

Suggestions for Providing Trail Magic

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), a §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works closely with Appalachian Trail volunteer maintaining clubs (“Clubs”) and other public and private partners to ensure the protection and stewardship of the natural, cultural, and experiential resources of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (known as ANST, A.T., or “the Trail”). Approximately fifty federal, state, or other public agencies have authority or jurisdiction over lands and resources within the protected A.T. corridor. ATC has a central management role by virtue of its Cooperative Agreement with the USDI National Park Service and its close working partnership with the USDA Forest Service and other agencies.

Overview

Trail magic, defined as an unexpected act of kindness, is a quintessential part of the Appalachian Trail experience for many long-distance hikers. The suggestions below incorporate *Leave No Trace* practices (www.LNT.org) to help those providing trail magic have the most positive impact on hikers, the Trail, its plants and wildlife, and the volunteers who maintain and preserve it. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association endorse these suggestions.

Guidance

Help conserve and maintain the Trail. The most essential service you can perform is to volunteer to maintain the Trail and overnight sites and monitor boundaries and resource conditions. Visit www.appalachiantrail.org/waystovolunteer for more information, or check with your local trail-maintaining club to find out how or where you may assist.

Locate events in developed areas on durable surfaces. Large gatherings in the backcountry can lead to trampling of plants, soil compaction, and disturbance of wildlife habitat. Trail towns and local parks are better locations. Keep events small. Consider whether your event may be contributing to an overabundance of trail feeds in the local area or region. Many hikers come to the Trail seeking solitude and contemplation.

Prepare and serve food safely. If you will be cooking or preparing food, check with the landowner to find an appropriate area and learn what food-safety or other regulations apply. Permits may be required. Charging a fee or asking for donations may not be allowed.

Be present if you provide food or drink. Unattended items—including their packaging—can harm wildlife that consumes them, or hikers, when unrefrigerated products grow bacteria or become contaminated. Unattended items are considered litter and their presence detracts from the wildland

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character of backcountry environments. Dispense food and drink in person, and carry out any trash or leftovers.

Restore the site. Leave the site as you found it—don't create a burden for Trail volunteers whose time is better spent in other activities.

Advertise off-trail. Advertising—even noncommercial—is prohibited on the A.T. Publicizing a “feed” in advance can lead to clumping of long distance hikers, causing overcrowded conditions and greater impacts at shelters and campsites.

Forgo alcoholic beverages. Don't risk the legality and liability associated with serving minors, over-serving adults, or the safety issues associated with intoxicated hikers.

Be hospitable to all. While many long-distance hikers will likely appreciate trail magic, be sure to make all trail users and volunteers feel welcome.

For questions related to this policy please contact the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at www.appalachiantrail.org, or P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV, 25425-807.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.