



# *Hiking* **THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY**

**by Randy Johnson**

## **Moses Cone Memorial Park**



GUILFORD, CONNECTICUT  
HELENA, MONTANA

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**Overview:** *Moses Cone Park's 3,500 acres are quite simply one of the Parkway's best places to pause—in part because Cone Park so well exemplifies the tourism tradition of the mountains and in particular the surrounding region. This is the heart of the North Carolina High Country resort area, and the village of Blowing Rock is its crown.*

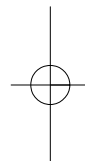
*Moses Cone (1857–1908) helped launch that resort tradition. His Parkway contribution started in Greensboro, North Carolina. Together with brother Cesar, Cone amassed a fortune in North Carolina's post-Civil War textile industry with his Proximity Textile Mills. He built an empire popularizing blue denim cloth and became known as "The Denim King." Cone moved to the mountains at the turn of the twentieth century. With the heart of a preservationist and the mind of a forester, he created lakes in his mountain estate and offered jobs in the new orchards and fields to original landowners still living on the property.*

*He crowned his holdings with a Victorian mansion on the crest of the Blue Ridge. His Flat Top Manor is still a memorable structure, which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary as the Parkway Craft Center in 2001. The rich estate that sprawls from the mansion—down across wonderful white-pine forests to Bass Lake, up to the peaks of Rich and Flat Top Mountains, and below into hardwood and hemlock-filled drainages toward Grandfather Mountain—is quite simply one of the most beautiful and unique places on the Blue Ridge Parkway.*

*Cone also exemplifies the role of wealthy benefactors in the very existence of this high road. John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s purchase of Linville Falls, Julian Price's donation of land just south of Cone Park, and Hugh Morton's granting of a free route across Grandfather Mountain and the conservation easements granted across the mountain's crest also come to mind as pivotal contributions.*

*Cone's lifestyle also symbolizes the situation of so many today who are attracted to life in the hills while their livelihoods lie in the flatlands. Cone died in 1908, less than a decade after acquiring his estate; his wife followed forty years later. By then the land had been donated to the new Parkway. Today he and his wife lie in graves on the Flat Top Trail, surrounded by wonderful views and a sheltering grove of evergreens.*

*One of Cone's "hobbies" was road building, and he certainly indulged it here. More than 25 miles of road-width carriage paths were lightly laid on the land. They wander—indeed, they at times corkscrew (one section is called "The Maze") at very gradual grades with flat footing to create wonderful, easy avenues for carefree strolls. That's why even hikes of 5.0 miles or more can be rated moderate. These paths are perfect for families and are Nordic nirvana to cross-country skiers. Hard-core hikers should gladly trade steepness for distance and just take long walks that gobble up the miles. It's a good barter—a 10.0-mile hike here can go from hemlocks along a mountain lake to*



meadow-covered mountaintops. Cone Park is a superb place to reach an energetic easy stride and just enjoy the woods.

Today, portions of this massive white-pine forest appear virgin in size and grandeur. Under the cathedral-like canopy, hikers experience a silent and beautiful setting, one of the scenic high points of the Parkway. And cross-country skiers are dazzled in winter. The Moses Cone and adjacent Julian Price Park parts of the Parkway are plowed between U.S. 321 in the north (Milepost 291.8) and U.S. 221/Holloway Mountain Road in the south (Milepost 298.6) though, of course, caution must still be exercised. When snow is on the ground, walkers should take care to help preserve smooth skiing conditions for skiers by not walking in ski tracks. Please create a hiker's path on one side of the trail.

Unlike Roanoke Mountain's horse trail on the Parkway in Virginia—more a favorite with riders than hikers—Cone attracts both horseback riders and walkers, so you'll surely find yourself stepping around reminders of equine passage. These are, after all, carriage paths, and the National Park Service chooses to reflect that historic use pattern by permitting, indeed, it seems, encouraging riding (nevertheless, one of the park's ongoing environmental problems is created by horseback riders who wear deep troughs between trails by cutting switchbacks). Cone Park trails connect with the Blowing Rock Stables, where rentals and trail rides are available. Bicycles of any kind, however, are prohibited on the trails.

Within Cone Park's system of carriage roads, trail junctions are many, and few are signed. This situation can be confusing, so the following descriptions recommend circuits with carefully described junctions and turns. The directions here, like experience on the trails themselves, are intended to provide a systematic introduction to routes that many hikers and skiers encounter by chance.

Cone Park's rolling uplands are an outstanding tribute to Moses H. Cone. Between the lakes of Cone and neighboring Price Park, this is the Parkway's best place for a "golden pond" experience of hissing breezes through lakeshore leaves, golden high-altitude summer light, and sunshine reflecting off the scintillating surface of a mountain lake. You can hike or camp by the water's edge; don't miss the A loop of Price Lake Campground for the quintessential lakeshore camping experience.

Today, Cone's Flat Top Manor is an impressive crafts center, visitor center, and gift shop, with frequent demonstrations by crafters and interpretive programs by park rangers. The seasonal visitor center phone number is (828) 295-3782. Bass and Trout Lakes are among the most popular fishing sites in the High Country area.

## Option 1: Figure Eight Trail

**General description:** This intriguingly designed trail explores a Northern-type forest. One of the Parkway's most successful interpretive trails; hikers walk away with a sense of the local woods and Moses Cone, the industrialist whose estate became part of the Parkway.

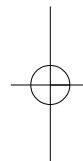
**Parkway mile:** 294.0

**Total distance:** 0.7 mile

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Elevation gain:** Negligible

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.



**Finding the trailhead:** Park at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center. Descend to the manor house, cross the front porch and descend the first flight of front steps. Turn right at sign and cross the lawn.

**The hike:** This very easy hike should be your first walk in Moses Cone Park. Even if you're not the artsy type, at least briefly explore the craft center in the manor house (or save it for later), then take in Mr. and Mrs. Cone's favorite path, the one they shared with guests. It gives a real sense of their world—often in the wonderfully evocative wording of plaques that introduce you to the forest and the culture of the mountaineers who were the couple's neighbors. The plaques “endeavour to interpret for you” the mountaineers' uses for the trees.

The gravel path barely climbs along the edge of the rhododendron and splits. Take the left turn at 0.1 mile through impressive rhododendron reaching for the sky. The trail parallels the road below the house that's visible from the front porch. The trail becomes underpinned on the left by stonework then turns right and heads back the way it came.

Halfway back, a right turn at 0.3 mile leads into the namesake figure eight that's hidden within the loop. Like the much larger “Maze” section of carriage road above Bass Lake, this little detour through dense rhododendron is instantly disorienting—and no doubt reflective of what the Cones loved about their densely wooded Blue Ridge estate. Just follow the arrows around, and take a right back on the main path at 0.4 mile.

Impressive hardwoods such as oak, red maple, hickory, and black cherry cluster inside the trail loop. Surrounding the loop are rhododendron, hemlock, and white pine. Toward the trail's end, spruce and fir mix in to lend a Northern feel. That and the flat terrain make this a wonderful cross country ski trail.

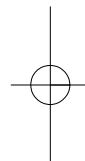
Signs tell how the mountaineers used the trees (tea made from black cherry bark was good for coughs, and the wood “warps not at all”) or how a tree was named (serviceberry, “sarvis,” bloomed when the circuit rider's church “sarvices” resumed in the spring).

By the time you leave the woods behind the massive manor house at about 0.7 mile, you're in the perfect frame of mind to pause at one of the final plaques and “visualize the feudal elegance of this elite estate set down in the midst of mountaineer country.”

At TRAIL'S END, you're more than ready to nod at the man who “made his mark the classic American way, by hard work, dedication, and a dream” and left the fruits of his labors “for all Americans to enjoy.”

## **Key points:**

- 0.1** Turn left onto loop.
- 0.3** Turn right into figure eight.
- 0.4** Turn right out of figure eight.
- 0.7** Return to manor house.





## Option 2: Flat Top Road

**General description:** The best hike to summit views of the Moses Cone Park area.

**Parkway mile:** 294.0

**Total distance:** 5.6 miles round-trip

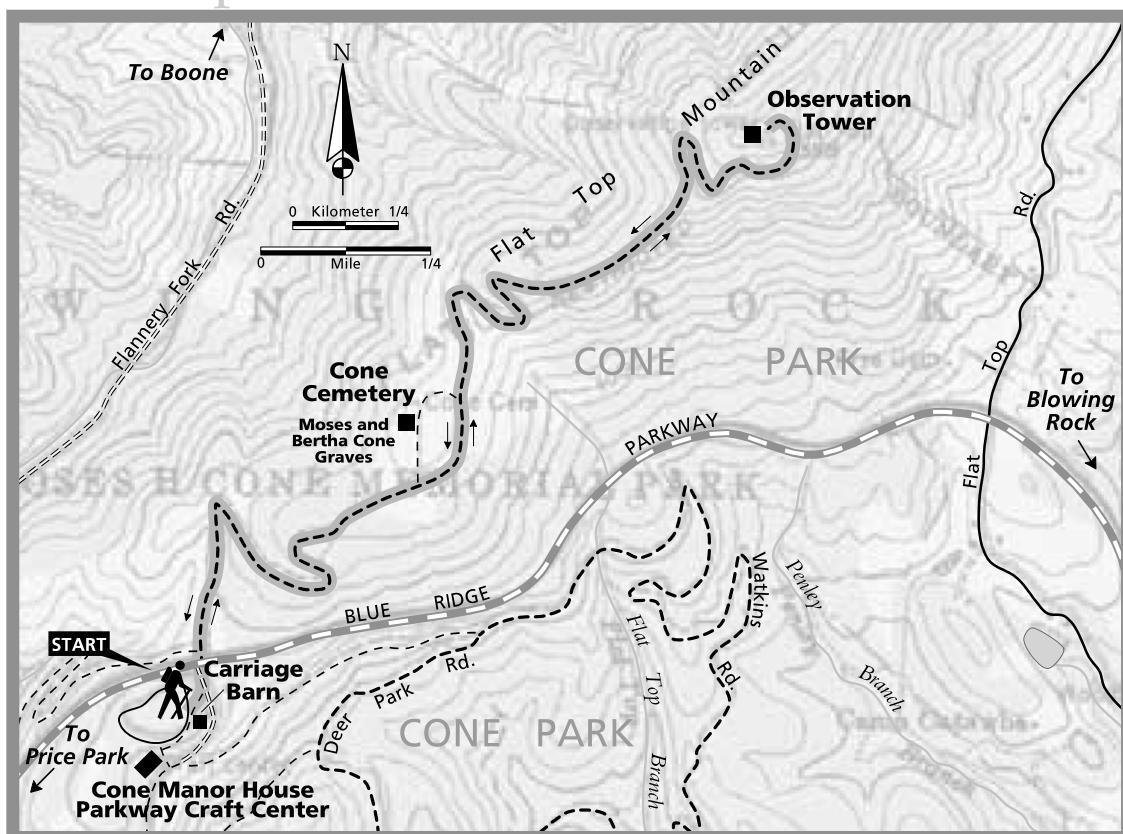
**Difficulty:** Moderate

**Elevation gain:** 580 feet

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.

**Finding the trailhead:** Park at the far end of the Manor House parking area away from the house and above the Carriage Barn. A new handicapped-accessible route leads down toward the barn (and right to the house—the preferred way for skiers to avoid the steps near the house in winter). Take the gravel path left below the Carriage Barn

## Flat Top Road



tiful meadows. The Rich Mountain Road goes left, so bear right and go uphill and around the first turn. Leaving the meadow and entering the woods, the trail emerges again into meadows at 0.9 mile where a spur to the left leads to the Cone family graves. Evergreens shelter the site. Mrs. Cone had four decades after her husband's death to appreciate her eventual place in this peaceful hilltop setting.

The road crosses the meadow to switchback right and enter the woods. At one point the route swings just above cliffs that drop off into the forest. The trail makes very tight turns at 2.0 miles, then curves around the summit to reach the tower at 2.8 miles (5.6 miles round-trip).

The tower was nicely restored in 2001. Nevertheless, expect to experience a touch of acrophobia on the breezy climb to the top. Views reach in all directions, including back to the meadow resting place of Moses and Bertha Cone.

### Key points:

- 0.1** Keep right at junction to climb along edge of meadow.
- 0.9** Cone family grave site.
- 2.8** Summit tower.

## Option 3: Bass Lake Loop Hike

**General description:** A circumambulation of Cone Park's prettiest lake.

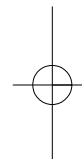
**Parkway mile:** 294.6

**Total distance:** 0.8 mile from the lakeshore parking lot, 1.6 from U.S. 221 trailhead

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Elevation gain:** Negligible

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.



**Finding the trailheads:** Exit the Parkway at Milepost 294.6 to U.S. 221. Turn left and descend in about a mile to the Bass Lake entrance and its two trailheads. The first is a left turn into a paved road that drops to a parking area on the banks of Bass Lake. Just beyond that turn, also on the left, the roadside Bass Lake parking slip is usable when snow complicates access to the lakeshore parking area.

**The hike:** This is an easy, extremely scenic loop that, although unpaved, might be suitable for wheelchairs in dry weather. The Bass Lake loop is easiest from the lakeshore parking area below U.S. 221.

Take a right—or left—out of the lot; there really isn't a preferred direction (this description goes right). The grade weaves in and out along the grassy lakeshore amid maples and reaches a junction right at 0.2 mile—the 0.4-mile side trail to the parking slip on U.S. 221.

Head left across the dam, with the Cone Manor House visible on a hill across and well above the lake. Across the dam, keep left as THE MAZE trail bears right. Cross a span over the lake's outlet, and then a second road goes right (the return leg of the Cone Manor House circuit hike; see that entry). In the area where the second carriage road veers right, you may notice the stone base of a boathouse down on the lakeshore at about 0.3 mile.



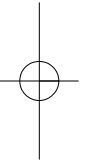
*Views of the distant Manor House make Bass Lake a quintessential Cone Park bike. It's so popular with hikers that horses are no longer permitted to use the trail.*

Continue left around the lake; your parking area is visible beyond an island on the opposite shore. The trail turns right and then left around the upper end of the lake where a bridge crosses the inlet brook at 0.6 mile. There's another bridge soon after, where hikers with dogs step off the trail to give their pets a drink. It's a few hundred feet back to the parking area, for an 0.8-mile loop.

Starting at the parking area on U.S. 221, hikers pass an iron gate and gradually descend about 0.1 mile to a T-junction with Duncan Road. The access road to the lakeshore parking area is just to the left, and a sign indicates that the Manor House is 2.6 miles in that direction across the access road. Bearing right, reach the lake 0.4 mile from your car. Turn right to cross the dam. The added access distance makes this a 1.6-mile loop.

### **Key points:**

- 0.2** Bear left where road goes right to U.S. 221.
- 0.3** Keep left across dam; avoid two roads to the right.
- 0.6** Major inlet brook feeds Bass Lake.
- 0.8** Return to lakeshore parking area.



## Option 4: Moses Cone Manor House Circuit Hike

**General description:** The quintessential Cone Park day hike to the Manor House and back from Bass Lake.

**Parkway mile:** 294.6

**Total distance:** 4.6 miles

**Difficulty:** Moderate

**Elevation gain:** 420 feet

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.

**Finding the trailheads:** Exit the Parkway at Milepost 294.6 to U.S. 221. Turn left and descend in about a mile to the Bass Lake entrance and its two trailheads. Avoid the first left turn into a paved road that drops to a parking area on the banks of Bass Lake. Just beyond that turn, also on the left, park at the roadside Bass Lake parking slip.

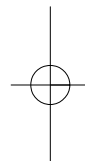
**The hike:** The Cone Manor House is a fine destination for a day hike. Visitors gather here on the porch to relax in rocking chairs with the panoramic view of Bass Lake below. The Manor House circuit hike is easy terrain but a moderate hike because of its length.

Park at the U.S. 221 parking slip and pass through the iron gate. After a short descent to the T-junction with Duncan Road, where a sign points left to the Manor House, go left across the road that drops to the lakeshore parking area.

At 1.1 miles the road swings out to meadows below the manor house then switch-backs left. At 1.7 miles, the Rock Creek Carriage Road goes left to circle an outlying summit on the way to Blowing Rock Stables (this popular horse trail doesn't hold much interest for hikers). After a meandering stretch through huge hemlocks and rhododendron, the road again swings back to and along the meadow, with views of the Manor House at 2.0 miles. Turn right at 2.3 miles onto the paved road that runs beneath the steps to the manor house at about 2.6 miles (craft center, rest rooms, water fountain).

To return to your car, bear right below the house, along the edge of the meadow on the paved Watkins Road (the pavement soon stops). At 3.2 miles turn sharp right onto the Deer Park Carriage Road where the Watkins Road goes left. The road descends (avoid one obscure old path that branches right) and emerges along the edge of the same area of meadows that you passed across the valley on the way up to the house. Just past this meadow, at 3.9 miles, the Apple Barn Connector goes left to The Maze and Watkins Road loops (see those entries). A nice point of interest, the historic Apple Barn is only 0.2 mile (0.4-mile round-trip).

Continue to the right for 0.5 mile from this junction downhill through tall, stately white pines to join the Bass Lake loop at 4.1 miles. Go left and cross the span over the outlet brook, and pass the entrance to The Maze on the left to bear right. Cross the dam, and at 4.2 miles bear left at a junction away from the lake and up to the T-junction at 4.5 miles, where you first turned left on your way down from the parking area. A left here returns to the edge of U.S. 221, for a 4.6-mile hike, the last 2.0 miles of it downhill from the house. If you take the Apple Barn side trip, this is a 5.0-mile hike.



## Key points:

- 0.1 Turn left onto Duncan Road.
- 1.7 Go right at junction; Rock Creek Carriage Road goes left.
- 2.3 Turn right onto paved road.
- 2.6 Reach Manor House.
- 3.2 Turn sharp right onto the Deer Park Carriage Road.
- 3.9 Go right at junction with Apple Barn Connector.
- 4.1 Bear right along shore of Bass Lake and across dam.
- 4.2 Go left at junction to leave lake.
- 4.5 Make last left up to parking lot.

## Option 5: The Maze Loop

**General description:** A nice walk, with lakeshore views and deep forest, made all the more interesting by the confusing route The Maze takes to get you where you've already been.

**Parkway mile:** 294.6

**Total distance:** 3.6 miles from the lakeshore lot; 4.0 miles from U.S. 221

**Difficulty:** Moderate

**Elevation gain:** 220 feet

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.

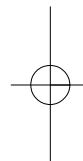
**Finding the trailhead:** Exit the Parkway at Milepost 294.6 to U.S. 221. Turn left and descend in about a mile to the Bass Lake entrance and its two trailheads. The first is a left turn onto a paved road that drops to a parking area on the banks of Bass Lake. Just beyond that turn, also on the left, the roadside Bass Lake parking slip is usable when snow complicates access to the lakeshore parking area.

**The hike:** The Maze twists and turns mysteriously through a mixed forest of mature hardwoods and towering white pines. Most hikers on this trail, especially during the summer, are rarely sure where they are (use map on p. 163) so be sure not to take shortcuts.

The best access is at the Bass Lake Carriage Road, so start at your choice of the two parking spots. This description reads from the lakeshore lot. From U.S. 221, the hike is 0.2 mile farther on the way down and that same 0.2 mile longer after you leave the lakeshore at the end of the hike.

Follow the directions for the Bass Lake loop, but take the first right across the dam, about 0.3 mile from the lakeshore lot. From this entrance, the carriage path corkscrews around for 2.3 miles before reaching the Apple Barn at 2.6 miles. The carriage path that drops off to the right at the Apple Barn, Black Bottom Road, leads to Watkins Road, and that is the key to Cone's loneliest circuit hikes, including another version of The Maze (see Option 6 of this hike).

Go left past that junction and the Apple Barn for another 0.2 mile to a T-junction. To the right, Deer Park Road leads up to the Manor House. Make a left here at 2.8 miles, and follow this last section of the Manor House circuit to Bass



Lake at 3.3 miles. Bear left over the span that crosses the lake's outlet; pass The Maze entrance on the left, and bear right across the dam. Bear right again along the shore where the road goes left to U.S. 221, and reach the lakeshore lot at 3.6 miles. If you park at the U.S. 221 parking slip, bear left just across the dam to end there for a 4.0-mile hike.

### Key points:

- 0.3** Turn into The Maze.
- 2.6** The Maze ends at the Apple Barn.
- 2.8** Turn left at T-junction.
- 3.3** Bear left along shore of Bass Lake.
- 3.6** Arrive at lakeshore lot.

## Option 6: Watkins Road Circuit Hikes

**General description:** A remote trailhead permits three lonely circuit hikes in a normally busy Blue Ridge Parkway hiking area.

**Parkway mile:** 291.8

**Total distance:** 7.3 miles for the largest loop; 6.0 miles for The Maze; 5.7 miles for the Watkins Road–Deer Park Road loop

**Difficulty:** Easy terrain, but moderate due to distance

**Elevation gain:** Greatest elevation gain is 360 feet via Watkins Road circuit

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.

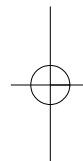
**Finding the trailhead:** Exit the Parkway at Milepost 291.8 on U.S. 321 to Blowing Rock (the exit on the east side of the Parkway and on the south side of U.S. 321). At the stop sign, turn right toward Blowing Rock, and in 0.1 mile turn right again onto Old Camp Catawba Road. At 0.2 mile there's a tiny, single-car parking slip on the left before the gated carriage road goes left.

**The hikes:** From its trailhead near U.S. 321, Watkins Road is the centerpiece of three downright quiet circuit hikes. This start is the choice for Nordic skiers wanting to avoid the chopped-up snow conditions of busier trails, but parking is almost nonexistent (please do not block private property).

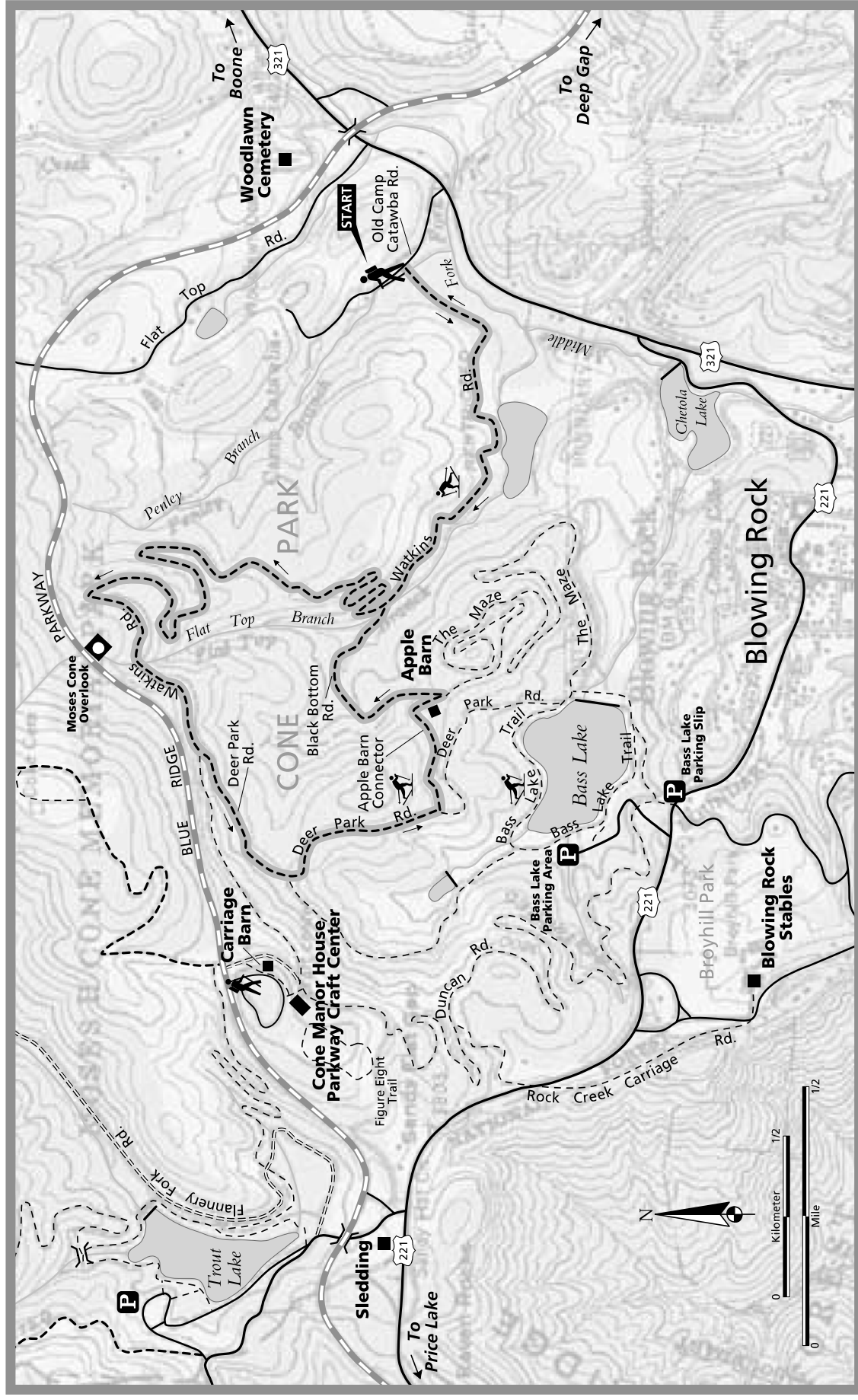
The largest loop is 7.3 miles; it comprises two smaller loops, formed by The Maze (6.0 miles) on the south side and the Watkins Road–Deer Park Road loop on the north side (5.7 miles). Both smaller loops join at the Apple Barn.

The Watkins Road branches from the Old Camp Catawba Road at a stream crossing with adequate stepping-stones. On its 1.0-mile jaunt to the first junction, dense rhododendron clusters under towering hemlocks. A meadow and small pond appear on the left at 0.7 mile.

To do The Maze loop, bear left onto Black Bottom Road at 1.0 mile where the Watkins Road goes right. At 1.5 miles go left again, this time into The Maze, at the Apple Barn. You'll emerge at Bass Lake at 3.8 miles. Turn right across the outlet brook bridge and make the next right. You'll ascend gradually through wonderful white pines to another right at 4.3 miles on the Apple Barn Connector. Just 0.2



# Watkins Road, Bass Lake, and Manor House Circuit Hikes





mile farther, at 4.5 miles, turn left at the Apple Barn; it's another 1.5 miles retracing your steps back to Old Camp Catawba Road for a 6.0-mile hike.

To take the Watkins Road–Deer Park Road circuit, turn right at the first junction and stay on the Watkins Road. The trail switchbacks four times then straightens as it climbs. Just below the Parkway's Moses Cone parking overlook, the road again switchbacks before bearing left below the overlook and toward the Manor House. Turn left at 3.3 miles on the Deer Park Road. At 4.0 miles, just past meadows on the right, turn left onto the Apple Barn Connector for 0.2 mile. Make the next left at 4.2 miles on the Black Bottom Road, and bear right at 4.7 miles on the Watkins Road again. Retrace your steps 1.0 mile for a 5.7-mile circuit.

The outer perimeter hike of both loops is 7.3 miles. Check the map for options. You could hike the smaller loops—or the outer perimeter—from either the Manor House or the Bass Lake trailheads to avoid the Catawba Camp parking.

### **Key points on Watkins Road–Deer Park Circuit:**

- 1.0** Turn right to stay on Watkins Road.
- 3.3** Turn left to descend on Deer Park Road.
- 4.0** Turn left onto Apple Barn Connector.
- 4.2** Turn left onto Black Bottom Road.
- 4.7** Turn right onto Watkins Road and retrace route to car.
- 5.7** Old Catawba Camp Road.

### **Option 7: The Rich Mountain Trail**

**General description:** The best hike to Cone Park's upland meadows.

**Parkway mile:** 294.6

**Total distance:** 5.2 miles from the first trailhead; 3.6 miles from the second

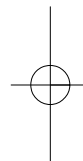
**Difficulty:** Moderate

**Elevation gain:** 510 feet from first trailhead

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.

**Finding the trailhead:** Both trailheads are on Shull's Mill Road, best reached from the U.S. 221/Parkway junction 0.5 mile south of Cone Manor. Exit the Parkway at Milepost 294.6, and turn right on Shull's Mill Road (trip your odometer at the junction). Descend under the Parkway tunnel, and bear left. From this low point, the road climbs through curves to a crest where a fence and a pull-off on the right at 0.5 mile mark the first start of a connector trail that joins the Rich Mountain Trail. The paved road downhill is the Trout Lake Parking Area exit. (Be sure not to block the gate across the trail or the parking area exit.) The second trailhead, for Mountains-to-Sea Trail access to the Rich Mountain Trail, is 1.3 miles past the first trail. Park on the left along a scenic line of mature maples, and cross the road (or in the next curve, where the Mountains-to-Sea Trail also leaves the road south to slab around Martin Knob to a junction with the Boone Fork Trail; see that entry).

**The hike:** Called "Nowhere Mountain" by baby-boomer locals of the Boone area, Rich Mountain is a great hike or ski tour. The corkscrew ascent to its summit is an ongoing scenic experience as you preview the peak's summit view on the way





around and around the peak. The hike described here is from either of two trailheads on Shull's Mill Road, but an even lengthier ascent can start at the Trout Lake Trail (see Option 8 of this hike).

From the first trailhead on Shull's Mill Road, the carriage path connector climbs pretty steeply at first then becomes manageably gradual. At about 0.6 mile, go left and arc gradually across the meadow on the upper part of the Rich Mountain Carriage Road. (Don't bear right; a lower section of the Rich Mountain Carriage Road also descends to Trout Lake and is part of a longer hike from there.)

The trail leaves the meadow and wanders through a wonderful rhododendron tunnel. At 1.2 miles, the Mountains-to-Sea Trail goes left over a fence stile and descends 0.4 mile to the second Shull's Mill Road trailhead. Continuing, the road turns right and right again at 1.7 miles as you leave the forest and slab across an open meadow. The peak is up to your right amid wind and ice-damaged trees.

The trail corkscrews twice before reaching the summit at 2.6 miles. At 4,370 feet, the peak has particularly good views across Blowing Rock and east off the Blue Ridge. Retracing your steps creates a 5.2-mile hike.

On the way down, or up, advanced hikers *can* alter the hike by wandering the meadows—just be sure to *completely* avoid the obvious routes that hikers, horses, and cattle (you could encounter some) are turning into eroded paths. Some of those trail-less options involve descents to the lower section of the Rich Mountain Road on its way to Trout Lake (see the map and that entry).

From the second trailhead, ascend the Mountains-to-Sea Trail up the bank on a log with notched steps, and switchback into a white-pine forest. The trail straightens to climb directly up the slope. Turning right, it switchbacks a half dozen times to a stile over a barbed-wire fence at 0.4 mile. Turn left—the peak is 1.4 miles, 1.8 miles from your car—for a 3.6-mile round-trip. That route cuts 0.8 mile off the hike from the first trailhead, 1.6 miles round-trip.

### Key points:

- 0.6** Take a left at the meadow on Rich Mountain Carriage Road.
- 1.2** Mountains-to-Sea Trail goes left over stile.
- 1.7** Enter summit meadow.
- 2.6** Reach the peak.

## Option 8: Trout Lake Loop and Rich Mountain Carriage Road

**General description:** Unlike popular Bass Lake, with its grassy banks and deciduous trees, Trout Lake is far less visited, and its shores are covered in an inspiring forest of towering hemlocks. This is also a great starting point for a long and quiet hike higher on Rich Mountain.

**Parkway mile:** 294.6

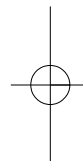
**Total distance:** 1.0-mile lakeshore hike; 2.6-

mile circuit of lower Rich Mountain Carriage Road; 6.6-mile circuit to Rich Mountain summit

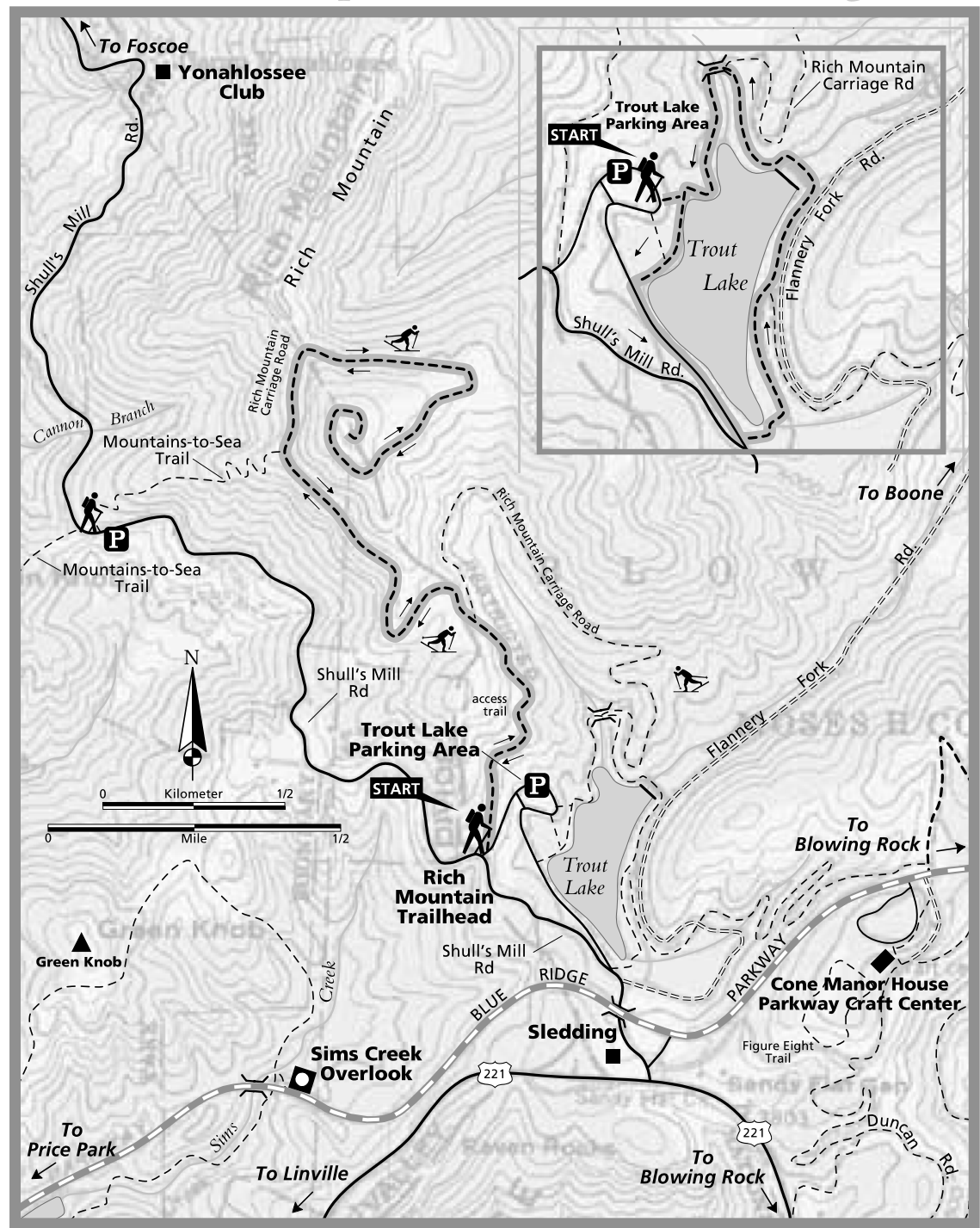
**Difficulty:** Easy for lake; Moderate to Strenuous for the longer walks

**Elevation gain:** Negligible around lake; 610 feet to Rich Mountain

**Maps:** A Parkway handout map is available at the Cone Manor House/Parkway Craft Center; USGS Blowing Rock.



# Trout Lake Loop/Rich Mountain Carriage Road



**The hike:** Trout Lake is a memorable lakeshore walk or ski trip.

From the edge of the Trout Lake Parking Area, take one of the two access trails that dip to the carriage road below, and go right. In a short distance take a left on the road you just drove in on. As you near Shull's Mill Road, turn left and dip down into the woods again. You'll pass a junction at 0.4 mile where the Rich Mountain Carriage Road comes in on the right (the Cone Manor House is 1.0 mile to the right). At 0.5 mile reach Flannery Fork Road, and take a left to cross the dam. Some Trout Lake hikers park here on the Flannery Fork Road (a secluded unpaved byway to Boone that's worth the detour).

Across the dam, the trail enters a towering, centuries-old hemlock forest that Cone found in the moist coves that became this lake. There's a junction at 0.7 where the Rich Mountain Carriage Road goes right (more below). Stay left across the bridge to continue through tall trees and glimpses of a northern lakeshore scene. Take either of the two side trails right and uphill to the parking area for a 1.0-mile hike. The proximity of the trailhead for the Rich Mountain Carriage Road hikes—it's only a hundred-yard walk up the exit road—makes this a nice start for more ambitious hikes.

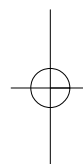
To make a loop of the lake and lower Rich Mountain Carriage Road, take a left from the parking area and enjoy the lakeshore forest for 0.3 mile on the way to a left at the first junction with the Rich Mountain Carriage Road. The trail makes a switchback past a scenic water impoundment with a splashing spillway, then passes through a gate at 1.6 miles. The trail soon exits the woods and at 1.9 miles enters the meadow and reaches a junction just above the main Rich Mountain trailhead on Shull's Mill Road. To the right, the Rich Mountain Carriage Road goes across the meadow to the summit. Turn left and descend the carriage road access trail to Shull's Mill Road at 2.5 miles. From there, go left down the parking area exit road for a 2.6-mile hike.

You could also go right at the meadow above the Shull's Mill Road trailhead and reach the summit of Rich Mountain at 3.9 miles. Retrace your steps from there to the top of the carriage road access trail at 5.9 miles, then turn right down to Shull's Mill Road. A left there down the Trout Lake Parking Area exit road makes a 6.6-mile circuit.

Advanced hikers could shorten this hike. Leaving the summit of Rich Mountain, bear right as meadows open up to your right and drop down through the meadows and beautiful glades to join the lower Rich Mountain Carriage Road on its way to the lake (see the map).

### **Key points on Trout Lake Loop:**

- 0.4** Rich Mountain Carriage Road comes in on right.
- 0.7** Rich Mountain Carriage Road goes right.
- 1.0** Parking area.



# 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.

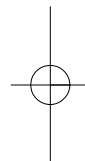
But everything else about this area says lofty, indeed, almost alpine. At Grandfather Mountain, the Blue Ridge escarpment rises to its greatest relief—nearly a vertical mile above the surrounding Piedmont. The computer-designed span of the Linn Cove Viaduct—the Parkway's newest section, completed in 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 hostleries 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.”

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.

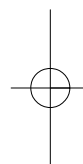
Environmental awareness is easy to cultivate on this stretch of the Parkway. The Museum of North Carolina Minerals (Milepost 330.9) is newly renovated and one of the best such exhibits anywhere. Just off the Parkway, Grandfather Mountain’s Nature Museum and environmental wildlife habitats are first rate. 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.

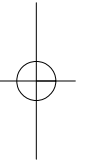
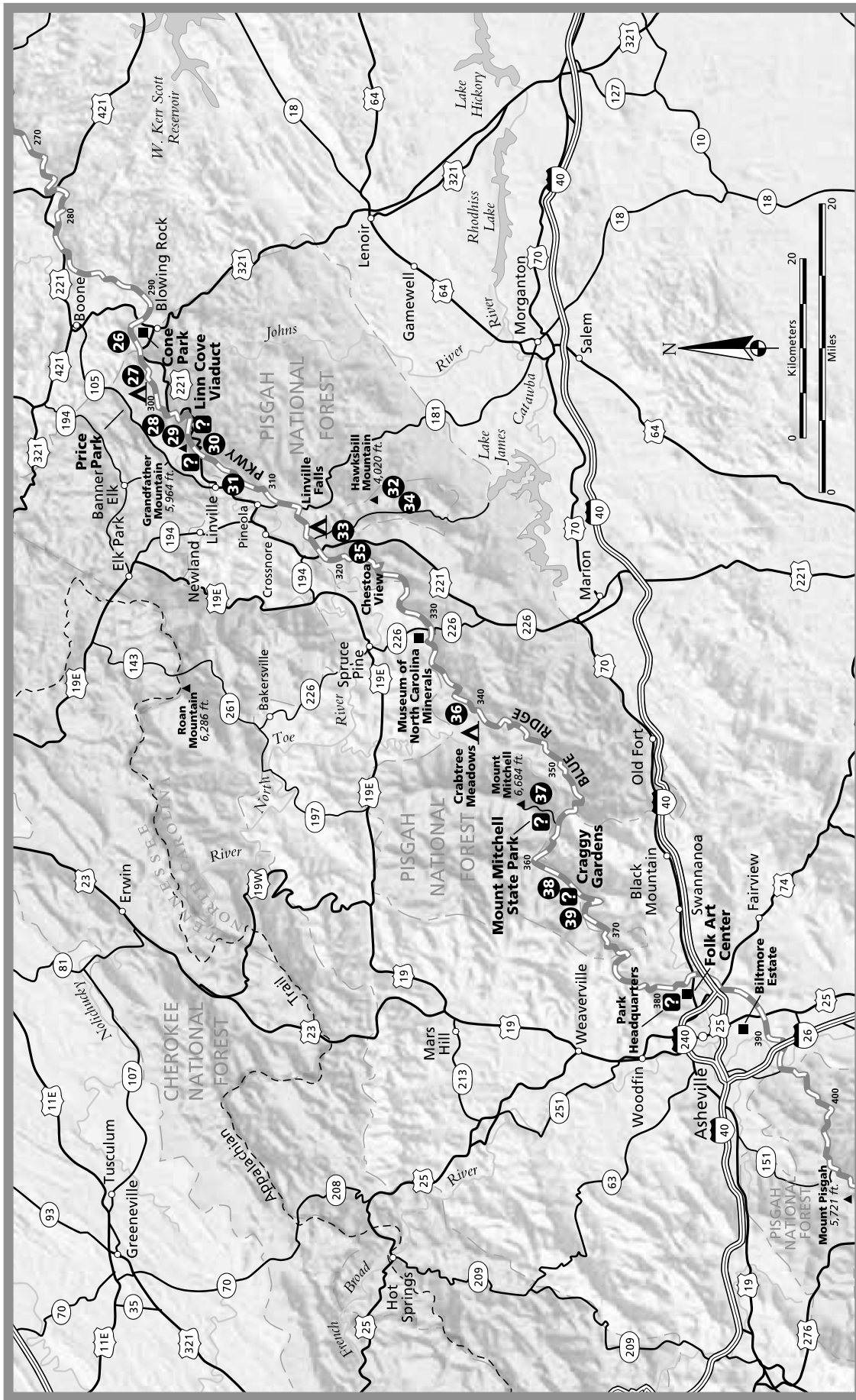
Museum-quality crafts are also in evidence. Between The Parkway Craft Center in Moses Cone’s Manor House (Milepost 294) and the stunning original works of art for sale in The Folk Art Center (Milepost 382), you’ll be astonished at the vibrancy of Appalachian handcrafts. The artisans who create these 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.



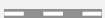







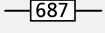

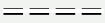

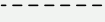





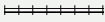

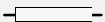

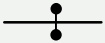




*Mast General Store is a High Country landmark.*

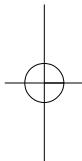




# Map Legend

## Map Legend

	Blue Ridge Parkway		Trailhead
	Interstate Highway		Summit
	US Highway		Mountain pass
	State Highway		Visitor Center
	Forest Service road		Campground
	Unimproved road		Picnic area
	Hiking trail		Ranger station, entrance kiosk
	Track		Toilets
	Hiking itinerary		Cross-country skiing
	Railway		Golf course
	Tunnel		Stream
	Gate		Waterfall
	Overlook, view		Lake
	Parking area		



## 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

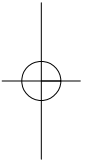
A strip map for finding the trailhead, available from Parkway headquarters and visitor centers, provides the perfect main map for your trip. That map plus the maps in this book should be all you need. Nevertheless, other maps, notably USGS topo quads and wilderness area trail maps, are recommended for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

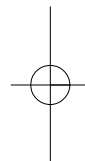
The newest generation of boots are light and relatively inexpensive compared with the heavy, costly leather boots associated with the 1970s backpacking boom. The new boots boast waterproof fabrics and various kinds of nonskid soles. They add comfort, safety, and enjoyment to any hike and are a worthwhile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

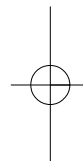
**Lightning.** In summer a hiker's major danger is lightning, especially on exposed mountaintops—and the Parkway is full of them. Take shelter at the first rumblings of thunder. Move off ridgetops and seek shelter in a group of smaller trees rather than under one tall one. Rest in a low, dry area (but 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 diphenhydramine (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.

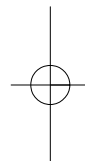
**Ticks.** The Piedmont and coastal forests of Virginia and North Carolina are favorite habitats for ticks, especially late spring through summer. Hikers on the Parkway's highest mountains are less likely to find ticks, especially where spruce and fir forests prevail. Ticks can carry Lyme disease and 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.

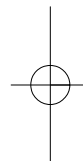


Insects find you, but you may step into some other pests. **Poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac** are all found everywhere on the Parkway except the highest peaks. All produce contact dermatitis—rash and watery blisters that appear twelve to forty-eight hours after skin rubs against the plant resin. 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-



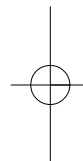
cally slit pupils (versus tube-shaped heads and round pupils for nonpoisonous snakes). Don't reach blindly behind logs and rocks, inspect wooded sites where you plan to sit, and watch where you step.

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 non-venomous 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.



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