



Wolf Knob

Big Laurel

Blazed Gap

Cowee 1

Cowee Bald

Cowee 2

LOOKOUT TOWER

NANTAHALA GAME LANDS

Cowee Bald Lookout Tower – Nantahala National Forest, NC

| Length | Difficulty | Streams | Views | Solitude | Camping |
|---|------------|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| 1.1 mls | ★ | N/A | ★ | ★6 | N/A |
| Hiking Time: 30 minutes with 10 minutes of breaks Elev. Gain: 145 ft Parking: Park at the wide turnaround area on FR 70. 35.33258, -83.34038 | | | | | |

Click Here For Detailed Location



By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

The Cowee Bald lookout tower was originally built in 1933, making it one of the oldest remaining towers in the state. Considering its age, the tower is in surprisingly good condition. Cowee Bald is the third tallest peak (4,944 feet) in the Cowee Mountains, only surpassed by Shortoff Mountain and Yellow Mountain, the home of another lookout tower. From the stairs of the 30-foot tower you will have limited views north of the Plott Balsam Mountains and south of the Little

Tennessee River Valley. The top cab is normally locked, but if you happen to join a hiking group with keys you will have outstanding views of western North Carolina. Cowee Bald is the highest point in the remote, ring-shaped Cowee-Alarka complex, where lonely forest roads meander through the backwoods between major mountain highways. This tower is not easy to reach, especially for smaller cars. It involves a long drive on FR 70 from Franklin and the final few miles on FR 70 are overgrown and eroded. The drive south on FR 86 from Whittier is worse. There are many confusing forest road intersections, erosion and potholes, and two creek fords; one of which has a steep slope for a small vehicle. This hike is not recommended unless you are trying to finish the Carolina Lookout Tower Challenge. Additionally, one or more gates will be locked during the winter meaning a hike to the summit could be many miles.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Park at the wide turnaround area before you reach the gate on FR 70. Follow the gravel FR 70 southeast towards the summit of Cowee Bald.
- ▶ **Mile 0.4** – At the summit of Cowee Bald you'll pass by a large complex of communication towers on the left.
- ▶ **Mile 0.55** – The gravel road continues past the communication towers ending in a field in front of the Cowee Bald lookout tower. The tower was built in 1933 and remains in good condition, but the top cab is normally locked. The trees are somewhat cleared around the tower, so you can get a decent view from the stairs. Franklin lies to the southwest in the Little Tennessee River Valley, surrounded by the Cowee Mountains to the east and the Nantahala Mountains to the west. The Plott Balsam Mountains dominate the skyline to the immediate northeast. The tallest peak in the middle of the range is Waterrock Knob, with Browning Knob and Mt. Lyn Lowry the two tall peaks immediately to the right. Further north the Great Smoky Mountains rise beyond Maggie Valley. Through the tower supports you can see the Great Balsam Mountains to the northeast.
- ▶ **Mile 1.1** – Hike ends at the turnaround on FR 70.