

Damascus: Heart of the Virginia Creeper Trail

Damascus, Virginia is known as the heart of the Virginia Creeper Trail and is the most popular starting location for biking adventures. Isn't that the best place to begin your mountain biking adventure? Our section of the Virginia Creeper Trail is just under 18 miles long, located in the pristine Mount Rogers National Recreation area.

With seven trails connecting at Damascus, we are known as Trail Town, USA. The Appalachian Trail comes right down Laurel Avenue and the Virginia Creeper Trail comes right down Creepers Way by the Town Mural (near Shady Avenue). Each year thousands of bikers travel to Damascus to spend time with family and friends along a picturesque mountain trail.

The most popular section of the Virginia Creeper Trail runs from the top of Whitetop, near the North Carolina border, down to Damascus. This section runs downhill for the entire 18 miles. Except for a short stretch through Taylor's Valley, it is part of the Jefferson National Forest, administered by the 200,000 acre Mount Rogers National Recreation Area.

The history of the creation of the Virginia Creeper Trail is an interesting story. Roots of the trail started as the Abingdon Coal and Iron Railroad Company, then as the Virginia Western Coal & Iron Railroad Company, both of whom ran into financial trouble trying to develop the railroad. Their assets were purchased by a new company called the Virginia Carolina Railroad Company. Focusing on the timber rich hills, the Virginia Carolina Railroad Company cut the railroad into Damascus in February 1900. It took 12 additional years to extend the railroad 18 miles to Whitetop, which is now the most popular section of the Virginia Creeper Trail.

The name "Virginia Creeper" is a result of how locals referred to the trains, loaded with lumber, iron-ore, supplies, and passengers as they slowly

climbed eastward into the Iron Mountains. The last steam engine was retired in 1957 and after the last owners of the route, Norfolk and Western Railroad Company, decided to close the railroad, it was secured by the US Forest Service for a recreation trail.

The total Virginia Creeper Trail is actually 33.4 miles long and Damascus is at the center point. The trail offers a different terrain and challenge depending on which section and which direction you head. For a down the mountain trip (not more than 5% grade) you can choose to ride from Whitetop down into Damascus for 17 miles. You can also choose to ride a more flat route with some uphill and some downhill and travel to/from Abingdon. The Damascus to Abingdon route crosses much private land so gates must be opened and closed as you travel.

The downhill ride from Whitetop to Damascus travels over 30 trestles and bridges, crisscrossing over The Laurel Creek many times. Riders down from Whitetop, can also visit the historic Green Cove Station, the only original depot left on the trail. Don't let the thought of a 17 mile ride scare you.....it is all downhill. Riders often come back and state they thought it would be a difficult ride and were surprised how easy the trip was. The ride is wonderful all year long, but a fall ride during leaf season is simply breath taking.

In Damascus there are currently seven bicycle shops, see listings on page 3. Each shop offers bicycle rentals, helmets, and shuttles for all ages. The shuttle van ride up the mountain to Whitetop usually takes 30 minutes and the shuttle drivers often have a story or two they will share. Get your family away from video games and the television and together you will enjoy biking down the Virginia Creeper Trail.



Find your “Trail Magic” in Damascus

Long-distance hikers coined the term “trail magic” to describe an unexpected occurrence that lifts a hiker's spirits and inspires awe or gratitude. Some have found “trail magic” while passing through the town of Damascus.

Every year less than 3,000 people embark on an

adventure of a lifetime, with the goal to thru-hike the 2,181 miles, traveling through 14 states on the Appalachian Trail. Attempting to hike the entire “AT” in a single season, is the hikers equivalent to Mount Everest with only 1 in 4, accomplishing this adventure. The “AT” runs from south-Springer Mountain, Georgia to the north in Katahdin, Maine. Amazingly, another 2 to 3 million people hike part of the Appalachian Trail either as section hikes or day hikes.

Thru hiking the “AT” takes most hikers on average 6 months and according to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in 2012 was successfully completed by just under 25% of those who make the attempt. In 2012, approximately 88% started at the southern end, Springer Mountain, in early spring so that they could finish up in the early fall before the “AT” is closed due to snow and bad weather. Damascus is one of the few towns that the “AT” actually cuts through and is considered a major resupply point on the “AT”. Damascus is known as “the friendliest town on the AT” named so by the hikers who have enjoyed the hospitality of Damascus businesses and citizens for well over 50 years.

Every year since 2000, Damascus has hosted the Trail Days Festival in May. Damascus now welcomes as many as 20,000 hiking enthusiasts making the Damascus Trail Days Festival, the world's largest backpacker gathering. Trail Days is not just for hikers, although alumni thru hikers are treated as heroes for living the dream of hiking the full Appalachian Trail. Anyone who loves the outdoors, music, food, hiking, camping, dancing or just hanging out with a large group of very cool people will love both Damascus and Trail Days.

The weekend is filled with concerts, lectures, food, and fun. One of the weekend highlights is the Hiker's Parade when hikers in the parade and folks on the sidewalks enjoy spraying each other with water guns.

Trail Days and the most famous long distance hike, brings people together as they experience the “trail together”. Everyone, both the hiker and their loyal dog, is given a trail name that they carry with pride. Coming back to Damascus or stopping by as they thru hike, gives the hikers the opportunity for reunion with old friends and inspiration to continue on to Katahdin, Maine.

Damascus welcomes you.



The historic Mock's Mill Falls, at 200 feet wide, is one of the widest waterfalls on the east coast. These falls were part of the original Mock's Mill grist mill, located on Laurel Creek in downtown Damascus. See the map on page 4 for the location.

Welcome to “Visit Damascus” and Laurel Creek Marketing

Many current Damascus residents and local business owners tell a story about how they first visited Damascus, fell in love with the town, and chose to stay. Our paper, “Visit Damascus” is dedicated to assisting our important visitors to discover the many places they can enjoy in the great (little) Town of Damascus and encourage them to stay, or at a minimum visit again and again.

Damascus has the small town feel, a place your children will feel safe. Whether it is riding down the Virginia Creeper Trail or playing with the ducks by Laurel Creek, Damascus has something for everyone. Our town now boasts 14 places to eat and 7 bicycle and shuttle companies. We are one of the few Appalachian Trail towns that are actually located on the Appalachian Trail. Only in Damascus can you walk down the center of town and say you actually walked part of the Appalachian Trail.

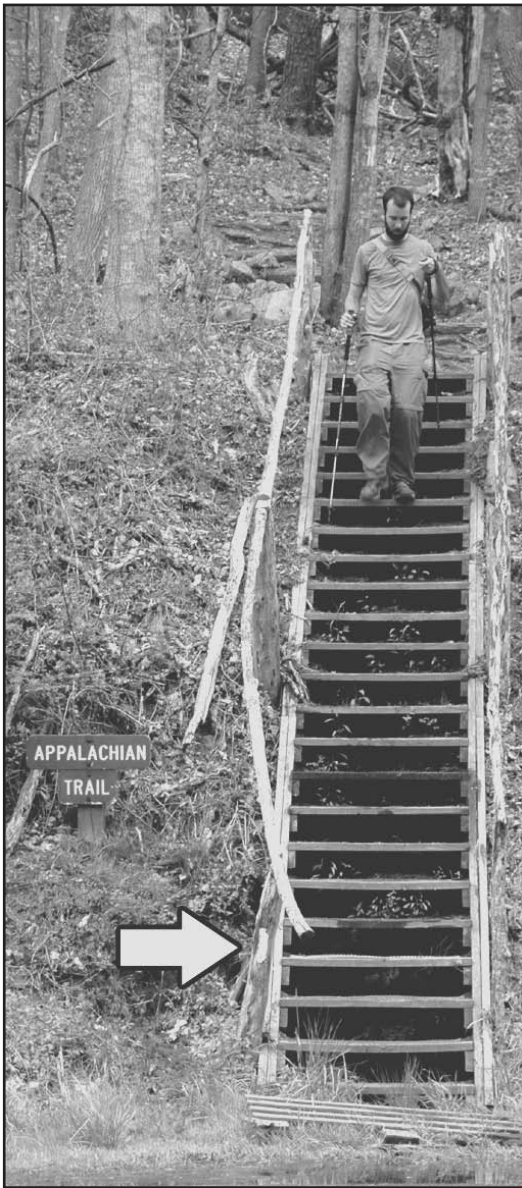
Damascus is the gateway to Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. Located in Southwest Virginia this National Forest contains 200,000 acres and has four Congressionally designated wilderness areas. We are most proud of our 18 miles of the Virginia Creeper Trail from Whitetop to Damascus, which by the way is downhill all the way. Our section of the Creeper Trail is said to be prettiest, easiest, most downhill, 18 mile bicycle ride you will ever encounter. Mount Rogers also includes the Mount Rogers Scenic Byway which traverses over 50 miles offering views of the National Recreation Area and the beautiful rural countryside; the 5000 acre, 400 foot elevation Crest Zone with large

rock formations, and a mixture of spruce-fir forests and mountain balds; a herd of wild, free-ranging ponies; and the highest elevated road in the state of Virginia leading to the summit of Whitetop Mountain which is over a mile high. There are over 500 miles of trails in the area, including 60 miles of the Appalachian Trail, 18 miles of the Virginia Creeper Trail, and 67 miles of the Virginia Highland Horse Trail. Over one million visitors come to Mount Rogers every year with almost ¼ visiting our section of the Virginia Creeper Trail.


Fishing is also special in the Damascus area with some of the finest trout fishing streams in the Southeast. The Whitetop-Laurel Creek is said to be the finest freestone trout stream in all of Virginia. Also, we must mention our town 200 foot wide Mocks Mill Falls, just one block from downtown Damascus on Laurel Creek, said to be one of the widest waterfalls on the east coast. This is just a small taste of what you will find when you visit beautiful Damascus, Virginia!

We encourage you to visit Damascus and stay for a few days, and join the thousands who return year after year to encounter nature at its finest.

Laurel Creek Marketing hopes you will enjoy your copy of “Visit Damascus”, and that you will enjoy the family orientated services of the business which make up the great (little) Town of Damascus, the friendliest town on the Appalachian Trail. For more information about Damascus, Virginia, visit our town website at www.Damascus.org.



Hiking the AT sometimes involves wooden stairs, such as this section entering into the town of Damascus. The arrow above points to the “white blaze”, the 2 inch wide by 6 inch tall white stripe on the bottom of the stairs marking the Appalachian Trail, just outside of Damascus on Highway 58.



VISIT DAMASCUS

& LAUREL CREEK MARKETING

Damascus is a unique small town which focuses on family friendly outdoor activities. Our mission is simple: to promote family friendly ecotourism in the Town of Damascus. We hope to provide visitors of Damascus with information regarding the fun things to do in our great town. If you have any articles or photos you wish to submit to be published in "Visit Damascus" please forward them to Fred@LaurelCreekMarketing.com.

Laurel Creek Marketing provides marketing services to businesses in beautiful Southwest Virginia.

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Your Fishing Adventure Begins in Damascus



Ranked as one of the finest natural wild trout streams in Southeastern US, the Whitetop Laurel Creek offers breathtaking backcountry fishing adventures just minutes from Damascus, Virginia. Southwest Virginia is known as an area rich both in history and culture. Fishing has always been a very important part of early settlers of Southwest Virginia life. Although fishing today often has a different purpose, the beautiful scenery surrounding Damascus, Virginia has countless fishing destinations to lure any fisherman.

The Whitetop Laurel Creek ranks as one of the best natural freestone wild trout streams in the Eastern US. The creek begins as two tiny feeder streams (Little Laurel and Big Laurel) near Whitetop Mountain. The important wild trout tributary, Beaverdam Creek, joins Whitetop Laurel Creek at the Damascus Old Mill, just below Mocks Mill Falls. Beaverdam Creek rivals larger creeks especially for wild brown trout. Annual surveys list Beaverdam Creek's brown trout as the largest in the tri-state area.

No matter if you are a young rookie fisherman or aged expert, Damascus has the best locations to cast your lines and have an unbeatable fishing experience.

Chris Maguire of Bennington, Vermont shows his daughter Ella the fundamentals of fishing. Laurel Creek offers both beginning fisherman and aged experts an unbeatable fishing experience.

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Is that a Trestle or a Bridge?

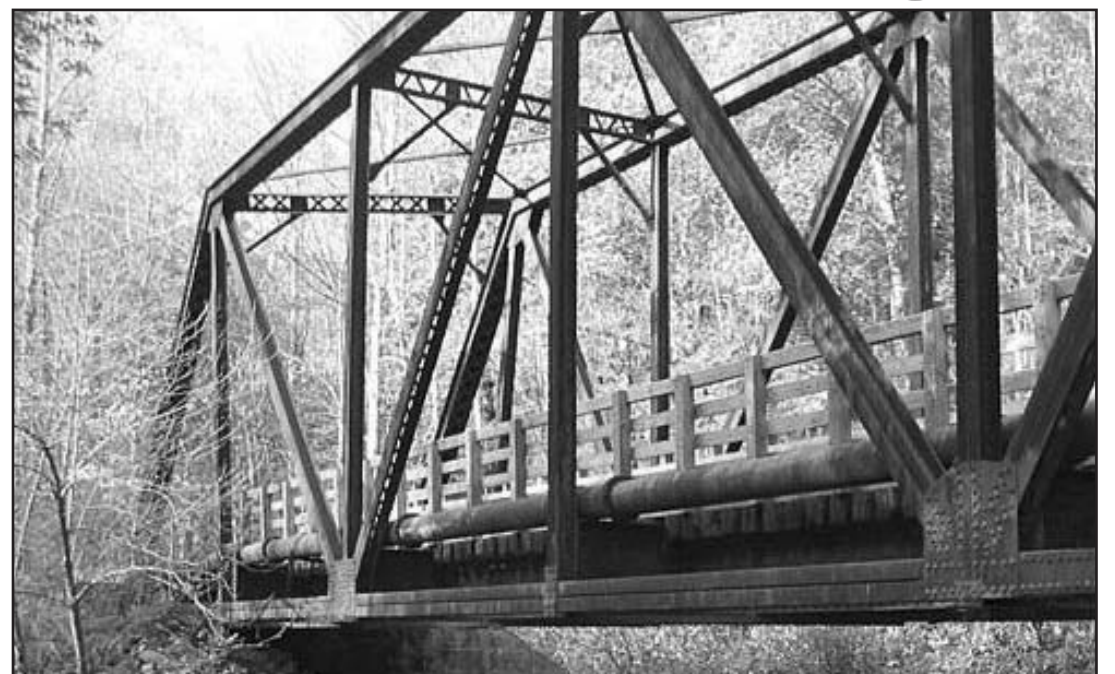
There are presently 46 trestles or bridges on the 33.4 mile Virginia Creeper Trail. A tornado destroyed the wooden Trestle 7 on April 27, 2011.

Do you know the difference between a trestle and a bridge? A trestle is a type of bridge, with the load bearing framework consisting of vertical, slanted supports and horizontal crosspieces making up the support for a certain style of bridge. In the 19th century, trestles were often built with timber, because of the availability of large trees. It has been estimated that 1 to 3% of the total length of the average railroad was made up of trestles.

The other photo here is a truss bridge, whose load bearing structure is composed of a truss. Truss bridges are one of the oldest types of modern bridges dating back to the nineteenth century. A truss design bridge is economical to build.

For photos of every trestle and bridge on the creeper trail visit the web site:

<http://www.vacreepertrail.us/trestles.html>.



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Map provided courtesy of

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