



Backpacking 301: Appalachian Trail, Grayson Highlands, VA (16 Miles)

Wednesday, May 26 at 7AM through Saturday, May 29 at 10PM

Put your boots on America's most famous scenic trail! This trek will take you to new heights in the Grayson Highlands where we will spend three nights on or near the Appalachian Trail and climb Mt. Rogers, Virginia's highest peak. There are stunning views from the treeless balds and if we are lucky, we may catch a glimpse of the local herd of wild ponies.

The hike will involve some rock scrambling and constant changes in elevation. Previous backpacking experience recommended.

Attendance at the pre-trip informational meeting is required (Thursday, May 20, 6-8PM, Oak Openings Preserve Metropark Lodge). We will check and fit gear, talk about the trip, and answer any questions.

Attendance is also required at the Backpacking 301: Are You Ready for the Trail? Program (Thursday, April 1, 6-8PM, Blue Creek Metropark Sledding Hill).

Fee: \$620 per guest. Backpacks, tents, sleeping bags, pads, stove and cook sets available to borrow. Program fees include all equipment and camping permits. Meals are not included.

Because of the intense planning for this trip, 50% of the fee is considered a non-refundable deposit per the refund policy. If you need to cancel for any reason, please call Ashley Smith at 419-265-2920.

The following packet contains information and resources you need to prepare for the trip including the trip agenda, packing list, and food suggestions for the trip. Please feel free to reach out to your trip leader with any additional questions.

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Travel Plan

Guests will meet at Oak Openings Mallard Lake Parking Lot at 6:30AM to check in and load gear. The van will depart for Grayson Highlands State Park at 7:00AM.

Guests are able to leave a car at the Mallard Lake Parking Lot during the trip. We will need to submit car make, model and license plate information to our rangers.

Tentative Schedule (This is the desired plan, however, it could be subject to minor changes. You will be advised of the final schedule at the mandatory pre-trip meeting.) Please note that daily mileages are approximate.

Wednesday, May 26th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:30AM: Meet at Oak Openings Mallard Lake Parking Lot, pack check and load gear. • 7:00AM: Depart from Oak Openings • 12:00PM Stop for lunch • 4:00PM: Arrive The Hickory Ridge Campground at Grayson Highlands State Park. Set up camp, prepare dinner, eat, evening share, fill water bottles/hydration packs
Thursday, May 27th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7:00AM: Wake, break camp • Breakfast • Pack up and load into van to drive to trail head parking lot. • Hike from trail head to Wise Shelter (2.4 miles) set up camp in open campsites nearby • Hike to/from The Scales (2.8 miles) • Prepare dinner, eat, evening share
Friday, May 28th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7:30AM: Wake, break camp • Breakfast • Hike from Wise Shelter to Thomas Knob (4.9 miles) • Set up camp • Option to Hike to/from Mt. Rogers (<2 miles) 1,400+ Elevation Gain • Prepare dinner, eat, evening share
Saturday, May 29th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7:30AM: Wake, break camp • Breakfast • Hike out from Thomas Knob to trail head. (4.2 miles) • 11:00PM: Depart from Hickory Ridge Campground • 5:00PM Stop for dinner • 9:00PM: Arrive at Oak Openings Mallard Lake Parking Lot. Return borrowed gear.

Total mileage: ~16 miles

Food Plan

Pack snacks for the trip down and back. Pack a lunch for the trip down to speed up drive time. Bring a refillable water bottle for the ride.

Trail food

Guests will need to bring their own food. Generally speaking you want to select food items that are calorie dense and high in complex carbohydrates and protein. We will have no access to refrigeration or coolers so please avoid foods that will spoil. Avoid foods that will squish or crumble easily.

For the trek you will need to pack:

- 3 dinners – Wednesday, Thursday, Friday
- 3 lunches – Wednesday (bus lunch), Thursday, Friday
- 3 breakfasts – Thursday, Friday, Saturday

Meal Pro Tips

- Pack trail snacks between breakfasts and dinners and to supplement meals. Food for a typical day on the trail usually involves breakfast, morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack, and dinner.
- We will take the time to boil water in the morning for coffee/tea/oatmeal/dehydrated meals, but please plan for a relatively quick breakfast. Lunches should be ready to eat and require no cooking. We'll have time to cook for dinner.
- Consider repackaging anything with a lot of packaging to save weight and space. Space is limited, so opt for lightweight, low bulk foods. Calorie needs vary per person, but plan for somewhere between 2500-4000 calories per day.
- Many sources quote that backpackers usually carry 2 pounds of food per person per day. That is a ballpark number and not a hard fast rule, but if your food bag weighs more than 3-4 pounds you should consider more calorie dense, lighter weight foods.
- Many backpackers opt for light-weight freeze dried meals. There are several brands to choose from, and meals can typically be found at Bass Pro, Cabelas, REI, Walmart, or online. Freeze dried meals typically just require adding boiling water. Pre-packaged varieties usually come sized for 1 or 2 persons/servings, or you can purchase bulk canisters that you can control your own portions by portioning into freezer strength zip-lock bags. For those that do not wish to purchase freeze-dried meals please see the sample meals section below for other trail-friendly meal suggestions.
- For more information on meal planning please see REI's expert advice:
<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/planning-menu.html>

Sample Meals

Breakfast: select 1 or more, supplement with bars, trail mix, dried fruit, jerky etc.

- Cold cereal with dehydrated milk (add water at breakfast)
- Bagel or tortilla with peanut butter
- Instant oatmeal (two packs for most people)
- Tea, instant coffee, hot cocoa
- Dehydrated meals

Lunch: select 1 or more, supplement with bars, trail mix, dried fruit, jerky etc.

- Bagels or tortillas with peanut butter and jelly or honey
- Tuna or chicken packets with crackers

Dinner:

- Dehydrated or freeze dried meals (Mountain House, Backpackers Pantry, etc.)
- Any combination of quick-cook pasta, dehydrated potatoes, instant rice, or pasta and rice sides with chicken or tuna packets, canned beans, or nuts for protein. For example:
 - Mac and cheese with chicken or tuna packets
 - Ramen noodles with chicken and instant mashed potatoes
 - Mexican rice with tortillas and chicken packets or beans
 - Thai noodles with peanuts and peanut butter

Snacks: Plan for a morning snack between breakfast and lunch, and an afternoon snack between lunch and dinner. Snacks also make good supplements to meals. Many people find they prefer to bring a mixture of both salty and sweet snacks. Popular snacks include: goldfish, Cheez-its, chips, jerky, granola bars/protein bars/energy bars, dehydrated fruit, trail mix, fruit snacks, teddy grahams, cookies, nuts.

Water: Plan to carry 2-3L of water a day. There will be potable water available in camp.

Resources for purchasing backpacking food:

<https://www.alpineaire.com/us/us>

<https://www.backcountry.com/backpacking-food>

<https://www.mountainhouse.com/>

<https://www.backpackerspantry.com/>

<https://goodto-go.com/>

<https://www.rei.com/>

Packing List

All items need to be packed in zip top bags or dry bags to keep them waterproof.

Your pack should be trail ready – except for water bottles/hydration packs. Keep these empty until we fill at the state park.

Backpack (available to borrow)

- Internal frame (60-80 liters recommended)
- External frame (65+ liters recommended)
- Pack Cover – waterproof nylon pack cover or extra 30 gallon trash bag (Metroparks packs come with pack covers if you are borrowing)

Sleep systems

- 1 person backpacking tent (available to borrow)
- Packable sleeping bag (available to borrow) in stuff sack lined with 30 gallon trash bag. Must be rated to 20 degrees or lower and made of down or synthetic down. We do not want oversized “sleepover bags” that are bulky and heavy. Bags should weigh less than 4 lbs.
- Sleep pad (available to borrow)
- Inflatable pillow (optional) or stuff a jacket into a stuff sack

Clothing

NO COTTON, PLEASE. Cotton does not insulate if it gets wet. Choose synthetic materials such as nylon, polyester, spandex, or wool. Fleece is good.

- 1 pair good hiking shoes/boots, well broken in.
- Camp shoes (optional but recommended to let feet breathe.) Crocs or light tennis shoes or sandals.
- 2-3 pair medium weight wool hiking socks.
- 1 set clean underwear per day
- Sports bras x2 (women)
- Hiking shirt and pants/shorts: 1 set, quick dry, non-cotton required
- Sleep Clothes – these are only for inside the tent. Depending on how cold or warm you sleep you may want a tee-shirt/shorts or long johns. Non-cotton.
- Packable rain gear such as Frogg Toggs jacket and pants. If you opt to use an emergency poncho, make sure to bring rain pants as well for your lower half.
- Wool sweater or down or fleece jacket (when paired with your rain suit this should be suitable for most weather conditions). No cotton jackets.
- Wicking base layer (tops/bottoms): Optional but recommended
- Hat, gloves, buff (optional)

Camp Kitchen

- Bowl/plate depending on what you are eating. Light-weight and not glass.*
- Cup/measuring cup*
- Spoon*
- Food bag: medium stuff sack that can be clipped to a carabineer *
- 2-3 gallon zip top bags for garbage*
- Cook kits* (available to borrow)
- Backpacking stove (available to borrow)
- Food* (see Food Plan for meal planning suggestions)

Miscellaneous

- Pocket knife or multi-tool.
- Waterproof matches or lighter* (a few cotton balls or small candle piece for fire starters.)
- Headlamp or lightweight flashlight (extra batteries)
- 2-3 bandanas/hankies
- Lip balm (with sunscreen recommended)*
- Toothbrush*
- Travel tube toothpaste* or baking soda in a small bottle
- Personal first aid items*: Staff will have a full first aid kit, but we cannot administer medications. Please bring a personal supply of your pain reducer of choice in case of sore muscles, headache, etc. (a small supply of ibuprofen, antacids such as Tums, Tylenol and aspirin should cover most inconveniences that may occur). Also include band-aids, antiseptic wipes, and foot care kit- Moleskin, foot powder.
- Sun protection: hat with brim, sunscreen*, sunglasses
- Feminine hygiene items*
- 3 or 4 large rubber bands (optional but helpful in compressing trash and other uses)

- 2-3 extra gallon size zip top plastic bags
- ½ -1 full roll toilet paper – each person will need to provide a minimum of half a roll. Think of your own needs.
- Hand sanitizer* or small bottle Dr. Bronner’s soap (scent free if possible)
- Several yards of duct tape (wrap around a water bottle or hiking poles or keep a small spool in your first aid kit.)
- Repair kit: Needle and dental floss, repair kit for inflatable sleeping pads if applicable, stove repair kit if applicable
- Hiking poles strongly recommended (available to borrow) or ski poles
- A ditty bag or stuff sack that can clip to a carabineer for scented items to bear bag

Water

- Water bottles that add up to 3-5 liters.
- **OR** 1 bladder water system and at least one water bottle (for ease of drinking in camp/ when your pack is off). Together these should add up to 3-5 L.
- Water treatment system: we will provide a pump system for the group, but you are also welcome to bring your own. There are many options to choose from.
 - Very popular: squeeze filtration system such as the Sawyer Squeeze regular or mini. Light weight and inexpensive.
 - Popular: Pump filtration system. Heavier and more expensive than a squeeze system, but some find these more convenient and faster to use. Work better in shallow water than a squeeze system.
 - The following treatment options will purify your water (kill bacteria, viruses, and protozoa), but they will not filter out sediment. These work best in places where you are guaranteed to have relatively sediment-free water sources. We cannot guarantee these sources on our hike, so these options are not recommended, but are available.
 - Micropur tabs (very light, relatively inexpensive). Must carry enough to clean 6-8 L per day. It takes a minimum of 30 minutes to 4 hours to work, so require proper planning.
 - Aquamira tabs- work similarly to micropur tabs
 - Potable Aqua tabs- work similarly to micropur and aquamira tabs
 - Steri Pen: uses UV light to kill bacteria, virus and protozoa.

Optional

- Camera
- Whistle
- Note pad/pencil
- Watch

Group gear

Group gear will be provided for you by Metroparks.

- Camp Suds* provided
- 100 ft. nylon rope- provided but each hiker will carry their own (For hanging bear bags)
- Carabiners provided (for hanging bear bags)
- Group first aid kit* provided (you still need to bring your own first aid basics listed above)
- Camp shovel/trowel provided

****Items that will be stored inside your personal bear canisters at night.***

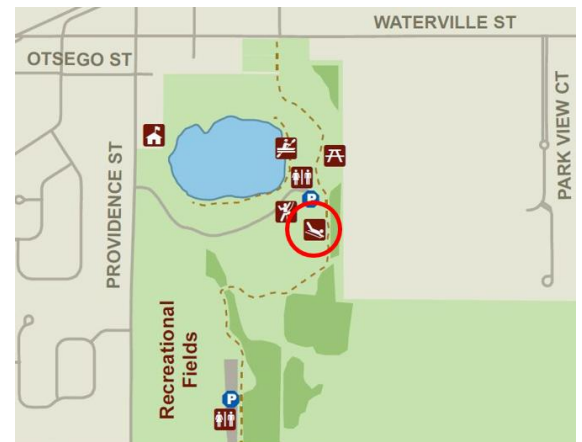
For travel

We recommend packing a travel bag separate from your backpack to leave in your car. In this bag you will want to pack:

- 1 clean mask per travel day. Everyone is required to wear a mask during transit.
- Clean travel clothes for the ride home
- Wet wipes and deodorant to freshen up (optional, but you'll feel better after!)
- A water bottle separate from your hiking water
- Snacks

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What do I do with my trash on the trail? Will there be garbage cans?
 - a. We will pack in and pack out all trash and practice Leave No Trace on the trail. For an overview of Leave No Trace (LNT) outdoor ethics: <https://lnt.org/>
2. What is a bear canister? Should I be worried?
 - a. We will be backpacking in black bear country. A bear canister is all your food and items that smell that will have to go in a bear proof canister at night. Each item indicated in the packing list above with an asterisk * needs to go in a bear canister at night. There are bear boxes (bear proof steel boxes available for use on trail) that we will primarily store our bear canisters in every night. If needed, staff will typically hang 2-4 different bear bag systems at night and your canister needs to go in one of these. This will also keep other critters away like mice, raccoons, squirrels, or fox.
 - b. Staff will carry bear spray as an added precaution.
 - c. When adventuring in bear country, its best to be educated: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/backpacking-in-bear-country.html>
3. What if I am a beginner?
 - a. This trip is not a beginners trek, but geared to those who have some backcountry backpacking experience. If you have never backpacked in the backcountry, please sign up for one of our local Backpacking 101 or 201 overnight experiences to gain some experience and decide if this activity is right for you.
 - Training in advance will be key to a successful trek.
 - Blue Creek Sledding Hill is an excellent training location and where we will meet for the Backpacking 301: Are You Ready for the Trail? Program.
 - <https://goo.gl/maps/ocKGK5HqquxaGUrB9>
 - Look for the sledding hill at the far east end of the Nona France Drive.
4. What will the campsites be like?



- a. There should be tent platforms, shelters, privies/pit toilets, fire pits, and occasionally picnic tables on the trail. We will use a trowel/cat-hole system for bathroom purposes on the trail.
5. Not to get into the dirty details, but what does trowel/cat-hole system mean? How do we go #1 and #2 on the trail?
 - a. #1 should be aimed at rocks if possible. Animals are often attracted to the salts and minerals in urine will chew on bark – damaging trees. Using the rock also prevents eroding loose soils.
 - Used TP for drying purposes should be packed out.
 - A “pee-dana” or bandana used for wiping #1 only is an excellent option. Keep on the outside of backpack for drying and UV sunlight sanitizing.
 - b. #2 needs to be buried in a cat-hole. We have trowels, but the waste does not touch this tool. Use a stick to push the waste in the hole if your aim is not true.
6. Ok, now that I know that, what if I am on my period?
 - a. Similarly, all products, before and after use, will need to go in your bear bag. You cannot bury any products. Multiple zip-top bags are recommended for this.
 - b. Please be prepared as several factors like tenting with others, altitude, or exertion can bring on a menstrual period even if it is not scheduled.
7. Why all the info? This is overwhelming.
 - a. None of this information is intended to scare off potential guests but it is very important to make sure you have a full understanding of this trek. Our hope is that you either have all the information you need or feel comfortable asking us the hard questions! We are very excited about the planning and execution of this trip and hope to fulfill some hiking dreams!

Going in the Woods

Please follow these simple steps when nature calls:

1. Find a spot at least 200 steps from any water source
2. Dig a hole 6-8 inches deep and bury human waste
3. Pack out used toilet paper



When people are not responsible going in the woods they contaminate the water you swim in, fish from, and drink. Bacteria and viruses found in human feces are known to cause hepatitis, blue baby syndrome, salmonella, giardia, and other gastro-intestinal diseases. Remember, the water in the rivers and lakes you visit may flow into your own drinking water supply.