AFALCONGUIDE®

Hiking THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

by Randy Johnson

Grandfather Mountain

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29 Grandfather Mountain

Mileposts 299.9–305.1

Overview: *In the years since young Hugh Morton, a World War II combat photographer, returned to his family's private lands on Grandfather Mountain, this spectacular North Carolina area has evolved from a tourist attraction to an International Biosphere Reserve. Morton's stewardship has preserved one of the Southern Appalachians' most significant natural heritage sites, setting a new standard in preservation and public use of private land.*

Grandfather Mountain is a rocky, spectacular summit known to tourists for great views from its privately owned road and Mile-High Swinging Bridge. The peak is one of the region's premier natural areas, with a wonderful network of trails. Grandfather Mountain's 4,000 acres boast forty-three species of rare or endangered plants and animals, more than Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

As part of a private conservation park, the mountain's summit road has been open since the 1930s. After World War II, Morton extended the road to "the top," actually one of the mountain's lower though still spectacular summits. In 1951 the Mile-High Swinging Bridge was christened. A summit visitor center later opened beside the bridge, and habitat-style animal exhibits debuted in 1973. The mountain became a high point of North Carolina tourism.

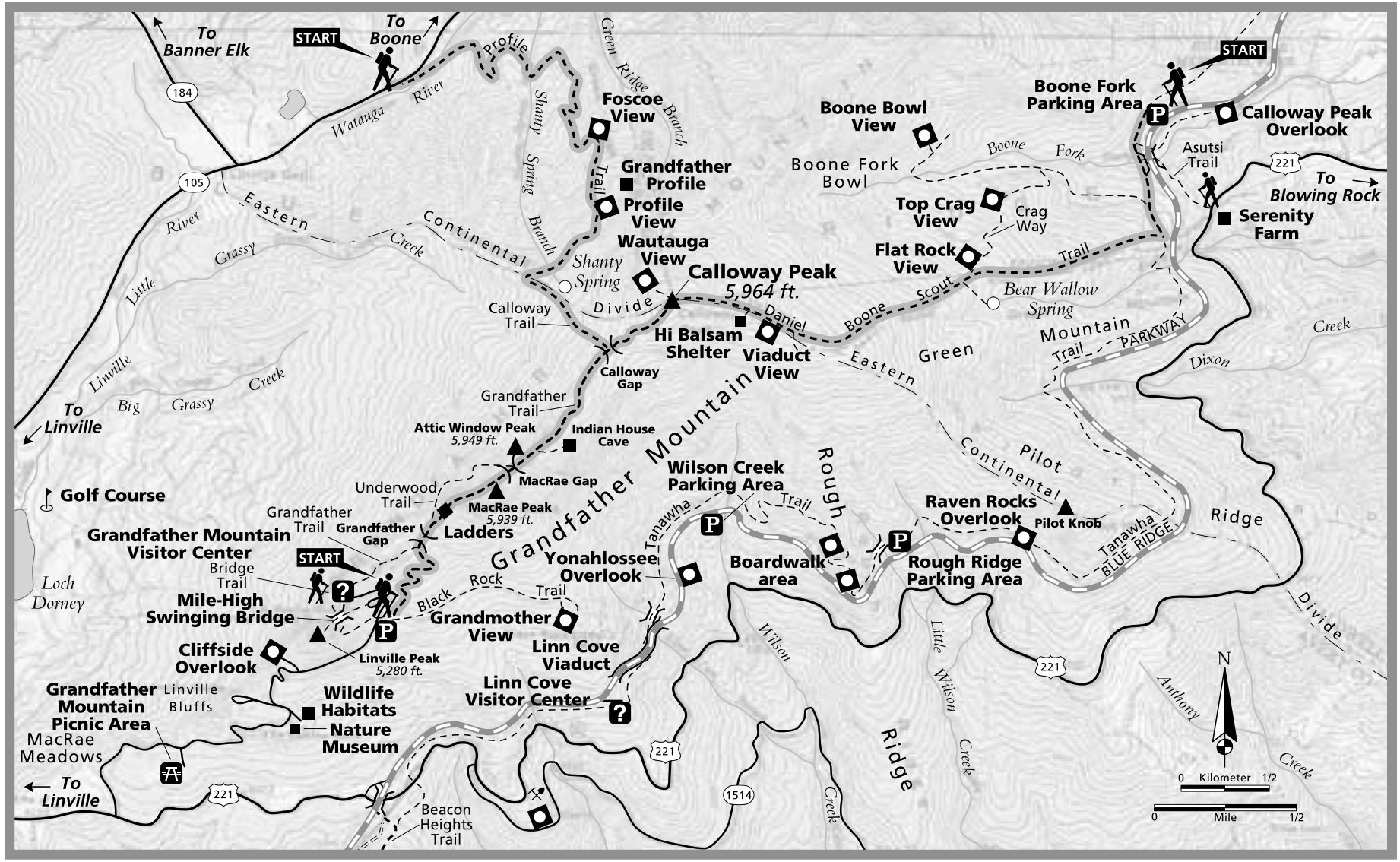
Meanwhile, Grandfather Mountain's undeveloped backcountry—a nearly 5,000-acre parcel of jagged, evergreen-clothed cliffs and nearly-6,000-foot summits—slumbered. An early book about the area described the wonderful hiking on the mountain, and at times during the development of the travel attraction, new trails were cut, signed, and occasionally "mowed" by park maintenance employees.

In 1978 Morton's Grandfather Mountain park successfully implemented a fledgling hiker fee system, establishing a pay-for-use trail preservation program that over the years became a significant example of wilderness management. The program attracted the country's leading backcountry researchers. The first peregrine falcons to be reintroduced into the wild Southern Appalachians were released here.

Spurred by the amicable resolution of Morton's "battle" with the Parkway (see sidebar) and the success of the trail management program, Grandfather Mountain's status as a natural area soared. More than 3,000 acres of its backcountry is preserved in perpetuity through conservation easements granted to the North Carolina Nature Conservancy. In 1994 it became the nation's only privately owned Biosphere Reserve, one of 311 outstanding natural areas designated in eighty-one countries by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization.

Halfway up the auto road—adjacent to habitats for deer, bears, cougars, and eagles—a first-class nature museum contains natural history exhibits. Daily nature films

Grandfather Mountain



and educational events, such as a free June outdoor photography clinic, are often held in the museum theater.

The mountain's innovative trail program is funded through a hiking permit system. All day and overnight trail use requires a permit. Campers pay the nominal permit fee for each calendar day they are on the mountain. Permit outlets are plentiful and usually adjacent to trailheads. Motor entrance fees to the mountain are double the permit fee and include hiking.

Hikers should be alert to weather conditions at Grandfather Mountain. People have died on the mountain from exposure, lightning strikes, falls, and heart attacks. The mountain is known for snowy winters and year-round high winds. A U.S. Weather Station caps the summit visitor center.

Option 1: Tanawha Trail and Daniel Boone Scout Trail to Calloway Peak

General description: Tracking up the back side of Grandfather Mountain, the Daniel Boone Scout Trail climbs to Calloway Peak, the highest summit in the Blue Ridge Range. Two other view-packed trails, one a nice beginning backpacking trip, also start on the Tanawha Trail from the Blue Ridge Parkway.
Parkway mile: 299.9
Total distance: 5.8- or 4.9-mile hike to Calloway Peak on the Boone Trail; a 3.6-mile hike on the Crag Way Trail; 3.2 miles on the Nuwati Trail
Difficulty: Strenuous for the Boone Trail to Calloway Peak and for the Crag Way circuit; Moderate for the Nuwati Trail
Elevation gain: 2,044 feet for the climb to Calloway Peak; 920 feet for the Cragway circuit; 580 feet for the Nuwati Trail
Maps: The best map for the hike is the trail map of Grandfather Mountain, available free at the Grandfather Mountain entrance (south 5.2 miles to U.S. 221 exit, right 1.0 mile to entrance; hiking permits available); a Tanawha Trail handout map is available at the Linn Cove Visitor Center; USGS Grandfather Mountain.

Finding the trailhead: The best starting point for all these hikes is the Boone Fork Parking Area on the Blue Ridge Parkway. An alternative, especially in winter when snow closes the Parkway, is the Boone Trail's year-round trailhead on U.S. 221, 8.5 miles north of the Grandfather Mountain entrance and 1.5 miles south of the U.S. Highway 221/Holloway Mountain Road junction south of Blowing Rock.

Hiking permits are required on Grandfather Mountain's trails and are available at the Grandfather Mountain entrance (see directions under maps) and closer to the Boone Trail at the Grandfather Mountain Market. That store is 2.3 miles from the Parkway's Boone Fork Parking Area. To reach the store go north on the Parkway 1.3 miles and exit at the U.S. 221 exit. Go left under the Parkway on the paved road, and in 1.0-mile reach the store at the junction with U.S. 221. The store is 1.5 miles north of the Boone Trail's alternate winter parking area on U.S. 221.

The hikes: The Blue Ridge Parkway side of Grandfather Mountain was once the least-visited part of the peak. U.S. 221 quietly snaked its way around the convoluted ridges, leading Parkway motorists past the portion of this national scenic road that wasn't completed until the late 1980s.

Top Crag frames Calloway Peak on Grandfather Mountain's Crag Way Trail.

Looking west from Calloway Peak, the view is developed, with everything from ski slopes lit for night skiing to condos. But the mountain bulks against the intrusion, and the Parkway side of the ridge gives campers on Grandfather a stunning vista of Piedmont cities sprawling like distant pinwheels of light over the dark isolation of Pisgah National Forest.

Since the early days of World War II, a primitive trail up this wilder side of the mountain has been in existence, built by a part-time Parkway ranger named Clyde Smith and a Blowing Rock troop of Boy Scouts. Smith moved back and forth between New England and North Carolina, pursuing his dedication to trails and handcrafting trail signs, many of which he installed on his favorite Southern summit: Grandfather. But the Boone Trail was only a memory a decade before the Parkway opened.

Grandfather Mountain's trail program reclaimed it in 1979. The route was pieced together from the remains of tin can–top trail markers, some bearing painted arrowheads. Also discovered was a decaying, half-century-old backpacking shelter felled by a wind-flattened grove of evergreens. By the early 1980s, the old backpacking shelter, Hi-Balsam, had been rebuilt. Then two new trails were added

in the bowl-shaped valley beneath Calloway peak that is spectacularly reminiscent of glacial bowls in New England. Two Appalachian State University professors guessed in the 1970s that the valley had been gouged by a glacier. Their embarrassing conclusion was based on "glacial grooves" that were later discovered to have been left by logging cables.

Starting at the Parkway's Boone Fork Parking Area, the connector to the Tanawha Trail leaves the lot and goes right at the first junction (left, a streamside trail connects a short distance north to the Calloway Peak Overlook—a good alternative if this lot is full). The next junction is the Tanawha Trail. Go left and cross the laminated bridge spanning the creek. The connector to U.S. 221 branches left just over the bridge (the 0.4-mile trail leads under a Blue Ridge Parkway bridge along an old road grade to the alternative trailhead). The Tanawha Trail wanders along, gaining elevation with moderate climbs to a junction on the right, at about 0.4 mile, with the Nuwati Trail.

The Nuwati Trail, formerly the Grandfather Trail Extension, was renamed in the early 1990s with a Cherokee word meaning "good medicine," a reference to the healing power of the wilderness experience, complementing the Tanawha Trail, which means "great hawk" or "eagle." Take a right on the blue-blazed trail, pass a trailhead signboard, and follow the level but rocky trail up an old logging railroad grade. A spring gushes under the trail at 0.7 mile. The trail winds along, gaining elevation until the bowl-like shape of the valley becomes noticeable. The sounds of the stream become audible far below on the right, and the old grade becomes a scenic rhododendron tunnel fringed by lacelike ferns. At 1.1 miles, the Crag Way Trail goes left.

Within a few hundred feet is a designated campsite on the left beside a stream. From here to its end, the trail crosses numerous tributaries of Boone Fork, all of them easy hops. Another campsite appears on the left, where a large logging cable (like those that created the "ice-carved" grooves) is held firm in the V of a tree.

Cross Boone Fork at 1.0 mile, and continue on the level path. The trail forks. A right leads to a dead end at a campsite. A left leads steeply to a prominent tooth of rock projecting above the valley floor at 4,500 feet, 1.6 miles from the trailhead. The 360-degree panorama encompasses the entire high mountain valley—the upper bowl and headwall of the supposed "cirque," Calloway Peak above it, and the cliffs of White Rock Ridge above on the right. The rocky pinnacles on the Crag Way Trail lie on the opposite side of the valley. East, the view stretches along the Blue Ridge Parkway to Blowing Rock and Piedmont cities.

The Nuwati Trail gains only about 600 feet in 1.6 miles, so it is a good beginning backpacking trip with moderate elevation gain, a number of trailside campsites, and spectacular scenery. The lowest crags on Crag Way and the bowl view at the end of the trail make nice evening viewpoints for campers.

The best way to hike the steep Crag Way is down, and that involves hiking up the lower part of the Daniel Boone Scout Trail.

To do that, where the Nuwati Trail goes right from the Tanawha Trail, turn left and stay on Tanawha. The path ascends around a ridge; at 0.6 mile from the trail-

head, the Daniel Boone Scout Trail goes right. Past the signboard and a flight of steps, the trail begins a gradual, switchbacking climb.

Emerging between two rock outcroppings 1.6 miles from the trailhead, the Boone Scout Trail continues left 0.1 mile to the "middle campsite," a group of tent sites at about the centerpoint on the trail. To the right, Crag Way starts its trip down to the Nuwati Trail. Go right, but first ascend Flat Rock View, the crag between the two—a table-flat vantage point on Boone Fork Bowl that makes a perfect lunch spot.

Going right on Crag Way, the trail skirts Flat Rock and winds along open crags, reenters the woods, and artfully broaches a line of small cliffs. Through dense rhododendron and occasional spruces, the path emerges into a heath bald of blueberry bushes and rhododendron before abruptly emerging to spectacular views at Top Crag. Keep to the trail here to avoid further impacting the Allegheny sand myrtle, a low-growing alpinelike plant that covers the open area. This expansive view is one of the best on the mountain.

The path steeply descends rocky crags with great views to a signed junction and a right on the Nuwati Trail (2.5 miles from the start). Going left on Tanawha, the round-trip back to the Boone Fork parking area is 3.6 miles. If you go left at the Crag Way–Nuwati Trail junction and hike to the view at the end of the Nuwati Trail and back, the hike is 4.6 miles.

To reach Calloway Peak, continue on the Boone Trail past the top of the Crag Way Trail—about 1.6 miles from the Boone Fork trailhead. The Daniel Boone Scout Trail enters a small flat where a left reaches the middle campsite. A side trail from there continues through a mixed deciduous and spruce forest about 100 yards to a small, reliable spring.

Heading up, the Boone Trail switchbacks in and out of a scenic red spruce forest. When the trail finally gains the crest of Pilot Ridge, a nice campsite with a view appears on the left. Continuing, the trail enters the spruce-fir forest zone—a dark, cool evergreen area carpeted with moss and wood sorrel. The trail climbs a rocky crag where a right turn at the top takes you out on the rock to good views. The trail reenters the woods and shortly reaches a signed trail on the left. Viaduct View is a rocky perch with a perspective on the Parkway's Linn Cove Viaduct.

The Daniel Boone Scout Trail crosses another crag, and a second side trail on the left leads to Hi-Balsam Shelter, a tiny low-lying lean-to that sleeps five. The shelter, at about 2.6 miles, was built by Clyde Smith during World War II and later rebuilt to the same style and dimensions. No tent camping or fires are permitted at the shelter site.

Just 100 yards from the shelter, the Daniel Boone Scout Trail continues past a designated campsite on the left (fires permitted). Opposite the campsite, across the trail and off in the woods lie the remains of a single-engine plane that crashed in 1978. Past this point the trail suddenly stands on end, climbing steeply with the aid of one large ladder to Calloway Peak (5,964 feet; marked by a white X), 2.8 miles from the trailhead. The panoramic view takes in the dramatic drop to the Piedmont.

The Boone Trail terminates about 0.1 mile away at the Grandfather Trail and Watauga View, the best vantage point to the west. Between the peak and the junction, the summit area is a rocky, evergreen-covered crest.

Retracing your steps, the entire hike is just under 6.0 miles; the route is just under 5.0 miles long if on the way down you go left on the Crag Way Trail.

Key points to Calloway Peak:

0.4 Tanawha Trail junction with Nuwati Trail.
0.6 Right onto Daniel Boone Scout Trail.
1.6 Junction with Crag Way Trail.
2.6 Hi-Balsam Shelter.
2.8 Calloway Peak

Option 2: Grandfather Trail

General description: One of the South's most rugged, spectacular, and storied trails traverses Grandfather Mountain's summit ridge. The route ascends peaks and scales ladders over cliffs to reach Calloway Peak, the highest summit in the Blue Ridge.
Parkway mile: 305.1
Total distance: 2.0 miles over the first major peak; 4.8 miles to Calloway Peak and back
Difficulty: Strenuous
Elevation gain: About 840 feet from the summit parking area for loop of MacRae Peak; 1,800 feet to Calloway Park and back returning on Underwood Trail
Maps: The best map for the hike is the free trail map of Grandfather Mountain; USGS Grandfather Mountain.

Finding the trailhead: Both trailheads lie at the top of the Grandfather Mountain motor road. A spur trail, the Grandfather Trail Extension, reaches the Grandfather Trail from the uppermost of the two Black Rock Trail parking lots just below the summit (next right after 5000 FEET elevation sign). The trail itself starts at the highest parking lot opposite the Linville Peak Visitor Center and the Mile-High Swinging Bridge.

Hikers may be asked to park at the lower of the two lots during busy times at the tourist attraction. If this is the case, and you do not wish to use the spur or would like to return to the visitor center (no walking is permitted on the road), take the Bridge Trail to the summit visitor center. That trail starts across the motor road from the Black Rock Cliffs Parking Area and is a nice, moderate, and meandering 0.4-mile climb through the cleft beneath the Swinging Bridge to the summit parking area.

The hike: Starting at the Black Rock Trail Parking Area has its appeal. The Black Rock Trail itself is a 1.0-mile level path across the mountain's eastern flank. It passes a wonderful formation called Arch Rock on the way to an end loop with great views of the mountain—the summits above, Parkway and Piedmont far below. The forest is a very New England–like mix of birches and spruce. And this is a nature trail; thirty-five stops interpret that inviting ecosystem.

The spur from the Black Rock Trail Parking Area to the Grandfather Trail is pleasant. It rises left out of the upper of the two parking areas (the Black Rock Trail goes right) and climbs through a meadow then spruces and rhododendron to a junction with the Grandfather Trail.

Leaving the summit lot opposite the visitor center, the blue-blazed Grandfather Trail scrambles up a steep, rocky pitch then turns right along a level path through open rhododendron areas and spruce forests and under an overhang called Head Bumpin' Rock. The cragtop view just beyond is a nice turnaround for a family stroll. Left, or west, is the resort development of Sugar Mountain (with the ten-story condominium now prohibited by state law) and Linville Ridge Country Club. Right, or east, the land plummets to the Piedmont, a view that will get even better as you climb MacRae Peak (5,939 feet), the cliff-faced, evergreen-covered summit straight ahead. If you peer closely at about 10 o'clock on the peak, you might see hikers on a series of ladders that you'll climb.

Descend along cables intended for use when the trail is a river of ice, and ascend over a crag; the spur trail from the Black Rock Trail Parking Area comes in on the right at 0.4 mile. You'll enter a large meadow with a junction just below the peak at 0.5 mile. The yellow-blazed Underwood Trail goes left to the gap beyond MacRae Peak, avoiding the climb over the summit. This is a nice return route that creates a great loop of the Grandfather Ridge. After crossing MacRae Peak, take a left on the Underwood Trail, and return to this point and the visitor center for one of the truly spectacular short hikes in the region, 2.0 miles round-trip.

Turn right on the Grandfather Trail toward MacRae Peak, and climb a steep section with the aid of cables. Ascending left, the trail then veers right into a fissure, where you'll encounter the first ladder. Not far above it, an opening on the left reveals a cliff that funnels a breeze in summer and a bitter wind in winter. Scramble up a few more rocks, and the steepest ladders reach to the clifftops above. An experienced climber could scramble up the rocks around the ladders, but to the inexperienced, this is a truly adventurous section of trail. Consider pausing on the large ledge before the last ladder. The visitor center is now far below.

Ascend along the clifftop, climb another ladder, wander along a precipitous ridgeline, and emerge on a knife-edge with a house-size boulder perched atop it. This is MacRae Peak (5,939 feet). An unnerving ladder leans against it. Climb and have lunch; the view is stupendous. To the east, the Blue Ridge escarpment plummets past the newest part of the Blue Ridge Parkway to the distant Carolina Piedmont. Farther along the ridge, the next summit, Attic Window Peak, rises with a deep cleft splitting its summit (the trail climbs through it). To the right of the peak, huge domes drop to the east. Continuing beyond the boulder, the trail reaches a steep chute where cables aid the decent to another ladder. In winter this is a frozen flow of ice.

At MacRae Gap, 1.0 mile from the visitor center, the Underwood Trail leads left 0.5 mile through crags, cliffs, mossy defiles, and a beautiful evergreen forest reminiscent of the far north. A return here nets a wonderfully adventurous day hike of 2.0 miles.

Hikers climb ladders up the cliffs of MacRae Peak on Grandfather Mountain.

Keep on the Grandfather Trail, winding through a wood sorrel–covered gap of evergreens to more ladders, this time scaling their way through a boulder cave called THE SUBWAY on a mid-twentieth-century trail sign discovered here. Scramble higher through the massive split in the peak.

At the top of the couloir, a trail leads right to a tent platform campsite atop the domes. To the left, the trail emerges from between rocks to a stunning western view from Attic Window Peak, at 1.2 miles.

Following the Grandfather Trail to the right, drop to the next gap. A side trail to the right at 1.3 miles leads to a massive overhanging rock called Indian House Cave. When discovered in the 1940s, the cave contained Native American artifacts suggesting that it was a significant ritual site. This is a nice place to escape the rain.

Back at the gap, climb a small ladder; the trail follows an evergreen-, rhododendron-, and mountain laurel-covered knife-edge above a series of dramatic cliffs then descends into a high, alpinelike meadow with a fine campsite accessible to nearby evening views. Farther on, the trail crosses another clifftop and a tiny gap grown close with evergreens and wood sorrel.

Going over a whaleback of crags, the trail winds into Calloway Gap at 1.9 miles, a traditional ridgetop campground with a number of campsites. In the gap, the red-blazed Calloway Trail descends steeply left 0.3 mile to a water source at Shanty Spring and the Profile Trail (see Option 3 of this hike).

Right on the Grandfather Trail, the path climbs again, through a tiny meadow and past a campsite on the right with a spectacular view from a ledge. Farther up, the trail passes through dense evergreens. Almost immediately, the Grandfather Trail's last junction is reached at 2.3 miles. To the left, a short spur leads to Watauga (*wa-TAW-ga*) View, a west-facing ledge facing Banner Elk and overlooking the headwaters of the Watauga River. Just 0.1 mile to the right, on the white-blazed Daniel Boone Scout Trail, is Calloway Peak (5,964 feet), highest in the Blue Ridge.

The easiest way to gauge Grandfather Mountain's significance is to look east from Calloway, MacRae, or Attic Window peaks and realize that Andre Michaux, the earliest and most important botanical explorer of the New World, clawed his way there in the 1780s and completely lost all evidence of scientific objectivity. The result was perhaps the biggest error of Michaux's scientific career. In what biographer Henry Savage Jr. says was an unprecedented burst of emotion, the botanist told his diary that he'd "reached the summit of the highest mountain in all of North America." He was so inspired that he sang the "Marseillaise" and shouted "long live America and the Republic of France. Long live liberty, equality, and fraternity." Michaux's discovery of nearly 200 species of plants is a more fitting symbol of his achievements.

The Grandfather Trail gives hikers the best glimpse of the kind of scenery that prompted Michaux's famous flub. They'll also observe many of the plants he found so interesting. On the high, rocky clifftops, hikers encounter the fuzzy reddish-green leaves of Michaux's saxifrage, a delicate boreal plant that he might have first noticed here.

Key points:

0.4 Junction with Grandfather Trail Extension.
0.5 Junction with Underwood Trail.
1.0 Junction with Underwood Trail in MacRae Gap.
1.2 Attic Window Peak.
1.3 Right turn to Indian House Cave.
1.9 Calloway Gap.
2.3 Watauga View.
2.4 Calloway Peak.

Option 3: Profile Trail

General description: A hike up the western flank of Grandfather Mountain to Calloway Peak.
Parkway mile: 305.1
Total distance: 1.8 miles to Shanty Branch; 7.0 miles round-trip to Calloway Peak
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate to Shanty Branch; strenuous to Calloway Peak
Elevation gain: 2,084 feet
Maps: The best map for the hike is the free trail map of Grandfather Mountain, available at the Grandfather Mountain entrance, which you pass on the way to the trailhead (hiking permits available); USGS Grandfather Mountain.

Finding the trailhead: Leave the Parkway at Milepost 305.1 and turn right onto U.S. 221. Continue past the Grandfather Mountain entrance (at 1.0 mile), and turn right on NC 105 in Linville at about 3.0 miles. At about 7.0 miles, pass the junction with NC 184, and in 0.7 mile turn sharply right into the trailhead parking area.

The hike: The Profile Trail was built in the mid- to late- 1980s to replace the ancient Shanty Spring Trail, a steep and eroding trail dating from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Some of the earliest hikers who used the Shanty Spring Trail arrived at the trailhead on the old E.T. & W.N.C. railroad that paused in Linville Gap on its way from Johnson City, Tennessee, to Boone. The early romance of that time was eloquently told in the book *The Balsam Groves of the Grandfather Mountain* by Shepherd Dugger, published in 1907.

The Profile Trail has dramatic views of the Profile, the multifaceted namesake face of Grandfather Mountain that looks west. The face, or faces, is best seen north of the trailhead. (A few miles in that direction, the Grandview Restaurant is a nice place to appreciate the profile during a breakfast or lunch stop.)

The trail starts in an intimate spot beside the headwaters of the Watauga River where fringed phacelia blooms in April. The graded trail is largely level as it wanders for its first 0.9 mile along the beautiful stream through a mature, New England–like forest.

The trail leaves the river, climbs steeply for 0.2 mile or so, and passes a mileage sign at 0.5 mile, the first of such reminders along the trail. The trail winds into a scenic, dry drainage; just beyond on the right, the large, waxy evergreen-leafed ground plant is Fraser's sedge, on the endangered list. At about 0.9 mile, the trail dips across Shanty Branch, the source of which is Shanty Spring, 2.0 miles ahead. Returning to the trailhead from here makes a nice round-trip family hike of 1.8 miles.

Past the stream, the trail dips through a fissure in large rocks, then winds higher in and out of the drainages above on its way around Green Ridge.

As the trail crosses over Green Ridge and levels on its way into the next drainage, immediately below the Grandfather Profile, it reaches a nice view at about 1.7 miles. It looks north over the Watauga River Valley town of Foscoe and on to White Top (with its crescent-shaped bald) and Mt. Rogers (just visible), the second-highest and highest summits in Virginia, respectively.

Now below the lowest, most facelike of the Profiles, the trail switchbacks again to another crossing of Green Ridge at 2.0 miles, this time at a major campsite with numerous tent sites and a grandiose campfire pit. A small spring is on the left just beyond the spur trail to the campsite. From the campsite, the trail ascends outstanding pathways of natural stone. A steep set of switchbacks reaches a huge boulder with a rock-paved shelter spot. A few hundred feet farther, the trail turns a corner to Profile View, a dramatic view of the face that early mountaineers said looked like a grandfather when hoarfrost blasted the mountain.

Rising more gradually, the trail passes a spring, parallels a small cliff, then winds to a junction, now almost imperceptible, with the old Shanty Spring Trail at 2.6 miles. At Shanty Spring, 2.7 miles from the start, water empties from below a cliff that is often spectacularly covered with ice in winter. In a typically Victorian claim, Dugger's *Balsam Groves* asserts that this is "the coldest water outside of perpetual snow in the United States."

Going right at the cliff, the red-blazed Calloway Trail rises on its historic, steep, and rocky route through increasing evergreens to Calloway Gap, at 3.0 miles, and a junction with the Grandfather Trail (see Option 2 of this hike).

The High Country

Mileposts 276.4 (U.S. 421 at Deep Gap) to 384.7 (U.S. 74 at Asheville)

From Deep Gap at U.S. 421 (Milepost 276.4) to Asheville, North Carolina at U.S. 74 (Milepost 384.7), the Parkway traverses what can only be called the High Country corner of North Carolina. Ironically, the highest spot on the Parkway is not here; it's south of Asheville.

But everything else about this area says lofty, indeed, almost alpine. At Grandfather Mountain, the Blue Ridge escarpment rises to its greatest relief—nearly a vertical mile above the surrounding Piedmont. The computer-designed span of the Linn Cove Viaduct—the Parkway's newest section, completed in 1987—puts you right in the middle of it. Easily accessible just 5.0 miles off the Parkway is Mt. Mitchell, at 6,684 feet, the East's highest summit. Trails at both locations deserve your attention.

But there are two sides to the High Country. The first half of this Parkway section is bordered by private lands, some of it intensively developed and popular as a resort area. The second half is again wrapped in national forest lands. In the High Country, you get the Parkway at both ends of a spectrum.

The resort experience is on the northern end—where it's been since the 1880s, when the lowland rich first fled the summer heat to spark tourism in the mountains. They came for the South's coolest summer temperatures and, later, golf at classic, still popular hostelries like Blowing Rock's Green Park Inn and the chestnut bark–covered luxury of Linville's historic Eseeola Lodge.

The inns and shops of Main Street in the quaint town of Blowing Rock epitomize the appeal of the High Country tourist towns. The town's namesake destination, the Blowing Rock, is a crag with a great view and an Indian legend. It bills itself as "North Carolina's first travel attraction." Early history is the focus at Boone's summer outdoor drama *Horn in the West*, the inspiring, little-known story of how High Country mountaineers marched over their mountains and down to defeat the British in one of the Revolution's pivotal battles.

Other area burgs include Linville, at the base of Grandfather Mountain, one of the United States' first planned resort communities. Banner Elk's special license plates call it the SKI CAPITAL OF THE SOUTH for Beech and Sugar Mountains, the region's southernmost major ski areas. And Boone, the "Hub of the High Country," is a granola-inclined college town, with Appalachian State University. The

village of Valle Crucis claims the 125-year-old Mast General Store, which Charles Kuralt called "America's premier country store."

Mast General Store is a High Country landmark.

It goes without saying that there are copious craft shops and country clubs, and the area's diverse dining is as good as or better than that in most of the surrounding cities of the Piedmont.

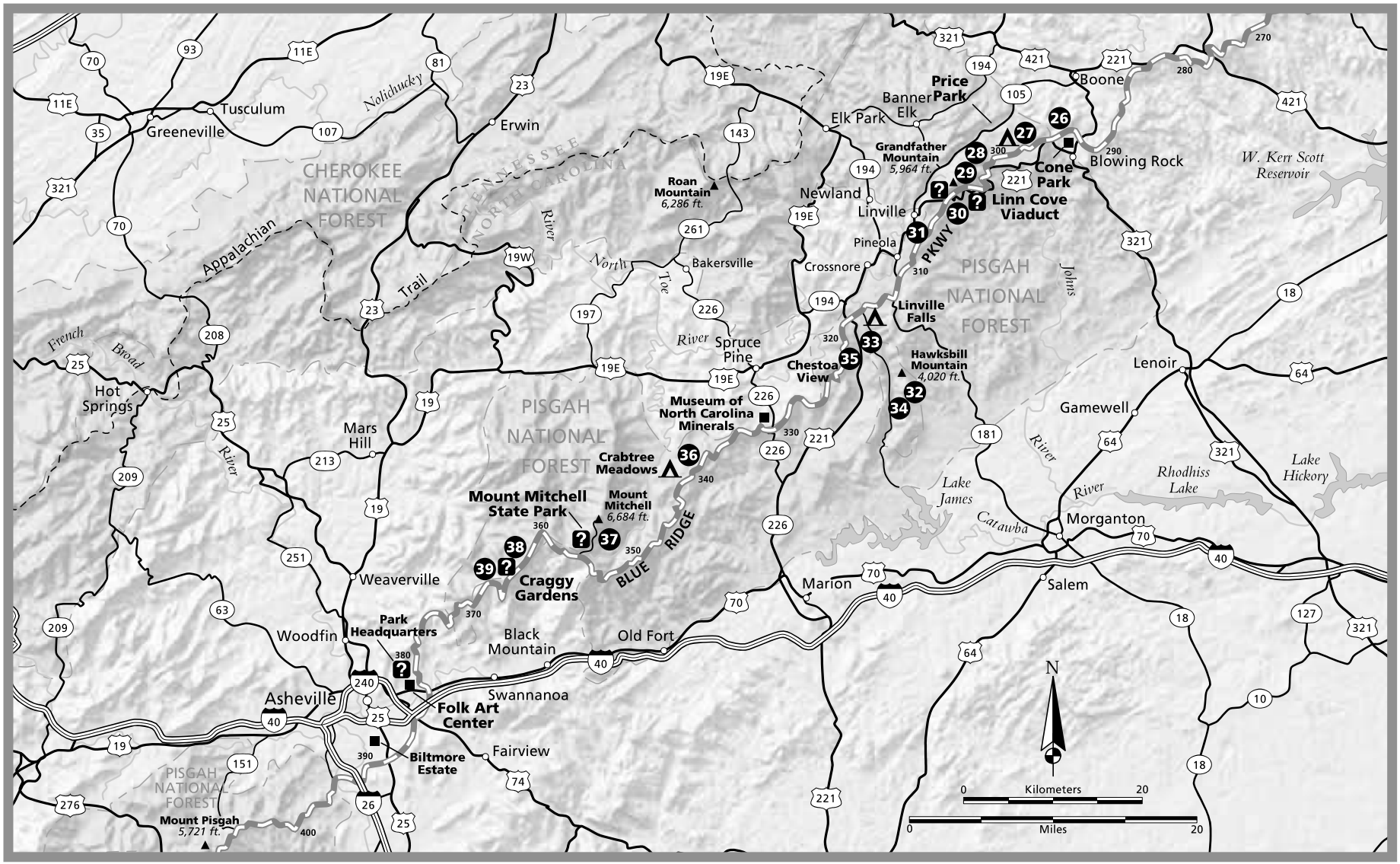
Parkway facilities in the High Country include Price Park (Milepost 296.9), a major picnic area and campground memorably sited beside Price Lake. Linville Falls also has a campground and a large picnic area (Milepost 316.4). Crabtree Meadows (Milepost 339.5) has a campground and restaurant. The summit state park at Mt. Mitchell (Milepost 355) also has a restaurant and small tent camp area (highest in the East).

Don't forget camping in the Pisgah National Forest. Nearer to Mt. Mitchell are classic campgrounds, such as Black Mountain, nestled in the virgin forest at the base of the mountain. There are a few additional campgrounds far below Grandfather Mountain in a huge dirt road–laced region called Wilson Creek.

Environmental awareness is easy to cultivate on this stretch of the Parkway. The Museum of North Carolina Minerals (Milepost 330.9) is newly renovated and one of the best such exhibits anywhere. Just off the Parkway, Grandfather Mountain's Nature Museum and environmental wildlife habitats are first rate. Mt. Mitchell also has a new nature museum. Just a few miles east of the town of Linville Falls on U.S. 221 is Linville Caverns—North Carolina's only commercial cavern.

Museum-quality crafts are also in evidence. Between The Parkway Craft Center in Moses Cone's Manor House (Milepost 294) and the stunning original works of art for sale in The Folk Art Center (Milepost 382), you'll be astonished at the vibrancy of Appalachian handcrafts. The artisans who create these works get their training not far off the Parkway at the world-renowned Penland School of Crafts.

All in all, the High Country may be the high point of the Parkway experience.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Greeneville
Erwin
Nolichucky
CHEROKEE NATIONAL FOREST
TENNESSEE
NORTH CAROLINA
Appalachian Trail
Roan Mountain 6,286 ft.
Bakersville
North Toe River
Spruce Pine
Elk Park
Banner Elk
Price Park
Boone
Grandfather Mountain 5,964 ft.
Cone Park
Blowing Rock
W. Kerr Scott Reservoir
Newland
Linville
Linn Cove Viaduct
Pineola
Crossnore
PKWY
PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST
Linville Falls
Johns River
Chestoa View
Hawksbill Mountain 4,020 ft.
Lenoir
Gamewell
Museum of North Carolina Minerals
Crabtree Meadows
Mount Mitchell State Park
Mount Mitchell 6,684 ft.
BLUE RIDGE
Lake James
Catawba River
Rhodhiss Lake
Lake Hickory
Morganton
Hot Springs
French Broad River
Mars Hill
Weaverville
Craggy Gardens
Marion
Salem
Woodfin
Park Headquarters
Black Mountain
Old Fort
Asheville
Folk Art Center
Swannanoa
Biltmore Estate
Fairview
Mount Pisgah 5,721 ft.
N
0 Kilometers 20
0 Miles 20

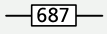
Map Legend

Blue Ridge Parkway

Interstate Highway

US Highway

State Highway



Forest Service road

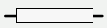
Unimproved road

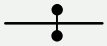
Hiking trail

Track

Hiking itinerary

Railway


Tunnel


Gate


Overlook, view

Parking area


Trailhead


Summit


Mountain pass


Visitor Center


Campground


Picnic area


Ranger station, entrance kiosk


Toilets


Cross-country skiing


Golf course

Stream

Waterfall


Lake

What to Carry

The shortest, easiest nature trails in this book require that the hiker carry nothing other than a camera or binoculars. But hikers who venture more than a mile into fields or forests will want to carry a few essential items.

A small backpack or fanny pack is big enough for the essentials:

- a canteen of water
- a snack or extra food
- spare clothing and other protective items (sunscreen, insect repellent, sun glasses, a hat and raincoat)
- a small first-aid kit (bandages, antiseptic, extra-strength aspirin/acetaminophen, moleskin for blisters)
- this book
- the recommended hiking maps
- any trail permits required by managing agencies

The ultimate item you'll want to carry isn't in your pack but in your head: knowledge. The information contained here is timely and extensive, but no single trail guide can do it all. Explore the variety of resources available to those who enjoy the outdoors, including FalconGuides® and other books on survival, route finding, mountaineering, and backpacking. To be truly prepared, take courses in first aid and CPR.

Maps

A strip map for finding the trailhead, available from Parkway headquarters and visitor centers, provides the perfect main map for your trip. That map plus the maps in this book should be all you need. Nevertheless, other maps, notably USGS topo quads and wilderness area trail maps, are recommended for many hikes.

Clothing

Choose clothing that is comfortable and protective.

Any outdoor activity, regardless of the season, requires that you be able to exert energy and remain comfortable. In summer on the Parkway that might seem to call for shorts and T-shirts. But you may find a hat, long-sleeved T-shirt, and long, loose pants necessary because of high-altitude temperatures, sun—or lack of it—insects, or trailside vegetation.

When choosing hiking clothing, the best policy is to be prepared for the worst weather the season and place can deliver. This means being flexible and dressing in layers and being prepared for rain and wind. The best choices are jackets made of synthetic fabrics that are waterproof and breathable. These are expensive but are highly recommended for their effectiveness and durability.

In spring, fall, and especially winter, waterproof outer garments are even more valuable. Your outer layer of clothing, which can include shell jacket and pants, is your first line of defense. Under that, wear layers—how many varies by season. Synthetic fabrics that are warm even when wet are the best choices. Look for polypropylene T-shirts, long underwear, pants, and zip-up or pullover pile jackets. They are indispensable for cold weather, and the T-shirts can be used year-round.

Major insulating garments are definitely necessary in severe winter weather. Your choice for thick insulation is, again, clothing made of synthetic fabric. Unlike down, synthetics don't lose their insulating value when wet. The serious winter explorer would do well to carry both parkas and pants made of such material.

Footwear

On the Parkway's easy trails, you'll need only a sturdy pair of walking or running shoes. But on moderate or more difficult hikes—or even easy hikes with rocky footing—you'll want a good pair of hiking boots.

The newest generation of boots are light and relatively inexpensive compared with the heavy, costly leather boots associated with the 1970s backpacking boom. The new boots boast waterproof fabrics and various kinds of nonskid soles. They add comfort, safety, and enjoyment to any hike and are a worthwhile purchase for even a casual hiker.

Serious hikers and backpackers know that boots may not be the only kind of shoe needed on a hike. Serious winter hikers will need more than a lightweight three-season boot. Those who walk wilderness or primitive trails often will find that in many places paths cross streams without the aid of bridges. Rather than avoid these trails, consider carrying a pair of aqua shoes, which slip over bare feet, or sport sandals for wading. After a day on the trail, they also make great in-camp wear.

Weather Dangers

It is not enough to own the proper clothing. Be sure to put on your high-tech garments *before* you become thoroughly wet or chilled.

Hypothermia results when lack of food and/or exposure to severe weather conditions prevent the body from maintaining its core temperature. Hypothermia can occur at any time of year—at temperatures well above freezing—with the dramatic cooling effects of wind and rain. To prevent it, stay dry and protected with the right clothing—especially a hat, since up to 70 percent of heat loss can emanate from your head. Don extra layers when you stop for a rest, *before* you get chilled. And remove layers before you get sweaty, starting with that hat. Adequately fuel yourself with food and water; drink plenty of fluids (in winter, simply breathing robs you of moisture), and nibble energy foods (such as trail mix, sandwiches, and hot soups). Set up camp early to accommodate an inexperienced or less physically fit member of your party.

The best way to treat hypothermia is to stop it before it starts, but you may not be able to. Do not ignore such symptoms as uncontrollable shivering and, later, slow and slurred speech, stumbling gate or clumsiness, and disorientation. Take immediate action to shelter and refuel anyone with these symptoms—including yourself. If the victim is uncooperative or unconscious, sandwich the unclad hiker in a sleeping bag between two similarly undressed helpers to share their body heat.

Frostbite. Frozen flesh can result from severe cold, and its first sign is reddened skin. Next, the frozen site—often toes, fingers or portions of the face—will turn white or gray. The best prevention is to stay warm so that your extremities receive the blood flow they need. If you can avoid it, do not venture into extreme conditions or exposed areas where wind-chill factors are below minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit—or be adequately clothed before you do. In severe conditions hikers should monitor one another's faces and suggest shelter when the need arises. Do not rub frozen skin or slap frozen extremities together. When an area with severe frostbite begins to thaw, expect severe pain; use aspirin or acetaminophen to ease the pain on the way to medical assistance.

Lightning. In summer a hiker's major danger is lightning, especially on exposed mountaintops—and the Parkway is full of them. Take shelter at the first rumblings of thunder. Move off ridgetops and seek shelter in a group of smaller trees rather than under one tall one. Rest in a low, dry area (but not a gully or near a pond, where water can conduct the current). Avoid overhangs or small caves where ground current might pass through you. In a lightning storm, you're better off sitting in the open below surrounding high points and atop a low-lying rock that is detached and thus insulated from the ground. To further insulate yourself, crouch low or kneel on top of your pack or sleeping pad.

Heat stroke and heat exhaustion are warm-weather equivalents of exposure to cold. The Parkway isn't known for hot hikes, but be sure to carry and drink plenty of fluids, especially if you're sweating heavily. Avoid hiking in the hottest part of the day; slip into one of the trailside pools often mentioned in this book's hike descriptions. If you feel dizzy and drained, heat exhaustion may be the culprit. Relax, drink fluids, and let your body recover. Heat stroke is a more extreme—and dangerous—condition. Rather than being damp and drained, you'll be dry and feverish, signs that the body has given up its attempts to cool itself down by perspiring. Immediately cool the affected person with cold, wet compresses. Administer water, and seek medical attention.

Trailside Pests

Winter weather largely eradicates the Parkway's most bothersome bugs, reptiles, and plants. But spring, summer, and fall are different matters.

In mild and hot weather, **wasps, hornets,** and **bees** of various kinds are abundant. Avoid contact with concentrations of bees. Be cautious around fruit and flowers, and be on the lookout for nests hanging from limbs, in hollow trees and logs, or on the ground. And don't act like a flower. You can't avoid sweating, which

attracts some types of bees, but don't entice them with perfume or scented body care products.

As long as you're not allergic, most stings are minor and easily treated. Simply scrape an imbedded stinger out with a knife blade. Don't squeeze it out, which releases even more venom into your bloodstream. A paste made of water and unseasoned meat tenderizer that contains papain (a papaya enzyme) can neutralize bee venom; baking soda paste does not.

Some stings are not so simple. A person who is allergic to bee stings or is stung many times can suffer anaphylactic shock—even death. An over-the-counter antihistamine that contains diphenhidramine (such as Benadryl) can help control mild allergic reactions. Serious toxic reactions and anaphylactic shock can either set in immediately or after some delay. If you know you are allergic to bee stings, always carry an epinephrine syringe bee sting kit—and be sure your companions know where it is and how to use it.

Ticks. The Piedmont and coastal forests of Virginia and North Carolina are favorite habitats for ticks, especially late spring through summer. Hikers on the Parkway's highest mountains are less likely to find ticks, especially where spruce and fir forests prevail. Ticks can carry Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever—potentially deadly diseases. North Carolina is infamous for the latter. Both diseases can take up to two weeks to gestate before symptoms develop. Among the signs are arthritis-like joint pain, high fever, and/or a circular rash.

The best defense against ticks is a three-pronged one: First, at the lowest Parkway elevation, use a tick and insect repellent that contains N, N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide, more commonly known as DEET. Second, whether you use repellents or not, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and avoid walking through tall grass, brush, or dense woods. Third, frequently check yourself for ticks, especially at night and when you finish a hike. Focus on armpits, ears, scalp, groin, legs, and where clothes, such as socks, constrict the body. It takes awhile for ticks to attach and transmit disease, so you have a good shot at preventing infection if you find them early.

If a tick becomes imbedded in your skin, use a bit of repellent, rubbing alcohol, or a hot, extinguished match to encourage the tick to back itself out. If you must use tweezers to remove a tick, grasp the head to avoid squeezing toxins into the wound. And don't hesitate to pull a little bit of your skin out with the tick so that mouth parts do not remain to cause infection.

Flies. In spring (mid-April to mid-June), hikers on the Parkway's higher elevations can be troubled by the same tiny black flies that pester North Country hikers in Minnesota and Maine. More often hikers here see common house flies and horse flies; the latter are particularly vicious at the coast. The best defenses are to use insect repellent, keep food and garbage covered or stored elsewhere when picnicking and camping, and cover your body. Consider wearing a repellent-coated cap.

Mosquitoes and **Gnats** are prevalent, especially on cool mountain evenings. Use repellent with DEET; nothing else will do.

Insects find you, but you may step into some other pests. **Poison ivy, poison oak,** and **poison sumac** are all found everywhere on the Parkway except the highest peaks. All produce contact dermatitis—rash and watery blisters that appear twelve to forty-eight hours after skin rubs against the plant resin. The outbreak usually runs its course in ten days, but isolated cases can be severe or cause allergic reactions. Learn to identify these plants ("Leaves of three, let it be"), and be wary of wading through brush in shorts.

If you realize that you just touched one of these poisonous plants, remove and isolate contaminated clothing until it can be washed at home. Flush the affected skin with water but no soap—your skin's natural oils will protect you temporarily. Cover rash areas with calamine lotion. See a physician if face, genitals, or more than 25 percent of your body is affected. Preventive creams you can apply before exposure are also available.

Snakes rank high on the list of hiker fears, but only two venomous types are found in the Blue Ridge: timber rattlesnakes and copperheads. Snakes are not a problem on the Parkway's higher peaks.

The best way to avoid being bitten is to be observant—and be able to recognize poisonous snakes *before* they can bite. Rattlesnakes and copperheads are generally heftier than harmless snakes and have triangular or arrow-shaped heads and verti-

cally slit pupils (versus tube-shaped heads and round pupils for nonpoisonous snakes). Don't reach blindly behind logs and rocks, inspect wooded sites where you plan to sit, and watch where you step.

If bitten, be able to report what kind of snake bit you. Observe your wound: The bite of a pit viper includes two or more prominent fang marks, while a nonvenomous snake bite usually leaves two rows of indentations and no big holes. If possible, use a commercial snake bite kit within three minutes of the bite. Immediately remove all watches and rings that may cause constriction from swelling. Do not make incisions with a knife or try to suck the venom out. Do *not* use tourniquets, cold water, or ice packs, which increase the possibility of gangrene. Instead, loosely splint and immobilize the affected limb, and mark on the victim with a pen the time and spread of swelling. If you are within twenty minutes of the trailhead, carry the victim (or permit the person to walk slowly, with frequent rests) to a vehicle for immediate transfer to a hospital. If hiking alone—not necessarily a good idea—walk as calmly as possible back to your car for help. Hikers who are far from a trailhead should send a companion for help and wait for emergency personnel to return with antivenin.

Most other animals in North Carolina are harmless to hikers. The exception is the rarely seen **black bear.** Most of the time, a backcountry glimpse of one of these reclusive mammals includes its rear end sprinting away. If you have a sudden encounter with a nearby bear, especially a mother with cubs, steadily and calmly back away. Leave the area. Do *not* turn your back on the bear. Do *not* run or climb a tree, since this may provoke a chase—and you cannot outrun a bear. If charged by a bear, stand your ground; bears often bluff.

The most problematic locations for bear encounters are popular campsites, where marauding bears forage through garbage. There they can be aggressive, especially if you approach while they are enjoying food. Stay away. The best defense against such encounters with bears—and with skunks and other animals—is to keep your food away from camp. Safely hang bagged food by tossing a rope over a tree limb, tying on your food container, running the food into midair away from the trunk, and tying the other end where you can reach it. Generally bears are much more of a problem in Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks than along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The other animal threat is a microscopic one. Ingestion of **waterborne pests** can cause a variety of backcountry infections. Perhaps the best known is *giardia lamblia*, but an *E. coli* infection can be deadly. Hikers have even contracted Type A hepatitis from drinking untreated water in the "wilderness." Unfortunately, even pristine-looking streams may contain these and other disease-producing agents. All hikers should carry water from treated sources, carry commercially bottled drinks, or treat the water they use. Boiling water for at least five minutes (before adding food or flavoring) will kill the tiny protozoan that causes *giardia*, so campers can often prepare hot foods with water from streams and springs. Boiling can cause drinking water to taste flat; so pour boiled water back and forth between clean containers to restore its oxygen content, or add flavorings. Better still, carry a portable water purifier. Do not attempt to disinfect water with Halazone, chlorine, or iodine.

A FALCON GUIDE®

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