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One summer day in the early 1930s, I 'climbed my first mountain'. It was 400m Bear Mountain, about 60 miles up the Hudson River from Times Square, New York City, a 370m 'ascent' from the river. At the top, I was thrilled to read the sign, 'Appalachian Trail', 1200 miles to Mount Oglethorpe, Georgia, and 800 to Katahdin¹, Maine! I wished that I might walk the whole Trail, at that time an impossibility. For 40 years I 'collected' bits and pieces of the Trail. In August, 1980, at the end of a 34-mile backpack in the Green Mountains of Vermont, I was celebrating the completion of the last bit.

The idea for a wilderness footpath along the crest of the Appalachian Mountains originated with Benton MacKaye, a forester, author and philosopher. In October, 1921, he published an article, 'An Appalachian Trail, a Project in Regional Planning,' in *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects*. He proposed the Trail as a backbone, linking wilderness areas suitable for recreation that would be accessible to dwellers in the metropolitan areas along the Atlantic seaboard. He wrote, 'The old pioneer opened through the forest a path for the spread of civilization. His work was nobly done and life of the town and city is in consequence well upon the map throughout our country. Now comes the great task of holding this life in check—for it is just as bad to have too much of urbanisation as too little. America needs her forests and her wild spaces quite as much as her cities and her settled places.'

The Trail extends NE for 2000 miles from 1160m Springer Mountain in Georgia (latitude 34°N, longitude 86°W) to 1610m Katahdin in Maine (latitude 46°N, longitude 68°W). It traverses 14 states; Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine². The Trail follows the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. Elevation varies from a low of 60m where the Trail crosses the Hudson River to highs of 1910m on the summit of Mount Washington in NH and 2020m on the summit of Clingman's Dome in Great Smoky Mountain National Park on the TN/NC state line.

The effort per mile varies greatly: very little in some parts of the Central Division where there may be a wide, relatively level path through mature forest; very great in parts of the Southern or Northern Divisions, the Nantahalas of NC, the White Mountains of NH and the Mahoosucs of ME. For about 250 miles from Springer to Big Pigeon River at the E of the Smoky Mountains, the average ascent is 76m per mile. For 125 miles from Glenciff, NH to Frye Brook lean-to in ME, the average ascent is 110m per mile. In addition, these northern sections of Trail go over the summits of a score of 1200m peaks, many above timberline. The pathway may be rough, over talus slopes and, occasionally steep cliffs. Combinations of low temperatures, high winds, fog and frequent precipitation may be fatal for a

hiker who is unprepared for such extreme weather.³ However, in good weather long ranging views and rare species of subalpine and alpine plants and birds make this region one of the most rewarding.⁴

It is volunteers who have made MacKaye's dream a reality. There are 61 trail and hiking clubs whose members build and maintain the Trail. They safeguard the quality of the Trail for the hiking public and for local communities. Trail work crews keep the trail clear from obstruction by major blowdowns and concealment by the rapidly growing weeds of summer. Volunteers construct shelters and install water bars to guard against erosion. Many of the clubs have 'On Trail Education Programs.' Ridge Runners or Caretakers hike the Trail or stay at the shelters. They answer hikers' questions, encourage them to carry out trash, teach them responsible use of the Trail, and may be of help in an emergency. Club members meet another important need, continued financial backing to provide support for volunteer activities and for land acquisition for the trail itself. Three of the clubs, Appalachian Mountain Club of Boston, Green Mountain Club of Vermont, and Dartmouth College Outing Club of Hanover, NH, had already built trails in the 19th and early 20th centuries that were to become part of the AT. The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, the Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club and the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club were founded in the 1920s for the specific purpose of building and maintaining the Trail. Many other groups, including College Outing Clubs and Boy Scout Troops, are responsible for sections of the Trail.

Co-ordinating the efforts of this large number of clubs and the government agencies responsible for National Parks, National Forests, and state or town parks through whose land the Trail passes, is the Appalachian Trail Conference, located in Harpers Ferry, WV.⁵ It was founded in 1925 to help the clubs plan the Trail route. It continues in a variety of roles: supervising relocations, publishing guidebooks and maps, and working closely with state and federal agencies in the land acquisition program.

The Trail is marked for travel in both directions. The marks are white paint blazes on trees (or poles) and rocks, about 2 in wide and 6 in high. Occasionally on open ledges a series of stone cairns identifies the route. In some areas diamond-shaped A.T. metal markers will be found. Two blazes, one above the other, are a signal for an obscure turn, or a change in route, or a warning to check for blazes with care.

From late spring through early autumn, several kinds of biting insects are troublesome. Mosquitoes and no-see-ums (gnats) may be problems anywhere below timberline. Chiggers (red-bugs) are common in the S half of the Trail. They are tiny scarlet fleas, the female of which burrows under the skin to lay her eggs. Ticks are also found on the Trail. These small arachnids bury their heads in the flesh of people and dogs. A few may be infected with rocky mountain spotted fever. However, if the head of the tick is removed within a couple of hours, it is unlikely that the host will be infected. In New England, mid-June to mid-July, small black flies are obnoxious. Using insect repellent, getting in the smoke from a campfire, or hiking with companions whom the insects find more attractive are methods that may help a hiker find some immunity from these pests.



74 A 'bald' in the southern Appalachians (This and next photo: P. Willis)

Backpackers will find a chain of lean-tos, three-sided shelters, at intervals of about a day's hike along most of the Trail. The majority of these are near water and have a fireplace. However, with increasing use of the Trail, the hiker may find a shelter full and the firewood gone. It is advisable to carry emergency shelter, water and a small stove.

SOUTHERN DIVISION

The 740 miles of Trail from GA to Shenandoah Park, VA, wind through a major part of the Southern Highlands with their rich deciduous forest. The Blue Ridge in the Southern Appalachians has the shape of an enormous V open to the N with 100 mile long sides. The apex of this V is Springer Mountain. Here the Blue Ridge which enters GA just E of Rich Knob reaches its southern extremity and then swings back NW. The Trail follows the E fork from GA to the TN/NC line. Southwest of the Great Smokies, which are continuous with the W arm of the V, the Trail crosses over to that arm.

For a distance of 420 miles from Mount Springer, the Trail, though rarely below 600m, is not often above timberline. Yet, in Great Smoky Mountain National Park, for 40 miles where the elevation is between 1500 and 2000m, there are spectacular views. For 200 miles beyond the Smokies to the Roanoke region, the Trail continues along the W fork of the Blue Ridge. The Trail crosses the Valley of Virginia and ascends the Blue Ridge

E of this valley, and continues to follow this ridge to the end of the Southern Division.

Some high peaks of this division are called 'balds'. They have rounded treeless summits, covered with grasses and heath, somewhat like high moorland. They are devoid of forest though below timberline. In spring or early summer they may be carpeted with wildflowers, sometimes uniformly golden with compositae, or a mosaic of blue, white, scarlet and purple. Later in the summer, hikers enjoy the wild strawberries, blueberries, or blackberries that grow in these open places.

Spring and early summer are beautiful seasons in the forests of the S Appalachians. The white-flowered shadbush, mountain ash and dogwood cover the hills. The 'tulip' trees hold their large, creamy green, tulip-shaped flowers to the sky. The white or pink flowers of rhododendrons and pink or orange flame azaleas are breathtakingly lovely.

Georgia: 78 miles

For primitive wilderness, opportunity for strenuous and continuous foot travel, beauty of forest growth and excellence of trails, N GA affords unheralded opportunities to the hiker. At its S terminus the Appalachian range loses nothing in ruggedness and height.

For the most part the Trail is coincident with a Forest Service trail. The hiker travels through mature, deciduous forest. From May through September views are infrequent. However, the 1360m open rocky summit of Blood Mountain affords splendid views. Brasstown Bald, 1460m, the highest peak in GA is W of the Trail. However, it may be reached from the Trail by means of a 2.5 mile side trail and 3 miles up a secondary road.

Southwestern North Carolina: 80 miles

On entering NC at Bly Gap, the Trail enters the Nantahala Forest where the trail follows the crest of the Nantahala Mountains along the E rim of Nantahala Gorge. It then continues to Fontana Dam via the Yellow Creek-Wauchecha-Cheoah Range.

The elevation is between 1130 and 1660m for the first 43 miles; then, drops to 520m. One of the most magnificent features is a ridge that culminates in 1660m Standing Indian Mountain. In good weather the summit affords extraordinary views. The ridge was enveloped in clouds when I was there, yet I have never forgotten the visions of misty greenness at the end of 30m long tunnels formed by rhododendron thickets whose branches met above my head.

In the last 25 miles there are 10 miles where the Trail goes from the N end of the Nantahalas W to Fontana Dam. These are described as 'very difficult, . . . much climbing with a rough footway . . . The exertion required in the traverse of this Section should not be underestimated . . . Sources of water are infrequent.' It is also one of many sections in the S that are difficult to maintain. Summer growth of weeds, including brambles and poison ivy, is prolific (Poison ivy is a plant that produces an irritating skin rash when a hiker makes contact with its leaves or roots).

From Fontana Village the Trail follows the crest of the Great Smoky Mountains E along the TN/NC state boundary. It is entirely within the National Park. From the Fontana Dam crossing of the Little Tennessee River, it climbs 600m in 2 miles and remains at elevations between 1200m and 2000m for the next 56 miles. At the end of the Park the Trail descends steadily for 10 miles from 1450m to 400m at the Big Pigeon River. The route through the Great Smokies is one of the most interesting and spectacular parts of the Trail. It is divided into 2 portions by the road from Gatlinburg, TN, to Cherokee, NC, that crosses the Trail at Newfound Gap.

W of the Gap, it reaches the crest of the Great Smoky Mountains at Doe Knob about 7 miles from Fontana Dam. Five miles further on is Maple Sugar Gap. For several miles beyond this gap the Trail is particularly scenic with views from Spence Field, the peaks of Mount Thunderhead (one of the finest Southern Appalachian balds), Chestnut Bald, Silers Bald, and Mount Buckley. There is some virgin forest in this region. Clingman's Dome, 2020m, the highest peak on the Trail, is 7 miles W of Newfound Gap. Rhododendron thickets grow on Thunderhead; a rare mountain cranberry, near Clingman's Dome. At higher elevations the forest changes from predominantly beech, to beech and spruce, to spruce and balsam fir.

East of Newfound Gap, though the Trail is graded so as not to exceed 15%, the difficulty of the Trail should not be underestimated. It goes through the wildest portion of the Great Smokies. The crest is narrow and goes down into many deep gaps and over many high peaks, including Mt Kephart, the Jump-Off, Mt Guyot, and Hell Ridge. Near Newfound Gap the forest is yellow birch, red spruce and Fraser fir; further there are many sections of balsam and spruce that are virgin forest. As the trail descends the conifers are replaced by oaks, beeches, maples, and a few surviving American chestnut. Here are more spectacular views than in the W half of the Trail in the Smokies. Particularly memorable are the views from the precipitous W peak of Charlie's Bunion. This is a 'Fire Scar' area, where some 4 miles of the crest were burned as a result of lumbering operations and the steep slopes later denuded by erosion.

A hike through the Great Smokies should be planned to allow time for side trips. Along the crest of the ridge one may see masses of flame azalea blooming on the summit of a bald; or birds nesting far S of their normal range: winter wrens and black-capped chickadees singing and juncos flushed from their nests at the edge of the Trail. But the very large number of unique species of plants, salamanders, birds, and other animals for which the Park is renowned can only be found lower down in valleys on the TN or NC side of the ridge. One of the loveliest sounds of these valleys is made by the veery, a thrush whose song, a rolling series of flute-like notes, is compared to the pipes of Pan.

Tennessee and North Carolina, NE of the Great Smokies: 210 miles

*Pisgah and Cherokee National Forests,
Big Pigeon River to Damascus, Virginia*

For the first 90 miles, from Big Pigeon River to the Nolichucky River, the Trail for the most part follows the crest of the Bald Mountains along the NC/TN state line. Its elevation is largely between 915m and 1370m, except for descents to 400m at Hot Springs, NC, and 500m near Erwin, TN, to cross the spectacular gorge of the Nolichucky River. The path, predominantly along ridges or in the woods, occasionally follows second class roads through farmland. Memorable was a June night when I was sleeping in a station wagon and looked out to see intermittent flashes of light from hundreds of fireflies. Further along, the Trail passed a small cemetery, witness to migration of descendants of the pioneer settlers from the mountains to urban areas. In another section, however, the Trail passes close to a region where Big Bald is being developed as a ski resort and summer home area. Fortunately the commercial development and most of the house lots are down on the NC side well away from the Trail.

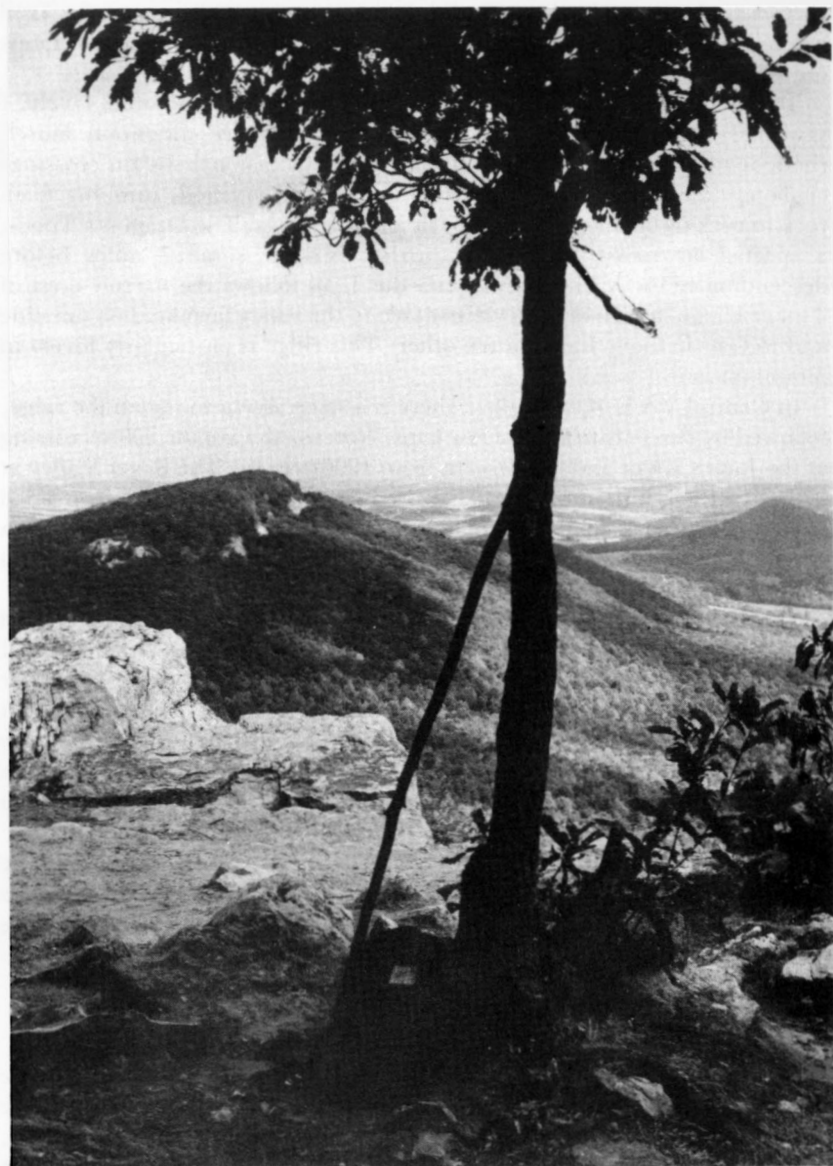
Hot Springs, Erwin and Damascus are small towns, where post offices, shops and laundromats are close enough to the trail for backpackers to pick up letters, buy supplies and get *some* of the dirt out of their clothes. In Hot Springs there is also a hostel, run by Jesuits, where free showers and beds are provided. (Other church groups, for instance, Methodists in Damascus and Presbyterians at the Delaware Water Gap, offer similar hospitality). The postmaster or postmistress at these towns not only delivers letters and parcels to the hikers but also is a link in the Trail grapevine, whereby hikers' news travels rapidly up and down the Trail.

I regard the next 100 miles from Erwin to Damascus, especially the Unaka area, Roan Mountain and Laurel Fork, as one of the most beautiful regions of the S Appalachians.

Incidents from my hikes will illustrate a few characteristics of this region. One spring day in the Unaka I heard a rustling in the bushes slightly above and behind me. As I turned my head towards the sound, I saw a spotted fawn so close beside me that I could have touched it! It 'froze' there, moving only its eyeballs. I walked slowly away, looking back over my shoulder. It was still there when a turn in the Trail hid it from my view. The next day, I was striding along where the Trail had a brown covering of pine needles. The path was good and I was not watching my feet. Fortunately, I happened to look down in time to see a ball of brown fluff, the same colour as the needles, less than an inch from the toe of my boot. As I bent down to see it better, the baby ruffed grouse flew off; the hen gave the alarm from a nearby tree, and 8 to 10 siblings took off in all directions! Further N the route traverses several balds, half a dozen with summits above 1500m, including Roan Mountain, known for its spectacular displays of pink and of white rhododendron. Here, I have walked through forest where the blossoms of white fringed phacelia on either side of the Trail were so thick they resembled snow.

The Trail follows the gorge of Laurel Fork, a narrow defile carrying an average of 26 million gallons of water per day, for $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles. (Annual

rainfall in the valley above is 54 inches). Some mountaineers still live in this and other valleys in remote areas of the Appalachians. A few may operate stills. One man whom I encountered at the entrance to Laurel Fork showed me the equipment he used to collect live rattlesnakes. These were possibly to be used by a religious sect whose members 'handle' these snakes during special ceremonies. There is no easy exit from the gorge during flooding, except to climb the somewhat precipitous cliffs.



Virginia has more miles of Appalachian Trail than any other state. Two-thirds of the Trail in VA, from Damascus to Rockfish Gap, is in the Southern Division; the remaining 160 miles, in the Central Division.

The Trail in VA, although still on the crest of the Blue Ridge, is now generally at lower elevations. However, shortly after leaving Damascus it ascends the 2 highest peaks in VA, 1680m Whitetop and 1750m Mt Rogers. Like the crest of the Great Smokies, these 2 are an 'island' where species of plants and birds are found that will not occur again until the Trail reaches N New England. Swainson's thrush nests in the red spruce forest on Mt Rogers; water pipit on Mt Whitetop.

The rest of the Trail in SW VA is sometimes rugged and often lovely. I saw one 10-mile section that was an avenue where mountain laurel, rhododendron and azalea were all blooming. Occasional stream crossings challenge the backpacker to pick his way across dryshod, jumping from rock to rock or balancing precariously on fallen logs. The Dragon's Tooth, a spectacular rocky outcrop, is further N. For some 7 miles before descending to the Valley of Virginia the Trail follows the narrow crest of Tinker Ridge, a section with views down to the valley farmland on one side and to Carvin Cove Lake on the other. This ridge is particularly lovely in mountain laurel season.

In Central VA E of the Valley, there is a steep ascent to regain the ridge, followed by descents to several low gaps. Noteworthy are the 200m crossing of the James River and the descent from 1200m to the Tye River Valley at 270m. In 1969, hurricane Camille caused severe flooding of this steep-sided valley. There was some loss of life and much property damage only a couple of months after I had parked my car down by the river for an overnight hike N.

That hike was memorable for several reasons. The route was obscured by weeds where it left a flat rock. As I tried to locate the path in the brush, I heard a buzzing sound coming from the ground. Wondering what bird or insect this was, I looked down to see a fine rattlesnake quite close to my left boot. Later the same day I returned to a lean-to by a stream about 2 miles N of the Tye. The resident birds were a pair of scarlet tanagers in plain sight for much of the evening, sparrow-sized birds—the female greenish with dark wings; the male a brilliant scarlet with black wings.

Rockfish Gap, where the Southern Division ends, is close to some historic sites. Charlottesville, the home of the University of Virginia, is about 20 miles from the Gap. A few miles beyond the University is Monticello, the classic 18th century mansion that was Thomas Jefferson's home.

CENTRAL DIVISION

The 700 miles of Trail from Rockfish Gap, VA to the MA/VT state line are at lower elevations than in either of the other 2 divisions. Moreover, the Trail is closer to large cities—some 50 or 60 miles from Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, more often adjacent to large suburban communities and to resort areas, and more accessible from

highways. At times volunteers from the maintaining clubs have to remove large accumulations of trash left by day hikers or overnight backpackers. Nonetheless, the Trail is still a continuous pathway, the greater part of which follows the ridge crests through uninhabited or sparsely populated areas.

For 250 miles the Trail in this division continues along the crest of the Blue Ridge: 100 miles in Shenandoah National Park; 50 in Northern VA and West VA, largely over privately-owned land. The Trail then crosses the Potomac River into MD. There, for a mile, it joins the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Tow Path, near Harpers Ferry and about 60 miles upriver from Washington. Then it ascends South Mountain, a ridge which is followed for 100 miles through MD and PA to the Cumberland Valley. Twenty miles N of this valley the Trail crosses the Susquehanna River.

Beyond the Susquehanna for 140 miles, the Trail continues E to the Delaware Water Gap, largely on terminal moraine. Then there are 100 miles in NJ and NY that start parallel to the Delaware River along the Kittatiny Ridge, traverse several ridges and valleys and descend from the Hudson Highlands to the Hudson River near Bear Mountain. Fifty miles E of the Hudson, the Trail enters NW CT. The last 140 miles in this division, in CT and W MA, alternately follow the Housatonic River Valley and the peaks of the Taconic Range and Berkshire Hills. It reaches the summit of 1050m Mt Greylock, the highest point since Hawksbill Mountain in Shenandoah Park, shortly before a final descent to the Hoosic River.

Although in this division the Trail is lower and less remote from 'civilised' regions, it is nonetheless a beautiful and, at times, challenging footpath. Spring and autumn are especially good seasons for hiking in the Central Division. Temperatures are comfortable; views are plentiful when leaves are not on the trees; and, except at the height of autumn colour, fewer hikers are on the Trail.

Shenandoah National Park: 100 miles

Shenandoah Park is a region where the Skyline Drive, a scenic road completed in 1936, closely follows the ridge along which the Trail had previously been constructed. Much of the Trail and many of the lean-tos in the Park were built during the Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Trail is an excellent footway; the shelters, also very good.

There is a greater variety of wildlife to be seen along the Trail in this Park, where animals and plants are protected, than in almost any other section. White-tail deer are common. Chipmunks and red squirrels scold from beside the Trail. A skunk may parade down the side of the Drive. Vultures and ravens soar above the ridges. The large, scarlet-crested, black and white pileated woodpeckers are heard drumming in the woods. The 'eight hoots' of a barred owl is common; less so, the bloodcurdling cry of a barn owl.

I have had many memorable encounters with birds and animals in the Park: seeing 2 white-footed mice curled up in the wooden case of the Trail register; finding a towhee nest and eggs on the ground, when I flushed the

female; seeing a wild turkey stretch her long neck out of the bushes before she flew off; watching a black bear on its haunches, eating blackberries, 25 ft away, within 3 ft of the Trail; a thrilling 30-second glimpse of a bobcat walking down the Trail ahead of me.

Much of the land acquired for the Park in the late 20s and 30s had been used for farming. It is now in an intermediate stage of transition from badly eroded farmland to primitive forest. Twenty years ago many apple trees and an occasional peach tree from the old farms were bearing edible fruit. Now there is little trace of the old farms. There are still a few locations where large tulip poplars and virgin hemlocks may be seen.

The 10 miles of Trail immediately N of the Park has been given the soubriquet, 'Tick Farm', by hikers. The high density of ticks here is mainly due to the zoological breeding grounds operated by the Conservation and Research Center of the National Smithsonian Museum of Washington. Descending a grassy hill, a hiker may be surprised to see across the highway some zebra, bactrian camels, or some rare species of deer. The animals are confined by high fences. The ticks, some of which may be descendants of ones that thrived when the enclosure was used for research on beef cattle, are subject to no such limitation.

(to be concluded)

(1) Katahdin is an Indian word for mountain; to say Mount Katahdin is redundant.

(2) Official abbreviations for these states are as follows: GA, NC, TN, VA, WV, MD, PA, NJ, NY, CT, MA, VT, NH, and ME.

(3) Table 1, see Pt II, summarizes data for climatic conditions for several regions.

(4) Table 2, see Pt II, lists some of the trees, wildflowers, and animals that may be seen.

(5) Address: The Appalachian Trail Conference, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, USA.