

For More Information

The recommendations in this brochure were collected with input from:

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy

appalachiantrail.org

Virginia Regional Office: 540-904-4316

Mount Rogers National Recreation Area George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, Forest Service, USDA

www.fs.usda.gov/qwi

3714 Virginia 16,

Marion, VA 24354

(276) 783-5196 or 800-628-7202

Grayson Highlands State Park

www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/grayson-highlands.shtml

829 Grayson Highland Lane

Mouth of Wilson, VA 24363

(276) 579-7092

Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club

www.mratc.org

To plan a great trip to the Mount Rogers High Country, you'll need a great map. The Trails Illustrated National Geographic Map 318: Mount Rogers High Country can be purchased at shop.nationalgeographic.com, the MRNRA Headquarters in Marion, Grayson Highlands State Park, the Ultimate A.T. Store at www.atctrailstore.org

In case of emergency, ALWAYS call 911 and have the following information available:

Nature of emergency: Medical, Cardiac or Trauma

Location: County, GPS coordinates, trail and/or closest road intersection



APPALACHIAN TRAIL
CONSERVANCY®

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail – ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. To become a member, volunteer, or learn more, visit

www.appalachiantrail.org

Please visit Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Excellence, at www.LNT.org



GROUPS: Planning Your Hike In the Mount Rogers High Country



Photo credit: Mac Barnhardt

The High Country of Mount Rogers, including the Grayson Highlands, is a very special place. Each year, more and more organized groups visit the High Country.

This guide, developed by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and Virginia State Parks, can help you plan a safe and enjoyable trip for your group that protects the natural beauty of this fragile environment for the next visitor...and for your next visit!

Greetings from the Mount Rogers High Country! In our little corner of the world, you will find beautiful vistas, refreshing mountain springs, herds of wild ponies and a place to introduce the young people in your life to your childhood memories of summer days spent in the woods, reconnecting with the natural world.

The Grayson Highlands area of Virginia is one of the most beautiful and beloved places in the southern Appalachians. We understand the draw these balds and high elevation forests have on people, from first-time visitors to the residents who live on their slopes. While we enjoy sharing these special experiences with everyone, we need your help to make sure we aren't loving our mountains to death.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy has partnered with the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area and Grayson Highlands State Park to develop this brochure for groups visiting the highlands. We are providing some suggestions on what to do, where to camp, what to bring, and how to practice the Leave No Trace principles.

Thank you for taking the time to read over this information. We hope you take our suggestions to heart when planning your group's trip and help us protect this special place for generations to come.

So, what are we protecting?

The 20,000 acres of the **Mount Rogers High Country** are located in Grayson, Smyth and Washington Counties of Southwest Virginia. The MRNRA has defined the High Country as all the land managed by the US Forest Service that is:

- South of VA-603 & North of US-58 and
- East of VA-600 & West of VA-16

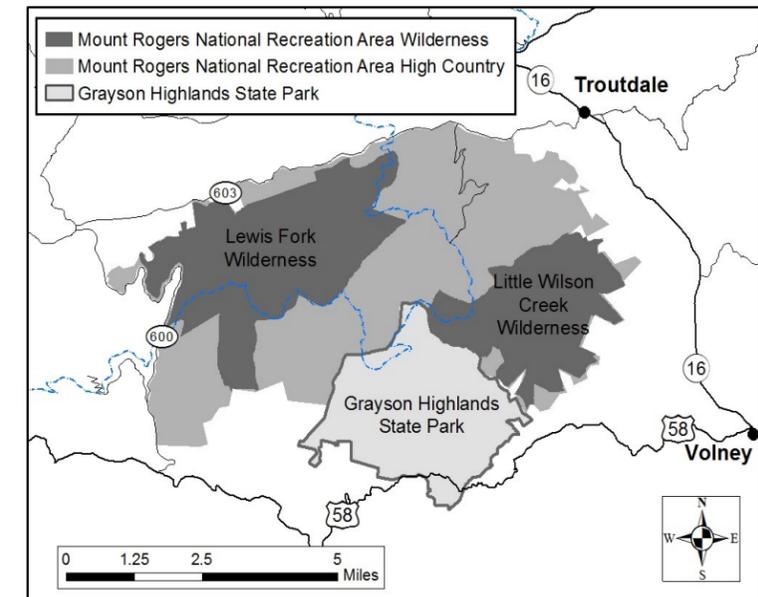
This region includes the 5,000-acre **Crest Zone** featuring elevations over 4,000 feet, large rock formations, a mixture of mountain balds and spruce-fir forests; herds of wild, free-ranging ponies; and the summit of Mount Rogers, the highest peak in the state of Virginia, at 5,729 feet above sea-level.

The High Country encompasses two Congressionally-designated Wildernesses where the imprints of human activities are minimized. It also contains many habitats rarely found in the southeast, such as high elevation open grasslands, bogs, seeps, and spruce/fir forest. Because these areas are protected, the High Country is home to many rare plants and animals including the federally listed endangered Northern Flying Squirrel, Weller's Salamander, Pigmy Salamander, Blue Ridge St. John's Wort, Roan Mountain Rattlesnake-Root, Umbrella Leaf, and Long-Stalked Holly.

And how are we supposed to protect it?

Protection of the natural resources of the High Country starts with a few simple steps. Practice Leave No Trace outdoor ethics by planning ahead and preparing for your visit, by hiking and camping on durable surfaces, by disposing of your waste properly, by leaving what you find, by minimizing campfire impacts, by being respectful of wildlife, and by being considerate of other High Country visitors. Reduce the impact of your group by abiding by posted signs, by avoiding peak visitation times, and by limiting your group to no more than 10 members.

Many groups come to the High Country for a combination of recreation, teaching or preparation for longer outings. Take the time to ensure your members understand why natural areas are special and deserve their protection. Encouraging young people to fully connect with the backcountry while giving them the knowledge, skills and sense of responsibility to minimize their impact on the environment is the greatest gift we can give to both our future generations and wilderness areas.



When should we visit?

If possible, avoid visiting the High Country during periods of peak use. Your group will have a better experience if you avoid the crowds, and you'll help protect the fragile areas that are already heavily impacted during these times.

Peak Use dates to avoid:

Holiday Weekends (for example Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Columbus Day)

Appalachian Trail northbound thru-hiking season: mid-April thru late-June

Weekends in October: fall foliage season

What should groups know about the Appalachian Trail?

Marked with white blazes, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, or "A.T." is one of the longest footpaths in the world, measuring roughly 2,180 miles in length. The Trail goes through 14 states from Springer Mountain, Georgia, to Mount Katahdin in Maine.

The A.T. is also our nation's longest-running volunteer project! Since its conception in 1925, the Trail has been constructed, maintained, and protected by volunteers.

The A.T. through the Mount Rogers High Country is maintained by volunteer members of the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club (MRATC). Volunteers keep the trail open, paint blazes, install signs, build bridges and repair the Trail when it becomes eroded or muddy.

You can show your appreciation for the beautiful resources of the A.T. by doing a little Trail maintenance or monitoring. Contact the Mount Rogers A.T. Club for suggestions: mtrogersatc@gmail.com

What rules do we need to know?

Group size must be 10 people or fewer throughout the High Country. This group size restriction applies to both day and overnight use. Groups larger than 10 could be fined under federal law 36 CFR 261.57 (a)

In Grayson Highlands State Park, overnight camping is restricted to the Campgrounds.

In order to protect the sensitive high-elevation forest, campfires are not allowed at Thomas Knob Shelter.

If the members of your group are paying to participate, your outing is considered commercial use. You must obtain a Special Use Permit from the US Forest Service. To find out more call 800-628-7202 well in advance of your outing.

Where should we camp?

High country land managers agree that some areas are more appropriate for group camping than others.

BEST places for group camping...

The Scales

Along the Crest Trail (FS Trail #4605)

Brier Ridge area

Cabin Ridge area

Along the Springs Trail (FS Trail # 4625)

Why?

By camping in these less heavily used backcountry areas, you can help the places that have been damaged by heavy use recover. You're also more likely to find a campsite!

Grindstone Campground

Hurricane Campground

Raccoon Branch Campground

Grayson Highlands State Park Campground

Why?

Each of these campgrounds makes a convenient "base camp" for hikes in the High Country.

Facilities like bathrooms and fire rings make it easy for your group to practice low-impact camping.

AVOID group camping here...

Wilderness Areas

There are two federally designated Wilderness Areas in the High Country: Lewis Fork Wilderness and Little Wilson Creek Wilderness.

Consult your map and look for signs to determine where the Wilderness boundaries are.

A.T. Shelters

There are three shelters in the High Country: Wise, Thomas Knob, & Old Orchard

Along the A.T. from the Mt. Rogers Spur Trail through Rhododendron Gap

Why not?

Federal Wilderness Areas are preserved as places "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled ." You can help keep Wilderness wild by passing through quietly, leaving no trace, and camping elsewhere.

Why not?

Appalachian Trail shelters are designed for individual long-distance hikers, not groups.

Why not?

This fragile area is already heavily damaged by over-use.

Why not have a campfire?

Because the High Country's environment is so fragile, having a campfire is one of the most destructive things a group can do here—even if they follow Leave No Trace low-impact practices.

How can your group experience the comfort and camaraderie a campfire provides, without damaging the High Country?

Cook on a camp stove, and enjoy hot chocolate instead of s'mores. Bring a few candle lanterns or a solar lantern to gather around at night. Be creative, and be a Hero to the High Country!

What is Wilderness?

Each of us has our own personal definition of "wilderness". However, on federal lands, "Wilderness" is a specific defined area designated by Congress to be kept in its natural state where the impacts of human activities are minimized to preserve its special characteristics and opportunities. The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines Wilderness as:

"...lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition..."

"...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man..."

"...generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable..."

"...has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation..."

"...shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreation, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historic use."

How can we help protect Wilderness?

Wildernesses are places for solitude and challenge. You can help keep Wilderness wild by passing through quietly to preserve the Wilderness experience for others. Read your map, look for signs to familiarize yourself with the Wilderness boundaries, and plan to camp outside of Wilderness.

If you love the High Country, you want to keep it beautiful.

Graffiti, litter, waste, and unsightly fire rings are all avoidable impacts. Your group can help protect this special place by learning the seven principles of Leave No Trace. Specific Leave No Trace recommendations for groups can be found here:

<http://tinyurl.com/ATLNTforGroups>

Here are a few Leave No Trace considerations specific to the Mount Rogers High Country:

	Plan Ahead and Prepare	Travel and Camp On Durable Surfaces	Dispose Of Waste Properly	Minimize Campfire Impacts	Respect Wildlife
DO:	Bring a map, prepare for extreme weather conditions and quick, unpredicted weather changes in all seasons.	Take the time to find a campsite, and consider using fewer large-capacity tents rather than a small tent for each person.	Pack out your trash. Bring a trowel and teach group members to bury human waste in a cathole 6-8 inches deep.	Come prepared to cook on a camp stove and go without a campfire.	Hang your food at night and keep a clean camp.
DON'T:	Count on having cell phone service.	Modify, alter, or create a campsite and avoid staying at heavily worn sites.	Burn or abandon your trash or extra food which attracts mice and insects to the site.	Bring axes, saws, or hatchets.	Feed ponies, bears, or other wildlife. Pony snacks lead to pony attacks!