



View from the Mountains-to-Sea Trail at Clingmans Dome
Photo by Danny Bernstein

Peak to Peak—MST Segment 1

CLINGMANS DOME TO WATERROCK KNOB

By Jim Grode

The 46.8-mile-long Segment 1 of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST) begins in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP), straddling Tennessee and North Carolina. Newfound Gap Road (US 441), which travels north from Cherokee, North Carolina, to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, forms the backbone of the park and climbs to over 5,000 feet at Newfound Gap.

If national parks have specialties, the Smokies is known as a hiker's park. The scenery is diverse: mountain views, old-growth trees, waterfalls, streams, and more shades of green than a paint chart. Mile for mile, you'll

find hiking in the park easier than in the neighboring national forests. Even though there are no blazes on Smokies trails, they are so well marked at every intersection that you can follow them with confidence. (Still, stop at a Visitor Center and pick up a Great Smoky Mountains Trail Map for \$1.00.)

The Smokies may be the most visited national park in the country but only the roads and parking lots are congested. With over 800 miles of trails, even popular trails are not very busy. The trails in the Smokies are well maintained and well marked. Hikers will appreciate that they're in a *national park*. The Smokies, in a temperate rainforest, have a great variety of wildflowers, from the first bloodroot in March to the last asters in October, as well as more tree species than all of Europe. But hikers will also see the richness of the community life that was here before the area became a national park in 1934.

This segment also highlights the southernmost part of the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP). Also administered by the National Park Service (NPS), the BRP runs 469 miles from GSMNP to Waynesboro, Virginia, and receives more visitors each year than any other NPS unit. It is a marvel of Depression-era (and later) engineering, and the MST roughly parallels it through the mountains.

Heading eastbound, the MST starts at the observation tower on top of Clingmans Dome in GSMNP, on "top of old Smoky" at the state boundary. After paralleling the road to Clingmans Dome for a few miles, it heads deep into the woods on the longest roadless stretch of the MST—22.8 miles with no road access. Emerging to US 441 at Mingus Mill, the segment continues past the GSMNP's Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Mountain Farm Museum and along the Oconaluftee River, popular for tubing.

From here, the trail continues along the shoulder of the BRP for several miles, with two short trail sections to avoid tunnels (in which walking is prohibited). The BRP is famous for the views from its overlooks, and this segment features several. Turning to gravel roads, the route continues through the Qualla Boundary, home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, before returning to hiker-only trail for the last 6.4 miles to Water-rock Knob.

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- The observation tower atop Clingmans Dome, at 6,643 feet the highest point in GSMNP, where you can see seven states on a clear day (although, sadly, pollution often limits visibility to 20 miles or less)
- Walking along Deep Creek, with its cascades and rock falls
- Campsite #57, Horace Kephart's last camp, and the historic millstone put up in his memory
- Historic Mingus Mill, built in 1886 and still in operation; tours are available
- The cultural and natural history exhibits at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Mountain Farm Museum
- The 0.3-mile side hike to the summit of Waterrock Knob, the third-highest point on the MST, where views on a clear day can encompass four states

Total Distance: 46.8 miles (34.7 trail; 7.4 on the grassy BRP shoulder; 4.7 unpaved woods road)

Difficulty: Challenging. Requires full backpack. The trails are well maintained and well marked, and use frequent switchbacks.

Trail Updates

When planning your trip using this guide, take a moment to see whether Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (Friends) has posted any updates about the trail route by visiting Friends' "Trail Updates" page at MountainstoSeaTrail.org/updates.

Trail Angels

The MST is fortunate to have many Trail Angels: friendly people who have volunteered to provide assistance to long-distance hikers ranging from local information to lodging and food. We greatly appreciate our Trail Angels' willingness to give back to the hiking community and the

MST. For information about Trail Angels in Segment 1 and the services they can provide, see MountainstoSeaTrail.org/the-trail/trail-angels.

Shuttle Services

Note: All prices listed in this guide are for comparison only and are subject to change at any time.

The Microtel Inn & Suites (674 Casino Tr., Cherokee, 28719; 828-352-2302; www.wyndhamhotels.com) offers shuttles (for guests only) between Newfound Gap and Cherokee for \$10 one way.

Frontcountry Camping/Lodging

Near Eastbound (EB) Mile 26.7; Westbound (WB) Mile 20.1

Smokemont Campground (about 2.5 miles north on US 441). Each site has a picnic table and barbecue grill. Restroom buildings have sinks with cold water and flush toilets. Water pumps and trashcans are plentiful. Open year-round. Reserve a campsite online at www.recreation.gov or by phone at 877-444-6777. You can also take your chances and get a site when you arrive; it's a very large campground.

Near EB Mile 28.0; WB Mile 18.8

The town of Cherokee, about a mile south on US 441, has numerous camping and lodging options.

EB Mile 39.2; WB Mile 7.6

Mile High Campground. This private campground offers cabins and tent sites. It has a bathhouse with showers. It's open from mid-May to mid-October. Check the schedule and amenities at campmilehigh.com or www.facebook.com/milehighcampground.

Also check Friends' "Trail Angels" page at MountainstoSeaTrail.org/the-trail/trail-angels for additional camping and lodging options.

Backcountry Camping

Backcountry camping in GSMNP is allowed only at designated campsites and shelters. Camping permits, reservations, and fees are required for all backcountry sites. Call 865-436-1231 or visit the backcountry reservations website at smokiespermits.nps.gov. Each backcountry campsite has a flat surface for tents, a bear cable system to hang your food, and access to water nearby.

EB Mile 3.5; WB Mile 43.3	Mt. Collins shelter, 0.5 mile west on Sugarland Mtn. Trail
EB Mile 9.0; WB Mile 37.8	Poke Patch backcountry campsite #53
EB Mile 11.7; WB Mile 35.1	Nettle Creek backcountry campsite #54
EB Mile 12.6; WB Mile 34.3	Pole Rd. Creek backcountry campsite #55 (horses allowed)
EB Mile 12.9; WB Mile 33.9	Burnt Spruce backcountry campsite #56
EB Mile 13.4; WB Mile 33.5	Bryson Place backcountry campsite #57 (horses allowed)
EB Mile 20.2; WB Mile 26.6	Newton Bald backcountry campsite #52

Camping (including sleeping in cars at overlooks) is **prohibited** on all BRP property and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians land except in designated campgrounds. Backcountry campers may leave cars at BRP overlooks overnight, but must call the BRP Comm Center (828-298-2491) the day before or the morning they leave to provide details.

Special Note Regarding Bear Activity and Requirements

Because of aggressive bear activity, the US Forest Service requires all backpackers to carry bear canisters in the Shining Rock Wilderness Area and nearby Forest Service lands to the northwest of the BRP. This area encompasses parts of Segments 2 and 3 of the MST. As a practical matter for MST thru-hikers, this will probably require carrying canisters between Cherokee and Asheville (Segment 3), as these are the nearest resupply points. For more information, see www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/alerts-notices/?cid=stelprd3832543.

Lodging/Food/Supplies/Services/Post Office

EB Mile 27.3; WB Mile 19.5

The Oconaluftee Visitor Center has a small store and vending machines with cold drinks.

Near EB Mile 28.0; WB Mile 18.8

Town of Cherokee with full services about a mile south on US 441. Note that you can only buy alcohol at the Cherokee Casino.

Water/Restrooms

There are numerous water sources all along the trail. A few of the larger or more isolated sources are identified below. In addition, water is available near all of the backcountry camping sites in GSMNP. All water taken from springs and rivers should be treated.

EB Mile 1.0; WB Mile 45.8	Spring	
EB Mile 5.6; WB Mile 41.2	Stream	
EB Mile 9.0; WB Mile 37.8	Deep Creek	
EB Mile 24.2; WB Mile 22.6	Stream	
EB Mile 26.6; WB Mile 20.1	Mingus Mill parking lot	 
EB Mile 27.3; WB Mile 19.5	Oconaluftee Visitor Center	 
EB Mile 39.2; WB Mile 7.6	Mile High Campground	 
EB Mile 46.8; WB Mile 0.0	Waterrock Knob Overlook	

Hunting

Hunting is not allowed on GSMNP or BRP land. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians allows hunting by enrolled members and certain family members only on Cherokee lands (including parts of EB Miles 35.8-39.9; WB Miles 7.0-11.0). Hunting may occur at any time, but is most common during the fall bear season, September 1 through December 31. Hikers are encouraged to wear blaze orange on this section.

Signs/Blazing

In GSMNP, large wooden signs at every junction indicate the name of the trail and the mileage to each intersecting trail. The trails, other than the Appalachian Trail, are not blazed.

There are MST blazes—3-inch white circles—on two short trail sections that bypass tunnels on the BRP at EB Miles 30.7-31.9; WB Miles 14.9-16.1. There are no blazes on the BRP roadway, but there are markers where the trail leaves the roadway. The trail is continuously blazed between Waterrock Knob and EB Mile 35.7; WB Mile 11.1.

Special Considerations

The road to Clingmans Dome observation tower is open April 1 to November 30 but may be closed in bad weather. If the road is closed when you want to start your hike, you can access the observation tower by hiking south on the Appalachian Trail 7.9 miles from the parking area at Newfound Gap on US 441.

The BRP is often closed in the winter, especially during and after inclement weather, affecting access to the MST. Wintertime hiking in this segment will require careful planning. The National Park Service posts real-time closure information at www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/roadclosures.htm.

Heintooga Rd., which crosses the MST at EB Mile 39.8, WB Mile 7.0, is closed seasonally to cars, usually from the end of October to mid-May. Check seasonal closures at www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/seasonalroads.htm and the latest road closures at www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/temproadclose.htm or twitter.com/SmokiesRoadsNPS.

Segment 1 includes two short sections of trail that bypass tunnels on the BRP. It is illegal to walk through these tunnels. Please do not attempt to do so.

Remember that GPS units and vehicle navigation systems may provide inaccurate information in the mountains. You're encouraged to use a trail map.

Hikers should be supplied for a full backpack (tent, sleeping bag . . .) and food for several days.

Dogs are not allowed on the trails in GSMNP, except on the Oconaluftee River Trail, EB Miles 27.3-28.0; WB Miles 18.8-19.5. On the Oconaluftee River Trail and elsewhere on this segment, dogs are allowed but should be leashed at all times.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Friends office: 919-825-0297 or info@MountainstoSeaTrail.org

Walt Weber and “the Gang” for the Carolina Mountain Club have published an excellent, highly detailed, set of maps and profiles for this segment of the MST entitled *Trail Profiles and Maps: From Clingmans Dome to Mount Mitchell and Beyond*. The book is available on Amazon or through a number of outlets in the Asheville area.

Trail Maps

Google map of the entire MST: MountainstoSeaTrail.org/map

GSMNP trail map: www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/upload/GSMNP-Map_JUNE14-complete4-2.pdf

BRP map: www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/maps.htm

Park Websites

GSMNP: www.nps.gov/grsm

GSMNP seasonal road closures:

www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/seasonalroads.htm

Other GSMNP road closures: www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/temproadclose.htm or twitter.com/SmokiesRoadsNPS

BRP: www.nps.gov/blri

BRP road and trail closures: www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/roadclosures.htm

Helpful Websites for Trails Through GSMNP—Under “Plan Your Visit”

www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/index.htm

www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/backcountry-camping.htm

www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/frontcountry-camping.htm

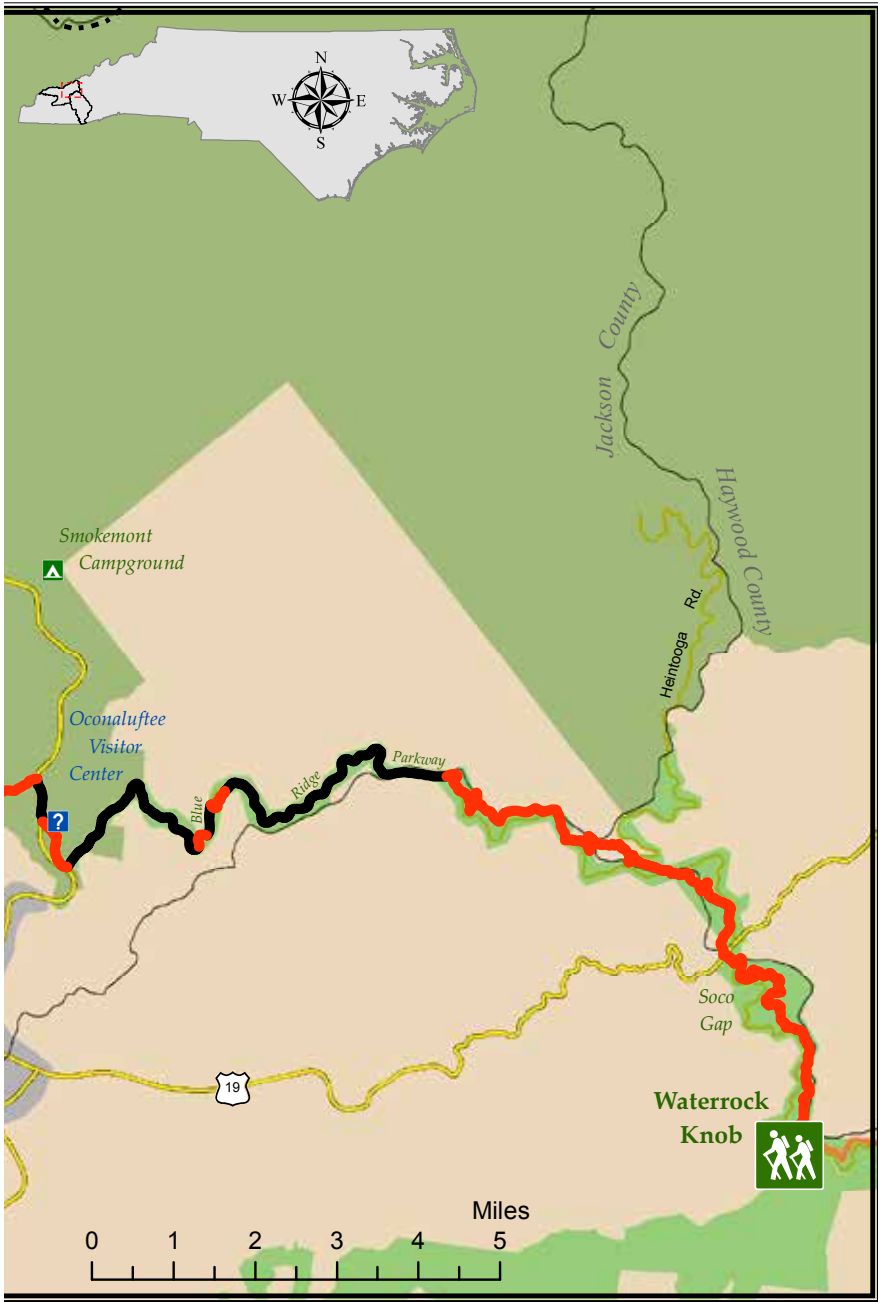
Other Websites

Town of Cherokee: visitcherokeenc.com

Mile High Campground: campmilehigh.com or www.facebook.com/milehighcampground



Map and elevation profile produced for Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail by Curtis Belyea, 2019.



PRIMARY PARKING LOCATIONS

Clingmans Dome Parking Area

EB Mile 0.0; WB Mile 46.8



N35.55711, W83.49389

Fork Ridge Trailhead

EB Mile 3.9; WB Mile 43.0



N35.59036, W83.46932

Mingus Mill Parking Lot

EB Mile 26.6; WB Mile 20.1



N35.52097, W83.30901

Oconaluftee Visitor Center

EB Mile 27.3; WB Mile 19.5



N35.51288, W83.30665

US 441/BRP Junction

EB Mile 28.0; WB Mile 18.8



N35.50559, W83.30104

Oconaluftee River Overlook (MP 468.4)

EB Mile 28.7; WB Mile 18.1



N35.51316, W83.29421

Raven Fork Overlook (MP 467.9)

EB Mile 29.2; WB Mile 17.6



N35.51863, W83.28852

Ballhoot Scar Overlook (MP 467.4)

EB Mile 29.7; WB Mile 17.1



N35.51750, W83.28451

Thomas Divide Overlook (MP 463.9)

EB Mile 33.5; WB Mile 13.3



N35.52058, W83.24748

Big Witch Overlook (MP 461.9)

EB Mile 35.5; WB Mile 11.3



N35.52495, W83.22240

BRP at Wolf Laurel Gap (MP 458.2)

EB Mile 39.8; WB Mile 7.0



N35.51044, W83.17895

Soco Gap Overlook (MP 455.5)

EB Mile 42.4; WB Mile 4.4



N35.49434, W83.15567

Waterrock Knob Parking Area (MP 451.2)

EB Mile 46.8; WB Mile 0.0



N35.45999, W83.14132



Crossing Deep Creek
Photo by Danny Bernstein

Hiking Directions, Eastbound

0.0 The MST and Segment 1 start at the Clingmans Dome observation tower at the western end of Clingmans Dome Rd. in GSMNP. From the Clingmans Dome parking area, walk up the paved access trail 0.6 mile to the observation tower. Just before the ramp to the observation tower, turn left at a sign marked “Appalachian Trail/Mountains-to-Sea Trail.” After about 100 feet, turn right at the MST sign. *Note:* To reach the parking area, take US 441 west from Cherokee or east from Gatlinburg. At Newfound Gap, the NC/TN line, turn onto Clingmans Dome Rd. The road is closed December 1 to March 31 and when weather conditions require. If road is closed when you are hiking, you can access the observation tower by hiking south 7.9



Camping



Lodging



Parking



Food



Restrooms



Supplies

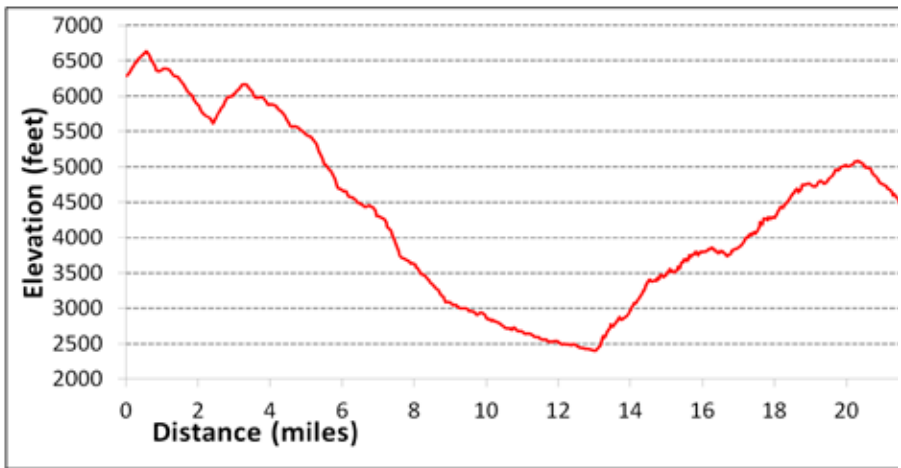




Water






Picnic

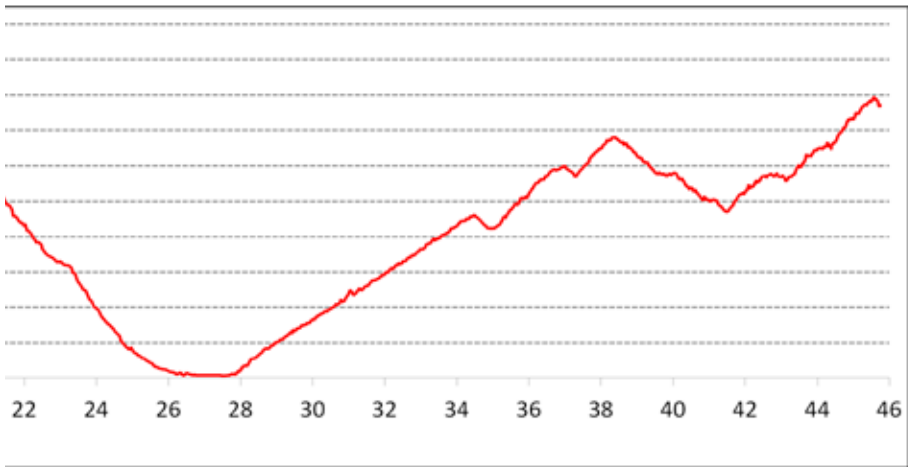
Segment 1 Eastbound



miles on the Appalachian Trail from the parking area at Newfound Gap. An information station and store managed by the Great Smoky Mountains Association is open in season.  

- 0.6 Continue straight over summit of Mt. Love (6,411 feet). *Note:* Although high, the summit is not very prominent and may not even be noticeable when hiking.
- 2.0 Continue straight at Collins Gap. *Note:* Although marked on many maps, the gap is not marked on the ground and is not very well defined.
- 3.0 Continue straight to ascend the summit of Mt. Collins (6,188 feet), a fairly large plateau with minimal views.
- 3.5 Continue straight through intersection with Sugarland Mtn. Trail. *Note:* Mt. Collins shelter is 0.5 mile to left on Sugarland Mtn. Trail. A permit is required to camp here, or at any backcountry site in GS-MNP. See the “Backcountry Camping” section for this segment for information about fees and reservations.  
- 3.9 Turn right on spur trail marked with sign for Fork Ridge Trail and go 125 feet on spur trail to cross Clingmans Dome Rd., then continue straight on Fork Ridge Trail. Continue straight on Fork Ridge Trail, which descends 2,800 feet over the next 5.2 miles. *Note:* There is a small parking area at the trailhead. 




Elevation Profile




















- 5.6 Cross a small stream. 💧
- 9.0 Cross Deep Creek. After crossing creek, turn right on Deep Creek Trail. *Note:* Poke Patch backcountry campsite #53 is at this junction. There are several significant creek crossings in the next 3.5 miles. 🏕️ 💧
- 11.7 Continue straight past Nettle Creek backcountry campsite #54. 🏕️ 💧
- 12.6 Continue straight past Pole Rd. Creek backcountry campsite #55, a horse campsite, on left. Pass Benton MacKaye Trail (Pole Rd. Creek Trail) on right. *Note:* Benton MacKaye Trail and MST continue on same trail to Mile 20.8. 🏕️ 💧
- 12.9 Continue straight past Burnt Spruce backcountry campsite #56. 🏕️ 💧
- 13.4 Pass Bryson Place backcountry campsite #57, a horse campsite, and turn left on Martins Gap Trail. *Note:* This is the last campsite of Horace Kephart (1862-1931), a writer and outdoor activist. If you continue on Deep Creek Trail for a couple of hundred feet and walk into a flat area on the right, you'll find a millstone put up by a Bryson City Boy Scout troop in his memory. 🏕️ 💧
- 14.9 Turn left on Sunkota Ridge Trail.
- 19.8 Turn right on Thomas Divide Trail.



Mingus Mill
Photo by Mary Stewart







- 20.1 Turn left on Newton Bald Trail.
- 20.2 Continue straight past Newton Bald backcountry campsite #52, a horse campsite.  
- 20.8 Turn right on Mingus Creek Trail.
- 23.6 Reach Deeplow Gap Trail and turn sharply left to stay on Mingus Creek Trail, signed to Newfound Gap Rd. The trail will descend steeply down a series of six switchbacks.
- 24.2 Cross small stream. *Note:* For the next 1.5 miles, there are many small stream crossings. 
- 25.3 Ford wide but shallow Madcap Branch.

- 25.4 Pass Cemetery Trail on left, then cross two bridges very close together. *Note:* The Cemetery Trail leads approximately 0.8 mile to an old family cemetery.
- 25.6 Pass “Mingus Creek Trail and Mountains-to-Sea Trail” sign on left.
- 25.7 Cross bridge over Mingus Creek.
- 26.2 Pass picnic tables and a retired target range formerly used for practice by park law enforcement on the left, then cross bridge over Mingus Creek. 
- 26.4 Cross bridge over Mingus Creek.
- 26.6 Pass through gate and reach Mingus Mill parking lot, with water and restrooms. *Note:* The historic Mingus Mill is across a bridge, on the other side of Mingus Creek.   
- 26.7 Turn right on US 441. *Note:* Smokemont Campground is approximately 2.5 miles to the left on US 441. See the “Frontcountry Camping/Lodging” section for this segment for more information. 
- 26.8 Cross bridge over Mingus Creek.
- 27.1 Pass road to Job Corps Center on left.
- 27.2 Turn left onto driveway for Oconaluftee Visitor Center.
- 27.3 Turn left to pass between Oconaluftee Visitor Center and restrooms. At fork in sidewalk, take right fork, signed to Oconaluftee River Trail. At Oconaluftee River Trail sign, continue onto gravel path, passing alongside split-rail fence. *Note:* The Visitor Center complex has a small store, educational displays, restrooms, water fountains, and vending machines with cold drinks. Beyond the fence is the Mountain Farm Museum, a historical exhibit featuring a replica mountain farmstead.    
- 27.4 At end of fence, turn right to follow Oconaluftee River Trail.
- 28.0 Turn right on side trail just before road bridge. Turn left on BRP at intersection of US 441 and BRP, then cross bridge over Oconaluftee River. *Note:* The town of Cherokee, with all services, is about a mile south on US 441.     
- 28.7 Pass Oconaluftee River Overlook (MP 468.4) on left. 
- 29.2 Pass Raven Fork Overlook (MP 467.9) on left. 
- 29.7 Pass Ballhoot Scar Overlook (MP 467.4) on left. 









View of the Smokies from Mile High Campground
Photo by Allen de Hart

- 30.7 Just before Sherrill Cove Tunnel, take trail into woods on left. *Note:* It is illegal to walk through tunnels on the BRP. Please do not attempt to do so.
- 31.0 Turn left on BRP.
- 31.4 Just before sign for Rattlesnake Mountain Tunnel, take trail into woods on right.
- 31.9 Turn right on BRP.
- 33.5 Pass Thomas Divide Overlook (MP 463.9) on left. **P**
- 35.5 Pass Big Witch Overlook (MP 461.9) on left. **P**
- 35.7 Turn left on the first gravel road after Big Witch Overlook.
- 35.8 Where a faint track goes uphill and a road comes in from the left, continue on the rightmost fork, then continue straight past road on right and through gate.
- 38.1 At bottom of hill, reach Bunches Gap.
- 39.2 Bear left in front of Mile High Campground office, taking the rightmost of the cluster of three roads. See the “Frontcountry Camping” section for this segment for information about camping here. **A** **W** **R**

- 39.8 Cross Heintooga Rd. and continue straight on BIA 434 (dirt road).
Note: If you turn right and walk a hundred feet or so, you'll reach BRP at Wolf Laurel Gap (MP 458.2). 
- 40.4 Pass under BRP at Docks Gap, then turn left on MST-blazed footpath. Pass side trail to BRP on left.
- 42.3 Cross US 19. Walk up BRP access road to right at fork next to no parking sign, then bear left onto trail.
- 42.4 Emerge from woods at Soco Gap Overlook and turn right on BRP. 
- 42.5 Turn left on paved road and walk around chain barrier, then turn left onto marked trail.
- 42.7 Cross log bridge.
- 43.9 Pass bench on left, then cross Soco Creek on Howard's Bridge, a beautiful log bridge named in honor of Howard McDonald. Howard was a Carolina Mountain Club (CMC) trail builder and maintainer who oversaw construction of many bridges, including this one, and set the record for most volunteer hours logged with CMC. This is the last reliable water source in Segment 1. 
- 44.4 Cross boggy area and small stream.
- 45.8 Pass log bench on right at left-hand switchback.
- 46.5 Climb a set of rock stairs with a handrail.
- 46.6 In a clearing with long-range views, pass "Piet's Place," a bench placed in honor of Piet Bodenhorst, a longtime CMC leader who was instrumental in the completion of the MST in the Waterrock Knob area.
- 46.7 Continue straight onto paved path. *Note:* If you turn left onto the paved path, the summit of Waterrock Knob, with spectacular views, is 0.3 mile ahead.
- 46.8 Continue straight past bench on left and reach a junction with a trail marked with the MST blaze. This is the eastern end of Segment 1. To continue on Segment 2, turn left; to reach the Waterrock Knob Overlook (MP 451.2), continue straight down the paved path. *Note:* The overlook has parking, a visitor center with a small convenience store (open seasonally), and restrooms. There is no water.   

Hiking Directions, Westbound

- 0.0 Segment 1 begins at a trail junction just above the Waterrock Knob Overlook (BRP MP 451.2). If continuing a hike from Segment 2, turn right from the trail onto the paved path. If beginning from the parking area, follow the paved path up to the junction and continue straight. Continue straight past a bench on right. *Note:* The overlook has parking, a visitor center with a small convenience store (open seasonally), and restrooms. There is no water.   
- 0.1 At hairpin turn, bear left onto gravel path. *Note:* If you continue straight on the paved path, the summit of Waterrock Knob, with spectacular views, is 0.3 mile ahead.
- 0.2 In a clearing with long-range views, pass “Piet’s Place,” a bench placed in honor of Piet Bodenhorst, a longtime Carolina Mountain Club (CMC) leader who was instrumental in the completion of the MST in the Waterrock Knob area.
- 0.3 Descend a set of rock stairs with a handrail.
- 1.0 Pass log bench on left at right-hand switchback.
- 2.4 Cross boggy area and small stream.
- 2.9 Cross Soco Creek on Howard’s Bridge, a beautiful log bridge named in honor of Howard McDonald. Howard was a CMC trail builder and maintainer who oversaw construction of many bridges, including this one, and set the record for most volunteer hours logged with CMC. Continue past bench on right. 
- 4.1 Cross log bridge.
- 4.3 Turn right onto paved road, then walk around chain barrier and turn right on BRP.
- 4.4 Enter Soco Gap Overlook and continue into woods on marked trail. 
- 4.5 Continue straight on paved road, then bear left on BRP access road. Cross US 19 and enter woods on marked trail.
- 6.4 Pass side trail to BRP on right. At T-intersection, turn right on BIA 434 (dirt road), then pass under BRP at Docks Gap.
- 7.0 Cross Heintooga Rd. and continue straight on BIA 407. *Note:* If you turn left, in a hundred feet or so you’ll reach BRP at Wolf Laurel Gap (MP 458.2). 



Camping



Lodging



Parking



Food



Restrooms



Supplies








Water











Picnic















Howard's Bridge
Photo by Mary Stewart















- 7.6 Enter Mile High Campground and turn right to pass between office and restrooms. See the "Frontcountry Camping" section for this segment for information about camping here.   
- 8.7 At bottom of hill, reach Bunches Gap.
- 11.0 After passing through gate, continue straight past road on left, then another road on right.
- 11.1 At T-intersection, turn right on BRP.
- 11.3 Pass Big Witch Overlook (MP 461.9) on right. 
- 13.3 Pass Thomas Divide Overlook (MP 463.9) on right. 
- 14.9 About 100 yards past "tunnel ahead" sign, take trail into woods on left. *Note: It is illegal to walk through tunnels on the BRP. Please do not attempt to do so.*

- 15.4 Turn left on BRP.
- 15.8 Just before Sherrill Cove Tunnel, take trail into woods on right.
- 16.1 Turn right on BRP.
- 17.1 Pass Ballhoot Scar Overlook (MP 467.4) on right. 
- 17.6 Pass Raven Fork Overlook (MP 467.9) on right. 
- 18.1 Pass Oconaluftee River Overlook (MP 468.4) on right. 
- 18.8 Cross bridge over Oconaluftee River. Just past sign for US 441, turn right on trail at a small gravel parking area. At T-intersection, turn left onto Oconaluftee River Trail. *Note:* The town of Cherokee, with all services, is about a mile south (left) on US 441.     
- 19.4 Turn left at split-rail fence, following Oconaluftee River Trail. *Note:* Beyond the fence is the Mountain Farm Museum, a historical exhibit featuring a replica mountain farmstead.
- 19.5 At Oconaluftee River Trail sign, continue onto sidewalk. Turn left at T-intersection. Pass between Oconaluftee Visitor Center and restrooms, then turn right and continue on sidewalk along edge of





The millstone honoring Horace Kephart placed at his last camp
Photo by Danny Bernstein

- parking lot. *Note:* The Visitor Center complex has a small store, educational displays, restrooms, water fountains, and vending machines with cold drinks.    
- 19.6 Turn right on US 441.
- 19.7 Pass road to Job Corps Center on right.
- 20.0 Cross bridge over Mingus Creek.
- 20.1 Turn left into Mingus Mill parking lot, with water and restrooms. *Note:* The historic Mingus Mill is across a bridge, on the other side of Mingus Creek. Smokemont Campground is approximately 2.5 miles straight ahead on US 441. See the “Frontcountry Camping/Lodging” section for this segment for more information.    
- 20.2 At end of parking lot, continue straight onto Mingus Creek Trail and pass through gate.
- 20.4 Cross bridge over Mingus Creek.
- 20.6 Cross bridge over Mingus Creek, then pass picnic tables and a retired target range formerly used for practice by park law enforcement on the right. 
- 21.1 Cross bridge over Mingus Creek.
- 21.2 Pass “Mingus Creek Trail and Mountains-to-Sea Trail” sign on right.
- 21.4 Cross two bridges very close together. At Y-intersection with Cemetery Trail, keep left on Mingus Creek Trail. *Note:* The Cemetery Trail leads approximately 0.8 mile to an old family cemetery.
- 21.5 Ford wide but shallow Madcap Branch. *Note:* For the next 1.5 miles, there are many small stream crossings.
- 22.6 The trail passes the last water source for the next few miles and begins climbing steeply, up a series of six switchbacks. 
- 23.2 Reach Deeplow Gap Trail and turn sharply right to stay on Mingus Creek Trail.
- 26.0 Turn left on Newton Bald Trail. *Note:* The Benton MacKaye Trail joins the MST from the right here and continues on the same trail to Mile 34.3.
- 26.6 Continue straight past Newton Bald backcountry campsite #52, a horse campsite. *Note:* A permit is required to camp here, or at any backcountry site in GSMNP. See the “Backcountry Camping” section for this segment for information about fees and reservations.  
- 26.7 Turn right on Thomas Divide Trail.

- 27.0 Turn left on Sunkota Ridge Trail.
- 31.9 Turn right on Martins Gap Trail.
- 33.5 Turn right on Deep Creek Trail and pass Bryson Place backcountry campsite #57, a horse campsite. *Note:* This is the last campsite of Horace Kephart (1862-1931), a writer and outdoor activist. If you go left on Deep Creek Trail for a couple of hundred feet and walk into a flat area on the right, you'll find a millstone put up by a Bryson City Boy Scout troop in his memory. There are several significant creek crossings in the next 3.5 miles.  
- 33.9 Continue straight past Burnt Spruce backcountry campsite #56.  
- 34.3 Benton MacKaye Trail (Pole Rd. Creek Trail) splits off to left. Continue straight on Deep Creek Trail past Pole Rd. Creek backcountry campsite #55, a horse campsite.  
- 35.1 Continue straight past Nettle Creek backcountry campsite #54.  
- 37.8 Turn left on Fork Ridge Trail, then cross Deep Creek. *Note:* Poke Patch backcountry campsite #53 is at this junction. The trail ascends 2,800 feet over the next 5.2 miles.  
- 41.2 Cross a small stream. 
- 43.0 After crossing Clingmans Dome Rd., take spur trail 125 feet and turn left on the Appalachian Trail, which runs concurrently with the MST. *Note:* There is a small parking area at the trailhead. 
- 43.3 Continue straight through intersection with Sugarland Mtn. Trail. *Note:* Mt. Collins shelter is 0.5 mile to right on Sugarland Mtn. Trail.  
- 43.8 Continue straight to ascend the summit of Mt. Collins (6,188 feet), a fairly large plateau with minimal views.
- 44.8 Continue straight at Collins Gap. *Note:* Although marked on many maps, the gap is not marked on the ground and is not very well defined.
- 46.2 Continue straight over summit of Mt. Love (6,411 feet). *Note:* Although high, the summit is not very prominent and may not even be noticeable when hiking.
- 46.8 Turn left on a side trail at sign for Clingmans Dome Tower Trail. After about 100 feet arrive at a paved path on the left leading to the Clingmans Dome observation tower—the western end of Segment



Soaked in at Clingmans Dome
Photo by William Dolling

1 and the MST. Walk right (down) on the paved access trail 0.6 mile to the parking area, passing an information station and store managed by the Great Smoky Mountains Association, open in season. *Note:* To reach the parking area, take US 441 west from Cherokee or east from Gatlinburg. At Newfound Gap, the NC/TN line, turn onto Clingmans Dome Rd. The road is closed December 1 to March 31 and when weather conditions require. If road is closed when you are hiking, you can access the observation tower by hiking south 7.9 miles on the Appalachian Trail from the parking area at Newfound Gap.  



Camping



Lodging



Parking



Food



Restrooms



Supplies



Water



Picnic