



ATC Policy on the A.T. Experience and Non-Hiking Recreational Uses of Trail Lands

Adopted by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in 1997

The Appalachian Trail is, first and foremost, a footpath open to any and all who travel on foot. Its sole purpose as a recreational resource is to provide an opportunity for “travel on foot through the wild, scenic, wooded, pastoral, and culturally significant lands of the Appalachian Mountains.” Except in isolated instances where historically recognized nonconforming uses are allowed by legislative authority, the footpath of the Trail should not be used for any other purpose. This policy is intended to provide a framework within which other recreational uses will be evaluated. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy may develop additional policy direction for specific uses as needed.

The lands acquired and managed for the Appalachian Trail, and lands designated within the A.T. management zone, not only protect the footpath itself, but provide primary protection of the Trail experience. The Trail experience, as used in this context, is intended to represent the sum of opportunities that are available for those walking the Appalachian Trail to interact with the wild, scenic, pastoral, cultural, and natural elements of the Appalachian Trail environment, unfettered and unimpeded by competing sights or sounds and in as direct and intimate a manner as possible. Integral to this Trail experience are:

- Opportunities for observation, contemplation, enjoyment, and exploration of the natural world;
- A sense of remoteness and detachment from civilization;
- Opportunities to experience solitude; freedom; personal accomplishment; self-reliance; and self-discovery;
- A sense of being on the height of the land;
- Opportunities to experience the historic and pastoral elements of the surrounding countryside;
- A feeling of being part of the natural environment; and
- Opportunities for travel on foot, including opportunities for long-distance hiking.

Other recreational uses of these lands should be considered compatible if they do not require any modification of design and construction standards for the Trail footpath or Trail facilities; cause damage to the treadway or Trail facilities; require an engine or motor; or adversely impact the Trail experience or the cultural, natural, or scenic resources of the Trail.