



ADVENTURES  
*in good company*



## INTRO TO LIGHTWEIGHT BACKPACKING ON THE AT

### Trip Summary

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Experiencing the freedom and comfort of carrying a backpack under 30 lbs
- Learning all the techniques of wilderness backpacking so you can do it on your own
- Backpacking over one of the most scenic sections of the Appalachian Trail
- Seeing wild pony herds and enjoying the azaleas and rhododendron in bloom
- Receiving a detailed and illustrated Introduction to Lightweight Backpacking handbook

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## TRIP AT A GLANCE

Location:	Damascus, VA
Activities:	Hiking
Arrive:	Meet at 5 p.m. at Mount Rogers Outfitters in Damascus, VA on Day 1
Depart:	You can leave any time after breakfast in Abingdon, VA on the last day.

### Trip Overview

On this wilderness backpacking trip we travel along one of the Appalachian Trail's most interesting sections, from Dicky Gap to Elk Garden, at the height of the rhododendron and azaleas in bloom. This section of the Appalachian Trail is known for high alpine meadows, towering rhododendron, azaleas, wild pony herds, other more indigenous wildlife, and spectacular views. It is the perfect setting for learning all about wilderness backpacking or, if you have backpacked previously, learn techniques from our expert guides that will keep your pack under 30 pounds. On this trip you will learn everything you need to know to start backpacking on your own. We keep our mileage low on this trip so that everyone has the energy and time to learn. Maximum group size: 12

### Rating

This trip is rated a 3 because, while you will be carrying a 30 pound pack on a trail where there are some sustained ascents and descents, the mileage is quite moderate to allow time to learn and practice skills. However, do not underestimate the physical challenges of this - even 5 miles when you're carrying a backpack for the first time can be quite an eye opener. **Rating:** 1 2 **3** 4 5. A rating of 3 requires aerobic conditioning for a minimum of 30 - 45 minutes 3 to 4 days a week.

### What's Included

- 1-2 Experienced Adventures in Good Company backpacking guides depending on size of group
- Three nights lodging and four nights camping
- Dinners and breakfasts from dinner Sunday to breakfast the following Sunday
- Group camping (double backpacking tents), cooking, and safety equipment
- Round trip shuttle from Damascus to the trail including driver gratuity

**Not included:** Transportation to Damascus; backpacks, sleeping bags and other personal gear; alcoholic beverages (alcohol in town is fine and we do not allow alcohol on the trail); guide gratuities; lunches and snacks

## OUR ITINERARY

Below is the itinerary we have planned for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

### DAY 1

Meet at 5 p.m. at Mount Rogers Outfitters, an outdoor store on the main street of the small town in Damascus, Virginia. If you are flying in, the closest airport is Tri-City airport (TRI) in Bristol, VA and you can arrange a shuttle from there with Mt Rogers Outfitters. After we're gathered there, we'll move over to A Step Away, our basecamp for the next 2 nights. We'll start with introductions and an overview of the trip, and then review some of the most important aspects of wilderness backpacking. We'll go out to eat at a local restaurant and then get to bed early.

### DAY 2

Today will be spent going into detail about lightweight backpacking and wilderness hiking/camping. We will spend our time listening, discussing and doing 'hands on' activities. Topics include safety in the wilderness, setting up camp, cooking, water filtration, clothing, setting up tents and tarps, the "ten essentials" and Leave No Trace philosophy. In the afternoon we begin the task of identifying those items we will take with us and those items that will be left behind, disbursement of group gear, packing and adjusting our backpacks. There will also be plenty of time for questions as well as for getting to know each other. Before the final packing of our packs we will make a trip to Mount Rogers outfitters for those items that were forgotten or maybe even those items we just have to have. After dinner, with all of our hard work done we can relax and look forward to our adventure.

### DAY 3

After parking our cars, we are shuttled to the start of our hike. Then, after the necessary 'before' picture has been taken, we will begin our trip on the AT! We begin the hike by skirting the northern slope of Iron Mountain, passing through deep canopy and along rolling terrain sprinkled with rocks and boulders. We cross several small streams and wetlands before reaching our first steep climb just below the crest of Iron Mountain. This final 'up' to our destination for the evening, Hurricane Shelter, is approximately 2 miles with an elevation gain of about 1,000 feet. Our shelter/camping area at Hurricane welcomes us and we will unpack (also known as pack explosion) set up camp, do our camp chores, and then enjoy a soup appetizer, and dinner!! If energy allows, we can have a campfire tonight. Total mileage 5.2

### DAY 4

We start our day with a short climb to the top of Iron Mountain where the Appalachian Trail intersects with the Iron Mountain Trail. We will continue on the AT and descend until reaching the gap on the southern side of Iron Mountain. Here we cross the beautiful mountain stream of Fox Creek Gap with its cascades and wonderful pools of cold mountain water. Crossing the paved VA. 603, we will re-enter the forest on the southern side of Fox Creek and enter the Lewis Fork Wilderness Area. We then begin a sustained but moderate climb up the northern side of Pine Mountain to our next 'home' for the night, Old Orchard Shelter. At Fox Creek we will be at 3,400 feet of elevation and will steadily climb to about 4,000 feet of elevation over 1.5 miles. Total mileage 5

## DAY 5

Our hike starts with a climb to the top of Pine Mountain where the views are magnificent on a clear day. We then descend to an area known as The Scales, originally used as a corral for cattle during roundups, when cattle were pastured in the highlands during the summer months. It is now a beautiful backcountry campsite complete with an outhouse, water source, trashcans and a wilderness campground host.

After passing through The Scales we begin climbing again. This climb will take us up Stone Mountain with its magnificent vistas to the west and north. This will be our first opportunity to see the wild ponies that inhabit this part of the trail, known for their exceptional interest in the food we are carrying in our packs. As we near our shelter area for the night, Wise Shelter, we will cross another lovely mountain stream, Little Wilson Creek, which is not only a wonderful water source but offers great pools for cooling off on a hot day! With any luck we will also start seeing some of the amazingly large azaleas and rhododendrons that are usually blooming at this time of year. Our campsite is just shy of Wise Shelter in a lovely meadow with a great view toward the east. Our terrain today is mostly either up or down with elevation gains/losses of just under 1,000 feet in 1 - 1.5 miles. Total mileage 5.9 miles.

## DAY 6

This may be one of the prettiest days of the trip! We begin this morning by traversing through beautiful old growth forest in Grayson Highlands State Park, steadily ascending a rocky ridge to one of the many beautiful vistas we will be rewarded with today - making us feel a bit like we have stepped into the Sound of Music. Below us is Massie Gap, which we next descend into and cross over, leaving Grayson Highlands and entering George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Wild ponies also frequent this area and we often see both the adults and the colts along the way.

Once across the Gap we continue climbing, steeply in a few places, until we reach the crest of the climb - Wilburn Ridge. The rest of our day will be spent on rolling terrain, above tree line on rocky and boulder covered trails. Our path will skirt Wilburn Ridge continuing to offer vista after vista, ascend stone stairs that skirt Grandview Peak with panoramic views of Pine and Stone Mountains; ascend to Fat Man's Squeeze, a short but rocky tunnel through large boulders; descend one short area of 'scrambling' down; and finally emerge onto an open field with, of course, more vistas.

At this point we are in Rhododendron Gap, at an elevation of 5,440 feet, with acres of rhododendrons and magnificent views. From Rhododendron Gap our final mile will take us through meadows and traverse a small pine forest. Upon arriving at Thomas Knob Shelter, our shelter/camp area, we will set up camp and if energy allows will set off to 'bag' the highest peak in Virginia, Mount Rogers. The trip to the top will take about 1 hour and steadily climbs up with an elevation gain of about 500 feet in less than 1 mile. There are no views from the summit but the old growth forest we hike through is beautiful. Although the actual mileage today is only 5 miles (not including climbing Mt Rogers), it will feel much longer. 5 miles

## DAY 7

Our last day of hiking on the AT - and what a way to go out! Our trail today will begin by traversing through an open area from Thomas Knob with beautiful morning views to the east, then descending from the junction of the AT and the Mount Rogers trail and into another old growth forest with huge beautiful trees and deep canopy.

We continue under canopy for a couple of miles and arrive at a meadow with one of our last views north of us. Skirting the meadow on the AT we continue under canopy, taking our time on this last day to enjoy the forest and the good company in the wilderness. As we enter an old orchard we see before us the final climb of the trip, and the trail ascends and then descends to Elk Garden where our shuttle will be waiting for us. Thoroughly steeped in the lore of the Appalachian Trail and the art of wilderness backpacking, we'll return to Damascus before heading to Abingdon for hot showers, beds, and a final farewell dinner. 4.2 miles

## DAY 8

The last night of the trip is spent at a local hotel in Abingdon, VA approximately 45 minutes from the Tri-City (TRI) Airport. You are free to leave anytime today, Day 8. Transportation may be arranged through Mount Rogers Outfitters or local taxi. Specific details will be sent with the Pre-departure document.

## ADDITIONAL TRIP INFORMATION

### Getting There

**If you are flying:** the closest airport is Tri-City airport (TRI) in Bristol, VA. Several major airlines fly into TRI including United, Delta, and US Airways. Plan to arrive by 3 p.m.; the easiest way to get to Damascus is to arrange a shuttle with Mt. Rogers Outfitter which you can arrange by calling 276-475-5416. In 2017 the cost was \$70 for up to 4 persons with an upcharge of \$5/person after 4. People who are driving may be able to drop you off at the end of the trip.

**If you are driving:** parking is available at Between the Trails for first part of the trip spent in Damascus at no charge. The morning we begin our section hike on the AT, you can leave your car parked at Mount Rogers Outfitters for the duration of our hike. The Mount Rogers parking area is located directly across from their store, on Laurel Ave (the main street of town) and is safe and supervised. The cost is \$2/day, payable when we return. We will be returning to Damascus at the end of our hike to pick up cars, pay for parking and buy souvenirs! Getting Home: The last night of the trip is spent at a local hotel in Abingdon, VA approximately 45 minutes from the Tri-City (TRI) Airport. You are free to leave anytime today, Day 8. Transportation may be arranged through Mount Rogers Outfitters or local taxi. Specific details will be sent with the Pre-departure document.

If you would like assistance with airfare, we recommend contacting our AirDesk Partner, [Exito Travel](#). Start by submitting this [form](#). Just fill in your dates and destinations, including any additional notes about preferred carriers, class of service, possible stopovers, etc., and an agent will typically respond via email within a few hours. If you prefer to call, the number is 800-655-4053; be sure to tell them you are traveling with Adventures in Good Company.

Please note: Most of the international airlines are in-network for Exito, so they do not charge extra for their services (and often have access to discounted rates). When necessary, processing fees out-of-network carriers are minimal at around \$35-\$50 per ticket.

### Accommodations

We spend the first two nights at [A Step Away](#) and the [Hikers Inn](#) in Damascus, Va. These buildings, adjacent to each other, give us plenty of space to lay out our gear and get packed. The next four nights are camping, having only what we carry in our packs. Some of our campsites will be at shelters with fire grates and pit toilets; others will be primitive. We spend our final night at a motel in Abingdon, VA, where hot showers and warm beds are a revelation after our 5 days on the trail.

### Travel Insurance

We recommend that you purchase a travel protection plan to help protect you and your travel investment against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, visit [www.travelexinsurance.com](http://www.travelexinsurance.com) or call 1-800-228-9792 and reference location number 06-0331.

Travelex Insurance Services, Inc CA Agency License #0D10209. All products listed are underwritten by, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance Company, NAIC #22276.

## CANCELLATION POLICY

Cancellation charges reflect the many expenses Adventures in Good Company cannot recover if you cancel, even if you must do so due to illness, injury, or personal emergencies. These fees are not meant to be punitive. The charges made reflect the expenses Adventures in Good Company has incurred in administering your reservation and planning for your participation. We recognize that the majority of those who cancel their reservations do so out of necessity. Please note that we do not make any refunds for any unused portion of your trip, not arriving, arriving late, or leaving the trip early.

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