

## **Historical Methods: The Appalachian Trail (History 300/ver. 12.0)**

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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). 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 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, 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](http://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, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, right outside my office. Already there are about two dozen such access point cards there from previous classes 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 brief 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. The website is seeing increasing public traffic and because we now have grant support from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities, that traffic will increase substantially over the next few years. In other words, unlike digital projects you might create in other classes, this one is going to get a lot of eyeballs on it, so attention to detail and quality is really important.

For this class to work, you have to come to class each week 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 or a presentation of something cool you've found. 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, and your grade will suffer.

### **The Technology of Our Course**

**Slack:** I don't use BlackBoard. Why not? 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.

**Zotero:** If you're like me, you do most of your bibliographic research online via JSTOR, library websites, online databases like ProQuest, and other similar online repositories. I still spend lots of time in archives and libraries, but I also do a lot of my research online. Zotero, created here at Mason and now used by more than 3 million people every day, is a free, open source software platform that lets you organize everything you find in your online research, download articles to use later, write research notes, and create links between items in your personal Zotero library. Knowing Zotero and how it works will be a big help when you get to History 499 and in other courses.

**Tropy:** Increasingly, historians (and others) use their phones and other cameras to copy sources from archives, libraries, out in the wild, and at home, but those sources are then organized according to a system created by your phone's manufacturer, which is not very useful to historians. At Mason's Center for History and New Media, we have created a tool to help with that problem – Tropy. Tropy is free, open-source software that allows you to organize and describe photographs of your research material. Once you have imported your photos into Tropy, you can combine photos into items (e.g., photos of the three pages of a letter into a single item), and group photos into lists. Like Zotero, knowing Tropy and how it works will be a big help when you get to your History 499 in a future semester.

**Omeka:** Omeka is a free, open-source database platform developed here at Mason for public historians, museums, archives, libraries, and historic sites, that drives content to the web and is very easy to use. Omeka is the back end database we'll be using to create exhibits for your final projects.

### **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 no matter what your personal circumstances are.

Finally, please note that we have a class field trip to the Trail on Saturday, October 19 (rain date Sunday, October 20). We will depart Mason at 9:30 am for Linden, Virginia, which is less than one hour west. We'll spend about five hours on the Trail – hiking up to one of the oldest shelters on the entire Trail (Manassas Gap), then back to our cars, and home. We should be back at Mason sometime between 3:00-5:00 that day. 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 three 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)
- Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics* (2013)
- Jeffrey Ryan, *Blazing Ahead* (2017) – **Note:** I forgot to order from the bookstore. It's available new and used on Amazon and elsewhere.

In addition, I have a large personal library of books about the Appalachian Trail which I am happy to loan out. These books will be especially useful when you start thinking about specific aspects of your research, but are not required.

If you have never written a long research paper or done any significant research before, I recommend acquiring a copy of:

Wayne C. Booth, *The Craft of Research*

It's a very helpful book and available all over the Internet for very low prices.

### **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 **October 31**. The first iteration of the two-page writing assignment will be due on **November 7**. I will hand it back to you on November 14 with comments and you will turn it in again, with revisions, on **November 21**. If you need to rewrite it a third time, that will be due on **December 5**.

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 in Tropy, and will then 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 December 5 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 September 12 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.. In fact, I encourage you to bring your laptop to class. But if you are clearly checked out (to Facebook, YouTube, League of Legends, or wherever, expect me to call on you.

### Planned Course Schedule

**Note: Readings should be completed before class.**

#### August 29 – Class introduction

- Doing history, formulating historians' questions, working with primary and secondary sources.
- A brief overview of the history of the Appalachian Trail
- Introduction to the technology we'll be using

#### September 5 – Origins of the Trail

- Read MacKaye essay (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.
- Write a one-sentence thesis statement drawn from these two readings, print it out, and bring it to class.

#### September 12 – The Appalachian Trail in Popular Culture

- Finish reading Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods* and 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. Ask yourself, as historians, what can we learn from a book like Bryson's?

### September 19 – Public History

- Read four of the five essays below (your choice)
- 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/>
- Laura Burd Schiavo, “White People Like Hiking,” *The Public Historian* (November 2016): 38/4, p. 206-235
- 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 3-5 sentence bibliographical annotation about one of these readings, print it out, and bring it to class. Use Chicago Style for your annotation.

### September 26 – Building the Trail

- Read *Blazing Ahead* pages 1-144. Come to class prepared to answer the following questions: How did Benton MacKaye’s idealism make the AT possible? How did Myron Avery’s pragmatism make the AT possible?
- 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.

### October 3 – Building the Trail

- Finish *Blazing Ahead* plus some primary sources I’ll give you.
- Come to class prepared to answer this question: How did the rivalry between MacKaye and Avery shape the future of the Appalachian Trail?
- Create a fake one-page paper (use some random text) that has at least five footnotes from the sources we’ve used so far this semester. Two of those footnotes should be from the same source.

### October 10 – Federalizing the Trail

- Read *Tangled Roots* (pages 1-94).
- Come to class prepared to answer the following questions: Why did the AT community decide to push for federalization? What were the fundamental issues in American society that federalization brought to the surface?
- Add three more footnotes to your fake paper, at least two of them from one source.

### October 17 – No class. I’m at a College function.

- **Topic proposals due via email**

### October 19 – Class hike!

### October 24 – Federalizing the Trail (continued)

- Finish *Tangled Roots*.
- Come to class prepared to answer the following question: How was the AT a test case, or not, for similar issue around public lands?
- Come to class with one question you really want to ask Sarah Mittlefehldt.

### October 31 – Hikers

Read the following essays:

- 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)

Then read one of these:

- “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)
- Cindy Ross, *A Woman’s Journey*, (East Woods Press, 1982).
- “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.
- Dorothy Laker, “My Three Appalachian Trail Hikes,” in *Hiking the Appalachian Trail*, Volume I: p. 64-267 (feel free to skim).

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.

### \* Annotated Bibliography Due \*

### November 7 – No class. I’m at a conference.

- **First draft of two-pager due via email by midnight on 11/7**

### November 14 – Digital work

- Workshop time on digital projects
- Come to class prepared to show one item, with all the necessary metadata, that you have uploaded to the database.

### November 21 – Final Presentations

- **Second draft of paper due**

### November 28 – Thanksgiving

### December 5 – Final Presentations

- **All work due by noon on this date**