

Elk Knob – Elk Knob State Park, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
3.8 mls	★	N/A	★	★	N/A
Hiking Time: 2 hours with 30 minutes of break Elev. Gain: 943 ft Parking: Park at main parking area beside the amphitheater. 36.33171, -81.68928					

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By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

Elk Knob State Park is one of the newest state parks in North Carolina and also one of the smallest. The trail system may be minimal, but the Summit Trail is one of the finest trails in the state park system. The immaculately built trail winds its way for 1.9 miles through entrancing northern hardwood forests to the summit of Elk Knob, the second tallest mountain in the Amphibolite Range.

Most of the land in the Amphibolite Range is privately owned and there isn't much public land available for hiking. Fortunately Elk Knob is available for the public to explore and the views encompass some of the highest peaks in NC, TN, and VA. At just under 4 miles round trip this is a great half-day hike for the family and those wishing to discover the extreme northwest corner of North Carolina.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – At the main parking area beside the amphitheater, find the Summit Trail (*blue diamond blaze*) and begin climbing gently through the forest.
- ▶ **Mile 0.6** – Trail crosses a service road that climbs directly to the summit. Throughout the hike you will cross the service road multiple times, but resist the temptation to use this old road as a shortcut. It is overgrown, exposed to the sun, and steep. The recently built trail is well-graded and winds through beautiful forest.
- ▶ **Mile 1.0** – At a tight curve pass by a bench with a view through the trees of The Peak.
- ▶ **Mile 1.1** – Second junction with the service road.
- ▶ **Mile 1.3** – Third junction with the service road.
- ▶ **Mile 1.5** – Fourth junction with the service road.
- ▶ **Mile 1.7** – As you approach the summit the gnarled forest gives way to swaths of flame azaleas that typically bloom in early June.
- ▶ **Mile 1.8** – Reach a T-junction with the service road. A sign will indicate North View and South View. Turn right for the North View first, which is the highest point of the mountain. Although the window between the trees is small, you have close to a 180° view of the northern Amphibolite Range. The Peak is the most prominent mountain in view with its craggy, imposing conical summit. In the distance beyond The Peak lies the Iron Mountains, the tallest peaks in Virginia including Whitetop Mountain and Mount Rogers immediately left of The Peak's summit. To the right the gentle, bare Old Field Bald is in the foreground with Bluff Mountain, Three Top Mountain, and Mt. Jefferson rising behind. Turn around and head down the trail to the South View.
- ▶ **Mile 1.9** – The South View is much more expansive than the North View as trees give way to dense collection of flame azaleas. Snake Mountain, the tallest peak in the Amphibolite Range, is the closest peak on the right with its elongated ridge. To the left of Snake Mountain is Rich Mountain with its extensive balds visible above Rich Mountain Gap. In the distance to the left of Rich Mountain are the Roan Highlands. Straight ahead the Watauga Valley lies in front of the massive Grandfather Mountain looming far behind. The sawtooth peaks between Grandfather Mountain and the Roan Highlands are Hanging Rock and the ski areas of Sugar Mountain and Beech Mountain.
- ▶ **Mile 2.0** - Retrace your steps and follow the Summit Trail back down to the parking lot.
- ▶ **Mile 3.8** – Hike ends at the parking lot.