

Alabama Hiking Trail Society

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TAKING A LONG WALK GIVEN NEW MEANING IN ALABAMA

New Hiking Trail Begins in Alabama

The Appalachian Trail! For many Americans it conjures up visions of adventure. How many have dreamed of taking that first step onto the A.T. in north Georgia and trodding the 5-million steps to Maine? It's an easy and reachable adventure of a lifetime for thousands. And there in lies the problem.

The A.T. is fast becoming bogged down with the masses. More and more we hear complaints about how the trail is becoming overcrowded and how it is literally wearing out. An alternative for hikers, young and old and of all skill levels, is slowly becoming a reality and the path begins right here in Alabama.

It is called the Great Eastern Trail. The trail travels over 2,000-miles from the Alabama-Florida state line near Pensacola, through the mountains of Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and finally into New York.

The trail, also known as the GET, is a series of existing trails that are being interconnected to form the long path. What makes the GET unique is that it is not only a 2,000-mile long trail, but also provides many smaller loop trails that offer fantastic adventures for day hikers and weekend trekkers alike.

The trail in Alabama begins at the Florida state line at the southern end of Conecuh National Forest in Conecuh County. Here the path travels through magnificent stands of pines, around cypress swamps, and beautiful crystal clear springs.

Further north, the trail travels over Flagg Mountain in Weogufka. The mountain is the first (or last depending on orientation) mountain over 1,000-feet tall in the Appalachian Mountain chain. The mountain was to have been the site of a new state park built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's. The CCC built a massive stone tower, much like the one atop Cheaha Mountain, at the summit. The park was put aside as World War II began. The state adopted the property as a state forest and now the GET will take hikers to its splendid and secluded vistas.

Still further north, the trail connects with the famous Pinhoti Trail. This 130+ mile long trail is the oldest long path in the state. The trail takes hikers to beautiful waterfalls and mountain panoramas as it travels the ridges of the Talladega National Forest.

These trails, already in existence and already being used by many, are only pieces of the puzzle for between Conecuh National Forest and Flagg Mountain a 230-mile stretch of road walk currently awaits thru-hikers. And that's where the Alabama Hiking Trail Society comes in.

AHTS is Alabama's only statewide hiking organization whose mission is to promote, protect, maintain, and develop safe and scenic hiking trails for all to enjoy. The non-profit organization has been tapped by the American Hiking Society to take the trail off the road and into woods as much as possible. It is a daunting, but not impossible, task according to AHTS President Mike Kennedy.

"The process begins by searching for suitable routes for the trail," Kennedy says. "That includes contacting land owners for permission to cross their property. We look for routes that will provide something of interest to not only long distance hikers but the general public as well."

And of course, not only will the trail provide outdoor adventures to the public but also eco-tourism dollars to the towns it passes through.

Currently AHTS is working with such organizations as Forever Wild and the South Eastern Foot Trail Coalition to make this the dream a reality. Volunteers are always welcome to help with planning and trail building through out the state. Visit the AHTS website for more information at www.hikealabama.org. And learn more about the Great Eastern Trail at its official website, www.greateastertrail.org.

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