

Hiking Your Own Hike

Make sure you consult maps and are properly equipped to explore any of the hikes in the area. Have fun, be safe.

Check link below for seasonal trail closures and forest service alerts

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/alerts-notice/?cid=fseprd529172>

The Appalachian Trail (AT) runs on the ridgeline directly north of our farm. There are two nearby access points; Wallace Gap is 1.5 miles east on West Old Murphy Rd and Winding Stair Gap is 2.5 miles north on Hwy 64.

Hikes from the Backcountry parking area.

From our entrance, turn right onto West Old Murphy Road for about a 1 mile. At Wallace Gap, turn right towards Standing Indian Campground. On the left you'll pass a parking area for Rock Gap, another AT access point. Continue past the entrance to Standing Indian Campground (stay to left) and the Backcountry parking area will be on the right. This is 3 miles from our farm, less than a 10-minute drive. This area is accessible year-round.

Long Branch Trail. Located across from the parking area this is a 2.5-mile hike to Glassmine Gap at mile 103 on the AT. It's a beautiful hike where you hear Long Branch Creek for most of the route and cross it once. Abundant wildflowers in Spring and interest year-round. It is considered a moderate hike with the last ¼ mile up to the AT the most difficult. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/nfsnc/null/recarea/?recid=48908&actid=50>

- From Glassmine Gap, at the end of the Long Branch Trail, you can take the AT south (right turn) to the **Albert Mountain Fire Tower** at mile marker 98. This is the closest access point when the Forest Service Road is closed past the Backcountry parking area.
- From Glassmine Gap you can also take the AT south (right turn) all the way around the basin to Kimsey Creek Trail at mile 85, then back to the Backcountry parking area for a 25-mile loop.
- Other options from Glassmine Gap are to take the AT north (left turn) to Rock Gap (mile 104), or Wallace Gap (mile 105), or Winding Stair Gap (mile 110).

Kimsey Creek Trail. Take the trail next to the information board through Standing Indian Campground. Cross the paved bridge over the Nantahala River, then immediate right following the trail until the Kimsey Creek trail sign directs you to the left. This beautiful 4.5 trail is heavily used for the first 2 miles, following Kimsey Creek out of the campground area and passing the primitive group camp sites. But after the second bridge crossing becomes remote and brimming with wildflowers. It ends at Deep Gap on the AT at Mile 84. Note – there is a FS road to Deep Gap from Hwy 64 that is open seasonally. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/nfsnc/recarea/?recid=48848>

From Deep Gap you can continue north on the AT another 2.5 miles to **Standing Indian Mountain**. Or south of the AT 3 miles to link to the Chunky Gal Trail.

Park Ridge/ Park Creek Trail loop. Take the trail next to the info board through Standing Indian Campground. Cross the paved bridge over the Nantahala River, then immediately right following the trail downstream along the river. You'll see the Park Ridge Trail turn, uphill to the left just before a small water crossing, this will be the end of your 5-mile loop – for now, keep going straight. This part of the trail is flat and easy for all ages but can be wet and muddy as it is heavily used when the campground is open. The trail takes a hard left after the bridge over Park Creek and rewards you with the most amazing hillsides of wildflowers (full of Trilliums in May). You will follow alongside Park Creek, going upstream (with one stream crossing) until you see the sign for the connector. This short, steep trail (with switchbacks) will take you to the Park Ridge Trail where you will turn left and follow through woodlands back to the Nantahala River. Turn right at the river, then left at the paved road, right after the bridge to make your way back to the Backcountry parking area. Alternatively, you can take the Park Creek trail all the way to Park Gap (avoiding the connector trail) and Park Ridge all the way back to create a longer 10-mile loop.

Hikes past the Backcountry Center

From mid-April through December Forest Service Road 67 is open past the Backcountry parking area. This gravel road is well maintained and should be accessible with most vehicles. There is one paved stream crossing.

Big Laurel Falls

Fun for the whole family. Drive 4.5 miles past the Backcountry parking area to the parking for Big Laurel Falls Trail. Only a half mile each way, this short hike leads to falls tumbling over big rocks and a swimmable pool at the base. The water is cold but refreshing on a hot summer day.

Mooney Falls

Drive 5.5 miles past the Backcountry parking area to a sign for Mooney Falls directly below the road. Park and take the very short trail to both the top and bottom of Mooney Falls.

Albert Mountain Fire Tower

Drive 9.5 miles past the Backcountry parking area (one signed left turn along the way) to the south approach trail to Albert Mountain. You'll see the Bear Pen Trail signed to the left side of the road; the AT is running on the right side of the road. Take the AT north (uphill to the left) for a 1/3-mile 450ft vertical rock scramble to the top.

OR

Drive past the Bear Pen Trail sign until this road ends at a large parking circle. From here take the blue blazed side trail to the AT, turn right and take the more leisurely north approach trail for an overall hike that is approximately ½ mile with 250ft elevation change.

Pickens Nose

Drive 8.7 miles past the Backcountry parking area (one signed right turn towards Coweta Hydrology) to the parking area for Pickens Nose. This moderate 1.5-mile round-trip hike leads to a beautiful rock outcrop that looks south into Georgia.

Chunky Gal Trail to Bolter Peak.

Take Hwy 64 west (left turn) 5.5 miles from West Old Murphy Road. Turn right onto a Forest Service Road before the Truck pull-off area. If you get to the sign for the overlook, you've gone too far. Park there at Hwy 64. Follow the gravel road to the left until you see the sign for the Chunky Gal Trail. At 3 miles each way with almost 1500ft. of elevation gain this is a strenuous hike. But you will be rewarded with two beautiful open vistas at the top. One of nothing but mountains, the other of Lake Chatuge. Don't expect to see many (if any) other hikers on this trail, but it is beautifully maintained by the Mountain High Hikers. And this is just a peek of the entire Fires Rim trail system.

Siler Bald

This short, steep side trail off the AT is one of the best 360 views in the area. There are two ways to approach this trail.

South approach. Drive east (right turn) on Hwy 64 two miles to Winding Stair Gap and hike north on the AT (across the road from the parking area). Follow the white blazes of the AT for 4 miles until the grassy open of Snowbird Gap. From there you'll see the steep trail to your left to the top of Siler Bald – yes, it is worth it.

North approach. Drive east (right turn) on Hwy 64 eight miles, turn left onto Patton Road (signed Wayah Bald), then another left onto Wayah Road (at Loafers Glory). Drive another 9 miles through countryside, then switchbacks. At the top you'll see a right turn to Wayah Bald, take the next left into a parking area for Wayah Crest. A short spur trail leads through a picnic area and links to the AT, turn right (south) onto the AT and follow the white blazes 1.5 miles to Snowbird Gap. From there you'll see the steep trail to your right to the top of Siler Bald – again, **yes, it is worth it.**

Walk with Views information on the following page.

Walks with Views

Mainspring Properties <https://www.mainspringconserves.org/>

Tessentee Bottomland Preserve: Experience the richness and diversity of the Upper Little Tennessee at the Tessentee Bottomland Preserve. This more than 70-acre tract of bottomland and river bluff land lies at the junction of Tessentee Creek and the Little Tennessee River. Visitors are welcome to hike the most extensive trail system found on any Mainspring property. View the Tessentee Bottomland trails map here <https://www.mainspringconserves.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Tessentee-Brochure-2016.pdf> GPS Address: 2249 Hickory Knoll Rd, Franklin, NC 28734

Queen Branch: A restoration site managed for scenic beauty, exceptional water quality and aquatic habitat, productive farmland, public recreation, wildlife habitat, and historic qualities. A short but stunning walk, perfect for all ages. From Franklin, take NC-28 towards Bryson City for about 10 miles. Queen Branch will be on the left marked with a property sign.

Gibson Bottoms: Slated to be an RV park and the first permit for point source pollution on the Little Tennessee River downstream of Franklin, Gibson Bottoms is a 64-acre property with forests, pasture and river frontage. A 1.7-mile hiking trail has been constructed, with the help of volunteers and local schools. GPS Address: Rain Ridge Road, Franklin, NC 28734 Follow the road past two houses and Gibson Bottoms will be on the right marked with a property sign.

Little Tennessee River Greenway <https://www.littletennessee.org/>

Providing a cornucopia of wildflowers and wildlife, the Greenway cuts a meandering path of nearly five miles through Franklin. Reflecting the extraordinarily rich diversity of the Macon County landscape, visitors experience wetlands, stroll through two railroad cuts left behind by the Tallulah Falls Railroad, wander alongside an old pasture, catch sight of the desert agave plant, and experience the upland woods. Trail end points at Arthur Drake Rd. at Riverview Dr. and Macon Co. Rec. Park