

VIDEO	Audio
	<p>&gt;&gt;NARRATOR:  <b>Whether you like hiking or horseback riding, Georgia has a trail for you. The Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest is just waiting to be explored. Join us on this episode of Georgia Outdoors as we visit Georgia's portion of the Appalachian Trail. We'll learn about hiking with kids and hiking with dogs. Then, if you'd rather be on horseback, stayed tuned to find out where horses are allowed in Georgia's National Forests.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: <b>The North Georgia mountains offer a wealth of hiking trails. In fact, the southernmost portion of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is here. Beginning at Springer Mountain, the Appalachian Trail wanders the ridges and valleys of the Appalachian range for more than 2160 miles before reaching its northern terminus at Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park, Maine. It is the longest footpath in the eastern United States and Georgia is home to 76.5 miles of its length. All along its route through the Chattahoochee National Forest, there are points called gaps, where the trail is easily accessible by road. The Appalachian Trail is managed and protected by a partnership between The Appalachian Trail Conference, the US Forest Service, and state trail clubs.</b></p> <p>&gt;&gt;Kuykendall: It's a unique partnership between public and private, and on the local level here on the Chattahoochee National Forest, we provide funding for the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, and we've also participated in some major building projects.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: <b>This partnership goes as far back as 1930 when the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club was founded. With the assistance of the US Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps the club built the trail and its first shelters. The GATC has always been an organization of volunteers, but for one person each year the trail is a full-time job.</b></p> <p>&gt;&gt;Cavender: I'm the ridge runner for the Georgia sanction of Appalachian Trail, which is probably the best job in the state. I hike the trail 5 days a week at least, and I'm a presence on the trail, representing first the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club and visiting with hikers, talking to them about the conditions on the trail, talk to them about Leave No Trace, Leave No Trace, Leave No Trace; that's what's important.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: <b>Leave No Trace ethics are guidelines, which prescribe behavior that minimizes the hikers impact on the natural environment. John finds evidence every week of hikers not following these guidelines.</b></p> <p>&gt;&gt;Cavender: This is our newest shelter in the Georgia section of the trail, and I see we've had some people not practicing the Leave No Trace.</p>

>>Narrator: **Other Leave No Trace rules are to use only designated campsites and hike only on the trail. In this way, we literally minimize our footprints in the forest. And there won't be extra work for John and the trail club to do.**

>>Cavender: Well a typical day at work would be, if I'm camped out, I get started hiking the trail oh anywhere from 7:30 to 8:30 in the morning, and I'll do anywhere from 7 to 12 miles. One of the main things is reporting all the trail conditions. I see there's been some work on some steps here also, so there's a lot of maintenance on the trail here.

>>Narrator: **During John's days on the trail, he meets all kinds of hikers. The Appalachian Trail attracts those on weekend trips and day-hikers.**

>>Spence: Camping out and backpacking is the real experience of the Appalachian Trail, but usually I don't have time, so I just come out on day hikes. I haven't been doing it that long, but what's really impressed me is sort of the combination of both the US Forest Service and the volunteers working together to create this incredible resource for all of us. And it's just a really magnificent thing and it's a great way to get out into nature and reconnect with it a little bit.

>>Narrator: **Reconnecting with nature is exactly what Benton MacKaye wanted people to do when he proposed the Appalachian Trail in 1921. The trail, which bears his name, also begins on Springer Mountain, close to the trail head of the AT, and will eventually cover 275 miles through 3 states. And there are folks that just love hiking such long distances. 6,773 people have informed the Appalachian Trail Conference that they have hiked the entire Appalachian Trail. Tracy Rothstein has just earned her place in the ATC 2000-miler registry.**

>>Rothstein: I am fortunate to just have completed each section of the Appalachian Trail. Doing the Smokies with a friend of mine was my last section.

>>Narrator: **Tracy's favorite hiking companion is her dog, Suzy.**

>>Rothstein: She's a wonderful companion. They require a lot of responsibility. It almost like bringing a child with you. You know, you're responsible for all their health and safety issues. But she carries her own food, so that's better than most kids. And she's great for bear watch, and she keeps away all sorts of rodents. And she's usually incredibly cooperative with this. So there you go, Suzy with pack. Usually she's a lot happier when we do that.

>>Narrator: **Another Leave No Trace principle is to plan carefully. That's especially important when bringing youngsters along.**

>>Felicity Carpenter: To take a little man like Andrew, who's about a year and a half, you want to do something where you can find places to stop and see interesting things. you don't want to push really hard, try to do say like a 12-mile trail one day with a child this young. I approach it as I bring him out and he'll find something on the ground and let him explore it. You know, pick up the acorn or pecan or whatever it is, let him touch it and feel it, or tickle the trees and feel the moss on it.

**>>Narrator: Lee and Felicity Carpenter met on the Appalachian Trail while each was attempting to become a 2000-miler.**

>>Lee Carpenter: Well we met on our second day, I guess it was our second day—her fourth, my second—at a place called Gooch Gap.

>>Felicity Carpenter: I had started out with my dad and my brother and it had been a lifelong dream of mine to hike the AT.

>>Lee Carpenter: I started with my dog, just me and my buddy, buddy dog. We kind of developed a group of folks to hike together. We really didn't hike together during the day, but we camped together at night. After Harper's Ferry, it was just me and her. It was a different kind of trip rather than being with a lot of folks.

**>>Narrator: Lee and Felicity made it about half way on their through-hike before deciding to return to Georgia.**

>>Felicity Carpenter: Um, I wasn't feeling so good (laughs).

>>Lee Carpenter: We decided it was time to get off the trail, and we decided that we'd go back to Georgia.

**>>Narrator: The Carpenters hope one day to take Andrew with them as they hike the entire trail.**

>>Felicity Carpenter: We'd like to start another through-hike I think maybe when—right before school age.

>>Lee Carpenter: I think the youngest child that actually completed the trail was 6.

**>>Narrator: In the mean time, the Carpenters enjoy short outings with Andrew along North Georgia's trail systems. US Forest Service ranger stations have extensive maps, which can help you plan hikes with or without children.**

>>Lee Carpenter: Hiking is about as free as you can get. There's—you're going to do what you want to do. Really all you have to do is put one foot in front of the other; as far as how far you go is up to you.

>>Felicity Carpenter: Being out in nature. There's a lot of different types of flora and fauna here, and the people that you

come across, a lot of really good people.

**>>Narrator: Whether on the Appalachian Trail or Georgia's other trails, one of the joys of being outdoors is appreciating the diversity of wildlife. The names of many of the plants that we see along the hiking trails are a mystery to many, but not to Tom Patrick of Georgia's DNR.**

>>Patrick: In the early Fall, if you're hiking the Appalachian trail in Georgia, you're liable to see lots of yellows and blues and purples, ground covers are often pretty conspicuous. There's one called partridgeberry. They're eaten by a number of animals and birds. Because we've had a little rain in the Fall, the mosses look real happy this time of year. Some are shaped like little pincushions. Some are shaped like little pine trees. Ferns are real conspicuous plants, and along the Appalachian trail in Georgia, you tell ferns by the shape of the frond or leaf and how they taper. One of the kinds of wildflowers that everybody tries to find are wild orchids. And we have two or three species in Georgia that produce attractive leaves. We can find the rattlesnake plantain orchid. It has fine stripes. Wherever it has a vein in the leaf, it's a different color. If you're lucky enough to be hiking after a late summer rain, there's an amazing display of mushrooms that appear on the Appalachian trail in all shapes and colors.

**>>Narrator: Following Leave No Trace principles means leave what you find. So if you find an interesting plant, don't disturb it. Another rule of Leave No Trace ethics is to respect wildlife. Bear biologist, David Gregory, has some advice on how to respect and appreciate Georgia's black bears.**

>>Gregory: Well there's many ways hikers can avoid having problems with bears, but most importantly it's don't feed the bears. Make sure you use bear proof trashcans like the one behind us here. Now if you're hiking overnight like in the backcountry or something like that, then you'd want to use a cable system or keep your food in a position where bears can't get them.

**>>Narrator: Cabling systems are available along the trail for use when staying in trail shelters.**

>>Gregory: If you happen to see a bear when you're hiking along the trail, first thing I'd do is just stop and enjoy seeing it. The bear is one of Georgia's largest and most intriguing animals. I wouldn't approach the bear.

**>>Narrator: While bears are afraid of humans, most likely a bear will run if it sees a human. But what if it doesn't immediately run?**

>>Gregory: Things that you wouldn't do would be to climb a tree to get away from a bear or run away. That may trigger some

	<p>predator/ prey response to the bear, but you need to stand your ground and be aggressive with the bear so that he knows who's boss.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: Using Leave No Trace principles helps ensure bears do not come to rely on humans for food, which is dangerous for us and for them. Leave No Trace also ensures we preserve the wonderful resource that is the Appalachian Trail. The trail belongs to all of us, and the more we learn about it and the land and wildlife around it, the better we can protect it for the future.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Spence: I sometimes forget, living in the city, just how much is out here.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Cavender: If you think about it, you find these white blazes, these 2-by-6" white blazes out here on these trees, and if you turn north, you can go all the way to Maine just following the blazes, and that's quite a, quite a statement.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Female Narrator: Most black bears in Georgia are black in color, but in some parts of the country they may be brown or cinnamon. The typical lifespan of a black bear is about 8 to 15 years. Wild bears tend to live 23% longer than garbage bears. Adult bears are generally up to 6 feet in length and about 3 feet high at the shoulder. Female adult bears can weigh up to 300 pounds, and males can weigh over 500 pounds. Bears have poor eyesight, but an excellent sense of smell. They are good tree climbers, can swim well, and are able to run at speeds of up to 30 miles per hour. Cubs are born in the den in late January and February and are entirely dependent on their mother. Cubs stay with their mother throughout the first year, den with her the following winter, and stay with her until she finally drives them away the following summer. Due to this extended care for her young, females only produce a litter every two years.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Male Narrator: The Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest delivers two forests in one package. The Chattahoochee is the more rugged of the two. It includes a piece of the legendary Blue Ridge Mountains and encompasses most of the Cohutta National Wilderness Area, the largest such area east of the Mississippi. Named after the prominent river whose headwaters begin here, the Chattahoochee National Forest is often called a hikers paradise. The forest includes the trailhead to the famous Appalachian Trail. We're going to explore the Chattahoochee National Forest on horseback with the help of Muletop Mountain Outfitters proprietor Wade Welch.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Welch: See that low rhododendron down like that, you can catch some pretty good trout in there.</p>

	<p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: <b>The Chattahoochee National Forest is often called the playground of Atlanta. It's almost 750 thousand acres, stretches from the wild and scenic waters of the Chattooga River on its northeastern boundary, through the Blue Ridge Mountains and across the ridges and valleys of northwest Georgia. The Chattahoochee adjoins the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee, the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina and the Sumter National Forest in South Carolina to create one of the largest expanses of public lands in the eastern United States.</b></p>
	<p>Welchel: The snakes and the bears just don't bother any body. The only thing that bothers people is the yellow jackets. There's a good stream to drink out of right there. Get in there pinto...come on mule.                  Skinner: Alright cornbread you can do it.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: <b>Traveling through the Chattahoochee National Forest on horseback provides an excellent way to experience the forest. The Forest boast over 500 species of wildlife and fish including some species found nowhere else on earth.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: this is very, very peaceful and very, very pretty                  &gt;&gt;Welchel: And our object is trying to keep a certain amount of serenity, and you know, have it peaceful.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: <b>Like all National Forests, primitive camping is allowed anywhere except where specifically prohibited. While Wade puts up the horses for the night, we'll visit with a man who know a lot about the forest up here, Bill Fletcher.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Fletcher: Hi Michael                  &gt;&gt;Skinner: Hey Bill                  &gt;&gt;Fletcher: How are you                  &gt;&gt;Skinner: Good, how are you?                  &gt;&gt;Fletcher: Great                  &gt;&gt;Skinner: Have a seat. Thanks for coming all the way out here to join us. We did that horseback ride today, up here in this country, and I'm telling you it was absolutely gorgeous. How do you guys, you know with all this land out here. How does DNR go about managing all of this?                  &gt;&gt;Fletcher: Well it's a real task and a real challenge. We work with the US forest service on that managing. We have 11 Wildlife Management Areas on the national forest up here. The national forest itself is 750,000 acres. We have 314 15,000 acres in our wildlife management areas. So that's a big chunk of land to look after with a limited manpower source. So we do a lot of the habitat management, law enforcement, especially wildlife related law enforcement. We also help with some of the maintenance of specific roads, and of course facilities and things like that.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Narrator: <b>The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest has 14 wildlife management areas, 37 developed recreation areas, 500 developed campsites, 200 picnic sites, 6 swimming beaches, 530 miles of trail, 1700miles of cool-</b></p>

	<p><b>water streams, 430 miles of warm-water streams, 19,000 acres of lakes, 3900 acres of wetlands and the forest receives more than 10 million visitors every year.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: Alright Michael what we need to do this morning is make sure the pack's even on this mule, and this is one of the best things. It's called a pack scale. Long as you're in 2 or 3 pounds your rig will stay on pretty good. You know, if you get too much one way or the other, you'll spend all day trying to keep it on and make your mule's back sore. What I do, I stick it in this ring, and pick it up, and it's showing...uh, twenty pounds on this side, and if you want to stick it in that ring over there and see what it shows on that side. Pull the little gauge up...show about the same?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: It does.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: Okay.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: So where are we headed?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: Well we're gone go up Axe Handle, and hit an old jeep trail, we'll come up on top of Mule Top Mountain, and uh, we'll ride a logging trail around Mule Top, and then we'll come down—we call it Cardiac Hill. And then we'll hit Turkey Pan Ridge...</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Narrator: Thank goodness Wade knows where we are going. These names are more confusing than the 18 plus Peachtree Streets we have back in Atlanta. With over 530 miles of trails in the forest, keeping track of where you are with a good map and compass or a GPS system, or hey, a good guide like Wade will go along way to keep you safe in the forest.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: I understand it's gonna be a clear day. And the wind's blowing. And maybe we'll luck up and see a bear or two, and a few turkeys</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: How do the horses react to a bear?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: They don't pay any attention to them. They really don't. Well let's head up this trail...</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Narrator: Mule Top Mountain Outfitters was founded in 1997 and is located about 12 miles northwest of Blue Ridge, Georgia. Their mission is to provide safe, recreational horseback riding for people of all kinds. This includes well maintained equipment and tack, and horses that are safe for all levels of riding experience. In addition to overnight trips, they also offer hourly and half-day trail rides, and wagon rides which provides children and adults of all ages the opportunity to enjoy a bit of the pioneer experience while touring the scenic surroundings of the forest.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: Big view up here. That's north Carolina and Tennessee over there to your right</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: Oh really?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: Yeah. It's always cooler. You can come up here in July and August and it's hot and humid down below and you can come up here and it's about like it is right now.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: This has turned into a beautiful day</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Welchel: It's a beautiful day today. Couldn't ask for a better day. Everything's green and clean.</p>

	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: So how far can you go on these trails up here Wade?                  &gt;&gt;Welchel: I think there's all together about 12, 14 miles of these, and then you cross the road up there and that becomes wilderness land, and there's certain trails you can ride, certain trails you can't ride. Forest Service has them all marked on a bulletin board.</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Narrator: There are many rules about riding horses in a national forest. Horses and pack animals are permitted on trails considered safe for travel, but you must take care to keep in a single file line to avoid creating a wider and more deteriorated trail. During rest stops and in camp, your horse may not be tied to a tree and should not be tied within 50 feet of a stream. You must also carry a water bucket and horse feed with you. These strict rules ensure that the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness are preserved.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: Is there any secret to going over here?                  &gt;&gt;Welchel: Yeah, just when you get down in the creek, stop a minute and that keeps your horse from getting in a hurry and trying to jump across – should do a whole lot better, makes it a lot safer.</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Narrator: At the top of this ridge we should to run into Nathan Klaus, a biologist with Non-Game and Endangered Species Program of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Nathan is conducting a survey about birds in the upper elevations of the Chattahoochee, so this should be a good place to find him. It's also a good time to give the horses a rest and partake of the vittles that Mule Top Outfitters has prepared.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: Nathan, if you would, tell us what you're involved in up here                  &gt;&gt;Klaus: Well I'm doing some surveys for the Appalachian yellow-bellied sapsucker. There's a number of birds we're starting to realize that live up here that, although they're widespread around much of the rest of the country, they actually are genetically distinct from the rest of the population. For years we've known that there are sapsuckers up here – just a few. Recent innovations and genetic analysis have revealed that actually this is a very distinct population and is a very high conservation priority. So, we're just now starting to do some surveys for them to figure out where they are and how many we've got and hopefully start to get some insight into their management needs.</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Narrator: Spotting this yellow-bellied woodpecker can be difficult. It is easier to identify them by sound, so Nathan has recorded their calls on a tape with which to lure these beautiful birds.</b></p>
	<p>(tape playing bird sounds)</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: That, that call. That drumming call...                  &gt;&gt;Klaus: Doesn't it just floor you                  &gt;&gt;Skinner: Absolutely amazing</p>

	<p>&gt;&gt;Klaus: There's no missing it, no missing it. They find just the right tree that has a real ring to it, and will carry really well. They'll actually sometimes really duke it out over a particular tree. If two males want the same tree they'll fight over a tree sometimes.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: Nathan, tell us about the work that you do with DNR.                  &gt;&gt;Klaus: Well I'm involved in a lot of projects involving songbirds up in this neck of the woods because the big land owner up here is the forest service. I've been heavily involved in the forest plan revision. They're on a ten-year planning cycle. They try to figure out how they're going to manage their forest every ten years. I guess one of the things I've always been interested in is forestry and forest health and how the land changes over time. You get up in a place like this with all these big trees and it's very tempting I guess to think that this has been here forever, and the reality is that this was all clear cut about 1900, 1920 somewhere, and this is what came back. Things are changing. This is a very dynamic forest, over time new species of trees are coming in and replacing old ones and there's a real species succession that's going on. That has some real implications for bird conservation in Georgia.</p>
	<p>There's also a whole host of diseases coming into Georgia that are certainly a threat to the forest area and probably a threat to the bird diversity up here. A couple of them are Dogwood anthracnose, the chestnut blight, which has of course completely wiped out chestnut.</p>
	<p>Estimates range that the chestnuts may have made up as much as 70% of the trees in the southern Appalachians. Early settlers described these mountains as looking like they were covered in snow because of all the white chestnut blossoms in the spring. The chestnut blight moved through this area in the 1940's 50's and 60's and just decimated that species; pretty much gone from the ecosystem today.</p>
	<p>What we were looking at today used to once be a chestnut forest. There are sprouts all over this region, in fact a lot more than what you usually see.                  &gt;&gt;Skinner: Can you show me one?                  &gt;&gt;Klaus: Sure, let's go take a look at some</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Klaus: Oh here's one. This is an American chestnut. You can see that the leaves are pretty distinctive; they look kind of like the Chinese chestnut that we have around our houses sometimes, but this is a different species entirely. You can see here where it's grown up a couple of times already, and the blight just stays with it, and once it gets to a certain size it just kills it back. This one's dead. That one's dead...and, this one's coming on, but it'll probably get killed back in just a few more years. You find these sprouts coming up all over through the woods where there was once a chestnut forest, but this is all there's left of it.                  &gt;&gt;Skinner: Do you know how the blight kills the tree?                  &gt;&gt;Klaus: No, I believe that it's actually in the vascular tissue, and it just disrupts the whole tree and kills it from the top down. Now the roots are still alive, so it'll keep sprouting up, but it won't get to ever be a tree again, and very rarely will you find one that bears fruit. It's a real loss for wildlife; the chestnut was</p>

	<p>one of the big mass producers up here. Probably supported black bear and deer populations much higher than what we see today. But it's—these small sprouts like this just don't bear fruit anymore.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: Nathan, you've given us a wealth of information. It's been great &gt;&gt;Klaus: No problem &gt;&gt;Skinner: Tell you what, I'm gonna let you get on with your work, and I'm gonna head on down the trail. &gt;&gt;Klaus: Okay, thanks. Good seeing you &gt;&gt;Skinner: See you later.</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Narrator: Another nice thing about horseback riding is that you can enjoy it in any weather. Muletop Mountain Outfitters is open year-round and often has a lot of fun in the colder months.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Skinner: Do you take a lot of folks out here in the wintertime? &gt;&gt;Welchel: Well, we rode a lot when we had that big snowstorm. We had a ball up here in that snow.</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Narrator: Well, this has been a really fantastic experience. I can't think of a better way to explore the Chattahoochee National Forest, except maybe to spend a week out here...or more!</b></p>