

**MST Alternate Route #1  
Great Smoky Mountains Route  
Clingmans Dome to Scott Creek Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway**

**Danny Bernstein**

**Notes**

Most of this section of the Mountains-to-Sea trail is in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, [www.nps.gov/grsm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm), and ends on the Blue Ridge Parkway, [www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri).

Dogs are not allowed on the trails in the Smokies. On the Blue Ridge Parkway, dogs need to be leashed at all times. Hunting is not allowed on Smokies or Parkway land.

The MST starts at the observation tower on top of Clingmans Dome. Park at Clingmans Dome Parking Area, at the western end of Clingmans Dome Rd. The road is open April 1 to November 30 but may close in bad weather. If the road is closed when you want to start your hike, you can access the Observation Tower by hiking south on the Appalachian Trail, 7.9 miles from the parking area at Newfound Gap, US 441. Check the latest Smokies road conditions at <https://twitter.com/SmokiesRoadsNPS>.

On this route, you can stay at two front country campgrounds in the Smokies, Smokemont Campground and Balsam Mountain Campground. Each site has a picnic table and a barbecue grill. The campground has restroom buildings with cold water, sinks, and flush toilets. Water pumps and trashcans are plentiful. Smokemont Campground stays open year-round. You can reserve a campsite at Smokemont campground or take your chances and get a site when you arrive; it's a very large campground. Smokemont Campground may be reserved online or by phone at (877) 444-6777.

Balsam Mountain Campground doesn't accept reservations and opens in the spring. Check the schedule at <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/frontcountry-camping.htm>

Each backcountry campground has a flat surface for tents, a bear cable system to hang up your food and access to water nearby. You need to purchase a backcountry permit for every overnight stay in a backcountry campsite. For details, see

<http://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/backcountry-camping.htm>

Mile High Campground, off Blue Ridge Parkway land, is a private campground. Check the schedule and amenities at [www.campmilehigh.com](http://www.campmilehigh.com).

**Legend**

C – Camping

P – Parking

W- Water

Additional information

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All trails in Great Smoky Mountains National Park are detailed in *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*, published by the Great Smoky Mountains Association, [www.smokiesinformation.org](http://www.smokiesinformation.org). The book, which comes with the latest trail map, is available on the Great Smoky Mountains Association website or in the park visitor center.

### Hiking Directions, Eastbound

- 0.0 From the Clingmans Dome parking area, walk up to the observation tower. An information station and store managed by the Great Smoky Mountains Association is open in season. P
- 0.5 From the observation tower at Clingmans Dome, head north on the Appalachian Trail.
- 1.5 Straight at Old Buzzards Roost in a spruce/pine forest. A spring is on the right. W
- 2.5 Straight at Mt. Collins Gap.
- 3.5 Straight to ascend the summit of Mt. Collins.
- 3.7 Sugarland Mt. Trail takes off to the left. *Note:* The Mt. Collins shelter is 0.5 miles on Sugarland Mountain Trail. C
- 4.0 Turn right 125 feet on spur trail to cross Clingmans Dome Rd. to Fork Ridge Trail. Small parking area at trailhead. P
- 4.5 Straight on Fork Ridge Trail, which descends 2,800 feet over the next 5.1 miles.
- 6.1 Trail crosses small stream. W
- 9.1 Cross Deep Creek, not necessarily on a bridge. W
- 9.1 Turn right on Deep Creek Trail. Camping at Poke Patch backcountry campsite #53. C
- 11.7 Nettle Creek backcountry campsite #54. C
- 12.5 Pole Creek backcountry campsite #55, a horse campsite. C
- 12.6 Pole Road Creek Trail takes off on right. Benton MacKaye Trail joins the MST.
- 12.8 Burnt Spruce backcountry campsite #56. C
- 13.3 Campsite #57, a horse campsite, at the junction of Deep Creek Trail and Martin's Gap Trail. *Note:* This is the last campsite of Horace Kephart (1862-1931), a writer and outdoor activist. If you continue on Deep Creek Trail for a couple of hundred feet and walk into a flat area on the right, you'll find a millstone put up by a Bryson City Boy Scout troop. C
- 13.3 Turn left on Martins Gap Trail. *Note:* The MST River Valley Alternate Route continues on Deep Creek Trail.
- 14.8 Turn left on Sunkota Ridge Trail.
- 19.7 Turn left on Thomas Divide Trail.
- 20.2 Turn left on Newton Bald Trail
- 20.7 Campsite #52
- 25.5 Cross Newfound Gap Road and bridge across Oconaluftee River. *Note:* Walk straight up to visit Smokemont Chapel, which is always open. W
- Turn left and walk into Smokemont Campground. Register for a campsite if you wish to stay here. Each site has a picnic table and a barbecue grill. The campground has restroom buildings with cold water, sinks, and flush toilets. Water pumps and trashcans are plentiful. No campstore. The town of Cherokee is about 3 miles down Newfound Gap Road with all services. C
- 26.0 At the far back of section D of the campground, walk up Bradley Fork Trail.
- 27.2 Turn right on Chasteen Creek Trail. Campsite #50 is on the right almost immediately after you make the turn. C
- 27.9 A short spur trail on the left takes you to Chasteen Waterfall. Look for a hitching post for horses and continue toward the creek. W
- 29.5 Campsite #48 is on the left, situated between two creeks. C

- 31.2 Turn left on Hughes Ridge Trail
- 31.7 Turn right on Enloe Creek Trail. Water is available from small cascades and creeks. **W**
- 32.7 Campsite #47 on Enloe Creek. The campsite is small and often muddy. **C**
- 35.3 Turn left on Hyatt Ridge Trail. *Note:* Sidetrail (0.9 mile one-way) to campsite #44 at McGee Spring. A spacious and attractive campsite. **C**
- 37.0 Turn right on Beech Gap Trail II.
- 39.8 Turn left on Straight Fork Rd. at Round Bottom. Cross bridge **W, P**  
Walk across the parking area and take Beech Gap Trail I.
- 42.3 Turn right on Balsam Mountain Trail. The MST now leaves the Benton MacKaye Trail.
- 44.6 At Pin Oak Gap, make a right on Balsam Mountain Rd. This unpaved road is a one-way road going north, so you're walking against traffic. This road is closed to vehicles in winter from here until the Blue Ridge Parkway spur road.
- 45.3 Palmer Creek Trail takes off to the left.
- 47.1 Spruce Mountain Trail takes off to the left. [1.1 miles one-way to Campsite #42]
- 53.0 Road changes name to Heintooga Rd. The road is paved and two-way.
- 53.1 Heintooga Ridge Picnic Area. **P**
- 53.6 Balsam Mountain Campground, the highest campground in the park. No reservations. First come, first served. Closed in winter. **C, P**
- 56.0 Polls Gap. Several trails start from here going into to Hemphill Bald and the Cataloochee section of the Smokies. **P**
- 57.2 Parking Overlook with views of Flat Creek Falls when leaves are down. **P**
- 58.1 Parking Overlook. **P**
- 58.4 Masonic Marker Trail. *Note:* The 250-foot trail leads to a huge Masonic monument, erected in 1938 with stones from 41 countries. Worth the slight detour. **P**
- 58.4 Black Camp Gap parking area. The road leaves Great Smoky Mountains National Park and enters the Blue Ridge Parkway. **P**
- 58.7 Horsetrough Ridge parking area. **P**
- 59.7 Lake Junaluska Overlook. You can't really see the lake from here. **P**
- 60.6 Maggie Valley Overlook. **P**
- 60.7 Mile High Overlook with great views of Clingmans Dome and Mount LeConte. **P**
- 62.0 Turn left on BIA 434 (dirt road). *Note:* If you continue straight a hundred feet or so, you'll reach the Blue Ridge Parkway at Wolf Laurel Gap **P**
- 62.0 *Note:* On right, BIA Rd. 407 leads to Mile High campground ([www.campmilehigh.com](http://www.campmilehigh.com)) in 0.7 mile.
- 62.7 Turn left on MST blazed footpath.
- 64.6 Soco Gap Overlook at MP 455.5. Walk on Blue Ridge Parkway. **P**
- 68.9 Pass entrance to Waterrock Knob Visitor's Center at MP 451.2.
- 71.6 Scott Creek Overlook at MP 448.5 where the MST goes into the woods for 300 miles. **P**  
*Note:* The next 140 miles are detailed in Trails Profiles and Maps by Walt Weber for the Carolina Mountain Club.

Clingmans Dome Tower in the Great Smokies closes June 4 for repairs. The iconic Clingmans Dome Tower, the highest point in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, closes June 4-15 for repairs. Post to Facebook. Clingmans Dome Observation Tower in Great Smoky Mountains National Park will be closed for repairs June 4-15. (Photo: Courtesy Kristina Plaas). [CONNECTTWEET](#) [LINKEDINCOMMENTEMAILMORE](#). GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK Getting to the highest point, and one of the most popular spots, in the Great Smokies will require a little patience this month. A view of Looking Glass Rock from an overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway on Friday, May 4, 2018. Angeli Wright/[awright@citizen-times.com](mailto:awright@citizen-times.com). Fullscreen. The park's activities are as diverse as its flora and fauna. From fishing to watching synchronized fireflies, there is plenty to do in this national park. Peak times in the Smokies are July 1 through August 15 and all of October (autumn leaf season). While summer and fall are great times to visit, you might want to plan your trip outside those busy periods if you like alone time with nature. Most people can do the park's stretch of the trail in about seven days, or you can cut your time in half by using Clingmans Dome or Newfound Gap as a midpoint and arranging pickup transportation. You must reserve a permit for all multiday backpacking trips and backcountry overnight stays. Wherever you chose to hike, be prepared and stay safe by consulting the park's site on hiking safety before your trek. For casual to experienced hikers, here are six ways to reach Tennessee's highest mountain, depending on your starting points in either Tennessee or North Carolina. As one of the most visited points along the Appalachian Trail, Clingmans Dome is in the center of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and gives you a 360-degree view of the Smokies from its circular lookout tower. It's a popular stopping point for park visitors during the peak seasons of spring and fall, and is accessible by car from US-441 to Clingmans Dome Road—a seven-mile drive that leads to the Forney Ridge Parking area and trailhead, just 300 feet below the summit. Though the incline to the tower is paved, it's still quite steep.