

Appalachian Trail

BACKGROUND: In June of 1916, Dr. Harry F. Rentschler took a group of men from the Reading, PA area, who liked to walk in the mountains, to an eagle's nest on the Blue Mountains above Shartlesville. They formed the Blue Mountain Eagle Climbing Club on October 12, 1916. In 1926, planners of the Appalachian Trail contacted the Club members and asked them to locate and build 102 miles of trail through the wilderness along the mountaintop from the Lehigh River to the Susquehanna River. In 1937, the Club formed a corporation, Blue Mountain Wilderness Park Association. Its goal was to acquire and own the land to protect the Appalachian Trail.



The first Appalachian Trail Conference, now known as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, was organized by Benton MacKaye and held in Washington, DC in 1929. His vision was a path with planned wilderness communities where people could go to renew themselves. Two men, Myron Avery and D. C. Perkins, then took the project to the next level as they started recruiting volunteers, establishing hiking clubs, clearing brush, and marking paths. The trail was completed in 1937, but was left in poor condition during World War II when it could not be maintained. After the war, the trail was restored and re-opened in 1951. On October 2, 1968 the AT became a national scenic trail under federal protection.

The Appalachian Trail that we know today starts in Maine and touches 14 states as it winds down to Georgia. It runs along the southern border of Schuylkill County, PA. It is a privately managed unit of the National Park Service and is the nation's longest marked footpath at approximately 2,181 miles. Approximately 165,000 white painted rectangles mark the Trail's route. There are 31 hiking clubs and more than 6,000 volunteers who contribute about 200,000 hours each year to maintain the Trail. If you would like to become a volunteer, contact the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at www.appalachiantrail.org.

INFORMATION: The Appalachian Trail covers 229.6 miles of wilderness in Pennsylvania. The trail is marked for hikers with white rectangular marks on the trees. As you cross other trails or enter state game lands you will encounter some other markers. While it is characteristically rocky, there are portions of the trail that are rather flat and easy-going. Some portions are more difficult than others. The area of the trail that is just south of SR 61 heading towards SR 309 is said to be a more difficult stretch featuring a steep incline, but beautiful views just off of the trail.

The weather in Pennsylvania can be beautiful and comfortable, but in the summer, it can be very hot and humid. Water can be scarce during the summer months. Be cautious about encounters with wildlife such as rattlesnakes and bears. Blaze orange should be worn during the hunting season in October, November, and December.

Campfires are permitted in designated areas only. Please remember to pack out any items that you took into the trail with you.

CONTACT: Most of the trail in Schuylkill County is maintained by Blue Mountain Eagle Climbing Club. Go to their website at www.bmecc.org. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy website, www.appalachiantrail.org, is a great tool that contains information for hikers such as location of shelters, water sources, Leave No Trace, and anything else you may need to plan for your hike.



AREA ATTRACTIONS: The AT is a great place to renew yourself and be one with your thoughts. It is refreshingly beautiful, wooded land that is home to wildlife such as chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, foxes, raccoons, skunks, white-tailed deer, and black bears. It is also a great place to bird watch as the migration of hawks, eagles, and falcons pass through.

The forest is a nice mixture of many trees and shrubs that is especially splendid in the autumn season. You will hike through pines, oaks, and maples. You'll see beautiful ferns, honeysuckle bushes, and our state flower, mountain laurel, which is in full bloom in mid-June.

At many points along the way you will find breathtaking views. These areas are the perfect place to take a break and get some wonderful photographs!

TRAILHEAD GPS COORDINATES:

SR 309 between New Tripoli and Tamaqua—Lat 40°42'26.81"N Lon 75° 48'27.67"W

Blue Mountain Summit Restaurant, Bed & Breakfast (www.bluemountainsummit.com) is located right across the street from the State Game Lands parking lot at the trailhead. Bear Rock Junction Mini Golf and Corn Maze (www.bearrockjunction.com) is located approximately 3.2 miles south of the trailhead on SR 309. Approximately 3 miles north on SR 309, there is a convenience store and deli, two restaurants, and an ATM machine.

Hawk Mountain Road—Lat 40°38'01.84"N Lon 75°57'41.85"W

Parking is on Hawk Mountain Road, just south of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, about 0.5 miles from the Visitors Center. This is a great area for bird watchers. The sanctuary's website at www.hawkmountain.org lists local attractions including dining, lodging, camping, and shopping.

SR 61 and Blue Mountain Road—Lat 40°34'28.39"N Lon 76°01'12.57"W

Go north on SR 61 from I-78 and make a right onto Blue Mountain Road. There are campsites at Pocahontas Springs. This trailhead is about 3 miles north of Cabela's, Walmart, Lowe's and a variety of stores and restaurants at the I-78 interchange with SR 61. There is a gas station and access to an ATM.

Port Clinton—Lat 40°34'37.98"N Lon 76°01'33.05"W

The trail can be accessed from two points in Port Clinton. A side trail leads west to the Appalachian Trail. To get to the trail will mean climbing steep, rock stairs. From SR 61, go west on Broad Street and cross the railroad tracks. There is parking available on the left at the rail yard and a camp site for thru-hikers at St. John's Church pavilion. Call LaVerne Sterner at 570-366-0489 in advance for a permit. Port Clinton offers a Towpath Trail, a playground, Port Clinton Hotel (www.portclintonhotel.net), Union House Bed and Breakfast (www.union-house.com), and



Port Clinton Peanut Shop. Another great stop is the Northern Berks/Southern Schuylkill Historical Society and Transportation Museum, by appointment only at 610-562-3996.

SR 183—Lat 40°31'39.39"N Lon 76°13'23.14"W

There is a small parking area here on a very busy section of SR 183. Use extreme caution if crossing the road here. On the north side of the trail, about 50 feet north of the trail, along SR 183, you can visit the Rentschler Marker. This part of the trail, both north and south, while still rocky is a nice flat area to walk.

SR 501—Lat 40°30'45.80"N Lon 76°20'38.87"W

From I-78 westbound, take Exit 13 and at the end of the ramp turn right onto SR 501 (Lancaster Avenue). Continue 4.3 miles north to the trail crossing. There is a parking area on the left (north) side of the road.

From I-81 southbound, take Exit 104 and turn right onto Molleystown Road. Follow to a "T" intersection and go right onto SR 125 for 3.5 miles into Pine Grove. In the center of town, SR 433 joins SR 125. Go left onto SR 895 (East Wood Street) for about half a mile, then go right onto SR 501. Go 3.3 miles to the trail crossing. The parking area is on the left.

Frystown & Pine Grove (SR 645)—Lat 40°30'24.31"N Lon 76°22'36.93"W

From I-78 westbound, take Exit 10 towards Frystown. At the end of the ramp go right onto Camp Swatara Road (SR 645). After 4 miles go right, staying on SR 645. Continue another 0.8 miles to the trail crossing. There is parking on the west side of the road just south of the crossing.

From I-81 southbound, take Exit 100 towards Pine Grove. Turn left onto SR 443 and go east for 2.2 miles to Geary Wolfe Road (SR 645). Follow this for 2.5 miles to the trail crossing. The road name changes from Geary Wolfe Road to Camp Swatara Road in the vicinity of the crossing.

RECOMMENDED GEAR: A good, supportive pair of hiking boots is recommended as well as precautions to prevent lyme disease. Pack out anything that you take in with you.