

Franklin, NC Area Hiking Trails



This area is rich in a variety of hiking trails. This listing can only cover a few. The [Appalachian Trail](#) (C just a few miles West of Franklin, and can be accessed at many places. The [Bartram Trail](#) also passes East-West, and offers many highlights. There is a wide variety of trails offering hikes of different leng Fishhawk, and Nantahala Mountains.

For more information, contact:

Forest Service, Wayah District (828-524-6441)

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Short Hiking Trails

Rufus Morgan Trail - (1 mile loop) - From Franklin, drive four miles West on US 64 and turn right at sign. Take first left onto Wayah Road (state road 1310), go about 6.5 miles. Turn left onto gravel FS 388 (Wayah Bald, Winter months), go about 2 miles to sign and parking area for Rufus Morgan Trail. Trail entrance is in parking area. This trail is blue-blazed. About half-way, a side trail to right leads to the base of a nice waterfall. Spring wildflowers, and mature hardwood forest make for a nice hike.

Shot Pouch Trail - (1.5 mi. total) Follow directions for Rufus Morgan Trail out of Franklin. Stay on state road 1310 past FS388, up to Wayah Gap. Turn right at sign for Wayah Bald onto gravel road FS 69. Go 0.9 miles to parking area and sign for Shot Pouch trail. This trail crosses the Appalachian Trail, goes across a grassed wildlife clearing, and continues as a logging road past small waterfall to end at a valley and Cowee and Fishhawk mountains. Return via same trail.

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Wayah Bald Lookout Tower (0.3 mi.) Follow above directions to Wayah Gap, turn right on gravel road FS 69. Go - about 4.5 mi. to parking area near end of road just around 180 degree turn. Walk back to the tower. There are latrines up to stone tower (path is suitable for handicapped). This national historic landmark offers panoramic views of mountain ranges and two valleys. From the tower, one can see the main ridge of the Smoky Mountains, Balsams and the Cowees to the East, and the Tusquittee and Slickrock ranges to the West.

Wasilik Poplar Trail - (1.4 mi round trip). This trail starts at Rock Gap on the road to Standing Indian Campground and Appalachian Trail. About 2 miles up this road is sign for campground - turn right (FS 67) to Rock Gap. The Wasilik trail crosses the Appalachian Trail (which crosses next to the parking area) and goes about 1.4 miles to the second largest poplar tree known in the US. The return trip can be strenuous for those who do not climb, but this enormous tree is worth the trip.

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Laurel Falls Trail - (1 mi. rt) Follow directions for Wasilik Poplar Trail, but continue on FS 67 past Rock Gap, taking left fork at rock gap. Turn right at sign for Campground, continuing past Backcountry Parking Area on gravel road FS 67. About 5 miles to sign and trailhead. The trail goes down to Mooney creek and crosses on footbridge. Follows creek, then up Laurel Creek to pretty waterfall. The junction of creeks passed on the way is the Nantahala River.



Mooney Falls Trail - (0.5 mi - steep!) This interesting long cascade/falls is reached by following Laurel Falls Trailhead to small parking area at sign. Trail descends alongside falls, getting very close to the water. In dry season, a good overall view of the falls can be seen from the road just down from the parking area. The trail has been changed some - correction will follow.

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Albert Mountain Firetower - (1 mi. rt) Follow directions for Laurel Falls trail, then keep going on FS 67 about 4 mi. further to intersection with road behind the mountain (there are good views of the firetower on the ride in). Trail is blue-blazed, and follows gated old road out of parking area. About 1 mi. reach white-blazed Appalachian Trail - turn RIGHT uphill. Climb up the ridge on the AT, to tower at top of mountain. Here are some good views of Little Tennessee valley, the Fishhawk and Cowee mountains, and the Coweeta valley just below. The firetower is another national historic landmark.

by FS people during times of high fire danger.

Whiteside Mountain - (2 mi.) Another mountain with spectacular views - but in the Highlands area. Drive toward Cashiers from Highlands on US 64. Near the county line, watch for the sign for the Whiteside parking area. The trail itself is a loop, and you can go either direction. The center section of the trail follows the top of Whiteside's steep South-facing cliffs, with great views of other rocky mountains in the area.

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Medium Length Hiking Trails

Standing Indian Mountain from Deep Gap - (5 mi. the Deep Gap par the Clay County line (small sign) then turn left onto FS 71, which is(5 mi. moderate, mile gravel- road ending at Deep Gap. At the gap, the Appalrt) crosses through the parking area. Go East on the AT (you pass a wilderness registration booth - if you don't, you're not on the right trail!). The trail does a long, gentle climb of the mountain for 2.5 miles, passing a trail shelter side-trail on the way. When you reach the blue-blazed Lower Ridge Trail, turn right - you are near the summit. Follow this trail to the summit with it's nice Southwesterly views. Standing Indian is the highest mountain South of the Smoky Mtns. in this area (5500 ft.).



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Whiterock Mountain via Bartram Trail - (4.5 mi. moderate) The hardest part of this hike may be finding the trailhead if you're not familiar with the area! Turn off US 64 between Franklin and Highlands at Gold Mine Road and follow it to Gold Mine Church. Just before the church parking lot, turn left on a dirt road. About 2.3 miles up this road, near the top of a long climb, an unmarked dirt road turns sharp right. Follow this road to Jones Gap and a parking area. Take the yellow-blazed Bartram Trail to the right out of the gap, across a couple of fields (views), then down a long gentle descent back of Jones Knob to Whiterock Gap. Follow the Bartram for another 0.7 mile, watching for the blue-blazed trail to the left. This trail takes you to the rocky face of Whiterock Mtn, with great views down into Tessentee valley and across to the Nantahala Mountains.

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Park Creek - Park Ridge Loops - (about 5 mi. each, moderate) Both Park Creek Trail and Park Ridge Trail start at Park Gap and end at the Backcountry parking area near Standing Indian Campground. Near the middle, there is a short 'connector' trail between the two. Thus you can make two different 5 mi. loops, or one long 10 mi. loop starting at either end. Park Gap is on FS 71 (described above for Standing Indian) about half-way from US 64 to Deep Gap (Both trails are marked here by signs). Or you can drive to the Standing Indian Backcountry parking area (see #5, Laurel Falls trail above) and start and end there. As their names imply, the Park Ridge trail stays high on the ridges and the Park Creek trail follows Park Creek, then the Nantahala River. These are interesting, little-used trails through pretty country.

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Wesser Bald Observation Tower - (4 mi. moderate) This hike uses the Appalachian Trail to reach a great viewpoint. There used to be a firetower on Wesser Bald, but it was burned many -years ago. Through joint efforts of the FS and Nantahala Hiking Club, the steel frame remaining was converted to an observation tower for the benefit of hikers. To reach the trailhead in Tellico Gap, follow route 28 North out of Franklin. Turn left across the new white concrete "lost bridge" onto Tellico Road. Follow this road as it climbs through scenic Tellico valley, turns to a gravel road, passes Tellico Trout farm, and finally climbs steeply up to the gap. There's a lot of parking space at the gap, and you want to follow the Appalachian Trail (AT) North - (away from the power-line and starting next to the fire-road). The trail is a graded but persistent climb all the way up to the summit. At the summit, there is a short (100 ft.) but not completely obvious side-trail to the right to the tower. From the tower, there are views in all directions - to the North, you see the

Smoky Mtns. across Fontana Lake (only bits of the lake are visible), the Balsam Mtns.(with visible parkway) to the NE with the Cowee Mtns. a little nearer. East is the Tellico Valley, and the Little Tennessee River valley. South there is the Nantahala ridge, hiding Wayah Bald, but Winespring Bald shows it's towers. To the West are the Valley River Mtns, the Snowbirds, and the Slickrock Range.

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Siler Bald - (4 MI. rt) Siler Bald has one of the nicer views in this area. Access is via the Appalachian Trail from the Wayah Crest picnic area, just across sr 1310 from the road to Wayah Bald. At the upper end of the picnic area you will find the white blazes of the AT - follow them for 1.6 miles to a clearing, from which you can see the top of the bald. When climbing through the clearing to the bald, walk in the grass, to prevent footpath gullies, which erode the slope. Both the observation tower on Wayah Bald, and the television/radio towers on Wine Spring Bald are nearby to the North. A portion of Nantahala Lake can be seen to the West, and the Franklin area valley to the East. South one can see into Georgia, past Standing Indian Mtn. and Albert Mtn. Return via the same route.

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Longer Hiking Trails (just a sample!)

Yellow Mountain Trail - (about 9 miles rt, fairly strenuous) This hike takes you up three mountains in just under 5 miles, each one offering some views, but Yellow Mtn. is the highest peak in the Cowee Range, and has fabulous views in every direction. From Highlands, follow US 64 toward Cashiers, and turn onto Buck Creek road at about 3 miles. Follow Buck Creek road 2.3 miles to Cole Gap (easy to miss) with limited parking on left side. From Franklin, follow US 64 toward Highlands, turn left onto Buck Creek road just where the highway starts up into the hills, and follow it to Cole Gap. The trail climbs Cole Mtn., crosses to Shortoff Mtn., then descends to a junction with a private trail: turn left here, and start the climb of Yellow Mtn. At the summit, there is a combined observation tower - radio building. For views of the Smoky Mtns. to the North, follow paths around to the NW side. Return via same route.



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Standing Indian Mountain Long Loops - (10 mi., strenuous) If you want a good workout, some great views, and a variety of countryside, this is the hike to make. Drive to the Backcountry - parking area near the Standing Indian Campground (see directions in short hike list). Follow the blue blazes to the bridge across the Nantahala River in the campground, then make your choice of which way you want to do the loop - to do your climbing early, turn left on the Lower Ridge Trail, and follow it all the way to the top of Standing Indian Mtn., about 4 miles. After enjoying the summit, come back to the Appalachian Trail and turn left. Follow the AT down to Deep Gap, then find and follow the blue-blazed Kimsey Creek Trail back to the parking area. If you prefer to do your climbing more gently, and pay for it with a rugged descent, take the other way around the loop.