

Name: Emile Benton MacKaye

Years: March 6, 1879 to December 11, 1975

Residence: The Cottage, Shirley Center, Massachusetts

Brief Biography: American Forester, planner, conservationist Benton MacKaye was born the sixth of seven children in Stamford, Connecticut, on March 6, 1879 to Mary and Steele MacKaye. Benton's father was a struggling actor and dramatist in New York and the family was plagued with financial distresses. In 1888 after many moves the family settled in Shirley Center, Massachusetts, about thirty miles outside Boston and the eight year old Benton was struck by the beauty and freedom of the country. The Shirley Cottage would remain MacKaye's true home for the rest of his life. Benton's father passed away in 1894. In 1895 he prepared for the Harvard entrance exams on his own and was accepted. He registered in the Harvard Forestry School on October 1, 1896. During his undergraduate studies Benton was fortunate to come in contact with two of the most influential figures in the emerging conservation movement, John Muir and Gifford Pinchot. He was moved by their enlightened views of the destructive fate of the wilderness. After his freshman year, MacKaye went on his first hike into the mountains of northern New England and experienced unspoiled wilderness for the first time. His experience there at the top of his first mountain changed the way he responded to the world around him. He later told a friend: "I felt then how much I resembled in size one of the hairs on the eye tooth of a flea." After graduation he tutored in New York then returned to Harvard for a graduate degree in forestry and taught there for awhile. In 1909 the succession of Theodore Roosevelt by Howard Taft proved damaging to the conservation movement. MacKaye and a girlfriend had become involved on campus in the controversy of Pinchot's dismissal from the Forest Service and MacKaye was soon unemployed. He took the opportunity to get a job as a forest examiner in Washington, D.C., through Forest Service Chief Henry Graves. In 1915 he met and married suffrage activist Jessie Hardy Stubbs and they traveled the political and social activist circles together, rubbing elbows with the progressive leaders of the conservation movement. In 1921 MacKaye's wife died in a tragic suicide. He would never remarry. MacKaye lost himself in a revolutionary idea that he publicly proposed months after her death. He published the plan in the October 1921 edition of the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning". This was a proposal for the redevelopment of Appalachia with a hiking trail along the entire ridgeline and with wild lands set aside in the populous Eastern United States like the ones being created in the West. The first part of construction on the trail began in 1923 in the Bear Mountain State Park in the Palisades Interstate Park system. It crossed the Hudson on the Bear Mountain Bridge and wound its way up through Putnam and Dutchess Counties. The Committee on Community Planning (CCP) adopted MacKaye's plan as part of its mission and served as the trail's major sponsor in the early years. The more than 2100 mile long trail was completed in 1937.

Major Achievements: Benton MacKaye, one of the founders of the modern conservation and wilderness movements, helped create the Wilderness Society in 1935 with other prominent figures including Aldo Leopold and Bob Marshall. MacKaye passed away on December 11, 1975, at the age of 96. In 1979 the Benton MacKaye Trail Association was organized by people who wanted to create a hiking path along MacKaye's original redevelopment of Appalachia portion. The almost 300 mile long Benton MacKaye Trail was completed in 2005. It links at either end with the

Appalachian Trail and passes through some of the most remote backcountry in Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

More Information: Palisades Parks Conservancy:
<http://www.palisadesparksconservancy.org/news/30/> ;

New York New Jersey Trail Conference:
<http://www.nynjtc.org/BearMountainTrails/pdfs/L%20Luxenberg.pdf>

Sources: Anderson, Larry. 2002. *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail*. Johns Hopkins University Press. ISBN 0801877911.

Wilderness.net: <http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=feature0108> ;

MacKaye, Benton. Journal of the American Institute of Architects. "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning". 9 (Oct. 1921): 325-330. at:
<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/atf/cf/%7BD25B4747-42A3-4302-8D48-EF35C0B0D9F1%7D/MacKaye.pdf>

By Steve Grim