

# Hiking North Carolina

A Guide to Nearly 500 of North Carolina's  
Greatest Hiking Trails

**Randy Johnson**

## Grandfather Mountain Trail

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## 14 Grandfather Mountain

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Hugh Morton's stewardship of his family's private lands on Grandfather Mountain helped this spectacular North Carolina area evolve from a tourist attraction to an International Biosphere Reserve. His efforts set a national standard in preservation and public use of private land. Morton passed away in 2006.

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. Following World War II, Morton christened the Mile-High Swinging Bridge after extending the road to "the top," actually one of the mountain's lower summits. Habitat-style animal exhibits debuted in 1973. The mountain became a high point of North Carolina tourism.

Meanwhile, Grandfather Mountain's undeveloped backcountry—jagged, evergreen-clothed cliffs and nearly 6,000-foot summits—slumbered. In 1978 Grandfather Mountain's successful hiker fee system started, 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.

Morton amicably ended a "battle" with the National Park Service in the 1970s. The agency wanted to route the Blue Ridge Parkway high across the mountain and Morton, wanting to protect the wilds of the mountain and the views of his private attraction, blocked the plan. He eventually prevailed, establishing the lower route for the road that's now in place. That and the park's growing appeal to hikers helped Grandfather Mountain's status as a natural area soar. Morton has since preserved more than 3,000 acres of the backcountry 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 areas designated by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization.

A first-class nature museum opened in the 1980s, with daily nature films and educational events, such as a free outdoor photography clinic in June.

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.

## Tanawha Trail and Daniel Boone Scout Trail to Calloway Peak

The Daniel Boone Scout Trail climbs to Calloway Peak, the highest 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.

**General location:** Off the Blue Ridge Parkway about 20 miles west of Blowing Rock.

**Distance:** 5.8- or 4.9-mile out-and-back hike to Calloway Peak on the Boone Trail; a 3.6-mile round-trip on the Cragway Trail; 3.2-miles out-and-back on the Nuwati Trail

**Difficulty:** Strenuous for the Boone Trail to Calloway Peak and for the Cragway circuit; moderate 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. Highway 221 exit, right 1 mile to entrance; hiking permits available); a Tanawha Trail handout map is available at the Linn Cove Visitor Center; USGS Grandfather Mountain.

**Elevation gain:** 2,044 feet for the climb to Calloway Peak; 920 feet for the Cragway circuit; 580 feet for the Nuwati Trail.

**Water availability:** Springs cited in text; treat all water.

**For more information:** Visit [www.grandfather.com](http://www.grandfather.com); or call (828) 733-4337.

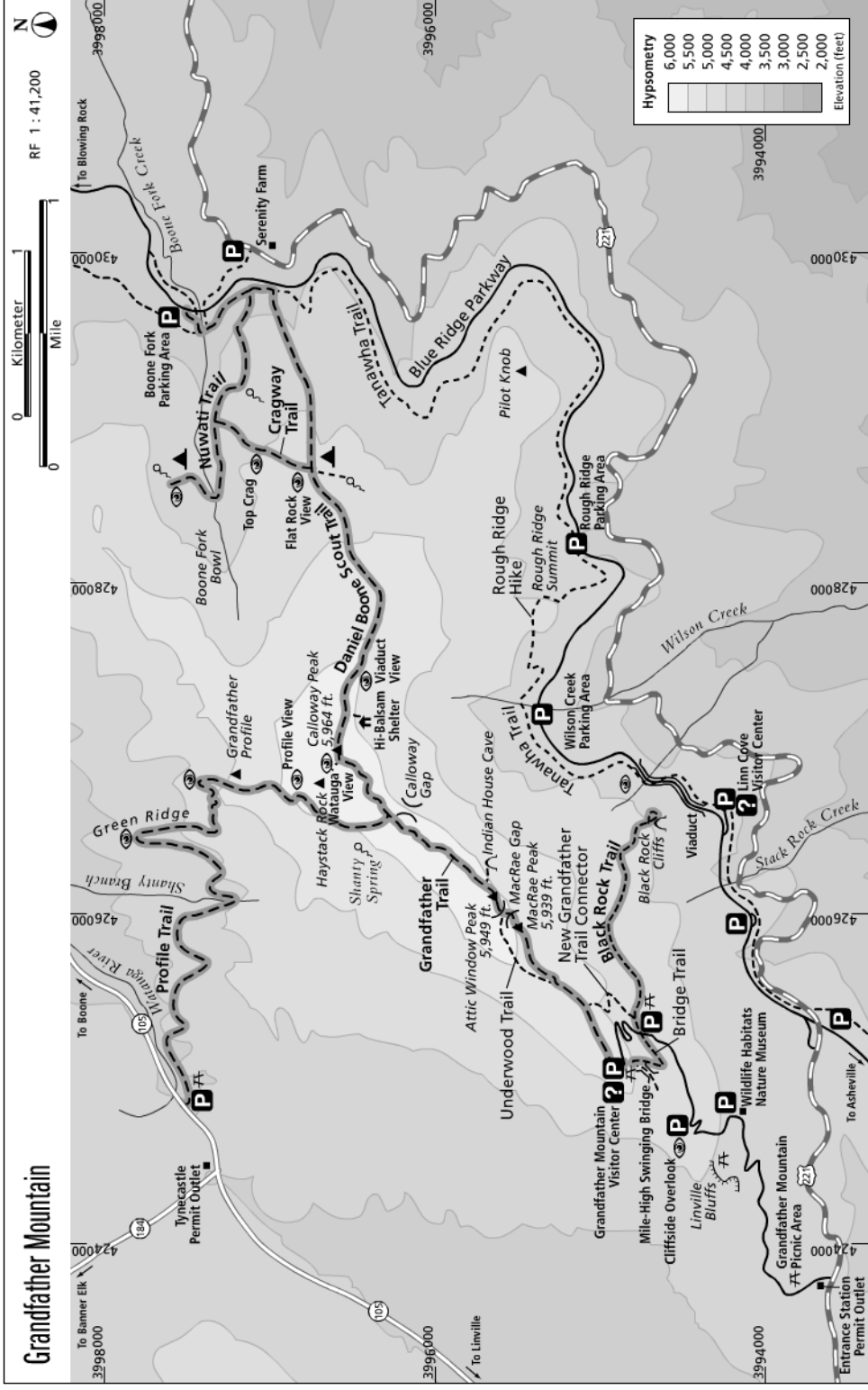
**Finding the trailhead:** The best starting point for all these hikes is the Boone Fork Parking Area on the Blue Ridge Parkway. An alternative, especially in winter when snow closes the Parkway, is the Boone Trail's year-round trailhead on US 221, 8.5 miles north of the Grandfather Mountain entrance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

Hiking permits are available at the Grandfather Mountain entrance (see directions under Maps) and at the Grandfather Mountain Market, 2.3 miles from the Parkway's Boone Fork Parking Area. Go north on the Parkway 1.3 miles and exit at the US 221 exit. Go left under the Parkway on the paved road, and in 1 mile reach the store at the junction with US 221. The store is 1.5 miles north of the Boone Trail's alternate winter parking area on US 221.

### The Hikes

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

# Grandfather Mountain



Part-time Parkway ranger Clyde Smith and a Blowing Rock Boy Scout troop built a primitive trail up this wilder side of the mountain during World War II. Many of Smith's handcrafted trail signs once lined the AT (he died maintaining the AT on Roan Mountain). The Boone Trail was only a memory a decade before the Parkway opened in 1987. (For more on the mountain's history, see articles on the author's Web site.)

Grandfather Mountain's trail program reclaimed it in 1979. The route was pieced together from the remains of tin can-top trail markers. Also discovered was a decaying, half-century-old backpacking shelter flattened by toppled trees. 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 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, then left at the next on the Tanawha Trail to cross the laminated bridge spanning the creek. The connector to US 221 branches left just over the bridge (at 0.4 mile). The Tanawha Trail gains elevation to the **Nuwati Trail** at 0.4 mile. Nuwati is Cherokee meaning "good medicine," which complements the Tanawha Trail's Cherokee name meaning "great hawk" or "eagle."

Take a right on blue-blazed Nuwati, pass a trailhead signboard, and follow the level but rocky trail up an old logging railroad grade. A spring gushes at 0.7 mile. The trail becomes a scenic rhododendron tunnel fringed by lacelike ferns. At 1.1 miles, the Crag Way Trail goes left. A designated campsite on the left is next. The trail crosses numerous streams and another campsite on the left (here 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 mile. A tent platform is off to the left before a fork. A right leads to a dead-end campsite; a left rises 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," and Calloway Peak.

The Nuwati Trail gains only about 600 feet in 1.6 miles, so it's a good beginning backpacking trip for trailside campsites and spectacular scenery. The lowest crags on Cragway and the bowl view make nice evening viewpoints.

The best way to hike the steep **Cragway Trail** is down. Where the Nuwati Trail turns right off the Tanawha Trail (above), turn left on Tanawha and at 0.6 mile go right on the Daniel Boone Scout Trail. After a gradual, switchbacking climb, the trail emerges between two rock outcroppings at 1.6 miles. The Daniel Boone Scout Trail continues left 0.1 mile to the "middle campsite," a group of tent platforms at about the centerpoint on the trail. To the right, Cragway turns down to the Nuwati Trail. Go right, but first ascend Flat Rock View, a table-flat vantage point and perfect lunch spot.

Going right on Cragway, the trail winds along open crags, reenters woods, and emerges into a heath bald of blueberry bushes and rhododendron at Top Crag. Be careful to avoid further impact on the alpinelike Allegheny sand myrtle growing here. This view is one of the best on the mountain.

The path descends rocky crags with great views to 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, hike the **Daniel Boone Scout Trail** past Crag Way Trail, at about 1.6 miles, to the middle campsite and a side trail 100 yards to a spring.

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

Cove Viaduct. A second side trail left, at about 2.6 miles, leads to Hi-Balsam Shelter, a tiny low-lying lean-to that sleeps five (no tent camping or fires).

The Daniel Boone Scout Trail continues past a designated campsite on the left (fires permitted). Opposite the campsite, off in the woods right of the trail, lie the remains of a plane that crashed in 1978. Then the trail 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, across a rocky, evergreen-covered crest, at Grandfather Trail and Watauga (wa-TAW-ga) View, the best vantage point to the west. Backtracking, the hike is just under 6 miles; the route is just under 5 miles long if on the way down you go left on the Crag Way Trail.

## Key Points

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- 0.0** Start from the Boone Fork Parking Area.
- 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.
- 2.9** Watauga View.
- 5.8** Return to parking lot.

## Grandfather Trail

One of the South's most rugged, spectacular, and storied trails scales ladders over cliffs to reach Calloway Peak, the highest summit in the Blue Ridge.

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**General location:** Off the Blue Ridge Parkway about 20 miles west of Blowing Rock.

**Distance:** 2 miles over the first major peak; 4.8 miles to Calloway Peak and back.

**Difficulty:** Strenuous.

**Maps:** The best map for the hike is the free trail map of Grandfather Mountain; USGS Grandfather Mountain.

**Elevation gain:** About 840 feet from the summit parking area for the loop of MacRae Peak; 1,800 feet to Calloway Park and back returning on Underwood Trail.

**Water availability:** Spring cited in text; treat all water.

**For more information:** Visit [www.grandfather.com](http://www.grandfather.com); or call (828) 733-4337.

**Finding the trailhead:** Start at the top of the Grandfather Mountain motor road. The main start is opposite the summit visitor center. From lower down, in the uppermost Black Rock Trail parking lot (right after 5000 FEET elevation sign), the Grandfather Trail Extension reaches the Grandfather Trail.

Hikers may be asked to park at these lower lots during busy times. In that case, if you want to see the visitor center (no walking is permitted on the road), take the Bridge Trail to or from the summit parking lot (0.4 mile). That trail starts across the road from the Black Rock Parking Area.

## The Hikes

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The **Black Rock Trail** itself is a 1-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 the summits above, and the Parkway and Piedmont far below. The forest is a New England-like mix of birches and spruce. And this is a nature trail; thirty-five stops interpret that inviting ecosystem.

The spur from Black Rock parking area to the Grandfather Trail rises left out of the upper parking areas (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 at the visitor center, the blue-blazed Grandfather Trail scrambles up a rocky pitch, turns right, and levels through spruce forests under so-called Head Bumpin' Rock. The crag-top 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). Right, or east, the land plummets to the Piedmont. MacRae Peak (5,939 feet) is the cliff-faced, evergreen-covered summit straight ahead. Peer closely at about 10 o'clock to see hikers on a series of ladders that you'll climb.

Descend along cables (you'll see many, used when the trail is a river of ice), and pass the spur trail from the Black Rock Parking Area at 0.4 mile. Pass a meadow to a junction at 0.5 mile where the yellow-blazed **Underwood Trail** goes left to the gap beyond MacRae Peak (the return route on a great loop of the Grandfather Ridge, one of the truly spectacular short hikes in the region, 2 miles round-trip).



*Whaleback clifftops carry the Grandfather Trail high above the Scottish architecture of Tynecastle on NC 105.*



Turn right on the Grandfather Trail, climb more cables, ascending left, then climb the first ladder in a fissure. Not far above, a cliffside opening on the left funnels a breeze in summer and a bitter wind in winter. The steepest ladders reach to the cliff tops above. To the inexperienced, this is a truly adventurous section of trail. Pause on the large ledge before the last ladder. The visitor center is now far below.

Ascend along the cliff top and emerge on a knife-edge with a house-size boulder atop it—MacRae Peak. Climb the unnerving ladder that leans against it and



*From Calloway Peak, the view looks across Pisgah National Forest to the Carolina Piedmont.*

have lunch. To the east, the Blue Ridge escarpment plummets past the Blue Ridge Parkway to the distant Carolina Piedmont. Continuing, the trail descends a steep chute with cables and a ladder. In winter, this is ice-climbing.

At MacRae Gap, 1 mile from the visitor center, turn back left on the Underwood Trail, 0.5 mile through crags, cliffs, mossy defiles, and evergreen forest reminiscent of the far north. Back to the visitor center makes an adventurous day hike of 2 miles.

Remaining on the Grandfather Trail, pass through a wood sorrel-covered gap and more ladders, through a boulder cave,

then straight up through the massive split in the peak.

At the top of the couloir, a trail leads right to a tent platform 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.

Follow the Grandfather Trail to the next gap and a side trail to Indian House Cave, a big overhang at 1.3 miles. In the 1940s, the cave contained Native American artifacts.

The trail continues on an evergreen-, rhododendron-, and mountain laurel-covered knife-edge above a series of dramatic cliffs then descends into a high, alpine-like meadow with a fine campsite. Going over a whaleback of crags, the trail winds into Calloway Gap at 1.9 miles, a traditional ridgetop campground. The red-blazed Calloway Trail descends steeply left 0.3 mile to water at Shanty Spring and the Profile Trail.

Right, the Grandfather Trail climbs again, through a tiny meadow and past a campsite on the right, then through dense evergreens to the Grandfather Trail's last junction at 2.3 miles. To the left, a short spur leads to Watauga View, a west-facing ledge over Banner Elk. To the right, the white-blazed Daniel Boone Scout Trail reaches Calloway Peak (5,964 feet).

Look east from Calloway, MacRae, or Attic Window Peaks and you'll understand why Andre Michaux, the earliest and most important botanical explorer of the New World, clawed his way there in the 1780s and made the biggest error of his scientific career. The dramatic drop led him to tell his diary that he'd "reached the summit of the highest mountain in all of North America." He sang the "Marseillaise" and shouted, "Long live America and the Republic of France. Long live liberty, equality, and fraternity."

On the rocky cliff tops you'll see the fuzzy, reddish-green leaves of Michaux's saxifrage, a delicate boreal plant that he might have first noticed here.

## Key Points

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- 0.0** Start from the parking lot across from the visitor center.
- 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.
- 4.8** Return to the visitor center.

## Profile Trail

A hike up the western flank of Grandfather Mountain to Calloway Peak.

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**General location:** Off the BRP about 20 miles west of Blowing Rock.

**Distance:** 1.8 miles round-trip to Shanty Branch; 7 miles round-trip to Calloway Peak.

**Difficulty:** Easy to moderate to Shanty Branch; strenuous to Calloway Peak.

**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.

**Elevation gain:** 2,084 feet.

**Water availability:** Spring cited in text; treat all water.

**For more information:** Visit [www.grandfather.com](http://www.grandfather.com); or call (828) 733-4337.

**Finding the trailhead:** Drive 4 miles north of Linville on North Carolina 105, pass the junction with North Carolina 184, and in 0.7 mile turn sharply right into the trailhead.

## The Hike

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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 that was in the way of proposed development (it never occurred).

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 (available at the Grandfather Nature Museum).

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 toward Boone, the Grandview Restaurant is a nice place to appreciate the profile during a breakfast or lunch stop.)

The trail starts 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; one contains the waxy evergreen-leafed ground plant 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 miles ahead. Returning to the trailhead from here makes a nice round-trip family hike of 1.8 miles.

Past the stream, the trail squeezes through a fissure, then winds higher in and out of the drainages above on its way around Green Ridge. Immediately below the Grandfather Profile, there's a nice view over the Watauga River Valley town of Foscue to Mount Rogers and Whitetop, the first and second highest peaks in Virginia, at about 1.7 miles.

The trail switchbacks again to numerous tent sites and a grandiose campfire pit with a small spring beyond on the left. The trail ascends outstanding pathways of natural stone and switchbacks to a huge boulder with a rock-paved shelter spot. Not far beyond, the trail turns a corner to Profile View. The dramatic face, which early mountaineers said looked like a grandfather when blasted with hoarfrost, looks west.

Rising more gradually, the trail passes a spring to a junction, now almost imperceptible, with the old Shanty Spring Trail at 2.6 miles. At Shanty Spring, 2.7 miles, water empties from below a cliff. 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 miles, and a junction with the Grandfather Trail amidst tent platforms.




## Key Points

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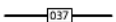







- 0.0** Start at the trailhead off NC 105.
- 0.9** Shanty Branch.
- 1.7** Foscoe View.
- 2.3** Profile View.
- 2.7** Shanty Spring.
- 3.0** Calloway Gap.
- 3.4** Watauga View.
- 3.5** Calloway Peak.
- 7.0** Return to trailhead.

## Map Legend


















### Boundaries

	National Park or Forest boundary
	State or Local Park boundary
	State boundary

### Transportation

	Freeway
	U.S. Highway
	State highway
	Primary roads
	Unpaved road
	Featured unpaved road
	Featured trail
	Faint trail
	Other trail
	Tunnel
	Powerlines

### Symbols

	Campground
	Campsite
	Ranger station
	Overlook
	Bridge
	Shelter/Cabin
	Waterfall
	Spring
	Mine
	Cave
	Picnic Area
	Visitor Center
	Parking
	Restroom
	Ruin
	Cemetery
	Gate

### Hydrology and Physiography

	River/stream		Wetland
	Intermittent stream		Pass
	Lake		Peak or spot elevation
	Bluffs		

## Being Prepared

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Given North Carolina's varied climate and geography, there is no substitute for adequate planning. This section covers the most important elements involved in preparing for a safe, enjoyable outing; hikers should also check the information included in the overviews and details of each trail entry. The following are general tips and hiking advice—an orientation—to FalconGuides and this book.

### Selecting a Trail

When you are deciding which one of the hikes from *Hiking North Carolina* to take, your first step is matching the trail with your level of ability. Hikes listed in this book are described as easy, moderate, or strenuous, with “moderately” and “extremely” added to these terms as modifiers. Generally, regardless of length, an easy trail has a graded or benched treadway, meaning that the tread has been excavated, like a mini road grade, to permit predictable footing. An easy hike is relatively level, meaning that its grade, or rate of rise, is gradual and consistent. A moderate trail involves a rougher, rockier treadway and fluctuations in the rate of rise, though the climb is usually gradual. Strenuous trails are steep overall or in places, require substantial exertion, and often have uneven footing or necessitate the use of ladders or climbing over rocks. When a trail is said to “slab around a peak,” it means that it avoids a summit, generally keeping to a level grade at one elevation.

Add these basic terms to the descriptions in the trail entries. For instance, both the Chestnut Oak Nature Trail in Hanging Rock State Park (rated easy) and the Nuwati Trail on Grandfather Mountain (rated moderately easy) are considered untaxing because of gradual grades. Nevertheless, the text mentions that both trails have rocky footing, a fact that hikers will need to consider.

Trail entries often use the terms “loop” or “circuit” to describe a recommended hike. In general a loop is a single trail that leaves a trailhead, splits at some point, then

returns the hiker to the initial path and trailhead. A circuit is a hike that originates on one trail, but turns onto another trail to return to the same starting point. Either of these hikes resembles a circle of sorts. The entry also specifies elevation gain.

Mileages are given for most hikes, often with “about” appended to them. This is done where seemingly reliable data conflict with other information, such as park brochures or official publications. All mileage information should be considered a best estimate. Certain kinds of terrain make it difficult to measure with certainty exactly how long a trail is. In addition, the varying levels of experience that hikers bring to the trails make mileage information less meaningful. Certainly, you don’t want to set off on a 10-mile hike when a 2-mile hike is what you have in mind; nevertheless, trail descriptions and ratings are often more valuable than simple mileage figures.

To further inform your trail choices, we’ve included entries that suggest ways for inexperienced or less physically fit hikers to sample longer, more strenuous trails. Most entries, for instance, suggest places to turn around or alternative routes that avoid the most difficult terrain. Still, a person in very poor condition could find an easy-rated trail to be a challenging hike, so the trail descriptions in this book are subjective. If you are considered overweight, do no regular exercise, or are unsure of foot, create your own hike rating system: Expect an easy hike to feel moderately difficult, and a moderate hike to be strenuous. The nice thing is that, with consistent exercise, your rating system will change.

### **How to Use the Maps**

The maps in this book that depict a detailed close-up of an area use elevation tints, called hypsometry, to portray relief. Each gray tone represents a range of equal elevation, as shown in the scale key with the map. These maps will give you a good idea of elevation gain and loss. The darker tones are lower elevations and the lighter grays are higher elevations. The lighter the tone, the higher the elevation. Narrow bands of different gray tones spaced closely together indicate steep terrain, whereas wider bands indicate areas of more gradual slope.

Maps that show larger geographic areas use shaded, or shadow, relief. Shadow relief does not represent elevation; it demonstrates slope or relative steepness. This gives an almost 3-D perspective of the physiography of a region and will help you see where ranges and valleys are.

### **Don’t Forget High Tech: The Web and GPS**

The first edition of this book was the first trail guide in North Carolina to feature Web sites and discuss the value of the Internet for hikers. Today’s nature-loving legion of hikers is even more likely to be online. Be sure to keep in touch with the exploding trove of information about hiking to be found on the World Wide Web, especially home pages for individual national, state, and city parks where you can find the latest on campground rates, new trails, storm closures, and more.

Now more than ever, aficionados are creating home pages for all kinds of things—even mountain peaks. Many sites are linked to an amazing array of related resources such as hiking clubs, conservation groups, and commercial enterprises. A good example is how easy it's become to get accurate weather reports for even micro areas. The Weather Channel ([www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)) is just one such source. This book suggests many Web sites; Google other topics.

High tech has also taken to the trails with the Global Positioning System or GPS. The maps in this book are already compatible with the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) system of coordinates used by GPS units. That is intended to encourage experimentation with GPS units and their capacity to pinpoint your location on the maps in this book or to overlay GPS “waypoints,” or locations on your hike, onto computer-based topographical maps. With one of a number of available computer topo map products, it's easy to print out great maps before a hike, to record the entire route of your hike on a map when you return, and even to find your way to desired locations.

That latter capacity has led to the “geocaching” craze. All over the state, GPS enthusiasts have established hidden caches of diverse items, including a log of visitors. Finding them is fun—kind of like a backcountry scavenger hunt. Take an item to add to the cache. The contents have even been known to migrate hundreds of miles when ferried by geocaching aficionados. Log onto [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) to find your way into this world. Or try [www.ncgeocachers.org](http://www.ncgeocachers.org).

Best of all, using a GPS unit will enhance your awareness of the outdoors and invite you into orienteering and backcountry travel that doesn't necessarily require trails. It does require skill though, so be sure to check out FalconGuides on route finding and using GPS.



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