





Grandfather Mountain - Linville, North Carolina

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
11.5 mls		N/A			
Hiking Time: 8.0 hrs with 2.0 hrs for breaks					
Elev. Gain: 3,378 ft					
Parking: Park at the Boone Fork parking area along Blue Ridge Parkway. 36.11986, -81.78131					

By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

A hike along the crest of Grandfather Mountain should be on everyone's bucket list if they live in the Southeast. The crest trail is readily identified as one of the most rugged in the East and some may consider this the "Old Rag of North Carolina." While not quite as rugged and technical as the nicknames suggest, Grandfather Mountain offers miles of exciting rock scrambles, ladders, cables, huge cliffs, exposed rocky summits, 16 distinct ecosystems, and views in every direction of tallest mountains in the Appalachian chain.

As an international biosphere some flock to the mountain for a huge variety of plant life which is vibrant in the Fall and Spring seasons. The real attractions are the 4 named summits on the mountain massif – Linville, MacRae, Attic Window, and Calloway peaks. Topping out at 5,946 feet this mountain dominates the surrounding valleys by nearly 2,000 feet.

There are 3 ways to access the crest trail. Two of them require difficult ascents from the valleys below and are part of the state park system. The third option is part of the private tourist attraction that existed prior to the state's purchase of the land in 2008 to create a new state park. This attraction operates independently from the state park and costs \$20/adult person to enter. The advantage is you can drive all the way to the ridge between Linville Peak and MacRae Peak.

The disadvantage is the cost and you will be amidst the crowds flocking to the bridge. The best way to experience the mountain is to start at the bottom, and hike the full crest across all 4 peaks. This can be achieved starting with trails on the east or west side of the mountain. The full-day hike described here starts at the Boone Fork parking area (mile 299.9) on the Blue Ridge Parkway to access the Daniel Boone Scout Trail.

**The full length hike is for fit hikers only because of the mileage, elevation gain, and technical ascents/descents over rock faces. Allot 6-7 hours minimum. For less-experienced hikers any of the 3 peaks (Calloway, Attic Window, MacRae) make great turnaround points for a shorter hike.

Winter Parking – The Blue Ridge Parkway closes during the winter depending on weather and this section is usually closed. The Asutsi Trail (*white blaze*) is a short access trail (0.4-mi) that connects to the Boone Fork parking area from a parking lot across from Serenity Farm on U.S. 221.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Start the hike on a short connector trail from Boone Fork parking area to the Tanawha Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 0.1** – Meet the Tanawha Trail (*white blaze*) and go left walking on a large bridge over Boone Fork.
- ▶ **Mile 0.2** – Enter the Grandfather Mountain State Park boundary and fill out a free permit at the information board which contains trail info and maps.
- ▶ **Mile 0.4** – Intersection with the Nuwati Trail (*blue circle blaze*) which is your return route. Stay straight on Tanawha Trail (*white blaze*).
- ▶ **Mile 0.6** – Take a right on Daniel Boone Scout Trail (*white diamond blaze*) leaving the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Daniel Boone Scout Trail switchbacks up the mountain for the next 1.1-mi through multiple types of forest. Grandfather Mountain is a designated international biosphere and contains 16 distinct ecological zones.
- ▶ **Mile 1.7** – Intersection with the Cragway Trail (*orange circle blaze*) at Flat Rock View. Flat Rock is on the right and provides a good view north of the Boone Fork Bowl. The Daniel Boone Scout Trail continues its moderately steep ascent up the mountain for the next 1.1-mi.
- ▶ **Mile 2.8** – The trail climbs diagonally up a large rock face and enters a thick conifer forest near the crest of the mountain. There are multiple side trails to campsites and views, skip these if you wish to finish the full hike in a day.
- ▶ **Mile 3.1** – On the north/right side of the trail there is a plane crash through the trees. A single engine plane crashed here in the 1980s.
- ▶ **Mile 3.2** – A second section of the plane crash on the north/right side of the trail where you can see the wing.
- ▶ **Mile 3.3** – Begin the first series of ladders and cables you will encounter during this hike. There is a tall ladder up a rock face followed by a steel cable section, then another ladder and steel cable section.

- ▶ **Mile 3.4** – Reach the summit of Calloway Peak (5,946 feet), the tallest peak on the Grandfather Mountain massif. The southern view includes the ridge to Attic Window Peak plus the Blue Ridge Parkway & Linville Gorge, and the Black Mountains. Beyond the summit the Daniel Boone Scout Trail officially ends and becomes the Grandfather Trail (*blue diamond blaze*) for the next 2.4-mi. There is a quick descent on 2 small ladders and a couple downclimbs on rock faces.
- ▶ **Mile 3.5** – A short spur trail on north/right side to Watauga View. This view encompasses the Watauga Valley and Amphibolite Range which cannot be seen from Calloway Peak. Begin a steep 300 feet descent in 0.3-mi to Calloway Gap.
- ▶ **Mile 3.8** – The Grandfather Trail intersects with Profile Trail (*orange diamond blaze*) at Calloway Gap. The Profile Trail is an alternative ascent trail on the west side of the mountain which has great views of the “Grandfather Profile” rock face. Continue south on the Grandfather Trail (*blue diamond blaze*).
- ▶ **Mile 4.0** – The next stretch of trail is a series of steep ascents and descents along the rocky spine of Grandfather Mountain. Begin a steep ascent up sheer rock faces with no cable or ladder assistance. The blazes are painted on rocks. Beware the cliffs on the west side of the trail especially in wet/icy conditions.
- ▶ **Mile 4.2** – Pass by Alpine Meadow, a small meadow and campsite situated in a shallow gap between a knob and Attic Window Peak.
- ▶ **Mile 4.4** – A spur trail on east side of the trail to Indian House Cave.
- ▶ **Mile 4.5** – Reach the summit of Attic Window Peak (5,880 feet). The views from this peak are 360° and provide birds eye views of the rocky ridgeline leading towards Calloway Peak and the massive dome of MacRae Peak. There are many cliffs and rock outcrops on this large peak to take a break and soak in the views. Notice the people climbing up MacRae Peak on ladders. You will also have outstanding views of Linville Gorge and the Black Mountains to the southeast, plus great views of Roan Highlands due west. The large open summit of Grassy Ridge Bald is prominent.

Beyond Attic Window Peak there is a spur trail to the left to a picnic area while the Grandfather Trail goes right and seemingly disappears. You will be looking at a giant cleft in the mountain which gives Attic Window Peak its name. The trail drops precipitously down this cleft via class 2/3 scrambling. Then the trail takes a sharp left turn and descends ladders under boulders through fallen rocks and caves. This descent is 200 ft in 0.1-mi and requires both hands and sure footing. If it is icy do not attempt this descent without proper equipment.

- ▶ **Mile 4.7** – At MacRae Gap the Grandfather Trail goes left climbing MacRae Peak. Go right on the Underwood Trail to skirt around the peak on the west shoulder. If you are ahead of schedule go left to climb MacRae Peak. Summiting MacPeak twice is a far more enjoyable option than hiking the Underwood Trail but requires ascents and descents up exposed ladders on cliffs.
- ▶ **Mile 4.9** – Begin a tough descent on the Underwood Trail over roots and small boulders around the west side of MacRae Peak under the Raven Rock Cliffs.
- ▶ **Mile 5.2** – The Underwood Trail meets the Grandfather Trail again at Grandfather Gap (forgot to take picture here). Continue south on the Grandfather Trail heading towards the tourist area.
- ▶ **Mile 5.4** – Intersection with the Grandfather Trail Extension which leads to the Black Rock Trail and lower parking lot for hikers visiting the tourist attraction. Stay straight on the Grandfather Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 5.7** – Grandfather Trail ends at the upper parking lot of the tourist attraction. This area of the mountain is still independently operated as a private attraction and has the Top Shop below the Mile High Swinging Bridge. It costs \$20 per adult to visit this section of the park by car. You will find nice bathrooms in the Top Shop as well as snacks, refreshments, and ice cream. Beside the shop is the staircase to the Mile High Swinging Bridge. This bridge is an extremely crowded attraction with lines to walk across. The bridge is at an exact elevation of 5,280 feet, or 1 mile. However the bridge is only 80 feet above the gap between the parking lot and Linville Peak.
- ▶ **Mile 5.9** – Across the Mile High Swinging Bridge is the 4th named peak on Grandfather Mountain – Linville Peak (5,295 feet). This is the shortest peak on the mountain but provides fantastic views south and west from the cliffs. The best view is looking north at the bridge and the massive dome of MacRae Peak rising above the parking lot. Turn around and head across the parking lot back to the Grandfather Trail (*blue diamond blaze*).
- ▶ **Mile 6.6** – At the Underwood Trail (*yellow diamond blaze*) and Grandfather Trail intersection, head right on Grandfather Trail (*blue diamond blaze*) to ascend MacRae Peak. Immediately you will encounter large boulders, and a couple ladders through a rock overhang. Summiting this peak requires a steep ascent up rock faces using ladders, cables, and sometimes just your hands. If you are afraid of heights and exposure it is suggested to avoid this part.
- ▶ **Mile 6.8** – Begin a series of 4 ladders and cables up sheer cliffs. This section can be quite unnerving to anyone afraid of heights. At the top of the last ladder is a spectacular view from a cliff of the swinging bridge.

- ▶ **Mile 7.0** – Crossing an open rock face you will see the rounded summit of MacRae Peak jutting above where you stand. A tall ladder allows you to climb up close to the top. MacRae Peak (5,844 feet) is a small, rocky dome completely exposed to the elements. The best view is directly north, allowing an entirely new perspective of Attic Window Peak and its massive cliffs. You will also have outstanding views west and southeast, although the tourist area is blocked from view. You can see the Blue Ridge Parkway far below and almost spot out the area where you parked.
- ▶ **Mile 7.1** – A steep descent on the north side of MacRae Peak via a ladder and long rock face with cable guideline. This is the most difficult cable section of the hike. At MacRae Gap stay straight on the Grandfather Trail and begin the steep ascent up Attic Window Peak. The ascent is easier than the descent.
- ▶ **Mile 7.9** – Reach Calloway Gap. The next 0.4-mile is the last steep ascent of the hike.
- ▶ **Mile 8.3** – Cross the summit of Calloway Peak where the Grandfather Trail officially ends and turns into the Daniel Boone Scout Trail (*white diamond blaze*).
- ▶ **Mile 9.7** – At Flat Rock View go straight on Cragway Trail – an alternative scenic return to the parking area. The Cragway Trail (*orange circle blaze*) begins with a moderately steep 0.4-mi descent through a rhododendron tunnel.
- ▶ **Mile 10.1** – Reach Top Crag, a series of large rock outcroppings with fantastic views of the Boone Fork Bowl and a northwest view of Calloway Peak. The Cragway Trail continues descending north passing by a series of rock outcroppings.
- ▶ **Mile 10.5** – Cragway Trail ends at Nuwati Trail. Turn right on the Nuwati Trail (*blue circle blaze*) which is a straight, flat roadbed high above the clearly audible Boone Fork.
- ▶ **Mile 11.2** – Nuwati Trail ends at the Tanawha Trail (*white blaze*). Turn left to head back towards the parking area.
- ▶ **Mile 11.5** – Hike ends at the Boone Fork parking area.