



The First BMT Thru Hiker



Each year, hundreds of long-distance hikers embark on a thru hike of the Benton MacKaye Trail. But who was the first to hike the entire trail -- a trail known not only for its scenic beauty, but also for its remoteness and, at times, difficult terrain?

According to a 2005 article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Roy Arnold, then an intern with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources was the first to hike the entire route in 1978.

In the early 1970s, Dave Sherman, Founding Father of the Benton MacKaye, began to seriously consider a wilderness trail coming down the spine of the Smokies, extending into the Cohuttas and ending on Springer Mountain. But the question was: Would this route work ... was it feasible?

Sherman, then the Director of the Office of Planning and Research (Georgia) assigned Arnold the task of checking the proposed route on the ground. Were any of the stream crossings or steep inclines serious impediments to the future hiking trail? How would the trail cross the Little Tennessee River? What is the mileage between points? If Arnold encountered serious obstacles to the future trail, he was to propose modifications to avoid/eliminate them. When enlisting support for the trail, Arnold's analysis of the proposed route was a valuable report included with the BMT's original concept map.

Arnold had fond memories of his trek through the wilderness. In 2005, Arnold (by then a program analyst for the U.S. Department of the Interior in Washington) said, "I wish I had been independently wealthy and could have spent my life working on it. All that trail

hiking makes for a long life. They tend to die off in their 90s. That's why I intend to go back to it when I retire." (Quote from a 6/4/2005 article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* - "Trail: Labor of Love Took 25 Years")



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