



Hiking **THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY**

by Randy Johnson

Tanawha Trail and the Parkway at Grandfather Mountain



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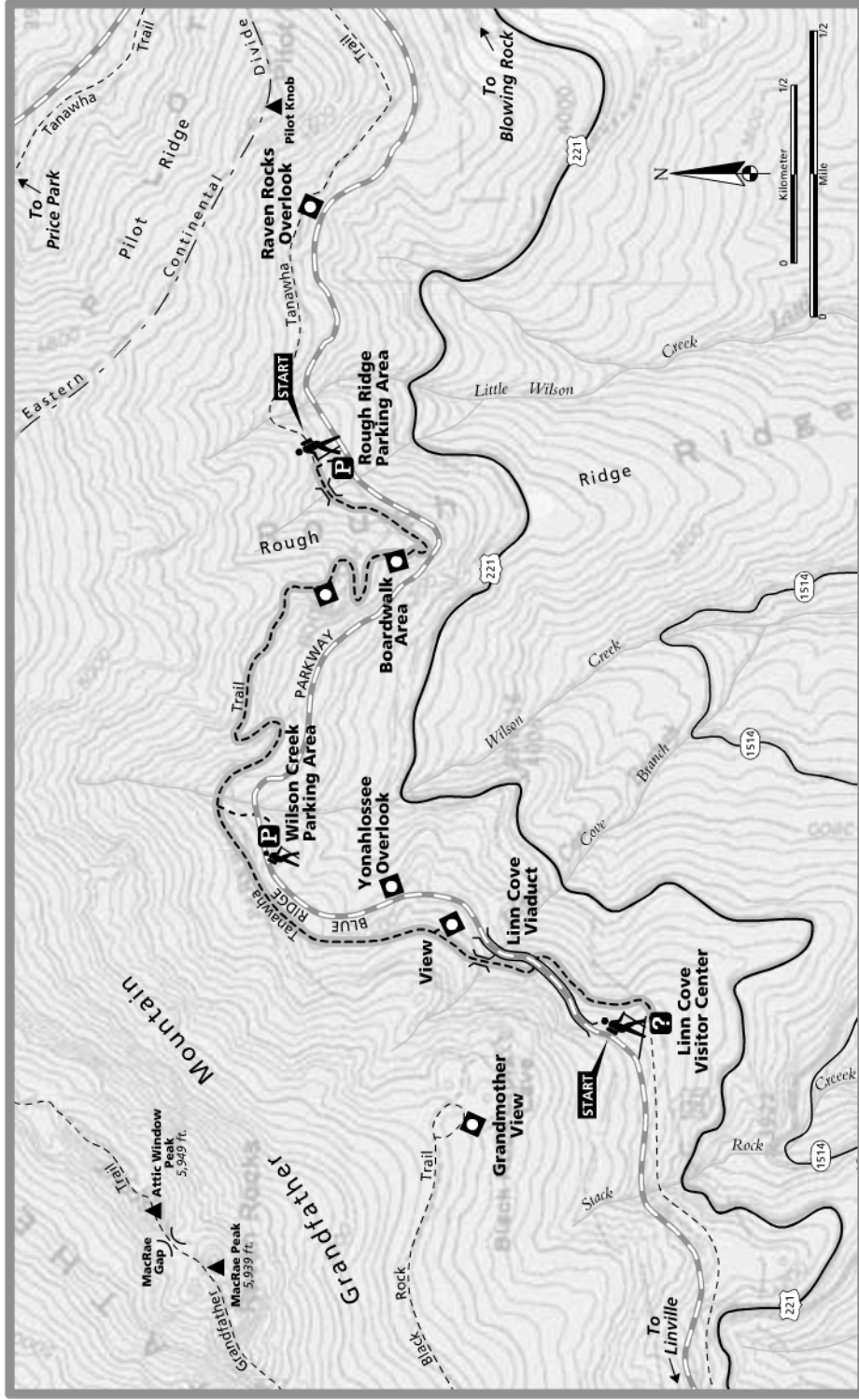
Overview: *The Tanawha Trail—the Cherokee word means “great hawk” or “eagle”—lies along the entire length of the Grandfather Mountain “missing link” portion of the Parkway. The trail reaches all the way to Price Park and is the crowning achievement of the Blue Ridge Parkway trail network.*

Hikers won’t fail to notice the trail’s intricate stone stairways, rock-paved treadways, and arching wood bridges (lowered here by helicopter), all designed to minimize hiker damage to this scenic environment. The federal government spent almost \$750,000 on the 13.5 miles of trail between Beacon Heights, near Linville, and Price Park Campground, near Blowing Rock.

The Tanawha Trail’s best views are from Rough Ridge, a high outcrop where boardwalks and handrails were required to keep the public from trampling the low, alpinelike vegetation, some of it rare and endangered (please stay on the trails). To those familiar with the roadless grandeur of Rough Ridge before the coming of the Parkway, the change speaks of how dramatically humankind dominates the wilds. Happily, substantial effort has been devoted to preserving a truly unique area.

The Tanawha Trail, like many other sections of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in North Carolina and the Appalachian Trail in Virginia, will rarely be hiked end to end by Parkway motorists. The most worthwhile sections of these roadside paths are the places which provide loop opportunities or attractive turnaround points. The hikes below focus on those parts of what planners called the “Parkway parallel trail” before it was renamed.

Tanawha Trail at Grandfather Mountain



Option 1: Tanawha Trail Hikes near Holloway Mountain Road

General description: Two opportunities—a circuit hike and an out-and-back walk—to sample the Tanawha and Mountains-to-Sea Trails in an area noted for outstanding meadow views.

Parkway mile: 298.6

Total distance: 2.4 miles for the circuit to the north of the road; 1.6 miles for the out-and-back hike to the south (with greater distances and a higher elevation hike possible)

Difficulty: Easy for the meadow hikes immediately north and south of Holloway Mountain Road; Moderate for others

Elevation gain: 50 feet

Maps: A Tanawha Trail handout map is available at the Linn Cove Visitor Center (that map does not show the hike described first below; rely on the map here); USGS Grandfather Mountain.

Finding the trailhead: Leave the Parkway south of Blowing Rock at Milepost 298.6—the Holloway Mountain Road/U.S. 221 exit. Turn immediately right onto the dirt road and park on the right in 1.0 mile at the Tanawha Trail crossing.

The hikes: The circuit hike to the north patches together an easy sampling of the Tanawha, Boone Fork, and Mountains-to-Sea Trails without requiring that you completely retrace your steps. It also takes hikers along one of the premier unpaved roads near the Parkway. If you continue past the trailhead 1.2 miles and then turn right onto a paved road, you soon reach NC 105 between Boone and Banner Elk, which makes this the perfect back way into the High Country.

Head through the fat-man squeeze going north (to the right coming from the Parkway) on the combined Tanawha and Mountains-to-Sea Trail. Cross the first stretch of meadow, pass through another squeeze at 0.1 mile, then turn right onto an old gravel farm road. Follow the grade a short distance beneath a power line at 0.3 mile, then at 0.4 mile veer left up the log steps as the trail leaves the grade. At 0.5 mile, cross the next fence and pass a Tanawha Trail signpost just beyond it onto another obvious gravel road grade.

Two hundred feet beyond the sign, at about 0.6 mile, near the edge of a meadow, the trail goes right on the main grade. Leave the formal trail here, and veer uphill where the gravel road rises left. Emerge into the meadow, and follow the obvious but faint, now grassy old roadway left through the grass for a hundred feet parallel to rhododendron at the edge of the woods. It wanders across the meadow, under the power line in the distance, and to the right of the rise beyond.

At about 0.9 mile, the grade reaches a junction where the Boone Fork Trail comes in on the left. The junction is marked by a Mountains-to-Sea Trail signpost and signs in two directions reading BOONE FORK TRAIL, 4.9-MILE LOOP. Keep straight; the Boone Fork Trail turns left at the sign and onto your road grade.

Follow the rhododendron-arched Boone Fork Trail straight ahead, or turn right at the sign on an obvious secondary path and go up over the grassy bulge of the meadow for a great view of Grandfather Mountain. Continuing over this meadow, head off the steeper side of the peak and down to the Boone Fork Trail, visible



The Tanawha Trail's elegantly arching spans, like this one at Rough Ridge, were lowered into place by helicopter.

below as it leaves the rhododendron tunnel you avoided and arcs to the right across the field below.

Back on the main trail, descend from the meadow into white pines to a junction at 1.3 miles. This is the Mountains-to-Sea Trail/Tanawha Trail combination that you started on but left back at the meadow. Turn right off the Boone Fork Trail, and head south along this section of trail you missed.

The first few hundred yards are beautiful—ferns, moss, and needles cover the ground under a grove of white pines. Notice the forgotten ruin of a tiny chestnut farm structure on the left as you start down from the turn. The path crosses a bridge, meets a fenceline, follows it, crosses another small bridge, and gradually climbs right to reenter the meadow at an old apple orchard. Leveling off, the trail switchbacks left and passes a grove of white pines flanked by another apple orchard—a long-ago mountaineer homesite. The trail swings past the site and enters

the woods at a trailside pit where an underground stream threatens to collapse the path.

Heading back into the woods at 1.8 miles, you immediately pass the uphill grade you earlier took to the left to exit the formal trail (now on your right). Now you're heading back the way you came. If you miss the last left turn from the road grade onto the Tanawha Trail to your car, don't sweat it. The grade empties onto Holloway Mountain Road 200 feet beyond where you parked, for a total hike of about 2.4 miles.

Just across the road from the hike above lies an even easier meadow walk to the south. The Tanawha Trail heads toward Grandfather Mountain, and views of the peak dominate the horizon in that direction.

The trail leaves the road through the fat-man squeeze, turns left at the roadside Tanawha Trail mileage sign, and arcs up the edge of the meadow. The path crosses another fence at 0.4 mile below an old cemetery that is just out of sight on the high right. It swings into the bowl of the next meadow, then wanders through a grove of white pines with views down on the Holloway Mountain Road. When you reach a power line toward the end of the meadow at about 0.8 mile, a return from there creates an easy, meadow-filled stroll that's perfect for a picnic or ski tour of 1.6 miles.

With two cars you could hike on to Cold Prong Pond Parking Area (Milepost 299), 1.4 miles farther, for a 2.2-mile one-way hike or, lacking a car, a 4.4-mile out-and-back hike from Holloway Mountain Road. Beyond the meadow turnaround point, at 0.8 mile, the trail continues, descending into the woods and passing through a meadow at 1.1 miles and a nice clifftop view up to Grandfather Mountain's northernmost ridge at 1.6 miles. It crosses a small stream at 1.9 miles, then rises to a junction at 2.0 miles. The Tanawha Trail continues right to the Boone Fork Parking Area, and a side trail goes left 0.2 mile to Cold Prong Pond Parking Area.

Key points for the circuit to the north:

- 0.4** Veer left off the grade and up log steps.
- 0.9** Join Boone Fork/Mountains-to-Sea Trail.
- 1.3** Turn right onto Mountains-to-Sea/Tanawha Trails.
- 1.8** Rejoin portion of trail you've already walked.
- 2.4** Holloway Mountain Road.

Option 2: Tanawha Trail from Cold Prong Pond Parking Area

General description: An out-and-back or two car hike from Cold Prong Pond Overlook uphill to Boone Fork Parking Area.

Parkway mile: 299.0

Total distance: 3.8 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Elevation gain: 360 feet

Maps: A Tanawha Trail handout map is available

at the Linn Cove Visitor Center; a portion of this hike is also on the Grandfather Mountain hiking map, available free at the Grandfather Mountain entrance (south from Cold Prong Pond Overlook 6.1 miles to U.S. 221 exit, right 1.0 mile to entrance); USGS Grandfather Mountain.

Finding the trailhead: Park at Cold Prong Pond Overlook. The trail leaves the north end of the parking lot and loops the now-drained site of Cold Prong Pond in 0.5 mile. As you go in that direction, go left and left again—the spur to the Tanawha Trail actually goes back south to parallel the length of the parking lot just below the pavement. Getting there from the formal start of the trail is so indirect that people have started an informal trail near the north end, before the trail to the pond site. That trail dips left and down directly to the Tanawha Trail access path.

The hike: Cold Prong Pond Overlook is the start of a noteworthy hike up to Boone Fork Parking Area. It's uphill, which means it's appropriately downhill on the way back, and it has a logical destination—a scenic bridge over rushing Boone Fork, where a variety of hikes to the Grandfather summit region start. Another plus is that few people hike this scenic section of trail.

Take a left 0.2 mile below the parking area on the Tanawha Trail. The path crosses a wet slab of rock and turns right over a trail bridge to veer well away from the Parkway. At 0.5 mile cross another bridge to a right turn that deftly surmounts a crag to leave the drainage.

The trail rises past hemlocks, sharply switchbacks left, and enters an impressive cove hardwood forest with plentiful wildflowers at about 1.2 miles. The road can't be heard from here—this would be a great place for one of those (nearly) ubiquitous Parkway benches. The trail dips out of the cove and turns right around a ridge to enter an old road grade within earshot of the Parkway. The path climbs above the grade at 1.7 miles, where rock walls deflect the trail around a little stream. At about 1.9 miles, bear right at the junction (the side trail goes left to Boone Fork Parking Area in 0.1 mile), and the Boone Fork trail bridge is a few hundred feet away. Nice pools lie below.

Key points:

- 0.2** Junction with Tanawha Trail; go left.
- 1.2** Nice cove hardwood forest.
- 1.9** Boone Fork Trail bridge.

Option 3: Tanawha Trail to Rough Ridge

General description: Quite possibly the Parkway's easiest path to a spectacular view. The Tanawha Trail traverses the alpine-appearing crest of a leading ridge to Grandfather Mountain.

Parkway mile: 302.8

Total distance: Entire section is 1.5 miles, but the closest view is only a 0.6 mile round-trip. Out-and-back hikes of 1.2 and about 2.0 miles lead to the peak of Rough Ridge

Difficulty: Moderate to Strenuous

Elevation gain: 540 feet from Wilson Creek Overlook; 480 feet from Rough Ridge Parking Area.

Maps: The Grandfather Mountain hiking map shows the trail best and is available free at the Grandfather Mountain entrance (south from Rough Ridge Overlook 2.3 miles to U.S. 221 exit, right 1.0 mile to entrance); a Tanawha Trail handout map is available at the Linn Cove Visitor Center; USGS Grandfather Mountain.

Finding the trailhead: Wilson Creek Overlook (Milepost 303.6); Rough Ridge Overlook (Milepost 302.8).

The hike: The cliff-lined, alpine crest of Rough Ridge offers startling vistas atop a stone face visible to Parkway motorists. From many places on this part of the Tanawha Trail, including boardwalks just 0.3 mile from the Rough Ridge Parking Area, the vista engulfs you.

As you're standing on the boardwalks, Rough Ridge rises to the three loftiest summits of Grandfather Mountain, a rocky, dramatic climax at nearly 6,000 feet. The Wilson Creek drainage drops like an expansive chute past the Linn Cove Viaduct and Parkway snaking to the south. Far below, across the rippling corduroy of the Pisgah National Forest, the land descends to the edge of the Piedmont. This nearly vertical-mile relief is the greatest rise of the Blue Ridge escarpment. Mt. Mitchell lies on the southern horizon, and Grandfather Mountain's Pilot Knob is the rocky peak just to the north.

Climbers have given the name Ship Rock to the faces below Rough Ridge, and the crags are among the South's most popular rock-climbing sites. (The National Park Service requires that climbers reach the rock from the Wilson Creek Parking Area.)

The most direct route to the summit of Rough Ridge is from the parking area of the same name. Here the access trail ascends log steps to a junction. Take the Tanawha Trail left, and immediately cross an arching wood bridge over a cascade that tumbles down beneath the parking area visible below. (To the right at the junction, the Tanawha Trail rises gently then descends in 4.0 miles through a luxuriant spruce forest around Pilot Knob to the Boone Fork Overlook. See the Tanawha Trail and Daniel Boone Scout Trail to Calloway Peak entry under Grandfather Mountain.)

Across the bridge, the often-soggy trail ascends through evergreens, climbs a flight of stone steps, then levels across a rocky shelf amid blueberry bushes and galax. It turns a corner, passes a distinctive stack rock formation on the right, and reaches 200 feet of ascending boardwalk designed to keep hikers from trampling the low vegetation that now surrounds you.

From this boardwalk—just 0.3 mile round-trip from the parking area—the view is remarkably similar to that found on the summit (another 0.3 mile ahead up rocky but nicely graded switchbacks). At the top, cable-defined pathways keep people on the paths amid fragile Allegheny sand myrtle. Unfortunately, dogs that are allowed off-leash don't stay within the barriers. The Park Service requires that all dogs be leashed while on trails, and this is one place where those who care about the environment will obey the rules.

Either location is a nice spot to watch a sunset and get back to your car quickly. On a crystal-clear fall day, with electric foliage below, a summit dusting of snow and racing clouds . . . you get the picture.

Wilson Creek Overlook is also a good start for an out-and-back hike to Rough Ridge. This approach is often less populated than the trail from Rough Ridge Parking Area.



The boardwalk at Rough Ridge is supposed to keep bikers off surrounding rocks and plants. Ultimately, the view is just as good behind the railing.

Starting at Wilson Creek, take the side trail under the Parkway 0.1 mile to a junction with the Tanawha Trail and go right. Cross Little Wilson Creek (hence the name of the entire watershed above and below the mountain). The trail drops to within sight of the road, then slips below the prow of an outcrop at 0.2 mile. Then comes a largely gradual and meandering climb across an ecosystem that recommends this Tanawha Trail hike—rock-garden boulder fields strewn with spring wildflowers and towering trees. After climbing through mixed evergreens to a saddle, stone steps artfully surmount the crag-capped summit of Rough Ridge, just under 1.0 mile from the Wilson Creek Parking Area (about 2.0 miles round-trip). From the summit to the Rough Ridge Parking Area it's another 0.6 mile, for a 1.5-mile total hike.

Of course, an end-to-end hike would require leaving a car at both the Rough Ridge and Wilson Creek parking areas. If that's not possible, consider walking between the trailheads. The roadside walk is only 0.8 mile, and it's recommended by spectacular views that motorists often stop on the road to see or walk to from Rough Ridge Parking Area. That makes for a 2.4-mile hike.

Key points from Rough Ridge Parking Area:

0.3 Boardwalk views.

0.6 Views from the summit of Rough Ridge.

Option 4: Linn Cove Viaduct

General description: A wheelchair-accessible paved path leads under this stunning span of the Parkway's Linn Cove Viaduct, then continues as a rougher trail through beautiful Linn Cove. The turnaround point is a classic postcard view of the viaduct.

Parkway mile: 304.4

Total distance: 0.3-mile round-trip for barrier-free trail; 1.0-mile round-trip to classic views of the viaduct

Difficulty: Easy and barrier-free to Moderate

Elevation gain: Virtually none for the paved trail; 50 feet for the moderate hike

Maps: The Grandfather Mountain hiking map shows the trail best and is available free at the Grandfather Mountain entrance (south 0.7 mile to U.S. 221 exit, right 1.0 mile to entrance); a Tanawha Trail handout map is available at the Linn Cove Visitor Center; USGS Grandfather Mountain.

Finding the trailhead: The trail starts at the end of the Linn Cove Parking Area opposite the small visitor center.

The hike: The easiest walk to a view of the Linn Cove Viaduct begins at the Linn Cove Visitor Center, just north of Milepost 304. A paved and barrier-free trail winds 0.15 mile from the end of the parking lot opposite the station to a viewpoint underneath the serpentine Linn Cove Viaduct.

The next-easiest walk lies just beyond. Stay on the trail past the pavement as it briefly climbs to the level of the bridge and zigzags through towering rhododendron, hemlocks, and birches. It undulates over impressive stone stairways among the jumble of huge boulders that tumble down from Grandfather Mountain's Black Rock Cliffs. This is the terrain that prompted the choice of span you see arcing around you. As you hike you'll hear the occasional whoosh and thump of a passing car. The trail crosses a bridge over Linn Cove Branch and ascends out of the stream drainage to a ridgeline above the road. At the 0.5-mile mark take a right on a side trail to the picture-perfect, oft-photographed view back at the bridge. Retrace your steps for a 1.0-mile round-trip hike.

The trail continues 0.8 mile north to the Wilson Creek Overlook, the start of a recommended hike to Rough Ridge. Continuing from the viaduct view could lengthen that hike to Rough Ridge by 1.3 miles, one-way. But this next section of Tanawha Trail is steep and very near the road. Lacking a strong desire for a longer hike, you'd do just as well to start at Wilson Creek.

Key points:

- 0.3** End of paved path.
- 0.5** View of viaduct.

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 hostelrys 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 burghs 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.

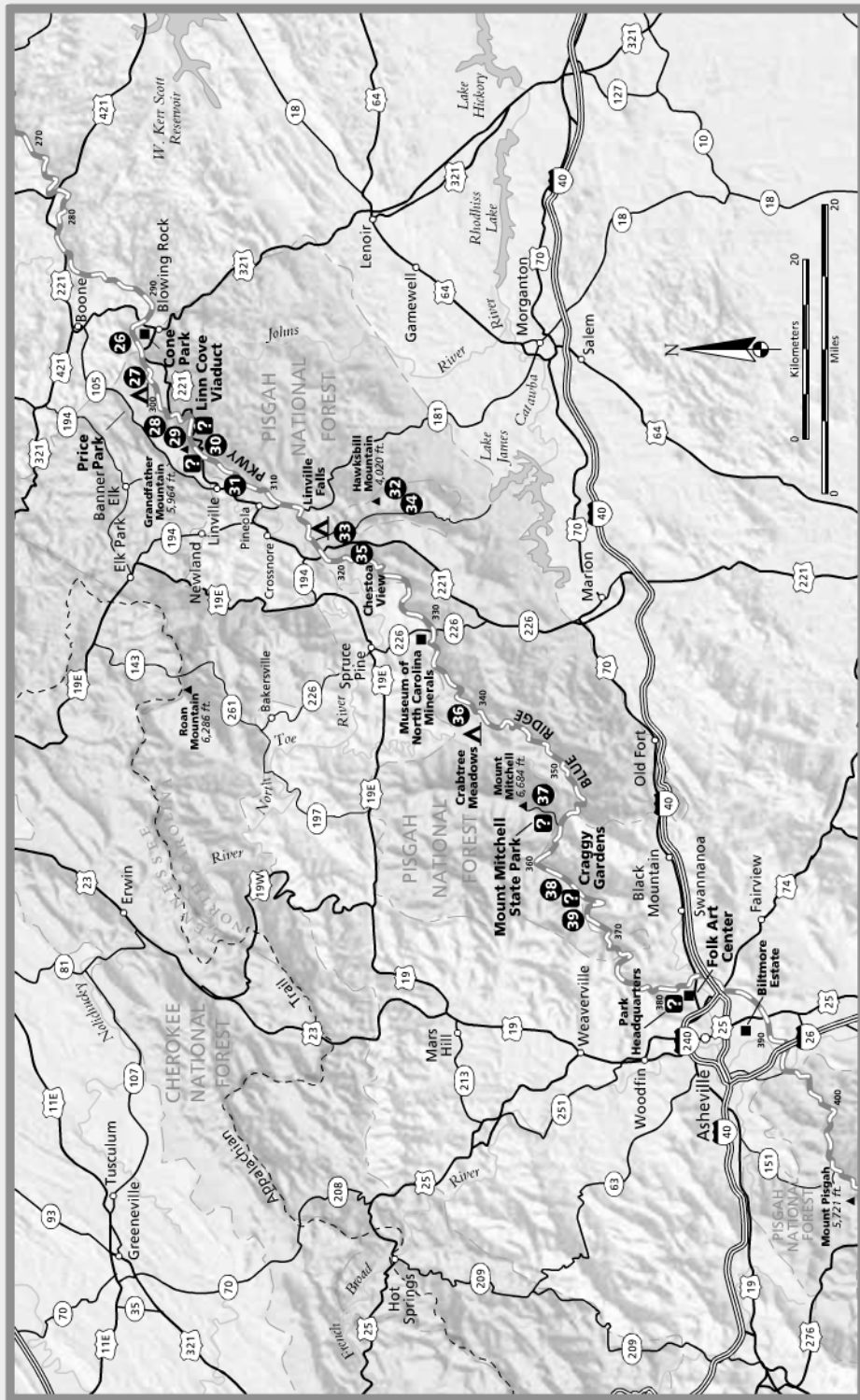
Environmental awareness is easy to cultivate on this stretch of the Parkway. The Museum of North Carolina Minerals (Milepost 330.9) is newly renovated and one of the best such exhibits anywhere. Just off the Parkway, Grandfather Mountain’s Nature Museum and environmental wildlife habitats are first rate.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