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# Go take a hike: Online hiking resources

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April J. Schweikhard

# Go take a hike

## Online hiking resources

Last year, in preparation for two hiking trips throughout the United States, I spent hours scouring the Internet for websites devoted to hiking information: I was not disappointed with the information available. Whether for adventure, health, or the opportunity to get out into nature, many people enjoy the benefits of hiking. And, according to the Outdoor Industry Association's "2018 Outdoor Participation Report," the number of Americans who engage in some type of outdoor adventure, including hiking, continues to increase.<sup>1</sup> Libraries are helping connect their users to the trails in a variety of ways, including dedicated LibGuides, exhibits, and even backpacks filled with guidebooks and park passes for patrons to check out.<sup>2-4</sup> Whether you are looking for resources to assist your library users or are simply interested in hitting the trails, yourself, the following Internet resources will help you discover new trails and increase your hiking knowledge. Websites listed here include trails databases, park resources, coalition systems, blogs, and magazines.

### Hiking trails

If you are not quite sure where to start hiking or are wanting to research trails for an upcoming trip, the following resources include databases with thousands of trail guides for you to consult. While these online resources are helpful and convenient for planning, remember that nothing can replace talking one-on-one with an experi-

enced ranger and having a detailed printed map when you head out on the trail.

- **AllTrails.** AllTrails is one of the largest online crowdsourced trail databases with more than 60,000 trail maps, both for the United States and internationally. Hikers can filter trails by difficulty (easy, hard, medium), length, route type, elevation gain, and other criteria (e.g., dog-friendly, trail traffic). Users must create a free account to access all trail guides, and a mobile app for recording trail routes in real-time is available in the Apple App Store and Google Play. Several features, including offline access to maps and certain overlays, are only available to AllTrails Pro subscribed members. *Access:* <https://www.alltrails.com/>.



- **Hiking Project.** Hiking Project is a crowdsourced trail guide sponsored by REI Co-op. Hikers can search and browse nearly 50,000 outdoor trails, filtering by region, miles, difficulty, and user reviews. This database has a stronger emphasis on U.S.

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trails, but some international trails are also included. A mobile app is available in the Apple App Store and Google Play, and users can download GPX trail files to track their routes when they are without cell phone service. Hiking Project does not charge fees for any of its services, though users will need to create a free account to access some features, such as downloading map files and uploading trail reports.



**HIKING  
PROJECT**

The website's FAQ section includes helpful information on navigating this resource, with a detailed description on the rating system trail difficulty. *Access:* <https://www.hikingproject.com/>.

- **Outdoor Project.** On the Outdoor Project website, hikers can search for and browse nearly 8,000 field guides detailing a variety of U.S. outdoor adventures, including hiking trails. Users can browse adventures by state, region, and activity type and then access a detailed guide that includes information on distance, elevation gain, trail type, and hike description. A downloadable field guide is available with a free Outdoor Project account. *Access:* <https://www.outdoorproject.com/>.



**outdoor project**

## Hiking trails, regional

Many states have developed their own online hiking resources in order to provide more localized information. The following are a few regional hiking resources. Try your own Internet search for state and regional hiking guides not listed here.

- **Atlanta Trails.** Atlanta Trails is not just limited to hikes near the metropolitan area. This resource features a hike finder for the entire state of Georgia. Trails can be sorted by distance, difficulty, location, and other features (e.g., state park, waterfalls, backpacking). *Access:* <https://www.atlantatrails.com/>.

- **Colorado Trail Explorer.** The ultimate guide to trails in the state of Colorado, Colorado Trail Explorer is a project of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Department of Natural Resources in conjunction with more than 225 land managers throughout the state. Search thousands of trails in Colorado, filtering by distance, difficulty, ascent, and more. This resource also allows users to save completed hikes and upload trip reports by creating a free account. A mobile app is available in the Apple App Store and Google Play. *Access:* <https://trails.colorado.gov/>.

- **Washington Trail Association (WTA).** The WTA hiking guide is a trail database compiling information from several guidebooks, user submitted information, and WTA data. Trails can be searched by region, features, mileage, elevation, and more. In addition, this guide includes information on state passes and permits, ranger stations, and seasonal recommendations. *Access:* <https://www.wta.org/>.

## Parks

Hiking in the United States will most likely take you through one of its many state and national parks. The following resources provide information about hiking in state parks, national parks, and federal recreational lands, including maps, fees, reservations, and up-to-date alerts.

- **America the Beautiful—National Parks & Federal Recreational Lands Annual Pass.** If you think that you will be visiting more than one U.S. national park in a year, you might consider the value of the America the Beautiful Annual Pass. At the cost of \$80, this one-year pass grants you unlimited entrance to U.S. national parks and Federal Recreational Lands. Without the pass, entrance fees to these parks can be anywhere from \$0 to \$35. A Lifetime Senior Pass (\$80) and an Annual Senior Pass (\$20) for those 62 years and older are also available. *Access:* <https://store.usgs.gov/pass>.

- **America's State Parks.** For information about state parks, America's State Parks website is the most complete resource. The

site's Find a State Park tool links to the website of each state park system. This resource is also the website for the National Association of State Park Directors and features state park news, events, and job announcements. *Access:* <https://www.stateparks.org/>.

- **National Park Services (NPS).** Covering more than 85 million acres across 418 sites, the U.S. National Park System was visited by almost 331 million people in 2017. The NPS website provides valuable information about each park, including downloadable trail maps, entrance fees, camping and backcountry reservations, and wildlife. Hiking within the parks, up-to-date alerts regarding trail conditions, and closures are featured on park pages, in addition to details on ranger stations and permit requirements for backpacking. *Access:* <https://www.nps.gov/>.

### Associations, coalitions, and societies

Trail systems are often championed and maintained by a dedicated group of hiking enthusiasts and volunteers. These group's websites offer a range of information on volunteer opportunities, trail systems, and educational materials.

- **American Hiking Society.** The American Hiking Society is a membership organization charged with conserving and developing trails and advocating for public policy and legislation affecting hiking. The organization also sponsors national programs, including Volunteer Vacations, Alternative Break, and National Trails Day. The website features several articles on planning hiking trips, developing outdoor skills, reviewing hiking and backpacking gear, and providing first aid. *Access:* <https://americanhiking.org/>.

- **Appalachian Trail Conservancy.** Each year, more than 3 million people traverse some portion of the 2,190 mile-long Appalachian Trail, while more than 3,000 people attempt to thru-hike the entire trail system. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is a membership organization that is dedicated to protecting and maintaining this system and is a valuable source for a hiking the Appalachian Trail. *Access:* <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/>.

- **Continental Divide Trail (CDT) Coalition.** The CDT is a membership organization providing information about and stewardship of the Continental Divide Trail, stretching 3,100 miles from Mexico to Canada through the Rocky Mountains. Along with the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail, the Continental Divide Trail is one of North America's "Triple Crown" thru-hike systems. *Access:* <https://continentaldividetrail.org/>.

- **Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics.** The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is an organization that encourages people to responsibly enjoy outdoor recreation on public lands. The website includes a variety of training and educational resources on outdoor ethics for people of all ages. *Access:* <https://lnt.org>.



- **Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) Association.** PCT is a 2,650 mile thru-hike across Mexico, California, Oregon, Washington, and Canada, covering desert, the Sierra Nevada, forests, and the Cascade Range. The PCT Association is a membership organization working to support the PCT community and protecting the trail system. The website provides PCT trail-specific information and up-to-date alerts. *Access:* <http://www.pcta.org/>.

### Blogs

Hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts are passionate about sharing their adventures and offering advice to those new to the trail. These blogs are great resources for hikers to follow in order to learn of new trail destinations, gear reviews, and tips to increase their skills and make their trips more enjoyable.

- **Bearfoot Theory.** Bearfoot Theory promotes itself as a website for everyday people looking to plan outdoor adventures. This resource features blog posts on a variety of activities (hiking included), gear reviews,

and travel tips. Posts are even categorized by destination, allowing the ability to browse posts by state or country. *Access:* <https://bearfoottheory.com/>.

- **OutdoorGearLab.** OutdoorGearLab aims to provide objective, independent reviews for a variety of outdoor gear, ranging from boots, backpacks, clothes, and more. Review editors purchase review products at retail (they do not accept free items) and then test them side-by-side in their lab and out in the real world. Users can search for specific gear or browse by activity. *Access:* <https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/>.

- **REI Co-op Expert Advice.** While best known for their stores, the Expert Advice hiking section of the REI Co-op website includes more than 100 articles dedicated to increasing hikers' skills and knowledge, including checklists, buying guides, and how-to series. *Access:* <https://www.rei.com/learn/c/hiking>.

## Magazines

Hiking and outdoor magazines are a great source for general interest stories that might challenge or inspire hikers to try new trails. In addition, these sources often feature articles about specific regions, skills (e.g., backcountry cooking), and gear reviews. Though subscription-based, many articles are freely available to readers online.

- **Backpacker.** *Backpacker* magazine features an array of hiking adventure stories, including outdoor skills, destinations, advice, and news. *Access:* <https://www.backpacker.com/>.

- **Outside.** *Outside* magazine is dedicated to covering stories addressing all aspects of outdoor recreation, including hiking. *Access:* <https://www.outsideonline.com/>.

## Notes

1. Outdoor Industry Association, "2018 Outdoor Participation Report," <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/2018-outdoor-participation-report/> (access December 31, 2018).

2. Penn State University Libraries, "Hiking and Backpacking," Library Guides, <http://guides.libraries.psu.edu/hikingguide> (accessed December 29, 2018).

3. UO Libraries, "Hiking Trail Exhibit in Science Library," Around the O, <https://around.uoregon.edu/content/hiking-trail-exhibit-science-library> (accessed December 29, 2018).

4. Ronnie Wachter, "Out of the Branches, into the Woods," *American Libraries*, January 2, 2018, <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2018/01/02/hiking-backpacks-branches-woods/> (access December 29, 2018). *zc*

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