

Enjoy Everything Outdoors



A family strolls along the Rhododendron Trail at the Ocoee Whitewater Center.

TAKE A HIKE

With the exception of certain winter conditions, most anytime during the year is a great time to hit the trails for a nice hike in the mountains of North Georgia. Fannin County and nearby Polk County, Tennessee, have numerous trails from which to choose.

The trails range from less than a mile one-way, and from easy walking to those that are very difficult.

The most well-known area trails are the Benton MacKaye and the Appalachian.

Among the numerous other trails in Fannin County are those on the Aska Trails System, many of which can be accessed from Aska Road.

Trails in Polk County often traverse both Tennessee and Georgia.

A number of the popular hiking, biking and multi-use trails begin at or near the Ocoee Whitewater Center (OWC), five miles west of Ducktown on Highway 64.

The OWC trails are known as the Tanasi Mountain Bike Trail System, and offer 30 miles of multi-use trails including the easy 1.5 mile Rhododendron Trail and the more difficult 1.5 mile Thunder Rock Express Trail.

Visit the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce, www.blueridgemountains.com, or the main office at 152 Orvin Lance Connector, Blue Ridge, Georgia, for information about hiking trails in Fannin County.

Visit the Ocoee Whitewater Center for hiking information and maps.

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ENJOY EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

BENTON MACKAYE VIEWS ARE SPECTACULAR

With its glorious ridgeline views and the innumerable crossings of mountain streams, the almost 300 mile long Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) comes by its reputation for beauty honestly according to Benton MacKaye Trail Association Vice President Joy Forehand.

Nestled in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, the BMT has some of the most varied and abundant wildflowers of any temperate climate forest in the

world, and the variety of tree species is second to none, Forehand said. "Whether it's the creek-side trilliums in the spring, the red-orange of the fall, sugar maples at the higher elevations or the unmatched 360 degree views in the winter, the BMT is a visual treat any time of the year." Also known for its remoteness, a third of the trail lies in wilderness areas where vehicular access and motorized tools are prohibited. "Here, the hiker finds true peace and solitude," she added.

With numerous accessible trailheads in the Fannin and Gilmer county areas, the BMT is a day hiker's dream. Begin your journey on Springer Mountain where the views south and west are su-

perb. Hike on to the exquisite Long Creek Falls followed by a jaunt across the Toccoa River on the iconic Swinging Bridge. Your trek continues past notable landmarks -- the Brawley Fire Tower and the historic Shallowford Bridge. Fall Branch Falls in the Aska Adventure Area is a fabulous half-mile hike for kids and adults alike. Those preferring a bit more solitude and/or challenge should check out the BMT in the Cohutta and Big Frog Wilderness areas.

Additional information on hiking the BMT may be found at www.bmta.org. Contact Joy Forehand at jwfbgga@gmail.com or 386-334-0336. Maps for these and other hikes also are available from the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce.



Hiker Richard Parks shot this photo at the top of Owen's Overlook on the Benton MacKaye Trail.



Fannin County and the Copper Basin offer hundreds of miles of hiking trails for hikers of all skill levels.