



Three Top Mountain – Three Top Mountain Game Land, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
4.7 mls	4	N/A	6	6	N/A
Hiking Time: 3 hours and 30 minutes with 1 hour and 15 minutes of breaks Elev. Gain: 1,492 ft Parking: Small parking area at the top of the road. 36.42188, -81.59793					

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By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

Three Top Mountain is a remote, craggy peak in the Amphibolite Mountains that offers solitude, premier rock scrambling, and outstanding views of the region. Although there are 11 peaks on the 6-mile long crest, the mountain is aptly named after the three prominent rock summits on the central spine. This hike follows a steep, rocky forest road from the Three Top Mountain Game Land parking area to Huckleberry Rock, the 2nd tallest peak on Three Top Mountain at 5,035 feet. Huckleberry Rock has fantastic 360° views of the Amphibolite Mountains and the Iron

Mountains to the north. You can decide to head back down for a 3.4-mile hike, or try the half-mile bushwhack along the mountain crest to Big Rock. There are a few faint paths along the ridge, but you'll still have to crawl through shrub/thorn tunnels and scramble up rocks to reach the destination. Big Rock is the tallest peak on Three Top Mountain at 5,044 feet, and features precipitous drop-offs and fantastic views. The views are similar to Huckleberry Rock, but you can also gaze upon the intimidating knife-edge row of rocks leading southwest to Peak 4880'. After taking a break on one of Big Rock's grassy perches, turn around and make your way back to the forest road, or continue exploring the crags of Three Top if you are up for the challenge.

Parking and Accessibility - The condition of the game land entrance road has deteriorated to the point that it may be difficult for some low-clearance 2WD vehicles. If you are not experienced driving on gravel and dirt forest roads then you may consider skipping this hike. Additionally, the parking area can fit 6-7 vehicles with turnaround space.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Finding the parking area can be confusing. The Three Top Mountain Game Land access road is located at the upper end of Poplar Trail between private homes. At the top of the road you'll see the game land sign at the small parking area. Begin the hike by following the gated forest road.
- ▶ **Mile 0.2** – Pass by a small waterfall upstream from the road.
- ▶ **Mile 0.5** – At a Y-junction turn right following the forest road uphill. The old, rocky roadbed now plows uphill along a very steep grade. You'll see occasional flagging tape along the main forest road to the summit. There are multiple old, overgrown forest roads branching off in every direction as you climb, pay attention to the GPS track and the flagging tape to stay on the right path.
- ▶ **Mile 0.8** – Right turn on the main forest road.
- ▶ **Mile 1.4** – Left turn on the main forest road, you'll probably see flagging tape here. In 150 feet the forest road will turn right, an overgrown forest road branches left.
- ▶ **Mile 1.6** – Pass by the highpoint of the ridge leading to Big Rock on the right, you'll return to this spot later.
- ▶ **Mile 1.7** – The forest road ends at Huckleberry Rock, the second tallest peak on Three Top Mountain at 5,035 feet. This summit is a long series of rock outcrops with outstanding views in every direction. The smaller knobs of Three Top Mountain unfold to the northeast, with Phoenix Mountain and Mt. Jefferson rising above the towns of West Jefferson and Jefferson. The Iron Mountains are located due north across the North Fork New River Valley. The smaller Pond Mountain and Stone Mountain are located on the left at the tri-state border. The tallest peaks in Virginia, Whitetop Mountain and Mt. Rogers, are the immensely broad peaks on the right. Bluff Mountain is the broad, craggy peak due south. The imposing summit of Big Rock is immediately southwest, framed by the tallest peaks in the Amphibolite Mountains behind. Elk Knob is directly behind Big Rock with Snake Mountain on the right, and Grandfather Mountain on the distant left.
- ▶ **Mile 2.0** – Before the trail begins descending, make a left into the open woods following the ridgeline south. This is an **OPTIONAL** bushwhack through relatively open forest to the summit of Big Rock. During some stretches there is a faint path, but most of this half-mile trek is a bushwhack. As you get close to the summit you'll encounter dense undergrowth, thorns, and some open rock faces to negotiate. None of this is difficult or dangerous, but a GPS device or phone app is recommended. (If you wish to bypass this section follow the trail down to the parking lot for a 3.4-mile hike.)
- ▶ **Mile 2.5** – The scramble tops out at Big Rock, the tallest peak on Three Top Mountain at 5,044 feet. Below the main summit are multiple grassy perches with precipitous drop-offs on both sides. The tallest peaks in the Amphibolite Mountains spread out before you from southeast to southwest. Bluff Mountain is the broad peak due south. The cliffs drop sharply southwest to a knife-edge row of rocks leading down and up to Peak 4880'. Further to the southwest are Elk Knob and Snake Mountain, with Grandfather Mountain to the left of Elk Knob in the distance. The long ridge to the south of west culminates in The Peak above the Long Hope Creek Gorge. You also have an expansive view north of the Iron Mountains around the Virginia border. Huckleberry Rock is the prominent, flat peak in the foreground. The Iron Mountains are visible further north beyond the North Fork New River Valley. Turn around here and head back to the forest road. Adventurous, experienced rock scramblers could explore the ridge to Peak 4880'.
- ▶ **Mile 3.1** – Return to the forest road and turn left heading downhill to the parking area.
- ▶ **Mile 4.7** – Hike ends at the parking area.