

AT 2026 • FEBRUARY START

Appalachian Trail Field Guide

Springer Mountain → Mount Katahdin

2,190+ Miles of Trail-Tested Knowledge

Prepared for HoggCountry

TABLE OF CONTENTS

18 Chapters + 5 Quick Reference Cards

00	<u>Introduction</u>	<u>Ch. 0</u>
01	<u>Hiker Profile & Experience</u>	<u>Ch. 1</u>
02	<u>Gear System</u>	<u>Ch. 2</u>
03	<u>Clothing System</u>	<u>Ch. 3</u>
04	<u>Water Treatment System</u>	<u>Ch. 4</u>
05	<u>Shelter vs. Tent Decision System</u>	<u>Ch. 5</u>

06	<u>Weather Strategy</u>	<u>Ch. 6</u>
07	<u>Food & Resupply</u>	<u>Ch. 7</u>
08	<u>Town Strategy</u>	<u>Ch. 8</u>
09	<u>Permits & Logistics</u>	<u>Ch. 9</u>
10	<u>USPS Mail Drop System</u>	<u>Ch. 10</u>
11	<u>Power & Electronics</u>	<u>Ch. 11</u>
12	<u>Medical Planning</u>	<u>Ch. 12</u>
13	<u>Safety & Emergency Procedures</u>	<u>Ch. 13</u>
14	<u>Trail Sections & Milestones</u>	<u>Ch. 14</u>
15	<u>Content Creation</u>	<u>Ch. 15</u>
16	<u>Financial Planning</u>	<u>Ch. 16</u>
17	<u>The Path to Katahdin</u>	<u>Ch. 17</u>

QUICK REFERENCE CARDS**Shelter Triggers**[When to use a shelter instead of tent](#)**Layering Chart**[Temperature-based layering decisions](#)**Emergency Protocol**[Emergency contacts and location script](#)**Resupply Locations**[Walkable Dollar General and mail drop locations](#)

Weather Warning Signs

Rapid weather change recognition

CHAPTER 00

The Complete Appalachian Trail NOBO Field Guide

Springer Mountain, Georgia — Mount Katahdin, Maine

2,190+ Miles of Trail-Tested Knowledge | February Start Edition

The Philosophy Behind This Guide

This guide represents hundreds of hours of research, planning, and real-world trail experience distilled into a single comprehensive resource. It is not a theoretical exercise—it is a battle-tested system built on 840+ miles of completed thru-hikes across three major trail systems, earning the rare Sassafras Award from the Ozark Society.

The Appalachian Trail demands respect. It is 2,190+ miles of variable terrain, unpredictable weather, and constant decision-making. Success requires more than fitness—it requires systems, knowledge, and the discipline to apply both consistently.

Core Principles

- Prevention beats treatment – in gear, health, and decision-making
- Consistency beats intensity – sustainable systems finish trails
- Sleep and recovery are non-negotiable
- Weight reduction comes from discipline, not deprivation
- Every decision should serve one goal: reaching Katahdin

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized by system rather than chronology. Each chapter addresses a critical aspect of thru-hiking and provides both the reasoning behind decisions and the specific protocols to follow.

- Read it before your hike
- Reference it during planning
- Carry the key sections digitally for field use

“The hikers who finish are not the strongest—they are the ones who listen, adapt, and stay patient.”

CHAPTER 01

Hiker Profile & Experience

This section documents verified long-distance completions, prior AT experience, and the skills that directly translate to Appalachian Trail readiness.

Completed Thru-Hikes

Ouachita Trail — Full Thru-Hike

- ~223 miles | ~45,000 ft cumulative elevation gain
- Arkansas–Oklahoma | Rugged, remote, limited services

Ozark Highlands Trail — Full Thru-Hike

- ~270 miles | ~35,000–40,000 ft cumulative elevation gain
- Northern Arkansas | Includes Buffalo River region

Ozark Trail — Full Thru-Hike

- ~230 miles | ~40,000 ft cumulative elevation gain

- Missouri | Rocky tread, long resupply gaps

Total Completed Mileage: ~720+ miles **Estimated Cumulative Elevation Gain:** ~120,000+ feet

Recognition

Sassafras Award – Ozark Society

Awarded for completion of the Ouachita Trail, Ozark Highlands Trail, and Ozark Trail.
6th person in history to receive this award.

Prior Appalachian Trail Experience

Standing Bear Farm to Hot Springs, NC

- ~35 miles | ~9,000 ft elevation gain
- Full pack, winter conditions

Newfound Gap to Clingmans Dome (Overnight)

- ~16 miles round trip | ~3,300 ft elevation gain
- Shelter stay in ~17°F conditions
- Summit: 6,643 ft (highest point on the AT)

High-Elevation Experience: Pikes Peak, Colorado – Crags Trail

- ~13 miles round trip | ~4,300 ft elevation gain
- Summit elevation: 14,115 ft

Core Competencies

- Multi-week self-supported backpacking
- Cold-weather camping and shelter living
- Sustained elevation gain/loss over long distances
- Rugged, rocky, under-maintained trail systems
- River crossings and navigation
- Resupply planning and execution

- Proven physical and mental endurance
-

CHAPTER 02

Gear System

Chapter 1: Base Weight Philosophy

Base weight is the foundation of sustainable long-distance hiking. Every ounce carried compounds over thousands of miles into joint stress, fatigue, and potential injury. However, ultralight ideology taken too far sacrifices sleep quality, safety, and morale—the very things that enable trail completion.

This gear system prioritizes:

- Sleep quality and recovery above all else
- Safety systems that function in worst-case conditions
- Durability over marginal weight savings
- Realistic winter capability for February start

Chapter 2: Complete Base Weight Breakdown

Pack System (No Food/Water): 24.76 lb

Backpack & Carry

Item	Weight
Osprey Atmos AG LT 50	67.0 oz
Scrubba Wash Bag	5.3 oz

Shelter System

Item	Weight
Durston 1+ Tent (body + fly + poles)	36.8 oz

Item	Weight
Tent stakes (10)	3.5 oz
Guylines	2.5 oz

Sleep System

Item	Weight
Zenbivy 10° Down Quilt	29.5 oz
Zenbivy Down Sheet	19.0 oz
Sleeping Pad (R ≈ 8)	25.0 oz
Pillow	4.8 oz

Sleep Clothing

Item	Weight
Smartwool Merino 250 Sleep Top	8.5 oz
Smartwool Merino 250 Sleep Pants	8.7 oz
Sleep Socks	3.7 oz

Insulation & Shells

Item	Weight
Mountain Hardwear Down Puffy	8.5 oz
Outdoor Research Rain Jacket	12.9 oz

Kitchen

Item	Weight
Stove	3.0 oz
Cook Pot	4.5 oz
TOAKS 450ml Titanium Cup	2.7 oz
Cup Lid	0.9 oz

Item	Weight
Spoon	1.6 oz
Fuel Canister (full)	7.0 oz
Lighter + Backup	0.8 oz

Electronics (Fanny Pack)

Item	Weight
iPhone	7.9 oz
Anker Prime 26,000 mAh Battery	23.5 oz
Anker 140W Fast Charger	8.8 oz
Garmin inReach Mini 2	3.5 oz
Ray-Ban Meta Gen 2 Smart Glasses + Case	6.4 oz
Headlamp	1.5 oz

Worn Weight: 2.76 lb

Item	Weight
Rab Proflex Rain Pants	11.6 oz
Rab Alpha Freak (Polartec Alpha Direct)	12.7 oz
Smartwool Hiking Socks	3.7 oz
Underwear	3.2 oz
Buff	2.3 oz
Bauerfeind Hinged Knee Brace	10.6 oz

Total Carried (No Food/Water): 27.52 lb Typical Trail Weight: ~36.7 lb

Chapter 3: Gear Transitions

This gear system is designed to evolve with trail conditions. Carrying winter gear through summer is unnecessary weight; arriving in the Whites without proper

equipment is dangerous.

Hot Springs, NC – First Transition

Items Dropped:

- Microspikes
- Chemical water treatment tablets

Changes Made:

- Switch from chemical treatment to filter-only

Rationale: Elevation drops after Hot Springs. Freeze-thaw risk largely ends. Filter freeze risk becomes manageable.

Damascus, VA – Major Transition

Items Dropped:

- Smartwool 250 Sleep Top
- Smartwool 250 Sleep Pants
- Heavy Winter Quilt
- R-8 Sleeping Pad

Items Added/Switched:

- Lightweight sleep layers
- Vesper Quilt (lighter)
- R-3-4 Sleeping Pad

Rationale: Daytime temps consistently 50s-60s. Nights rarely below freezing. Sleep warmth becomes comfort-based, not survival-based.

Chapter 4: Hard Shakedown Principles

Weight reduction is achieved through discipline and redundancy removal—not by sacrificing sleep, safety, or morale.

Zone 1: Electronics Discipline

Electronics creep is the single biggest silent weight problem for experienced hikers.

- **Keep:** 1 primary charging cable, 1 backup cable, 1 wall charger, 1 battery bank
- **Cut:** Duplicate adapters, long cables, ‘maybe I’ll need it’ electronics
- **Expected Savings:** 6-10 oz

Zone 2: Clothing

Cut clothing that doesn’t get used, not insulation.

- **Allowed roles:** Hiking, Sleeping/Dry, Insulation
- **Hard limit:** 1 hiking set, 1 sleep set, 1 insulation system
- **Expected Savings:** 8-16 oz

Zone 3: Cook System

- **Keep:** One pot, one spoon, one mini Bic
- **Cut if present:** Backup lighter, extra utensil, windscreens (unless required)
- **Expected Savings:** 4-8 oz

Zone 4: Consumables

Repackage into 3-5 day amounts: toothpaste, soap, sunscreen, wet wipes, meds.

- **Rule:** Refill in town. Do not carry fear weight.
- **Expected Savings:** 6-10 oz

Zone 5: Tools & Just-in-Case Items

- **Cut:** Overbuilt repair kits, excess cordage, multi-tools doing single jobs
- **Rule:** If unused for 7 trail days, it goes in a hiker box.
- **Expected Savings:** 4-6 oz

CHAPTER 03

Clothing System

Core Principles

- Dry at night. Warm while moving. Block wind always.
- Wet hiking clothes are acceptable.
- Wet + cold + static is dangerous.
- Sleep layers are sacred and never hiked in.
- Calories are heat.

Layer Definitions

Base Layer (Next-to-Skin)

- Smartwool merino long-sleeve top
- Smartwool merino long johns
- **Primary role:** Sleep + camp
- **Secondary:** Rare, brief emergency daytime use only

Active Mid Layer

- Lightweight fleece / grid fleece
- Hiking pants
- **Purpose:** Warmth while moving. Breathable insulation.

Shell Layer

- Waterproof rain jacket (also wind shell)
- Rain pants
- **Purpose:** Wind and precipitation protection. Critical on ridges and during stops.

Insulation Layer (Static Only)

- Down puffy jacket
 - **Purpose:** Camp warmth. Emergency heat retention. Not used while hiking except in emergencies.
-

Layering by Temperature

Condition	Layers
45-60°F Moving / Dry	Hiking shirt only, pants if windy
35-45°F Moving / Dry	Hiking hoodie, Alpha Freak, hiking pants, Buff optional
25-35°F Moving / Dry	All mid layers, Buff, shell for wind only
20-30°F Moving / Snow / Wind	Full layering including shell, Buff, gloves
Camp / Static (Any Temp)	Down puffy ON immediately. Shell over puffy if windy. Never rely on Alpha for static warmth.
Sleep (Every Night)	Smartwool 250 sleep top and pants. Dry socks. Puffy inside quilt if temps drop.

72-Hour Cold/Wet Survival Protocol

Morning

- Eat something
- Pack sleep clothes first (dry bag)
- Accept wet hiking clothes
- Start slightly cool

Moving in Rain/Sleet/Snow

- Alpha Freak + shell
- Rain pants
- Vent early to avoid sweat buildup
- Eat every 60-90 minutes
- **Never hike in the down puffy.**

End-of-Day (Non-Negotiable)

- Strip wet clothes immediately
- Put on dry Smartwool sleep layers
- Puffy on immediately
- Eat calories
- Get into quilt early

If Forced to Stop (Injury/Delay)

- Puffy on
 - Shell on
 - Buff + gloves on
 - Get off the ground
 - Preserve heat first
-

CHAPTER 04

Water Treatment System

Final System Decision

- Primary: Hollow-fiber filter (BeFree or Platypus QuickDraw class)
- Backup: Chlorine dioxide tablets

Why This Combination

- Filters cannot be reliably tested after possible freezing
 - Chemical drops provide guaranteed backup
 - Both systems require waiting time in cold water (30-45 minutes)
 - Filter + drops provides maximum margin
-

Tablet Selection: Potable Aqua — Chlorine Dioxide

- Same chemistry as Aquamira drops
- Kills bacteria, viruses, Giardia
- Kills Cryptosporidium with extended time
- Best taste among widely available tablets
- Cannot freeze

Supply Math

- Daily water use: 3 liters
 - 1 tablet = 1 liter
 - 60 days = 180 tablets
 - Buy 10 packs (20 tablets each) = 200 liters coverage
-

Winter Workflow

Step 1 – Collect

Scoop water into dirty bottle or bag. Choose clearest source available.

Step 2 – Filter

Filter into 1L Smartwater bottle. Removes sediment, improves taste. **Water is NOT virus-safe yet.**

Step 3 – Purify

Drop 1 chlorine dioxide tablet into bottle. Cap and gently shake.

Step 4 – Wait

- Normal filtered spring water: 30-45 minutes
- Cold, questionable, high-use areas: up to 4 hours

Step 5 – Drink

Water is now safe from bacteria, viruses, and protozoa.

Freeze Protection Rules

Night Rule (Non-Negotiable)

Liquids and lithium sleep with you.

Put these inside your sleeping bag every night:

- Filter
- Tablets
- Batteries
- Glasses
- Phone / InReach

Day Rule

After using the filter:

- Shake out excess water
- Put filter immediately against your body
- Inner jacket pocket or fanny pack

What Does NOT Work

- Backpack pockets
- Wrapped in clothes inside pack
- Insulated sleeves without body heat

Insulation without heat always loses overnight.

CHAPTER 05

Shelter vs. Tent Decision System

Core Philosophy

- Tent is the default
- Shelters are a safety tool, not a comfort choice

- Poor sleep and mouse exposure are accepted costs only when risk outweighs discomfort
 - Decisions are made using objective triggers, not mood or convenience
-

When Shelter Becomes the Right Decision

Go to a shelter if **ANY ONE** of the following is true:

Wind + Cold Combination

- Temps below ~25°F
- Sustained wind 15+ mph or gusts 20+ mph
- Exposed ridge or saddle
- You feel cold before stopping

Freezing Rain or Heavy Wet Snow

Automatic shelter night. No debate.

Ground Conditions You Cannot Mitigate

- Solid ice
- Snow too deep to anchor
- No flat or drained tent sites

You Are Wet and Can't Get Dry Before Dark

- Damp clothing
- Temps dropping
- No sun left
- Hands losing dexterity

Mental or Physical Exhaustion

- Foggy thinking
- Irritation during setup
- Skipping food or water steps

- **Shelter reduces complexity when judgment is compromised.**
-

What Is NOT a Shelter Trigger

- It's cold but dry and calm
- You're tired but functional
- Others are staying there
- You want convenience

Tent handles those conditions fine.

Shelter Night Protocol

Arrival

- Scan for mice
- Choose sleeping spot away from walls and corners
- Identify food hang or bear box immediately

Food & Scent Lockdown (First Action)

- Food, trash, toothpaste, lip balm, sanitizer, wrappers – all together
- Hang or box immediately
- Nothing scented touches the floor
- Pack stays closed

Gear Control

Keep with you:

- Headlamp
- Phone
- Filter (inside bag)
- Battery bank
- Water bottle

Never leave loose:

- Gloves
- Socks
- Trek pole handles
- Hip belt pockets

Night Behavior

- No food after final hang
- No wrappers opened
- Ignore mice unless contacting gear
- Shoes upright, not flat

Morning Exit

- Pack sleep system
 - Pack all non-food gear
 - Retrieve food last
 - Eat outside if possible
 - Visual sweep for crumbs
-

CHAPTER 06

Weather Strategy

Temperature Planning

Elevation Temperature Drop

Worst-case planning: 5.5°F colder per 1,000 feet of elevation gain

This represents dry air, strong mixing, and cold-biased conditions.

Example: Hot Springs to Max Patch

- Hot Springs: ~1,378 ft
- Max Patch summit: ~4,629 ft
- Elevation gain: ~3,251 ft

If 30°F in Hot Springs:

- 1,000 ft up: 24.5°F
- 2,000 ft up: 19.0°F
- Max Patch: ~12°F (before wind chill)

Wind Chill Impact

At 12°F air temperature:

Wind Speed Feels Like

5 mph ~4°F

10 mph ~-1°F

15 mph ~-4°F

20 mph ~-6°F

Multi-Day Rain Strategy

Core Principles

- Rain alone is manageable. **Wind + rain is the threat.**
- Your sleep system must stay dry at all costs.
- You operate in two phases: **WET PHASE → DRY PHASE**
- Decisions are made early, not at dark.

Movement Strategy

- Continue hiking in rain
- Reduce mileage slightly if needed
- Take short, infrequent breaks
- Stay warm by movement, not by stopping

Rain Camp Sequence

Step 1: Pitch tent FIRST (wet phase) Pitch immediately on arrival. Do NOT open dry bags.

Step 2: Cook & Eat (wet phase) Cook outside or at vestibule edge. Rain gear stays ON.

Step 3: Bear Hang IMMEDIATELY (wet phase) Do not enter tent before this step.

Step 4: Dry Phase Transition (inside tent)

- Enter tent, close door
 - Strip wet clothes
 - Put on dry sleep clothes
 - Get into quilt
 - If you forgot something outside — it waits.
-

Off-Grid Weather Awareness

Using Apple Watch Ultra + Garmin inReach Mini 2 without internet.

Core Principle

You NEVER evaluate pressure while hiking. You ONLY evaluate pressure while STOPPED.

Trail elevation changes while hiking are meaningless for weather detection. Elevation drift while stationary = pressure change.

Morning Baseline (5 minutes)

1. Open Apple Watch → Compass → Elevation
2. Stand still 2-3 minutes
3. Note the elevation number
4. Pull Garmin weather forecast

How to Interpret Elevation Drift (While Still)

Pattern	Meaning
Normal/Stable	Elevation fluctuates ±3-5 ft, settles quickly. Pressure stable, weather stable.
Caution – Weather	Elevation drops 10-20 ft over 3-6 hours without moving.
Approaching	Weather likely in 12-24 hours.
Danger – Weather	Elevation drops 20-30+ ft in 1-3 hours. Rapid pressure drop. Adjust plans immediately.
Imminent	

The 2-Out-of-5 Rule

If **ANY TWO** occur together, act conservatively:

1. Pressure dropping (Ultra elevation drift)
2. Wind increasing or shifting
3. Clouds thickening or lowering
4. Garmin forecast worsens
5. Sudden temperature drop

CHAPTER 07

Food & Resupply

Typical Carry Strategy

Standard Food Carry Range

3 to 5 days of food — This is the dominant norm across the entire trail.

By Section

Section	Common Carry
Early Trail (Georgia through Southern NC)	3-4 days — Frequent road crossings, hostels close together

Section	Common Carry
Mid-Trail and Later	4-5 days — Rhythm stabilizes
Long Carries (6-7+ Days)	Exceptions only. Primarily the 100-Mile Wilderness in Maine.

Trail Food Staples

Breakfast

- Instant oatmeal packets
- Pop-Tarts
- Granola or cereal
- Carnation Breakfast Essentials

Lunch & All-Day Carry

- Tortillas (won't crush like bread)
- Peanut butter or Nutella
- Summer sausage
- Hard cheese
- Tuna or chicken foil packets

Dinner (One-Pot Meals)

- Instant ramen noodles
- Knorr Pasta or Rice Sides
- Instant mashed potatoes
- Couscous or instant rice

Snacks

- Snickers (unofficial AT currency)
- M&Ms, Reese's
- Trail mix
- Jerky
- Energy bars

Food Storage & Bear Protection

The Three Problems

Threat	Reality
Bears	Strong, smart, food-conditioned in many AT areas
Mice / Rodents	Everywhere shelters exist. Silent. Chew gear, not just food.
Humans	Tired, lazy at night, cut corners. Cause most failures.

PCT Bear Hang (Gold Standard)

Required Geometry (Non-Negotiable)

- Branch height: 18-20 feet
- Bag height: ~12 feet off ground
- Distance from trunk: ~6 feet
- Distance below branch: ~6 feet

Step-by-Step

1. Choose single strong horizontal branch
2. Throw line over branch (use throw bag)
3. Clip food bag to one end with carabiner
4. Hoist bag to proper height
5. Insert stick toggle into carabiner
6. Slowly lower rope until toggle jams
7. Let free end hang loose

Nothing is tied to the tree.

Simple Decision Rule

- Bear box available? → **Use it**
- Bear cables or poles? → **Use them**
- No system + tenting/shelter? → **PCT hang**

- Sleeping in shelter (no bear system)? → **Mouse line + odor control**
-

Ramen Cooking Guide

Trail/Fuel-Saving Method

1. Bring 2-2½ cups water to rolling boil
2. Turn stove OFF
3. Add noodles
4. Cover pot immediately
5. Let sit 5-7 minutes (7-8 minutes below freezing)
6. Add seasoning packet
7. Stir thoroughly
8. Eat immediately

Key Rule: Seasoning goes in AFTER soaking, not before.

Peanut Butter Ramen

Chicken broth + peanut butter does NOT taste good.

Best Method: Noodles + Peanut Butter Only

1. Cook noodles using trail method
 2. Drain most water
 3. Add 1-2 tablespoons peanut butter
 4. Stir until fully coated
 5. Optional: Add pinch of seasoning for salt
-

CHAPTER 08

Town Strategy

Town Rhythm

Standard Pattern

- Town stop: Every 3-5 days
- Nero (near-zero day): Every 5-7 days
- Zero day: About every 7-14 days

Nero Days

Partial day in town:

- Eat, Shower, Laundry, Charge devices, Resupply
- Then hike short distance (under 10 miles)

Zero Days

Full 24 hours off trail:

- Complete recovery
- Gear checks
- Physical and mental reset
- Mail drops or gear replacement

5-Day Hike + Zero Day Schedule

Never hike more than 5 days without a zero.

Planning Assumptions

- Start window: February 1-7
- Hiking days per cycle: 5
- Zero day per cycle: 1
- Total cycle length: 6 calendar days

Phased Mileage Targets

Phase	Section	Target
Phase 1: Winter Start (Feb)	Georgia → Southern NC	8-9 miles/day – Cold weather, short daylight, cautious movement. Body-preservation phase.
Phase 2: Trail Legs Arrive (Mar-May)	NC/TN → Virginia	10-11 miles/day
Phase 3: Strong & Efficient (May-Jun)	Virginia	12-13 miles/day – Schedule debt gets paid back—without breaking food limits.
Phase 4: Long Daylight (Jul-Aug)	NY → VT → NH	13-14 miles/day
Phase 5: Maine Reality (Aug-Sep)	NH → Katahdin	11-12 miles/day – Maine terrain is slower; final push is realistic and safe.

Expected Finish: September 17-20

Laundry System

Core Reality

You do NOT carry extra clothes. Laundry is done while you are still dressed and functional.

Standard Laundry Outfit

- Smartwool long johns (top and/or bottom)
- Flip-flops
- Rain jacket (puffy if cold)

Correct Laundry Order

1. Enter town wearing hiking clothes
2. Change into laundry outfit first
3. Put all hiking clothes directly into washer
4. Add detergent and start washer
5. Shower while washer is running

6. Put laundry outfit back on after shower
7. Transfer clothes to dryer
8. Dry fully (run twice if needed)
9. Change into clean hiking clothes

Never shower first and then wear dirty clothes again.

Walk-Only Resupply: Dollar General

There are ZERO Walmart stores within 2 walking miles of the AT. All Walmart resupplies require a ride.

Walkable Dollar General Locations

Town	Mile	Distance
Hot Springs, NC	~274.5	0.3 miles
Erwin, TN	~343.8	0.6 miles
Hampton, TN	~421.9	0.8 miles
Pearisburg, VA	~635.7	0.9 miles
Daleville, VA	~727.3	0.7 miles
Waynesboro, VA	~861.7	1.1 miles
Front Royal, VA	~971.1	1.0 mile
Palmerton, PA	~1266.6	0.9 miles
Great Barrington, MA	~1518.8	1.4 miles
Gorham, NH	~1890.7	1.2 miles

CHAPTER 09

Permits & Logistics

Required Permits

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Appalachian Trail Thru-Hiker Permit — REQUIRED

- Online only: smokiespermits.nps.gov
- Cost: \$40
- Get 1-5 days before entering the Smokies
- PDF permit generated immediately
- Digital copy accepted (no print required)
- Valid for 38 days from issue

Shenandoah National Park

Backcountry Permit — REQUIRED

- Recreation.gov (online only as of Jan 2024)
- Cost: \$9 per person + \$6 reservation fee
- Select 'Appalachian Trail' area for thru-hiker flexibility
- Choose 14-day window
- Get before entering Shenandoah
- Digital copy sufficient

Baxter State Park / Katahdin

AT Hiker Permit — REQUIRED

- **IN PERSON ONLY**
- Katahdin Stream Campground Ranger Station
- FREE
- Can obtain up to 7 days before summit
- The Birches Campsite: \$10/night, first-come first-served

ATC Hang Tag

Voluntary identifier, NOT a permit. NOT required to hike.

How to Get:

- Register on ATCamp (online) before pickup
 - Participate in short Leave No Trace discussion
 - Available at Amicalola Falls (mid-Feb through mid-April)
 - Also available at Damascus, Harpers Ferry, Monson
-

Known Detours (2026)

Detour	Added Distance
Green Corner Road Detour (NC/TN)	~0.5 mi
Nolichucky River Bridge Detour (TN)	~3.6 mi
Iron Mountain Gap Detour (NC/TN)	~5.5 mi
Virginia Creeper Trail Closure	~20.9 mi
Great Gulf Detour (NH)	~6.4 mi (actually easier than original)

CHAPTER 10

USPS Mail Drop System

General Delivery Rules

Hold Times

- Official USPS rule: Up to 30 days
- Large AT towns: Usually 30 days
- Small/rural offices: Often 7-14 days

Best Practice

- Ship packages 7-10 days before arrival
- Never ship earlier than 14 days

- Always include an ETA
 - If delayed, call the post office
-

Box Labeling Format

Do not deviate from this format:

THEMAN HOGG
GENERAL DELIVERY
CITY, STATE ZIP
PLEASE HOLD FOR AT HIKER
ETA: MM/DD/YYYY

Rules

- Write your name on all six sides
 - Use Sharpie
 - ETA matters
-

Recommended Mail Drop Locations

Location	Mile	Notes
Hot Springs, NC	~274.6	One of the most reliable mail drops on the AT
Damascus, VA	~470.7	AT hub, dependable, generous hold times
Daleville, VA	~685.3	Easy access, grocery nearby
Harpers Ferry, WV	~860.6	Psychological halfway point, very reliable
Duncannon, PA	~1090.5	Excellent PO + hostel logistics
Hanover, NH	~1460.4	Key resupply before the Whites
Monson, ME	~1893.1	Gateway to 100-Mile Wilderness. Hold time often 14 days max.

CHAPTER 11

Power & Electronics

Primary Charging Sources

Anker Prime Power Bank (26,000 mAh, 300W)

- Rated energy: 99.75 Wh
- Airline compliant (under 100 Wh)
- Real usable capacity: ~22,000-23,000 mAh
- This is the single energy reservoir for the entire system.

Anker 140W USB-C Wall Charger

- Used in towns only
 - Allows rapid recharge
 - Minimizes town time
-

Devices Being Charged

Device	Requirement
iPhone 17 Pro Max	Daily recharge: ~3,000-3,500 mAh. Must be charged every night.
Garmin inReach Mini 2	Recharge cycle: once every 5-7 days
Apple Watch Ultra	Recharge frequency: every 2 days
Headlamp, Air Pump, Ray-Ban Case	Recharge: once per 4-5 days each

5-Day Power Budget

Metric	Value
Estimated Total Demand	~24,000 mAh
Available Capacity	~22,000-23,000 mAh
Duration	Status
4 days	Comfortable, low stress
5 days	Achievable with discipline
5+ days	Requires strict power-save mode

Daily Charging Routine

Every Night (Non-Negotiable)

- Charge iPhone to ~90-95%

Every Other Night

- Charge Apple Watch Ultra to ~80-90%

As Needed

- Garmin: charge if below 35%
- Headlamp: charge if below 40%

CHAPTER 12

Medical Planning

First Aid Kit Philosophy

- Prevent problems before they stop mileage
- Treat common injuries efficiently
- Stabilize serious issues and walk to town
- Resupply in towns—do not overcarry

- **Feet are the highest priority**
 - Target weight: 3-6 oz
-

Kit Contents

Wound Care

- Leukotape (wrapped around straw)
- Alcohol wipes (2-4)
- Non-stick gauze pads (2)
- Medical tape
- QuikClot or clotting gauze (1)
- Neosporin or antibiotic ointment

Foot & Blister Management (Critical)

- Pre-cut Leukotape strips
- Sewing needle or safety pin
- Benzoin tincture wipe
- Anti-chafe stick or balm

Tape early. Do not wait for pain.

Medications

- Ibuprofen (6-10 tablets)
- Antihistamine (4 tablets)
- Anti-diarrheal (4 tablets)
- Personal prescription meds

Winter Add-Ons

- Lip balm with SPF
 - Hand cream
 - Extra Leukotape
 - Chemical hand warmers (2)
-

Trail Medical Rules

Use Urgent Care For:

- Sprains, strains
- Cuts needing stitches
- Infections
- Dehydration
- Respiratory issues

Dental Red Flags (Do Not Wait):

- Swelling
- Tooth fracture
- Abscess
- Persistent pain

CHAPTER 13

Safety & Emergency Procedures

Core Principle

Act early. Most trail emergencies are not sudden disasters—they are delayed decisions.

Rapid Weather Change Recognition

Visual Warning Signs

- Dark clouds moving quickly, especially low and rolling
- Clouds dropping into ridges or saddles
- White haze forming on ridgelines
- Sudden loss of visibility

- Fast temperature drop over minutes

Wind-Based Warnings

- Sudden wind direction change
- Rapid increase in wind speed
- Wind funneling hard through gaps or saddles

Sound & Sensory Warnings

- Any thunder (even distant)
- Metallic or sharp smell in the air
- Tingling, buzzing, or hair standing up

Lightning protocol immediately. Get off ridges and summits.

Hypothermia Indicators

Shelter or bail immediately if:

- Wet + cold + wind present
- Hands stop working normally
- Violent shivering OR shivering stops
- Slurred speech or slowed thinking
- Loss of coordination

Terrain-Based Abort Signals

Turn around if:

- Ice on rocks or roots
- Snow covering trail tread
- Fast-rising streams after rain
- Slips increasing in frequency

Emergency Exit Strategy

Emergency Call Priority

1. Call 911 (life, limb, weather danger)
2. National Park Service dispatch: 1-866-677-6677
3. If no service: 3 short whistle blasts, repeat

Emergency Location Script

Use this verbatim when calling:

“I am on the Appalachian Trail.” “State: [STATE]” “Nearest named point: [ROAD/SHELTER/LANDMARK]” “I am hiking northbound.” “Approximate mile marker: [MILE]” “GPS coordinates: [LAT/LONG]” “Can I walk: Yes/No/Limited” “Nature of problem: [ISSUE]”

InReach Bail-Out Method

Primary Method: Relay Through Logistics Contact

Message a trusted person at home. They:

- Call hostels
- Call shuttle drivers
- Coordinate rides
- Message instructions back to you

Example Message:

“Bad weather. Need off-trail help. I’m near AT mile 705 (McAfee Knob area).”

When to Press SOS

- Injury prevents movement
- Hypothermia risk is real
- Flooding traps you

- You are lost and disoriented
 - Self-rescue is no longer possible
-

— CHAPTER 14 —

Trail Sections & Milestones

Major Sections (NOBO)

“I’m not hiking 2,198 miles—I’m hiking 14 victories.”

Georgia – Mile 0 to ~78.5

Sharp climbs early, Blood Mountain. First state down.

Southern North Carolina – Mile ~78.5 to ~165.7

Long ridge walks. You’re officially a real AT hiker.

Great Smoky Mountains – Mile ~165.7 to ~241

Highest sustained elevations. Clingmans Dome 6,643 ft.

Northern NC & Tennessee – Mile ~241 to ~386

Big balds, Roan Highlands. Damascus = Trail Town USA.

Southern Virginia – Mile ~386 to ~550

Grayson Highlands, wild ponies. You’re cruising now.

Central Virginia – Mile ~550 to ~785

Longest state. Long ridge walks, manageable climbs.

Shenandoah National Park – Mile ~785 to ~863

Gentle grades, frequent services. Fast miles.

Northern Virginia – Mile ~863 to ~1,025

The Roller Coaster. Short, steep ups and downs.

Mid-Atlantic – Mile ~1,025 to ~1,290

Harpers Ferry, rocky PA. **Halfway is behind you.**

NY-NJ Highlands – Mile ~1,290 to ~1,525

Short climbs, frequent towns. States fall fast.

Southern New England – Mile ~1,525 to ~1,630

CT and MA. Rolling, humid. You're in the North.

Vermont – Mile ~1,630 to ~1,791

Green Mountains. Mud season. Last 'easy' state.

White Mountains – Mile ~1,791 to ~1,912

Hardest terrain on AT. Alpine travel. **If you finish this, you WILL finish.**

Maine – Mile ~1,912 to ~2,198

Roots, rocks, ladders. **Katahdin is inevitable.**

CHAPTER 15

Content Creation

Daily Video Structure

Each video serves three goals:

1. Document the Appalachian Trail honestly
2. Provide practical information future hikers want

3. Capture the emotional, physical, and spiritual reality

Total length: 5-10 minutes max

Section 1: Quick Context (30-45 sec)

- Where the day started
- Weather or expectations
- One concern or unknown

Section 2: On-Trail Movement (1-2 min)

- Trail tread (rocks, roots, mud, ice)
- Steep climbs and descents
- Confusing turns
- White blazes

Section 3: Significant Sites (1-2 min)

- Summits and viewpoints
- Shelters (inside and outside)
- Water crossings
- Trail magic locations

Section 4: Practical Trail Intel (2-3 min)

- Weather report
- Water report (source name, flow, filtering notes)
- Shelter report (water, bear systems, mice, crowding)

Section 5: Gear in Real Use (1-2 min)

- Water filtering
- Cooking meals
- Cold-weather layering
- Camp setup

Section 6: End-of-Day Wrap (1-2 min)

- Total miles hiked
 - Hardest part of the day
 - Best moment
 - One lesson learned
 - What tomorrow looks like
-

Scripture Integration System

Each verse reflects the day—it does not explain it.

The Six Trail Categories

Category	Scripture
Fear / Uncertainty / Wildlife	Isaiah 41:10 – “Fear thou not; for I am with thee...”
Cold / Rain / Suffering	James 1:12 – “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation...”
Long Miles / Fatigue / Grind Days	Galatians 6:9 – “And let us not be weary in well doing...”
Decisions / Route Finding	Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart...”
Provision / Help / Right Place Right Time	Matthew 6:11 – “Give us this day our daily bread.”
Gratitude / Victory / Quiet Days	Psalm 118:24 – “This is the day which the LORD hath made...”

Scripture Presentation

- King James Version text only
- Clean on-screen text
- Soft or ambient audio underneath
- Fade in → hold → fade out

- Never more than 10 seconds
-

CHAPTER 16

Financial Planning

Worst-Case Funding Plan

Locked Assumptions

- Total trail time: 242 days
 - Start: February 1
 - Finish: End of September
 - Zero days: One every 5 days (48 total)
 - Hiking days: 194
 - Lodging: Private rooms preferred
-

Cost Model

Hiking Days (194 days)

Item	Cost
Trail food + snacks	\$22/day
Small incidentals	\$4/day
Total per hiking day	\$26
Hiking day total	\$5,044

Zero Days (48 days)

Item	Cost
Private lodging	\$110
Town food (2-3 meals)	\$55

Item	Cost
Laundry/resupply incidentals	\$20
Shuttles/local transport	\$15
Total per zero day	\$200
Zero day total	\$9,600

Total Gross Trail Cost

\$14,644 (worst case, 242 days)

Offsets

Source	Amount
Weekly allowance ($\$150 \times 34.5$ weeks)	\$5,175
Household expense savings	\$4,658
Starting food carry	\$110
Total offsets	\$9,943

Net Household Impact

\$4,701 total (~\$590/month)

Money will not be the reason the hike becomes unsafe, rushed, or miserable.

— CHAPTER 17 —

The Path to Katahdin

This guide represents everything learned from 840+ miles of thru-hiking, hundreds of hours of research, and the hard-won wisdom of countless hikers who came before. It

is not theoretical—it is tested.

The Appalachian Trail will challenge you in ways you cannot fully anticipate. Weather will test your systems. Terrain will test your body. The sheer length will test your mind. But with proper preparation, disciplined execution, and the humility to adapt, you will stand on Katahdin.

Final Trail Truths

- Heavy packs don't end hikes—**bad sleep and injury do**
 - Water planning matters more than mileage
 - Small injuries ignored become hike-enders
 - Weather humility keeps you alive
 - Mental discipline finishes the trail—not strength
 - The trail is not conquered; it is negotiated daily
-

One-Line Trail Rule

Slow early. Strong later. Never break the 5-day rule.

Every system in this guide exists for one purpose: to put you on top of Katahdin, healthy and strong, before the snow flies.

The preparation is complete. Focus now shifts to execution, pacing, and decision-making.

See you on Katahdin, Theman.

— QUICK REFERENCE

SHELTER TRIGGERS

Go to a shelter if ANY ONE is true:

1. Wind + Cold

- Temps below ~25°F
- Sustained wind 15+ mph or gusts 20+ mph
- Exposed ridge or saddle
- You feel cold before stopping

2. Freezing Rain or Heavy Wet Snow

Automatic shelter night. No debate.

3. Ground Conditions

- Solid ice
- Snow too deep to anchor
- No flat or drained tent sites

4. Wet and Can't Dry Before Dark

- Damp clothing + temps dropping
- No sun left
- Hands losing dexterity

5. Mental/Physical Exhaustion

- Foggy thinking
- Irritation during setup
- Skipping food or water steps

NOT a shelter trigger:

- Cold but dry and calm
- Tired but functional
- Others are staying there

- Convenience
-

— QUICK REFERENCE —

Layering Chart

While Moving

Temp	Layers
45-60°F	Hiking shirt only, pants if windy
35-45°F	Hiking hoodie, Alpha Freak, hiking pants, Buff optional
25-35°F	All mid layers, Buff, shell for wind only
20-30°F	Full layering including shell, Buff, gloves

Static / Camp

- Down puffy ON immediately
- Shell over puffy if windy
- Never rely on Alpha for static warmth

Sleep (Every Night)

- Smartwool 250 sleep top and pants
 - Dry socks
 - Puffy inside quilt if temps drop
-

Core Rules

- Wet hiking clothes = acceptable
- Wet + cold + static = dangerous
- Sleep layers are sacred – never hike in them

- Calories are heat
-

QUICK REFERENCE

Emergency Protocol

Call Priority

1. **911** (life, limb, weather danger)
 2. **NPS Dispatch:** 1-866-677-6677
 3. **No service:** 3 short whistle blasts, repeat
-

Location Script

Use this verbatim:

“I am on the Appalachian Trail.”

“State: ___”

“Nearest named point: ___”

“I am hiking northbound.”

“Approximate mile marker: ___”

“GPS coordinates: ___”

“Can I walk: Yes / No / Limited”

“Nature of problem: ___”

InReach Bail-Out

Message your logistics contact:

"Bad weather. Need off-trail help. I'm near AT mile __ (landmark)."

They call hostels/shuttles and message back.

Press SOS When:

- Injury prevents movement
 - Hypothermia risk is real
 - Flooding traps you
 - Lost and disoriented
 - Self-rescue is no longer possible
-

— QUICK REFERENCE

Resupply Locations

Walkable Dollar General

Town	Mile	Distance
Hot Springs, NC	~274.5	0.3 mi
Erwin, TN	~343.8	0.6 mi
Hampton, TN	~421.9	0.8 mi
Pearisburg, VA	~635.7	0.9 mi
Daleville, VA	~727.3	0.7 mi
Waynesboro, VA	~861.7	1.1 mi
Front Royal, VA	~971.1	1.0 mi
Palmerton, PA	~1266.6	0.9 mi
Great Barrington, MA	~1518.8	1.4 mi
Gorham, NH	~1890.7	1.2 mi

Recommended Mail Drops

Location	Mile	Notes
Hot Springs, NC	~274.6	Most reliable on AT
Damascus, VA	~470.7	AT hub, generous hold
Daleville, VA	~685.3	Easy access
Harpers Ferry, WV	~860.6	Halfway, very reliable
Duncannon, PA	~1090.5	Great PO + hostel
Hanover, NH	~1460.4	Before the Whites
Monson, ME	~1893.1	100-Mile gateway (14-day max)

Box Format

THEMAN HOGG
 GENERAL DELIVERY
 CITY, STATE ZIP
 PLEASE HOLD FOR AT HIKER
 ETA: MM/DD/YYYY

— QUICK REFERENCE —

Weather Warning Signs

Visual Warnings

- Dark clouds moving quickly (especially low/rolling)
- Clouds dropping into ridges or saddles
- White haze on ridgelines
- Sudden visibility loss
- Fast temperature drop

Wind Warnings

- Sudden direction change
- Rapid speed increase
- Funneling through gaps/saddles

Sound & Sensory

- Any thunder (even distant)
- Metallic or sharp smell
- Tingling, buzzing, hair standing up

→ Lightning protocol immediately. Get off ridges and summits.

2-Out-of-5 Rule

If ANY TWO occur, act conservatively:

1. Pressure dropping (watch elevation drift)
 2. Wind increasing or shifting
 3. Clouds thickening or lowering
 4. Garmin forecast worsens
 5. Sudden temperature drop
-

Pressure Reading (Stationary Only)

Elevation Drift	Meaning
±3-5 ft, settles	Stable
Drops 10-20 ft over 3-6 hrs	Weather in 12-24 hrs
Drops 20-30+ ft in 1-3 hrs	Weather imminent
