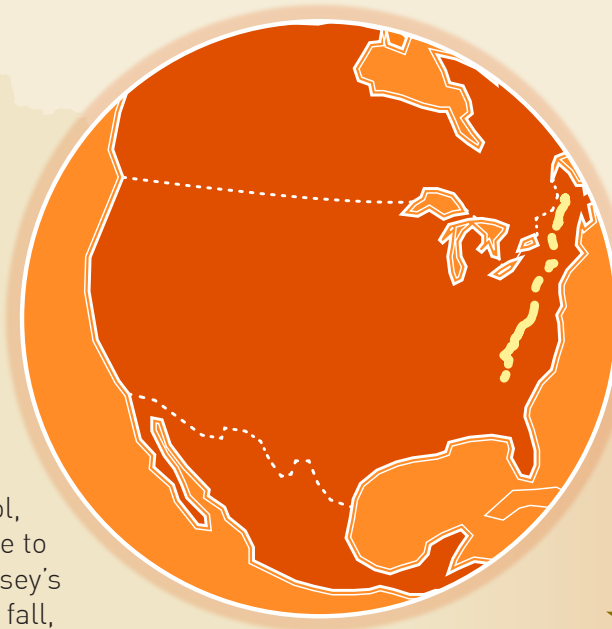


treatment consists of a calming walk through a forest of oak, hickory, pine, red cedar, hemlock, and rhododendron, with plentiful blueberries in late summer. It will move on to water therapy, with a visit to the peaceful bowl of Sunfish Pond, a National Natural Landmark and the AT's southernmost glacial pool, and a 3.2-mile round-trip side hike to 75-foot Buttermilk Falls, New Jersey's highest. And if you (wisely) hike in fall, your remedy will climax with sightings of migrating hawks and bald and golden eagles. Because the trek is relatively easy, fit hikers should consider adding the 14.3 miles from Culvers Gap north to High Point (NJ 23).

Drive South end: Under the I-80 bridge (NJ side) at the Delaware Water Gap. North end: On US 206 at Culvers Gap in Stokes State Forest.

George Washington National Forest, VA ★⁵

Hike we can't promise you'll bump



BEST OF THE — Appalachian — Trail



Photo credit(s):
George Senft

★ WEEKENDS: SOUTH Kittatinny Ridge, NJ

Hike sprawling metro region? Where? This 28-mile ridge traverse is a tonic for city-weary souls. Your de-stressing

into moonshiners or Confederate gun stashes—but we can't guarantee you won't. Rebel troops turned the Tye River Valley into a supply route during the Civil War; rumrunners also plied these secluded mountains during Prohibition. The 28 miles from Reeds Gap south to Salt Log Gap also serves up killer views (best: Chimney Rock and Hanging Rock), wildflowers (trillium, fire pink, and Turk's cap lily), old trees (wild cherry, mountain ash, and gnarled chestnut oak), and even solitude in the Three Ridges and Priest Wilderness Areas. From April through June, detour on Crabtree Falls Trail for blooming rhododendron and azalea around numerous cascades.

Drive South end: On VA 664 in Reeds Gap, immediately east of Blue Ridge Parkway (mile 13.6). End: From US 60, a mile west of Long Mountain Wayside, turn north on VA 634 (becomes FR 63); go 7.1 miles to Salt Log Gap.

room in the shelters. In summer and fall, the 32 miles from Newfound Gap to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park's eastern boundary is a quiet, even mystical ridgecrest stroll above the famed valley fog. Mostly above 5,000 feet, the trail passes numerous views of lush mountains and deep valleys of virgin forest; the Smokies contain 90 percent of the East's remaining old-growth. Highlights include the views from the Jump-Off (via the Boulevard Trail), Charlies Bunion, Bradleys View, Deer Creek Gap, and the Mt. Cammerer lookout tower (a 1.2-mile side trip). Don't let the ridgetop-hike description fool you—there are 11 major climbs and descents along the way.

Drive South end: Newfound Gap on TN 71/US 441 in GSMNP. North end: In Davenport Gap at TN 32/SR 1397, near I-40 exit 451.

★ **Newfound Gap to Davenport Gap, NC-TN**

Hike A caveat up front: Avoid this hike during the late-April-to-May thru-hiker rush, because there won't be



5 INSIDER TIPS
1 2 3 4 5
Click number to view tip

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Why? To get the most out of your hike, you need to be prepared. The Appalachian Trail is a long, rugged trail that passes through some of the most beautiful scenery in the East. It's a great way to see the mountains and enjoy the views. Make sure you have a good map and a compass. Also, bring a first-aid kit, because a road and hospital are never far away.