

Clingmans Dome, TN, 6,643 ft. – October 4, 2019, HP #27: On Another Border

It was close to 11:00 a.m. the morning of October 4, when I left Great Smokey Mountains National Park's Smokemont Campground heading for my third peak of the "Southern Six Pack." The Southern Six Pack, which I had started the day before, refers to reaching the highest natural points in South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and North Carolina - all in a single trip. The order is not important.

I arrived at the large parking area for Clingmans Dome at noon. Great Smokey Mountains National Park is one of the most visited national parks in the country, and the all-but-full parking lot clearly made that point.

From the west end of the parking lot, I picked up the paved hiking trail leading northwest up to the North Carolina/Tennessee border. This half-mile hiking route to the top of Tennessee is located almost entirely in North Carolina.

As it happened, after becoming a State in 1789 North Carolina ceded its western claim to the Federal Government. This western claim, which became the state of Tennessee in 1796, was defined as running from the extreme height of the Smoky mountains to the Mississippi River. Because Clingmans Dome resides along the extreme height of the mountains, its north side became part of Tennessee even as the rest remained in North Carolina. With the North Carolina side having a paved road to within a half mile of the peak, reaching the highpoint of Tennessee is typically done from North Carolina.

Not surprisingly the paved hiking path contained a steady stream of people, both coming and going. I assumed most were not concerned with finding the highest point in Tennessee, as I was. Rather they were there to summit the 45-foot-tall circular concrete observation tower located on the peak.

A few feet before reaching the North Carolina/Tennessee border the trail curved to the right, then headed east entering Tennessee. The border of the two states was not labeled. Within 50 yards I encountered the spiral ramp leading up to the top of the tower. Stepping on to the 375-foot-long ramp I was back in North Carolina. Somewhere along those 50 yards, I trusted, I had reached the Tennessee highpoint, but there was no sign to indicate it. Frankly, a pinpointed location of Tennessee's highpoint is not likely, as the summit does not raise to a pinnacle.

Reaching the circular observation platform at the top of the tower I asked someone to take my photo. From the 28-foot diameter platform, under the right conditions, seven states can be seen - Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Built in 1959, Wikipedia states the tower was one of several observation decks constructed as part of an effort by the National Park Service to upgrade its facilities to accommodate an influx of visitors to national parks during the post-World War II era.



Some criticize the tower calling it too urban for its wilderness setting. To me the overly long ramp, and not its urban materials, is what made it seem out of place. However, I noticed if I ignored the ramp the structure seemed to resemble a giant survey marker, making it seem more at home.

Leaving the tower ramp, I asked a park employee to take a picture of me. In the photograph I am standing on the gravel path which connects with the Appalachian Trail. The concrete tower is visible behind me, showing I reached the Tennessee side of Clingmans Dome.

Maps show the Appalachian Trail to run along “the extreme height” of Clingmans Dome. As such, as a means of dotting my I’s and crossing my T’s, I headed over to the Appalachian Trail. I followed it down to the southwest for a bit before returning to the paved trail. As such, lest I had not already crossed the highpoint of the Volunteer State on the paved trail then surely, I crossed it on the Appalachian Trail.

My next Six Pack highpoint would be Kentucky, but not until tomorrow afternoon as I had some more Great Smoky Mountains National Park hiking and camping to do.

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/tjuUFF7WHf6DVU2NA>