



Panther Top Lookout Tower – Nantahala National Forest, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
1.5 mls		N/A			N/A
Hiking Time: 45 minutes with 15 minutes of breaks Elev. Gain: 410 ft Resources: Park at the T-junction of gravel FR 85 and FR 85A. 35.06321, -84.10796					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)

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The Panther Top lookout tower is the westernmost tower in North Carolina, located in the southwest corner of the state near Murphy and Hiwassee Lake. Although the mountain appears little more than a hill on a topographic map, the 30-foot tower affords spectacular 270° views of the region. A short, easy walk on gravel FR 85 takes you to the summit of Panther Top (2,293 feet) where you can see the Unicoi, Snowbird, Valley River, Tusquitee, and Georgia Blue Ridge Mountain ranges from the stairs. If you are in the region this easy and accessible hike is a perfect capstone after a day of adventure.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Park at the T-junction of gravel FR 85 and FR 85A. From your probable drive approach FR 85 turns left and is gated, with a sign indicating Panther Top Tower is ahead. There is little room to park here other than the grassy shoulders, but since this hike is isolated you most likely will not have an issue parking.
- ▶ **Mile 0.7** – FR 85 ends at the grassy aerial marker on the summit of Panther Top (also shown as Panther Knob on some maps). Ironically, even though the lookout tower is the westernmost in the state, it is at the lowest elevation of all publicly accessible lookout towers in the North Carolina mountains (2,293 feet). The 30-foot steel lookout tower was originally built in 1940 and remains in very good condition. Although the top cab is locked, you will have tremendous views from the stairs with the benefit of the wide aerial marker clearing.

Due north is Hiwassee Lake with the Unicoi Mountains straddling the North Carolina/Tennessee border. To the east is the town of Murphy. Beyond Murphy is the Valley River Valley, surrounded by the Snowbird Mountains to the north and the Valley River Mountains to the south. The Valley River Mountains and Tusquitee Mountains to the east form the expansive Fires Creek Gorge. The broad Hiwassee Valley to the southeast is surrounded by the Georgia Blue Ridge Mountains. You may be able to spot Standing Indian and Rabun Bald in the distant east on clearer days.

- ▶ **Mile 1.5** – Hike ends at the gated FR 85 intersection.

