

# History of the Appalachian Trail

HIST 389/395

(ver. 3.2)

## Mills Kelly

Robinson B373b

Email: [tkelly7@gmu.edu](mailto:tkelly7@gmu.edu)

Web: [edwired.org](http://edwired.org)

Twitter: @EdwiredMills

## Office Hours

<http://millskelly.youcanbook.me>

## Slack

[athistory.slack.com](https://athistory.slack.com)

**Introduction:** In this course, we will examine the history the Appalachian Trail, America's oldest multi-state long distance hiking trail. From Springer Mountain in Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine, the AT currently spans 2,190 miles and passes through 14 states. Those who hike the entire length of the trail experience 464,500 feet of elevation gain and loss (that's a lot of hills) and each year the trail is visited by more than 3 million people, only a tiny fraction of whom attempt to hike it from end to end. The trail has a rich and sometimes controversial history dating back into the 1920s, and it is this history that will be our primary concern.

This course also serves as an introduction to the methods of digital public history. A relatively new field, digital public history uses digital media to present historical topics to a general audience rather than to just a small community of scholars. No IT skills are required to be successful in this course, however, you will learn a few during the semester. You will also complete a final digital public history project that is part of a larger effort ([appalachiantrailhistory.org](http://appalachiantrailhistory.org)) that I hope you will be proud of and can show to friends, family, and future employers.

**Course Structure:** All semester long we will be investigating a variety of topics related to the history of the Trail and I have arranged for two guest speakers to join us at various points. One speaker, Jeffrey Ryan, is the author of one of the books we're reading for the class, and the other, Chris Woodside, is the editor of *Appalachia*, America's oldest magazine/journal devoted to topics related to conservation, outdoor adventure, and wilderness preservation. Both have hiked the entire Appalachian Trail. Because the class is discussion-based rather than lecture based, you will need to keep up with the readings. Otherwise, you won't have a lot to contribute to our class. In the second half of the semester we will be much more focused on the design and execution of your final project (more on that below).

**Slack:** I don't use BlackBoard. Why? Because when you graduate from Mason, you'll never use BB again as long as you live. By contrast, you may well end up using project management software like Slack, Trello, etc. So, we'll be using Slack this semester as our main way of communicating outside of class. After the first day of class, you'll receive an invitation from me to join our Slack channel. That is the place where I'll be posting various useful documents, notices about class, and so on. We'll also be using that as a place for online discussion as we move through the semester.

**My expectations of you:** This course offers you a chance to do something interesting, possibly exciting, and most of all, public. Because you will be making your work public,

both online and on the wall in Robinson Hall, I expect that you will pay close attention to the issues we discuss with respect to audience, design, and user experience, as well as to the more traditional aspects of historical research. Students who have taken one of my courses before know that I place a very high premium on students deciding how to do their own work, but the trade off is that I'm not going to spoon feed you solutions. You have to think. You have to work. And you need to bring your "A" game most of the time (no one can bring it every day).

**Your expectations of me:** You should expect me to bring my "A" game almost every day, to challenge you intellectually, to show respect for you as a student and a human, to have created a course where you can learn some interesting things and produce work that you will be proud to show to others.

### **Assignments**

In addition to completing all the assigned readings in a timely manner and coming to our meetings ready to discuss the topic of the day, you will be expected to complete the following assignments:

Writing – 3 short papers (one of 2 pages, two of 3-5 pages)

Project work – 10 database entries, one online exhibit (see Appendix A)

### **Grading**

Grades in this course will be allocated according to the following scheme:

Discussions	30%
Short papers	35%
Final project (yours)	35%

### **Books to Purchase**

I have selected three books for the course. As I drafted this syllabus in May 2016, they could be purchased new online for \$75 and used for \$41. I mention this pricing so that you can comparison shop as you get ready for the semester.

- Bill Bryson, *A Walk in the Woods* (2006)
- Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics* (2013)
- Jeffrey Ryan, *Blazing Ahead: Benton MacKaye, Myron Avery, and the Rivalry that Built the Appalachian Trail*

There will be other readings, but these will all be available for free online or I'll give you copies.

### **Essays**

In the first half of the semester you will write three short essays: one of them two pages long; the other two will be 3-5 pages in length. These papers will give you a chance to dig a little deeper into the topics we will have been discussing in class. For each paper you can rely heavily on the assigned readings, but I will expect you to also find at least a couple of additional sources outside of those I've assigned – preferably primary/original

sources. I'll go over the topics and my expectations for each paper in more detail in class, but in general the paper topics will be under the following general headings:

Paper 1 – Select one of the topics about the history of the Trail that Bryson raises in *A Walk in the Woods*, find two or three primary sources on that topic, and write a two-page paper that has an argument drawn from a combination of your sources and what Bryson had to say. We'll talk about this short paper in our meetings. Its purpose is to give me a sense for your writing and for you to get a sense for my expectations of your writing. (5% of your final grade)

Paper 2 – A focus on the “policy” side of the history of the Trail, including such things as federal land use practices, the role of the various volunteer clubs in acquiring access rights and later ownership of land along the route of the trail, etc. Much of the history of the AT is about who has the right to the land that encompasses the Trail and so we'll need to step back a bit from the readings and think more critically about these issues. (15% of your final grade)

Paper 3 – A focus on the “people” side of the history of the Trail, including such things as the people removed from their land to make way for the Trail in various parks along the Trail's route, the key figures in the building and preservation of the Trail, and the hikers themselves, whether casual users (day or weekend hikers) or the thru hikers. As important as policy is to the history of the Trail, the history of the AT is also a history of its people. (15% of your final grade)

### **Optional Hike**

The Appalachian Trail reaches its closest point to George Mason University at Manassas Gap in Linden, Virginia. We will be doing an (optional) day hike to the [Manassas Gap shelter](#) on October 13. For this hike, we will leave Mason at 8:30 am and will be back no later than 4:00 pm. The hike itself is 2.5 miles each way, with a moderate uphill climb out of the Gap to the shelter. The shelter is one of the original AT shelters, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1939. We'll hike up, have lunch at the shelter, then turn around and hike back down to the cars. You are more than welcome to bring friends and/or family along.

### **Course Policies (please read them all)**

ADA: If you have any accommodations from the Office of Disability Services, please show me the paperwork by September 4.

Medical and Other Issues: Every semester someone is forced to miss 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: I have every expectation that you will do your own work. If I have reason to believe that you are plagiarizing another's work, we will discuss my concerns. If your explanations don't satisfy me, I'll turn the whole matter over to the university honor committee for adjudication. In addition to my own high expectations when it comes to academic honesty, the university also expects students to demonstrate a high code of

personal honor when it comes to academic work. Please read the [George Mason University Honor Code](#). If you have any questions about what is expected of you in this regard. Penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, including, but not limited to failing the assignment, failing the course, many hours of community service, suspension or even expulsion from the university.

Communication: In general, the best way to get hold of me is by email or messaging in our Slack channel; I will usually respond within one business day, often sooner. Please be aware that I sometimes don't check email in the evening or on weekends and I spend a lot of time off the grid (in places with no connectivity), so if I don't respond same day, don't worry. I will usually contact you by email (gmu email account only if it involves a grade), and I too will try not to expect a response sooner than one business day. I'll give you my cell number in class (we don't have office phones any longer in the History Department) and you should feel free to call me or text me any time between 9:00 am and 8:00 pm. I get up crazy early, so I turn my phone off at 8:00 every night. If you text me, which is fine, be sure to identify yourself, because you won't be in my contact directory and I might wonder just who you are. Also, privacy rules and laws dictate that I cannot send you any grade related information over text or Slack.

Enrollment Status: Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment status in this (and every) course. Any change in that status is the responsibility of the student and must be made by the dates listed in the *Schedule of Classes*. After the last day to drop a course, withdrawal from the course must be approved by the Dean and will be approved only for nonacademic reasons. Attempting to add a class after the last day to add is all but impossible. Undergraduate students wishing to drop a class after the drop date may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the *Schedule of Classes* for [selective withdrawal procedures](#).

Helpful Resources: George Mason University provides [many resources](#) to students that can help you be successful. These include everything from writing assistance, to tutoring, to counseling services. When I was an undergraduate, it was resources like these that helped me graduate (close to) on time. If you find yourself in any kind of difficulty—from diet to organization to depression to simply not understanding something in one of your classes—be sure to take advantage of these resources that are provided to you at no cost.

## Weekly Schedule

### Week of August 27

Read MacKaye essay (sent via email and posted in Slack) and be prepared to discuss it on Thursday. Start reading *A Walk in the Woods*. As you read, begin a list of questions you want to answer about the Appalachian Trail.

### Week of September 3 – What is Public History? Digital Public History?

Readings:

- Robert Kelley , "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian*, 1/1 (Autumn, 1978): 16-28 DOI: 10.2307/3377666. Posted in Slack Documents.
- 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.olderbourg-verlag.de/3-2015-13/digital-public-history-bringing-the-public-back-in/>

Tuesday discussion — What is public history?

Thursday discussion — How is digital public history different?

### **Week of September 10 – The Trail in Popular Culture**

Finish reading *A Walk in the Woods*.

Tuesday discussion — As historians, what can we learn from a book like Bryson's?

Thursday discussion — Read Kathryn Miles, "[Can the Appalachian Trail Survive a Walk in the Woods](#)," *Outside Magazine*, August 31, 2015. Look at the data in the graph posted to Slack about visitors to Catawba Mountain in Virginia (McAfee Knob). Be prepared to discuss the tension between the AT as a public resource and the AT as a space that needs protecting. Think back to MacKaye's essay about the purpose of the Trail.

### **September 17 – Building the Trail**

Read *Blazing Ahead* pages 1-144

Tuesday discussion — How did Benton MacKaye's idealism make the AT possible?

Thursday discussion — How did Myron Avery's pragmatism make the AT possible?

### **Week of September 24 – Building the Trail**

**Guest Speaker (9/27): Jeffrey Ryan, Author of *Blazing Ahead***

Finish *Blazing Ahead* plus some primary sources I'll give you.

Tuesday discussion — How did the rivalry between MacKaye and Avery shape the future of the Appalachian Trail?

Thursday discussion — Come to class prepared to ask Jeffrey Ryan pointed questions about his book!

### **Week of October 1 – Federalizing the Trail**

Read *Tangled Roots* (pages 1-94). Read the

Tuesday discussion — What are the essential issues when it comes to federalizing a public resources like the AT?

Thursday discussion — Read the primary sources posted into Slack for this week (documents about Trail corridor acquisition in central Virginia in the 1970s). How do the parties involved present their cases for acquiring or holding onto private lands?

### **Week of October 8 – Federalizing the Trail**

Finish *Tangled Roots* pages 154-183.

**\* October 9 — No class. Columbus Day Switcheroo!**

Thursday discussion — How was the AT a test case, or not, for similar issue around public lands?

**Optional Hike — Saturday, October 13, from 8:30-4:00**

### **Week of October 15 – Hikers**

**Guest Speaker (10/16): Chris Woodside. Author, editor, and 1983 thru hiker**

Read:

- Adam Berg: "To Conquer Myself: The New Strenuousness and the Emergence of Thru-Hiking on the Appalachian Trail in the 1970s." Journal of Sport History 42/1 (Spring 2015): 1-19. (JSTOR)
- One of the three hiker narratives from the "Class of '51" or "The Long Cruise" by Earl Shaffer. (All in Slack)
- Read one of these:
  - o "Ambassador to the World of Men," in *A Journey North. One Woman's Story of Hiking the Appalachian Trail*, by Adrienne Hall, (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club Books, 2000): p.135-51. (In Slack)
  - o Cindy Ross, *A Woman's Journey*, (East Woods Press, 1982).
  - o "Grandma Gatewood: A Legend along the Appalachian Trail," in *Hiking the Appalachian Trail*, Volume I, James R. Hare ed., (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1975): p. 54-63.
  - o Dorothy Laker, "My Three Appalachian Trail Hikes," in *Hiking the Appalachian Trail*, Volume I: p. 64-267 (feel free to skim).

### **Week of October 22 — No class. I'm in Norway**

Find a Trail narrative online and research it. Post a summary in Slack along with commentary on what this narrative tells us about the history of the Trail. Use the #trailnarratives channel.

Also read: Laura Burd Schiavo, "White People Like Hiking," The Public Historian (November 2016): 38/4, p. 206-235 (provided via email and Slack)

- I will be available throughout the week for consultation via email and Slack.
- Use this time to work on your third essay, which is due on October 30 via email.

### **Week of October 29 – Hikers**

**\* No class on 10/30 (I'm in Romania)**

Come to class on Thursday with a summary of the hiker narrative you researched. Be ready to present it to the group in under five minutes.

### **Week of November 6 – Project Design, Audience**

**\* No class 11/8 (I'm in Banff)**

- This week will be devoted to thinking about the design of the final exhibit you will be creating. For that conversation, you need to have examined a number of the student exhibits on the project website and have thought about how the form of your exhibit will support the points you want to make. In other words, what images, how many, what text, how long, do you need a map, etc., etc.
- What will your audience want?

### **Week of November 12 – Work on your exhibit**

- Come to class prepared to show some of your sources, all with the proper metadata fields filled in.

### **Week of November 19 – Work on your exhibit**

- Come to class with a preliminary version of your exhibit complete that you can show the class.

### **\* No class November 22 — Thanksgiving**

### **Week of November 26 – Finishing your exhibit**

- This week will be a chance to trouble shoot your exhibit.
- Come to class ready to show off what works, what doesn't, and to give input on your colleagues' work.

### **Week of December 3 – Additional work time if needed**

- This week will be your chance to wrap up your exhibit. On December 4 and 6 each student will give a *very* brief presentation of their final version.

## **Appendix A Final Project**

An important of this course will be research that you do on an Appalachian Trail-related topic that interests you. The topic you pick is really up to you and if you don't have one in mind right away, don't worry. As the semester goes along more than one will suggest itself to you. Just to get your juices flowing, I'll mention some general categories of possible research topics:

1. The history of a particular trail club
2. A biographical history of a thru hiker
3. Political issues surrounding land use/property rights
4. Crime on the Trail (there are some unsolved murders, for example)
5. Women on the Trail
6. Diversity on the Trail
7. Environmental impacts
8. Local economic development along the Trail ("trail towns", etc.)
9. A history of gear

Your work would need to be much more specific than these broad categories, but these should at least help you start thinking.

Once you settle on a topic, you will do research in various archival collections—some online, some not—and will acquire original/primary sources that can then be entered into the database we are building as part of the course: <http://appalachiantrailhistory.org>. Then you will build an online exhibit in this database that will eventually be made public. Your work must include the following elements:

1. At least 10 original sources added to the database, with images, descriptions, and proper metadata (you'll learn about metadata). You can add more than 10, but you must add at least 10.

2. These entries must include a mix of images, texts, maps, and other types of documents. There is no perfect mix, but you can't have all images, or all texts, or all maps.
3. These items must be in the public domain, or you'll need to secure permission to post them online. We'll also spend time on how to do that, so no worries.

Your exhibit will be built via the "exhibit builder" that is part of the database, so formatting will be relatively easy.

Once your exhibit is ready for public viewing, you'll make it public and create an access point to it that we'll place on the wall in Robinson Hall.