

Trails...

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Trail near the picnic area (Milepost 241) is a two-mile round trip with a bit of an incline near the trailhead, but otherwise is a moderate hike.

Flat Rock Ridge Trail, Cedar Ridge Trail, Grassy Gap Fire Road, Basin Creek Trail and Bluff Ridge Primitive Trail ascend and descend the mountain escarpment for varying lengths. Elevation changes can be up to 2,000 feet. Allow plenty of time for these hikes.

A map is available at the Doughton Park Picnic Area (Milepost 241) and at some of the overlooks along the Parkway. A visitor center with a store also is at Milepost 241, and a tent and RV campground is at Milepost 239.2.

STONE MOUNTAIN STATE PARK has as its centerpiece a 600-foot granite dome, a mid-19th century homestead and the 200-foot Stone Mountain Falls.

The most popular hike is the 4.5 mile Stone Mountain Loop Trail, with wide wooded paths, staircases and hearty elevation changes. It is rated strenuous, but shorter out-and-back walks are available from the Upper Parking Lot to the Stone Moun-

tain Summit and Stone Mountain Falls.

Stone Mountain's best-kept secret is the Wolf Rock/Cedar Rock loop, which doesn't go to Stone Mountain but affords breathtaking views of that granite dome and the surrounding mountains.

Its centerpiece is Wolf Rock, an expansive granite dome that itself rivals the beauty of Stone Mountain. Access this loop from the Lower Parking Lot and follow the Stone Mountain Loop Trail to Wolf Rock and then Cedar Rock trails.

Numerous other wooded trails meander through the 14,000-acre park, including a 5-mile trail open to horseback riders, and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, which ascends for about six miles from the park to Devil's Garden Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Several waterfalls are also available as hiking destinations, including a prominent fall dropping from the edge of the promontory that some visitors enjoy sliding down into the pool below. However, climbing on the rocks is not recommended, as they are often slippery and can be dangerous. The falls are best, and most safely, enjoyed visually.

THE NEW RIVER STATE PARK in Alleghany and neighboring Ashe counties has five sites along the New River with varied amenities that range from a simple

parking lot and launch site to RV camping. Three of those sites have walking trails.

The U.S. 221 Access is about 16 miles from the center of Sparta, just over the Ashe County line on U.S. 221 South. This site has four named trails ranging from 2/10ths of a mile to 1.4 miles, all rated easy or moderate. Hikers can access the river, walk by an old homestead or meander through fields and forests.

The Alleghany Access in Piney Creek is a canoe-in only site with two moderate one-mile trails and an easy half-mile trail. The one-mile trails offer views of rock bluffs and the scenic river. This is a primitive camping area with pit toilets and drinking water.

Wagoner Road Access is about 22 miles from Sparta at 1477 Wagoner Road Access, off N.C. Hwy. 88 in Jefferson. Guests can hike the moderate one-mile Fern Trail, or connect with the Running Cedar Trail for a total of two miles.

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK is located at 829 Highland Lane in Mouth of Wilson near Whitetop, Va. From Alleghany, take U.S. 21 to Independence, Va., and then take a left at the intersection with U.S. 58 West. The roadway then turns left again before heading right up a winding roadway to the park.

The Grayson Highlands are best known

for beautiful long-range views and wild ponies. Adjacent to the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, it lies within the Jefferson National Forest. The park was established in 1965 and contains a total of 4,502 acres. Ample camping and hiking opportunities may be found at the park, along with bathhouses and other amenities.

For the best shot at seeing the ponies, which have been somewhat tamed by their exposure to people, take the horse trail to Wilburn Ridge. Once the ponies' numbers grow too high, an auction is held offering them for sale to the public. While the ponies may be approached, it is not recommended to pet or feed them.

There is a parking fee at the park, and rangers give out maps of the trails, which are amply marked with signage. The park features numerous long-range, breathtaking vistas and walks of various lengths to suit both amateur and more experienced hikers.

Want to Know More?

All of these parks have websites with contact info, and more information is also available from the Alleghany Chamber of Commerce at 800-372-5473. For more information on state parks, visit ncparks.gov or dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks. You can learn more about local trails by visiting the ASTA website, spartatrails.org/trails/.

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