

Historical Methods: The Appalachian Trail (History 300/ver. 11.2)

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Introduction

The Appalachian Trail, first conceived of by Benton MacKaye in 1921, is one of America's three long distance National Scenic Trails (along with the Pacific Crest and Continental Divide Trails). Of the three, the Appalachian Trail sees the heaviest use – estimates generally float around 2-3 million people per year walk some portion of the trail's 2,189 miles – and it remains the most famous, both as a fixture in popular culture and as a beacon to the adventurous, those who hope a hike will change their lives for the better, and those who just want to spend a few hours or a few days taking a walk in the woods.

The history of the Appalachian Trail is complex and offers the historian many paths for exploration. We will use the many histories of the Trail to learn both about the AT and about historical methods this semester as you prepare yourself for upper level history courses and eventually History 499, your senior seminar.

The best way to have you learn historical methods is for you to be a historian. To that end, here are my learning objectives for this course:

- *You will learn the techniques of the historian by being a historian.*
- *You will start with a problem, locate evidence that will (you hope) help you solve that problem, will learn how to analyze that evidence as you try to solve your problem, and will need to figure out how the presentation of your answer to the problem fits with the ways historians talk about the past.*
- *You will learn a little bit about such things as online databases, geolocation of data, government records, the use of social media in history, and digital public history.*

Like History 499, this course is organized around a final project. Unlike History 499, that final project is not a long essay. Instead, your final project will be a digital public history exhibit created on the website AppalachianTrailHistory.org. This final project, which we will discuss in a lot of detail during the semester, will include at least 10 entries in the website's database, an exhibit created from those entries (and using other sources you may find in the database), and an access point card on the wall map of the Appalachian Trail that you will find in the main hallway of Robinson B, 3rd floor, right outside my office. Already there are about a dozen such access point cards there from a previous class to give you an idea of what they might look like.

Using your digital public history exhibit as the focus, you will also make a final presentation to the class about your research.

Class Sessions

Because we all (me included) will be working on a similar project, we will use class sessions not for me to talk at you, but for each of us to report out what is happening with our projects—I found this, I couldn't find that, here's a picture from something I found, I don't know what to make of this evidence, I can't figure out how to get started on the database, etc. In the final third of the semester we spend a lot of time together in a workshop environment trying to complete our projects at the highest level of quality we can.

For this class to work, you have to come to class with something to say – either about your own work about the work of others in the class. What you have to say needs to be generative, meaning it takes us somewhere. If it's about your own work, it should be a question that you need input on. If it's about someone else's work, it should be a useful comment that helps them move forward. If you don't come to class prepared, two things will happen: you will slow us all down because you aren't helping us speed up; your grade will suffer.

Out of Class Activities

You will be expected to visit the Appalachian Trail, archives, local libraries as well as major research libraries/archives such as the Library of Congress, and/or the National Archives. Some of these can be visited digitally, others will need to be visited in person. In other words, you will be required to be a real historian, not just a student finding out what historians do and how they do it.

Visiting the Appalachian Trail will require a car, access to a car, or a friend who is willing to drive you at least once during the semester. If none of these is possible for you, I will arrange to drive you where you need to go, but you'll have to let me know in plenty of time so I can organize my schedule accordingly. If you have a mobility issue that will make it difficult for you to walk on the Trail, please see me immediately, because there are accessible sections of the AT within an easy drive from Fairfax. We'll make it work together without difficulty.

Finally, please note that we have a class field trip to the Trail on March 4 (rain/snow date March 25). This is a Saturday and we'll use most of the day (9-5). If you are going to have a conflict with this trip (work, sports team, other activity), start working on resolving this conflict immediately. Keep me involved in the conversation.

Required Readings

I have ordered four books for the course and we will also be looking at a variety of other readings as we go along. These books are required and must be purchased or borrowed. All are available used.

- Bill Bryson, *A Walk in the Woods* (2006)
- Sara Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, The New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (2010)
- Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics* (2013)
- Ben Montgomery, *Grandma Gatewood's Walk* (2016)

In addition, I am placing a couple of books on reserve for your use. These books are useful when you starting thinking about specific aspects of your research, but are not required.

Terry A. Barnhart, *On Doing Local History*

David E. Kyvig, *Nearby History*

Wayne C. Booth, *The Craft of Research*

Finally, I have a small collection of books on the history of the Trail in my office that you can make use of.

Assignments and Grading

Class participation: Every week you must do the assigned readings and come to class ready to talk about them.

Research product: You will select a topic for your research on the Appalachian Trail and research that topic in every way you (and we) can think of. You will also produce an annotated bibliography of at least 10 primary and secondary sources and a two-page introduction to a much longer paper (more on this later). The annotated bibliography is due in class on **April 3**. The two-page writing assignment will be due on **April 10**. I will hand it back to you on April 17 with comments and you will turn it in again, with revisions, on the first of May.

Digital Work: From among the sources you gather in your research, you will decide which are the most worthy for inclusion in our database/website, you will convert them to digital formats, and will enter them into the database following a set of rules handed out in class and impressed upon you in a training session early in the semester. From those raw materials you will create a compelling presentation of your findings using the exhibit builder in the database. Your final project must be complete **by May 1 at noon**.

Final Presentation: At the end of the semester you will use what you created in the database/website to give a presentation to the class.

The grades go like this:

Class participation	25%
Annotated bibliography	20%
Sources in the database	20%
Final project	25%
Final presentation	10%

The Lawyer's Chorus

Attendance: Because this is a seminar, I place a high premium on arriving on time. Unlike a lecture course, where you can slip in late, in a seminar, it is the height of bad manners to show up while someone else is speaking, disturbing his or her train of thought. Please extend the same courtesy to others that you would expect when you are the one speaking. Also, because class participation is a substantial portion of your grade, you should plan to attend each and every class this semester. How can you participate if you aren't in class?

ADA: Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me to make necessary accommodations (before February 3 please). Students should present appropriate verification from the Disability Resource Center.

Medical and other excuses: Every semester someone is forced to miss the due date for an assignment either as the result of an illness or a family emergency. If you find yourself in this situation, fairness to all students in the class requires the proper documentation, without which your excuses will not be accepted. If you need to know more about this process consult me as soon as the emergency is taken care of.

Plagiarism and cheating: In a word, don't. I refer every case of suspected cheating and plagiarism to the Honor Committee, so do us both a favor and just say no. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating, please see me.

Consumption: In my classes drink is permitted, but food and tobacco products of all kinds are prohibited. If you must chew, whether food or tobacco, do it before you arrive or after you leave.

Cell phones: Why do I even have to say this? Please turn off your phone or set it to vibrate before you come to class. And if you take a call in class (it's happened), I will penalize you severely in that all important class participation grade. However, if your phone is your primary connection point to the Internet or note-taking device, just let me know. Otherwise, I'll think you are texting and will be less than pleased.

Laptops: I am not one of that growing legion of professors who bans laptops from class (see my blog post on this: <http://edwired.org/?p=587>). In fact, I encourage you to bring your laptop to class. But if you are clearly checked out (Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?) to Facebook, YouTube, AIM, League of Legends, or wherever, expect me to call on you.

Planned Course Schedule

Note: Readings should be completed before class.

January 23 – Class introduction. Doing history, formulating historians' questions, working with primary and secondary sources.

January 30 – The Appalachian Trail in Popular Culture

- Read MacKaye essay (sent via email)
- Bryson, 1st half
- Write a one-sentence thesis statement drawn from these readings, print it out, and bring it to class.

February 6 – Public History

- Bryson, 2nd half.
- Robert Kelley, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian*, 1/1 (Autumn, 1978): 16-28 DOI: 10.2307/3377666
- Sharon Leon, "21st Century Public History," Parts I, II, and III (April, 2010): <http://www.6floors.org/bracket/2010/04/21/21st-century-public-history-part-i/>

- Serge Noiret, "Digital Public History: bringing the public back in," *Public History Weekly*, 3 (2015): 13: <http://public-history-weekly.oldenbourg-verlag.de/3-2015-13/digital-public-history-bringing-the-public-back-in/>
- Write a bibliographical annotation about one of these readings (not Bryson), print it out, and bring it to class.

February 13 – Public Policy and the Appalachian Trail

- Read *Tangled Roots* (specific pages)
- Laura Burd Schiavo, "White People Like Hiking," *The Public Historian* (November 2016): 38/4, p. 206-235 and Nina S. Roberts' review of *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, by Carolyn Finney, in *The Public Historian* (November 2016): 38/4, p. 335-338.
- Write a short paragraph – 3-5 sentences – drawn from these readings and footnote all three using Chicago style. Print it out and bring it to class.

February 20 – Building the Trail

- Finish *Tangled Roots* (specific pages)
- Create a bibliography using Chicago style that includes all of the readings and digital sources assigned in this syllabus, print it out, and bring it to class.

February 27 – **No Class. I'm at a board meeting in NYC**

March 4 – **Class Hike (rain date March 25)**

March 6 – The Human Context

- Read *Managing the Mountains* (specific pages)
- **Topic proposals due**

March 13 – **No class. Spring Break**

March 20 – The Human Context

- Finish *Managing the Mountains* (specific pages)
- Sources from JMU Oral History and our database assigned in class

March 27 – Hikers

- Read *Grandma Gatewood's Walk*
- Listen to "Baltimore Jack Consumes an Entire Chicken," Pox and Puss Podcast, Episode 16, May 2, 2013: <http://trailshuttles.libsyn.com/16-part-1-baltimore-jack-consumes-an-entire-chicken>
- Find a Trail narrative online and research it and come to class prepared to discuss it.

April 3 – Presentation of final topics/research updates (progress reports).

- **Annotated bibliographies due**

April 10 – Research update/conversations about writing

- **Two page writing assignment due**

April 17 – Research update (progress reports)

April 24 – Final presentations

May 1 – Final presentations and class party

- **Final project due**