



Little Wilson Creek Wilderness - Grayson Highlands, Virginia

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
13.1 mls	★	★	★	★	★
Hiking Time: 7 hours with 1 hours and 40 minutes break time Elev. Gain: 2,247 ft Parking: Park at the amphitheater/restrooms beside Hickory Ridge campground. 36.64005, -81.48721					

By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

The Little Wilson Creek Wilderness on the eastern fringes of the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area is rarely visited by hikers. Most visitors to the area may brush by the wilderness on the Appalachian Trail as it passes through for 2 miles but even with easy access from Grayson Highlands State Park, the most traffic it gets is likely from equestrians.

With 5,458 acres and over 20 miles of mixed-use trails you can easily get lost in here and not see a person for days. This hike starts at the campground area of Grayson Highlands exploring the hidden gem Wilson Creek with multiple cascades and waterfalls. You will then connect to the Appalachian Trail climbing over the beautiful fields of Stone Mountain to Scales described in the Wilburn Ridge/Pine Mountain hike. From Scales the hike goes to the summit of Stone Mountain, one of the best unknown summits in the Mount Rogers NRA. After this windswept summit the rest of the hike follows mostly forested horse trails through the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness where you will find solitude, trees, and plentiful camping opportunities.

Grayson Highlands State Park requires a \$7 entrance fee at the gate (increases to \$10 for April-October weekends). From the gate drive 3.3-mi to a paved road on the right towards the campgrounds. Turn right and drive 1.3-mi to the Hickory Ridge campground entrance. There are two parking areas on the right for the amphitheater/store and restrooms directly before the campground loop road. The Wilson Creek Trail is across the road from the restrooms. There is a large information board with the state park map at the trailhead.

Horse Trails – In general, the horse trails in this region do not have official blazes and only have wooden trail signs at intersections. They are generally easy to follow but sometimes will have intersections with multiple trails not always indicated on maps. The horse trails in the wilderness are either extremely rocky or in swamp-like condition with lots of mud.

Maps – In addition to our topo hike map, there are two National Geographic Trails Illustrated Maps for this region – Mount Rogers National Recreation Area & Jefferson National Forest #786 and Mount Rogers High Country & Grayson Highlands State Park #318. Map #318 is a more accurate version for the state park and wilderness and is much more helpful for the Big Wilson Creek Trail.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Start the Wilson Creek Trail (*red blaze*) across the street from the restrooms going right downhill.
- ▶ **Mile 0.3** – Cross Upchurch Road (*orange blaze*) and keep heading downhill.
- ▶ **Mile 0.5** – Junction with Wilson Creek at spur to Upchurch Road on the right beside storm shelter. Turn left to continue the Wilson Creek Trail. The trail stays right beside Wilson Creek for the next 0.9-mi.
- ▶ **Mile 0.8** – The trail touches a series of cascades through a narrow gorge with at 25-ft slide waterfall at the top.
- ▶ **Mile 1.2** – Come across a 10-ft waterfall falling below the trail with a 40-ft waterfall upstream. There is a pool above the large waterfall with a great view looking down into the gorge.
- ▶ **Mile 1.4** – The trail turns left away from the creek.
- ▶ **Mile 1.5** – Junction with Seed Orchard Road (*red blaze*), turn right.
- ▶ **Mile 1.7** – Rock hop over Quebec Branch.
- ▶ **Mile 2.2** – The trail passes by a fence with an unmarked spur trail to the left to Wise Shelter. Continue right and rock hop over Big Wilson Creek. Seed Orchard Road ends at 3-way intersection with Scales Trail (*no blaze*) and Wilson Creek Trail (*no blaze*). Go right on Scales Trail (*no blaze*).
- ▶ **Mile 2.3** – Rock hop over Wilson Creek then take right on Appalachian Trail (*white blaze*) while Scales Trail continues straight. The AT enters the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness.
- ▶ **Mile 3.7** – Intersection with Bearpen Trail (*no blaze*). AT leaves Little Wilson Creek Wilderness and begins ascent up south peak of Stone Mountain.
- ▶ **Mile 4.2** – Excellent campsite and shaded tree for a break looking at Wilburn Ridge across the valley.
- ▶ **Mile 4.9** – Reach Scales compound, go right to find the First Peak Trail. First Peak Trail (*no blaze*) is a wide myriad of eroded trails that wind its way up Stone Mountain.
- ▶ **Mile 5.8** – Summit of Stone Mountain (4,940 feet) and intersection with closed trail. From here there are fantastic 270° panoramas of the Mount Rogers high country and the Allegheny Mountains at the Virginia border.

Advice – For day hikers there are few worthwhile sights for the remainder of this hike through the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness. If you are backpacking there are lots of good campsites with complete solitude. All of the trails are mixed-use for equestrians. Much of the trails are either extremely rocky or muddy due to horse traffic and low maintenance. Be ready to tiptoe on rocks and sink into mud for most of the hike. A good option for a day hiker is to turn around for an 11.6-mile out-and-back hike or use the Scales and Seed Orchard trails for a shorter loop.

- ▶ **Mile 5.9** – Junction with Third Peak Trail (*no blaze*) on left in protected clearing with campsites. First Peak Trail continues straight into Little Wilson Creek Wilderness. The horse trail is sometimes very narrow through thick forest. This trail receives little traffic but is very rocky and muddy.
- ▶ **Mile 6.2** – Trail skirts south shoulder of Third Peak (4,920 feet) with possible campsites on the left on usage paths. As you descend the mountain there is a view straight ahead of Second Peak.
- ▶ **Mile 6.6** – Clearing atop Second Peak (4,857 feet) with some views of Third Peak and Haw Orchard Mountain. According to Falcon Guide's Hiking Virginia there is rock outcrop with good views on the north side hidden from the trail but no usage paths were found. Between here and First Peak is the muddiest sections of the trail.
- ▶ **Mile 7.4** – Intersection with Jackie Street Trail (*no blaze*) on left. First Peak Trail turns right into a wooded clearing with campsites. First Peak Trail is on left of clearing while the closed section of the Bearpen Trail (*no blaze*) is on the right side. **Do not use** this section of the Bearpen Trail to shorten the hike, it is closed to horses and supposed to be a swamp until it meets the Big Wilson Creek Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 7.6** – The trail skirts First Peak (4,600 feet) and continues the descent.
- ▶ **Mile 8.1** – First Peak Trail ends at intersection with Hightree Rock Trail (*no blaze*) and Kabel Trail (*no blaze*) in a large wooded clearing with campsites. The scenic Hightree Rock is 2-mi one-way on Hightree Rock Trail from this intersection. Go right on Kabel Trail. The Kabel Trail is generally flat through sparse forest as it follows the south shoulders of the First-Third Peaks.
- ▶ **Mile 8.4** – Cross 3 small tributaries of East Little Wilson Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 9.3** – Cross 2 small tributaries of West Little Wilson Creek and begin descent towards West Little Wilson Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 10.0** – Rock crossing over West Little Wilson Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 10.3** – Kabel Trail ends at junction with Big Wilson Creek Trail (*no blaze*), go left and continue the long descent towards Wilson Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 10.7** – **Very important!** – As the trail comes close to an obvious stream there's a split. The trail seems to continue straight but actually turns right crossing the stream then continues downhill on the other side parallel to the stream. This is unsigned but the trail across the stream is obvious and wide.
- ▶ **Mile 11.1** – Trail reaches Wilson Creek and turns to the left.
- ▶ **Mile 11.2** – Rock crossing or likely ankle-deep ford through Wilson Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 11.4** – **Very important!** – Big Wilson Creek Trail continues straight across Wilburn Branch but an unmarked road goes right before the crossing. Go right, this forest road connects shortly to Upchurch Road.
- ▶ **Mile 11.6** – Junction with Upchurch Road (*orange blaze*), Upchurch Road continues left/south across Wilburn Branch towards the picnic area of the state park. Stay straight and do not cross Wilburn Branch and climb uphill away from the creek.
- ▶ **Mile 11.7** – Junction with unmarked trail going left with sign indicating no horses. This spur connects to Wilburn Branch Trail (*green blaze*) and is an alternate return to the parking area. Go right on Upchurch Road staying high above Wilson Creek which should be on your right.
- ▶ **Mile 12.6** – Upchurch Road goes left before a storm shelter climbing away from Wilson Creek. Continue to storm shelter and go left on Wilson Creek Trail (*red blaze*), your original entry point, climbing steeply towards the parking area. Upchurch Road is an alternate longer but more gradual route.
- ▶ **Mile 13.1** – Hike ends at road across from parking area.