



# Smartphones in Wilderness

Inherently Incompatible *or* Avenues for Access?

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Rogers, A. G., & Leung, Y.-F. (2020). Smarter Long-Distance Hike: How Smartphones Shape Information Use and Spatial Decisions on the Appalachian Trail. *International Journal of Wilderness*, 26(2), 88-103.

Rogers, A.G., & Leung, Y.-F. (2021). “More helpful than hurtful”? Information, Technology, and Uncertainty in Outdoor Recreation. *Leisure Sciences*, DOI: [10.1080/01490400.2020.1871132](https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2020.1871132)

The Wilderness area I most recently visited was administered by:

- Bureau of Land Management
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Not sure

In designated wilderness areas, I believe the use of smartphones should be:

- Encouraged and promoted
- Accepted without interference
- Accepted but restrained
- Forbidden or highly discouraged

Wilderness should be a place where people can expect to escape modern technologies:

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2
- 3 Neutral / Don't know
- 4
- 5 Strongly Disagree



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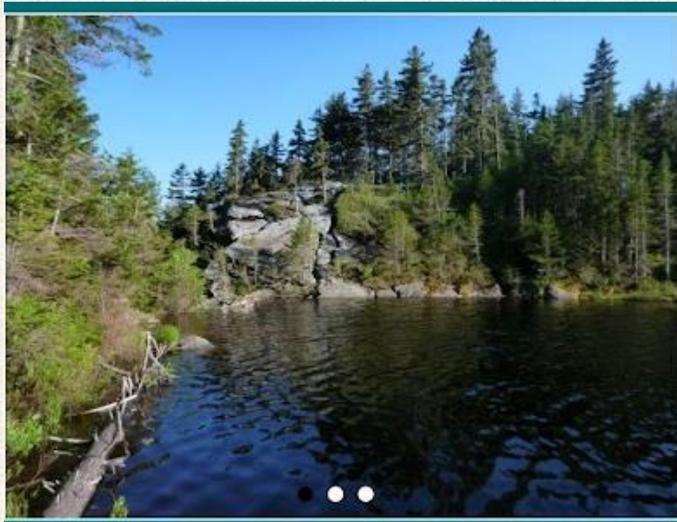




Hike Inn  
A.T. Approach Trail







## Gentian Pond Shelter

off Mile 1906.6 of Appalachian Trail

Elevation: 2158 feet

← Previous  
0.6 miles

Next →  
0.9 miles

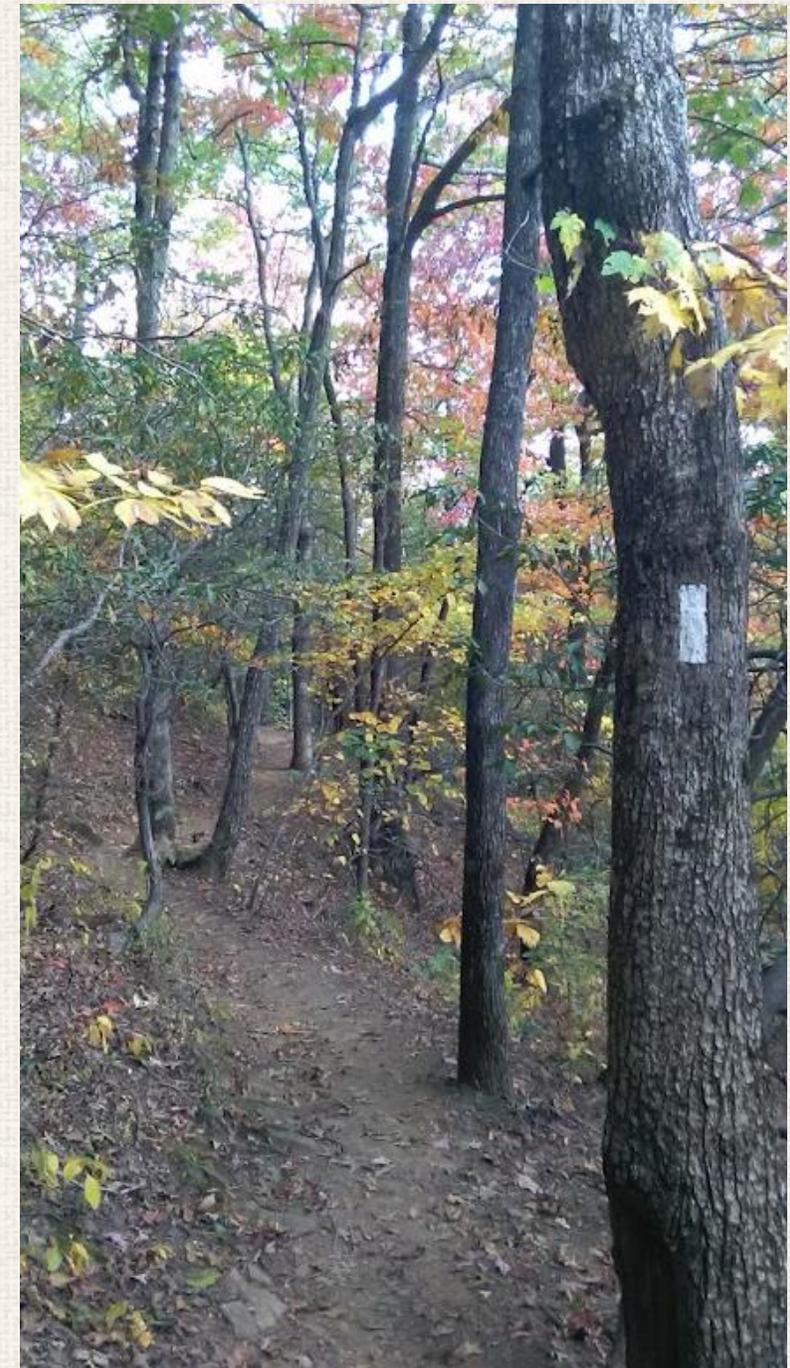
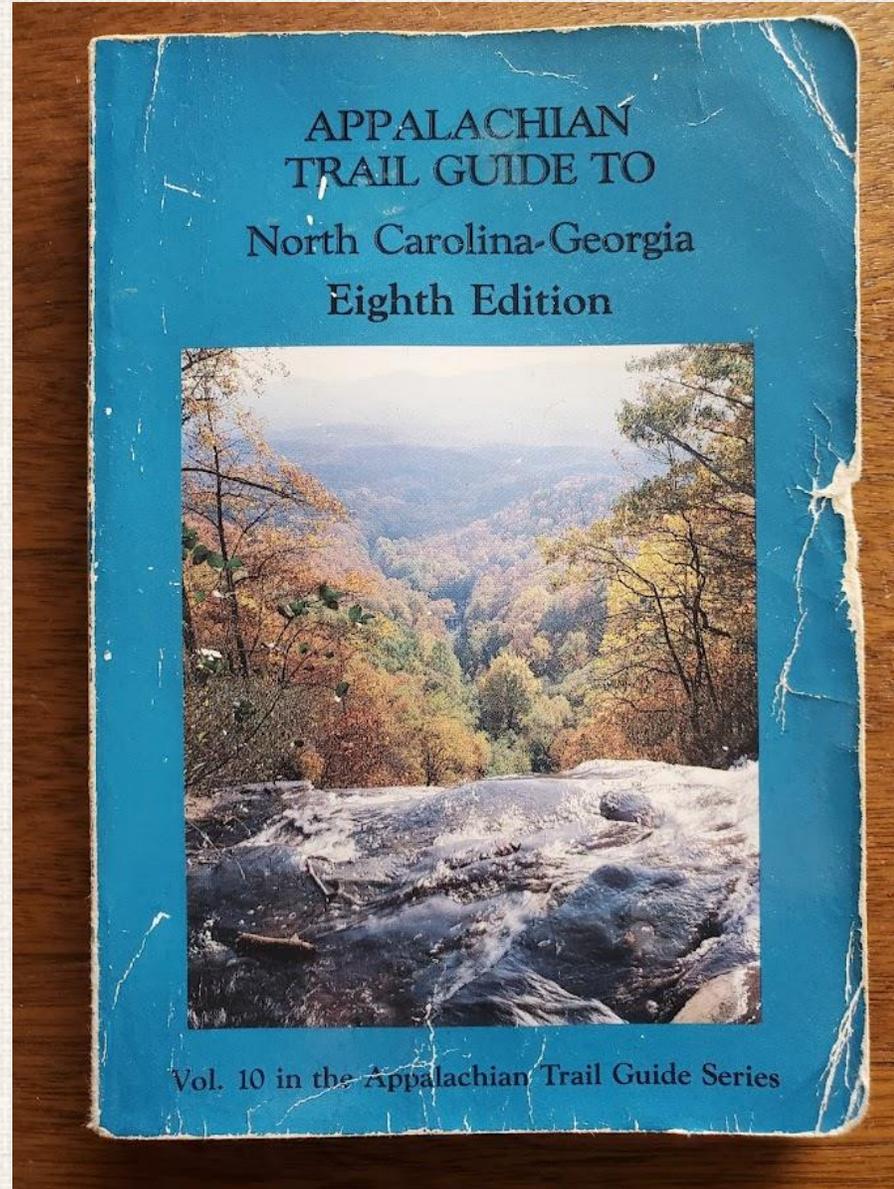
ABOUT

COMMENTS

NOTES



Gentian Pond Shelter is a large double-decker shelter with space for 12 people, and a view across the Androscoggin valley to the Carter-Moriah Range. The shelter is located at the south edge and





PACIFIC CREST

NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

NORTHBOUND

LOCATOR  
BEACON **COMPASS**

MUSIC  
PLAYER CALCULATOR

NOTEPAD **PHONE**

ALTIMETER

INTERNET **MAPS**

ACCESS WEATHER

CAMERA RADIO



# NORTH CAROLINA Wetlands

**Diverse**  
The variety of wetland types creates habitat diversity across the state.

**Vulnerable**  
Wetlands are being drained, converted to other uses and lost.

**Valuable**  
Wetlands benefit us and our environment in many ways.

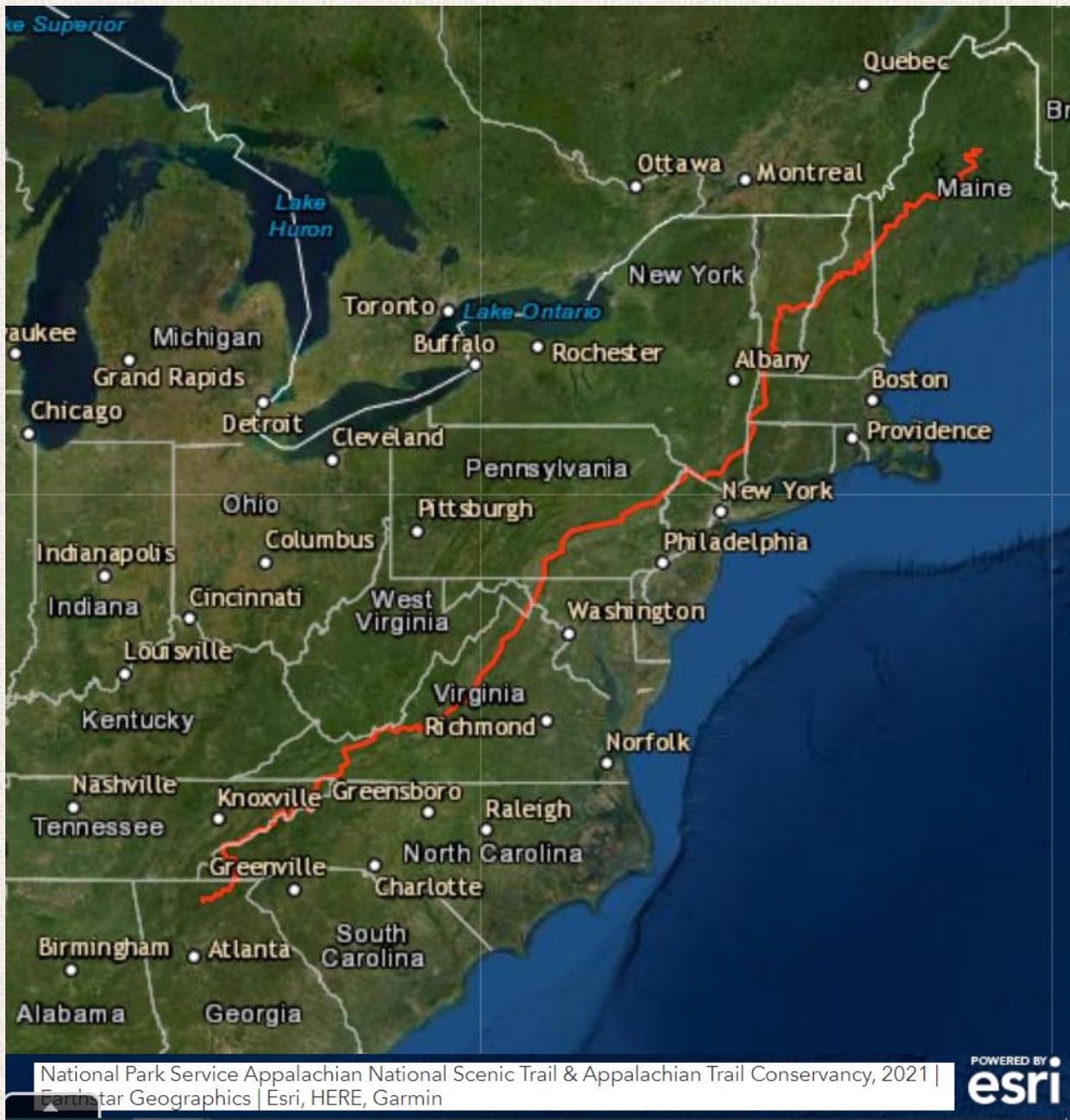


How do hikers make “spatial decisions”?

How do long-distance hikers (LDH) view technology on the trail?

How do LDH view their use of information on the trail?





- Northbound
- Southbound
- Flip-flop
- Section

RAINCROW'S  
**WHERE ARE THE HIKERS?**  
VISUALIZING APPALACHIAN TRAIL USAGE





**Table 1.** Participants were section hiking and thru-hiking both directions. All five flip-flop hikers were traveling northbound at the time of the interview.

Participant	Miles Hiked so far	Direction of Travel	Type of Hike
John	470	Northbound	Section
Cinderella	480		
James	340	Southbound	Thru-hike
GG	440	Flip-flop	
Sally	440		
Jane	830		
Nut	860		
JK	915		
Flower	1777	Northbound	
Sarah	1810		
Dan	1858		
Charlie	1868		
Stacy	1879		
Ben	1894		
Henry	1894		
Wanderer	295	Southbound	
Rhino	299		
BS	495		
Gigi	495		
Sweet	495		

# Long-distance hiking vs Wilderness



“People have been critical of mobile phones and GPS devices in wilderness places and even on the trail, but other folks have also identified a number of benefits associated with their use. What are your thoughts on the role of these technologies in long-distance hiking?”

*“There’s definitely benefits to technology on-trail. Being able to pinpoint myself, know exactly where I am, is huge. Not having to carry paper maps and switch them out the whole time—that’s huge. It’s less weight I have to carry on my back. The disadvantages are sometimes we get a little too caught up, you know, on our phones in our daily lives, and now you’re doing it on the trail.” (Dan, 1858, app & book)*

*“[Technology] does change the dynamic of the trail in a distinct way. I don’t know. It takes that element of wildness out of it when you can call an Uber or you could see other people doing it. Even though we don’t have these things, like we don’t have Uber, we don’t have Guthook... there’s always that choice. You see people lugging heavy batteries. I don’t know. It just makes me feel like, ‘Okay. If this isn’t the place you can detach, where is it?’” (Sally, 440, book)*



## Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division

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No cells, no service?

*“There’s no dilemma at all because, as years go, things are going to change. 30 years ago, of course there’s no cell phone, GPS. People gotta use whatever you got to use. But now, technology makes things a little bit easier. Plus, it’s a safety thing for me.” (Ben, 1894, app & book)*

*“It’s a lifesaver. It’s the best feeling just to know where you’re at. It’s a happy feeling. It’s just something good to have. It’s knowing you’re safe. Like I said, that time when I got lost, I was pretty scared. I didn’t see a white blaze, hiked a mile off trail. Took me a good bit to get back on. So I think GPS is a wonderful tool to have. It’s reassuring. It’s almost like a safety blanket for me. Ya know, because if you’re on your own, that’s all you have. And then if you’re like an amateur, like me, I need that, ya know...” (Ben)*

*“Without technology nowadays, I think it would be tough for the newer generation to hike. I didn’t grow up learning how to read maps and whatnot. Without the technology nowadays there would be a lot of confusion going on on the trail. A lot! So Guthook plays a big deal on the trail. There were some hikers that never heard of Guthook. And then when they heard about it and downloaded it they were just- they were on their own. So, it’s awesome. Technology’s awesome.” (Ben)*

A photograph of a wooden signpost in a forest. The signpost is made of two vertical wooden posts. A white, rectangular sign is attached to the top post. The sign has the text 'SAN JACINTO WILDERNESS' in large, bold, black capital letters. Below this, in smaller black capital letters, it says 'SAN BERNARDINO'. At the bottom of the sign, in a smaller, black, serif font, it says 'National Forest'. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees with green foliage. The ground is a mix of dirt, sand, and small rocks. The lighting suggests it's daytime, with some sunlight filtering through the trees.

SAN  
JACINTO  
WILDERNESS

SAN BERNARDINO  
National  
Forest

Smartphones don't belong in the wilderness

*AND*

Smartphones are important avenues of access to the wilderness





**THANK YOU!**

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