

Appalachian Trail wants to redefine 'take a hike'

Trail Conservancy is celebrating 100 years by highlighting nature's mental health benefits.



Volunteers Kumi Aizawa (from left), Shin Hasegawa and Patrick Wilsey walk to their campsite near the Cherry Gap Shelter along the Appalachian Trail in Unicoi, Tenn. Some federal facilities may be closed during the shutdown. ERIK VERDUZCO/AP 2025

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In American slang, “take a hike” is often used to tell someone to go away. But as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy celebrates its 100th anniversary, the organization is working to reframe the phrase — shifting its meaning to encourage more people to embrace nature.

“Look, I’m not saying hiking solves everything,” comedian and actor Kevin Nealon said in a news release. “But I’ve never seen anyone come back from the woods angry. Hungry, maybe, but not angry.”

The ATC is partnering with Nealon to promote their new petition to have major dictionary publishers, including Merriam-Webster and the Oxford English Dictionary, add a new definition to the phrase: “a friendly invitation to reset, recharge, and reconnect with the outdoors.”

The campaign hopes to remind people that hiking is a simple, accessible way to support both mental and physical well-being — especially at a time when many feel overwhelmed and disconnected. According to Mental Health America, over half of Americans struggling with mental health issues today go without treatment.

“Now more than ever, we all can benefit from taking a hike,” Sandi Marra, president and CEO of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, said in a news release. “With this campaign, we’re not just celebrating a century of stewardship, we’re inviting everyone to experience the restorative power of the Trail and help protect it for the next century.”

The mental and physical health benefits of spending time outdoors are well known, and in the crisp fall air, a hike through a new terrain and elevation can bring a sense of calm.

“The hiking that we know reduces stress, it improves physical health, and it boosts your mood,” Nealon said in a video promoting the campaign. “After a century of stewarding the trail, the ATC and I agree it’s time to update this definition.”

Georgia is home to the southern end of the Appalachian Trail, and within 90 minutes of Atlanta, hikers of all skill levels can find scenic routes to explore along the over 70-mile stretch.

Because of the ongoing government shutdown, some federal facilities along the AT are closed and services may be limited — increasing potential safety risks.

While trails are still open, hikers are urged to use extra caution.

Springer Mountain

The Appalachian Trail starts at Springer Mountain, where a 2-mile rocky trail will allow you to experience some of the terrain and cross paths with thru-hikers just beginning their long journey.

Located near Ellijay, this accessible hike is a great option for any skill level looking to enjoy the outdoors.

Blood Mountain

One of the most popular stretches of the Appalachian Trail in Georgia, the hike to Blood Mountain covers 4.3 miles and starts with intense elevation out the gate with unforgettable views at the end.

This is a great pick for anyone seeking a fun, rewarding challenge. Make sure to bring extra water!

Three Forks to the Hawk Mountain Shelter

At 9.1 miles, this winding hike makes for quite the day trip, where you are sure to see unique plants, mushrooms and staggering trees. Along the way, you'll pass a waterfall and a historic cemetery.

Pack many snacks and something to eat for lunch when you reach the shelter before you have to head back.