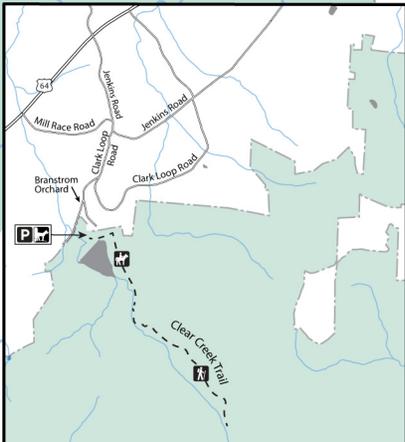
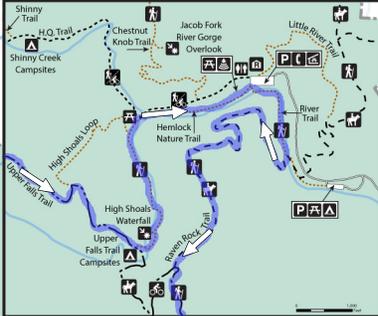
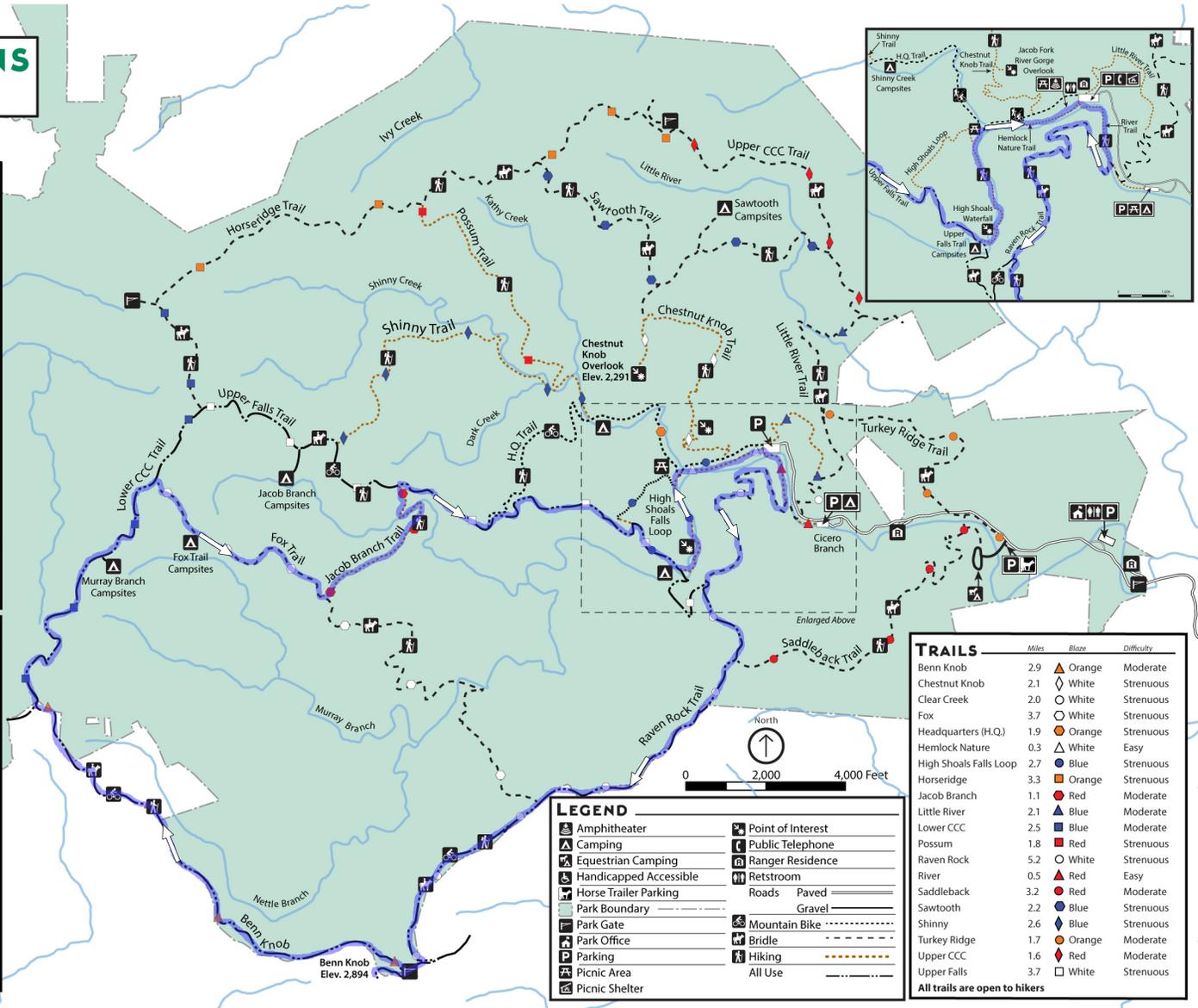
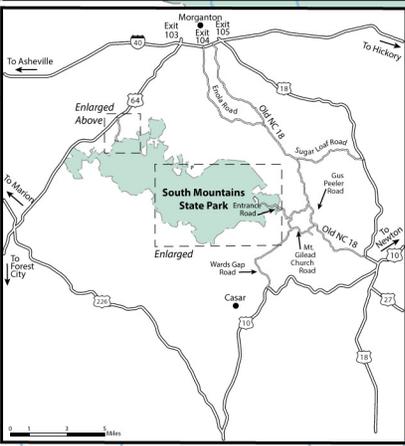


# SOUTH MOUNTAINS STATE PARK



**CLEAR CREEK ACCESS**  
 GPS: 35.643277, 81.753001  
 5999 Branstrom Orchard St, Morganton, NC 28655



**LEGEND**

	Amphitheater		Point of Interest
	Camping		Public Telephone
	Equestrian Camping		Ranger Residence
	Handicapped Accessible		Restroom
	Horse Trailer Parking		Roads Paved
	Park Boundary		Roads Gravel
	Park Gate		Mountain Bike
	Park Office		Bridle
	Parking		Hiking
	Picnic Area		All Use
	Picnic Shelter		

**TRAILS**

	Miles	Blaze	Difficulty
Benn Knob	2.9	Orange Triangle	Moderate
Chestnut Knob	2.1	White Diamond	Strenuous
Clear Creek	2.0	White Circle	Strenuous
Fox	3.7	White Circle	Strenuous
Headquarters (H.Q.)	1.9	Orange Circle	Strenuous
Hemlock Nature	0.3	White Triangle	Easy
High Shoals Falls Loop	2.7	Blue Circle	Strenuous
Horseshoe	3.3	Orange Square	Strenuous
Jacob Branch	1.1	Red Circle	Moderate
Little River	2.1	Blue Triangle	Moderate
Lower CCC	2.5	Blue Square	Moderate
Possum	1.8	Red Square	Strenuous
Raven Rock	5.2	White Circle	Strenuous
River	0.5	Red Triangle	Easy
Saddleback	3.2	Red Square	Moderate
Sawtooth	2.2	Blue Circle	Strenuous
Shinny	2.6	Blue Diamond	Strenuous
Turkey Ridge	1.7	Orange Circle	Moderate
Upper CCC	1.6	Orange Diamond	Moderate
Upper Falls	3.7	White Square	Strenuous

All trails are open to hikers

A larger map is available at the park office.

## Jacob Fork Rim – South Mountains State Park, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
16.1 mls	4	3	3	4	5
<b>Hiking Time:</b> 7 hours with 1 hour of breaks or 2 days for backpacking <b>Elev. Gain:</b> 3,261 ft <b>Parking:</b> Park at Jacob Fork parking access. 35.60178, -81.62956					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)



By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

Think of this hike as framework for exploring the interior of South Mountains State Park, often a desolate, deserted region of the largest state park in North Carolina. The main attraction here is High Shoals Falls, and at some point during the trip you'll pass it once, maybe twice if you improvise. However, other than the hike to Chestnut Knob, the rest of the trails see few hikers. In addition to publishing a great park map, the trails are well-blazed and typically follow old forest roads.

It is almost impossible to get lost here, or get stuck in a dangerous situation. This is an excellent opportunity to take a beginner's backpacking trip or test out some new gear before that big national park trip. The campsites are outstanding, located beside water courses, and never seem to be full. The hike described is a long day hike or an overnight trip that would include the Murray Branch Campsites, Fox Trail Campsites, or Jacob Branch Campsites. This big loop includes a lonely, punishing trip to Benn Knob, one of the tallest peaks in the South Mountains and on the list of many NC peak baggers. Take the Fox Trail at mile 3.8 to skip this section and still end up at one of the great campsites far away from civilization.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Find the trail heads at the back of the Jacob Fork parking access. Cross the bridge on the left over the Jacob Fork River to begin the River Trail (*red triangle blaze*). The River Trail is flat and easy as it parallels the beautiful Jacob Fork River.
- ▶ **Mile 0.5** – River Trail ends at a T-junction with the Raven Rock Trail (*white circle blaze*). Turn right following the Raven Rock Trail up the ridge away from the river valley. This trail is a wide gravel forest road that climbs steeply in places with no help from switchbacks.
- ▶ **Mile 1.5** – Open view west from the Raven Rock Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 1.9** – T-junction with the Upper Falls Trail (*white rectangle blaze*) on the right. (A right turn here will lead down to the Upper Falls Trail Campsites and High Shoals Falls.)
- ▶ **Mile 2.1** – Open view northwest from the Raven Rock Trail. Shortly beyond this viewpoint is another smaller view east from the trail.
- ▶ **Mile 2.2** – T-junction with the Saddleback Trail (*red circle blaze*) on the left.
- ▶ **Mile 2.7** – Beyond a horse gate the trail begins to follow the paved Pine Ridge Drive which marks the boundary between state park land and private land or game lands. Car traffic is almost non-existent here, so you can walk in the road.
- ▶ **Mile 2.9** – A water tower marks the summit of Dogwood Stamp Mountain. To the west you should be able to pick out the communications tower on top of Benn Knob.
- ▶ **Mile 3.8** – T-junction with the Fox Trail (*white hexagon blaze*) on the right. (A right turn here will shorten the hike significantly and would be a sensible option if you are backpacking and behind schedule. Consider this option for camping at the Fox Trail Campsites or Jacob Branch Campsites.)
- ▶ **Mile 4.6** – Paved section of the trail ends.
- ▶ **Mile 5.0** – Raven Rock Trail ends at a T-junction with the Benn Knob Trail (*orange triangle blaze*). Make a hard right to follow the Benn Knob Trail. Pine Ridge Drive continues down to the left.
- ▶ **Mile 5.2** – Y-junction with a forest road to the summit of Benn Knob, turn left to quickly reach the summit.
- ▶ **Mile 5.4** – Forest road ends at the communications complex at the summit of Benn Knob (2,880 feet). A powerline clearing offers a northern view of the South Mountains. Turn around and head back to the Benn Knob Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 5.7** – Turn left on the Benn Knob Trail. Begin the long lonely walk into the interior depths of the state park.
- ▶ **Mile 8.1** – T-junction with a game lands trail on the right.
- ▶ **Mile 8.5** – Benn Knob Trail ends at a T-junction with the Lower CCC Trail (*blue square blaze*). Turn right on the Lower CCC Trail. (The forest road on the left heads into the game lands.)
- ▶ **Mile 8.6** – T-junction with a game lands trail on the left.
- ▶ **Mile 9.5** – Optional out-and-back at a T-junction with a spur trail on the right to the Murray Branch Campsites.
- ▶ **Mile 9.7** – Spur trail ends at the Murray Branch Campsites. This backcountry site has plentiful space for tents with tree cover and easy access to Murray Branch.
- ▶ **Mile 10.1** – Continue following the Lower CCC Trail northeast.
- ▶ **Mile 10.7** – T-junction with the Fox Trail (*white hexagon blaze*) on the right. Turn right on the Fox Trail to head back towards the parking area. An alternative route would be to continue on the Lower CCC Trail and follow the Upper Falls Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 11.0** – Fox Trail Campsites on the right side of the main trail offer a spacious grassy field with picnic tables and fire rings. If choosing between Murray Branch and Fox campsites, the Fox Campsites feel more luxurious while still offering relative solitude many miles away from the parking area.
- ▶ **Mile 11.2** – Graveyard for a Confederate soldier on the left side of the trail.
- ▶ **Mile 11.8** – T-junction with the Jacob Branch Trail (*red hexagon blaze*), turn left. This hikers' only trail plunges downhill steeply to cross Jacob Branch.

- ▶ **Mile 12.6** – Jacob Branch Trail crosses the tiny Jacob Branch twice on two wooden bridges then briefly parallels the stream.
- ▶ **Mile 12.9** – Jacob Branch Trail ends at a T-junction with the Upper Falls Trail (*white square blaze*). Turn right heading back towards the parking area. (Turn left to head towards the Jacob Branch Campsites.)
- ▶ **Mile 13.4** – T-junction with the Headquarters Trail (*orange hexagon blaze*) on the left.
- ▶ **Mile 13.7** – View north from the Upper Falls Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 13.9** – Expansive view south from the Upper Falls Trail. From here you can trace some of your hike along the Raven Rock Trail and Benn Knob Trail which follows the ridgelines across the valley. The communications tower on Benn Knob is in the distant southwest corner of your view. Nettle Branch and Jacob Branch meet below around the middle ridge to form the Jacob Fork River.
- ▶ **Mile 14.4** – T-junction with the upper portion of the High Shoals Falls Loop Trail (*blue circle blaze*) on the left. Continue east following the Upper Falls Trail and High Shoals Falls Loop Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 14.6** – Turn left at a Y-junction following the High Shoals Falls Loop Trail. (The Upper Falls Trail continues right to the Upper Falls Campsites.)
- ▶ **Mile 14.8** – Bridge over Jacob Fork River with a view across the gorge north towards the Chestnut Knob Trail. The trail follows a platform beside the upper drop of High Shoals Falls before steeply descending stairs towards the main waterfall.
- ▶ **Mile 15.0** – Large viewing platform at the base of High Shoals Falls. Jacob Fork River plunges 50 feet over a beautiful, mossy cliff into a large pool before tumbling hundreds of feet over enormous boulders through the gorge. This is the most popular attraction in the park.
- ▶ **Mile 15.1** – The trail descends steeply down the gorge then crosses the river again on an elaborate wooden bridge. Upriver almost beside the bridge the river gushes through, around, and over gigantic boulders.
- ▶ **Mile 15.4** – Y-junction with the split of the High Shoals Falls Loop Trail, continue straight into the large field.
- ▶ **Mile 15.5** – T-junction with the Headquarters Trail on the left. Shortly after this junction the trail crosses a road bridge over Shiny Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 15.6** – Veer right at a Y-junction with the Hemlock Nature Trail (*white triangle blaze*) which closely follows the Jacob Fork River for the final leg of the hike. This beautiful stretch of the Jacob Fork River is accessible at many spots and the trail also includes many informational displays about the park.
- ▶ **Mile 16.1** – Hike ends at the Jacob Fork parking area.