Looming high over Marion and the North Fork Catawba River Valley, Bald Knob and Dobson Knob form a whale-like ridge that stands separate from the mountains of Linville Gorge. Even though these peaks lie within Pisgah National Forest, this area is largely unknown to the casual hiker. The only maintained trail running through this area is North Carolina’s Mountains-to-Sea Trail as leaves Linville Gorge heading west, crossing Dobson Knob, and Bald Knob before descending to North Fork Catawba River. You can access the Mountains-to-Sea Trail via Good Rd., which has a small pull out parking area beside the road’s terminus.

From the parking area follow a forest road south along the North Fork Catawba River where it eventually meets the Mountains-to-Sea Trail beside an impressive pedestrian bridge across the river. From here the Mountains-to-Sea Trail ascends Bald Knob over many switchbacks as you pass by numerous outcrops with outstanding views to the west of the valley and the Black Mountains.

At the summit of Bald Knob you’ll be treated to unique views of Linville Gorge and Lake James. Dobson Knob and Shortoff Mountain look particularly impressive. Beyond Bald Knob the trail climbs steeply up Dobson Knob then travels gently through an enchanting forest. From Dobson Knob you’ll be treated to equally impressive views west of the North Fork Catawba River Valley.

- **Mile 0.0** – Hike begins following the forest road to the left of the terminus of Good Road. This forest road heads south beside North Fork Catawba River.
- **Mile 0.8** – Four-way intersection with the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST). Go left crossing a large pedestrian bridge over North Fork Catawba River. On the other side of the bridge the MST crosses railroad tracks and follows a single path up the hillside.
- **Mile 1.1** – The trail turns left following a forest road north. You will be able to see Good Road and the parking area through the trees, although you will be hundreds of feet above the river.
- **Mile 1.9** – Turn right leaving the forest road following a narrow path east. The MST gently climbs a ridge through open forest. For the next mile the ridge gradually narrows and becomes rockier.
- **Mile 2.8** – Crossing over a tiny stream with a wonderful little drop covered in moss. The drop resembles a man-made stream in someone’s garden.
- **Mile 3.3** – The trail makes an abrupt U-turn beneath a series of cliffs with small campsites.
- **Mile 3.5** – First view of the day atop the cliffs you just hiked under. From here you can see the rugged west face of Bald Knob plus views northwest into the North Fork Catawba River Valley.
- **Mile 3.6** – A campsite and enormous rock outcrop jut out from the trail. This exposed series of knife-edge rocks have the best views of the day looking west. From here the Black Mountains rise sharply above the North Fork Catawba River Valley. To the southwest Mackey Mountain is the massive, double peak. Farther to the southwest the Swannanoa Mountains and Hickory Nut Mountains can be seen. Beyond this view the trail switchbacks up Bald Knob for 0.8-mi. These switchbacks are tight and steep, but have continuous views to the west throughout this stretch. There are multiple rock outcrops to pause for a break.
- **Mile 4.4** – Intersection with unmarked forest road. The MST goes left briefly following the forest road before turning left again. The trail follows an extremely rocky and narrow ridge north with views through the trees.
- **Mile 4.7** – Pass a series of rock outcrops on the left with spectacular views west of the mountains above the North Fork Catawba River Valley.
- **Mile 4.8** – Intersection with a spur trail on the right to the summit of Bald Knob. Go right on this unmaintained path to the summit. Reach the summit of Bald Knob in 300 feet. The summit offers spectacular views north and east above the stunted shrubs. Directly north the large double-peaked Dobson Knob rises sharply above the landscape. To the northeast you will be treated to a rare up-close view of Linville Gorge. Shortoff Mountain looks very impressive from this angle. Lake James lies to the southeast with the South Mountains rising above. Turn around heading back towards the junction with the MST.
- **Mile 4.9** – Turn right on the MST heading north towards Dobson Knob. You will drop into a gap and have a steep climb to the ridge.
- **Mile 5.5** – Reach a minor summit of Dobson Knob. There are no views here but the path along the ridge is through a wonderful forest.
- **Mile 5.7** – Continue along the trail for another 0.3 miles to the main summit of Dobson Knob with views from a rock outcrop to the west.
- **Mile 6.0** – At the main summit of Dobson Knob turn around and follow the MST back to the parking area.
- **Mile 12.0** – Hike ends at Good Road parking area.

**Parking Issues** - The end of Good Rd may be off-limits for parking and trail access if recent reports are correct about the No Trespassing signs. An alternative could be to drive further down American Thread Rd, turn right on Ce Goode Rd, and parking near the railroad. Follow the railroad tracks south until you reach the MST crossing at Mile 0.8 in the directions.