



Catawba Falls - Pisgah National Forest, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
3.0 mls	★	★	N/A	★	N/A
Lower Catawba Falls and Catawba Falls Hiking Time: 2 hours minutes with 30 minutes of breaks Elev. Gain: 495 ft					
3.9 mls	★	★	N/A	★	N/A
Upper Catawba Falls Hiking Time: 2 hours and 30 minutes with 45 minutes of breaks Elev. Gain: 863 ft					
Parking: Park at the Catawba Falls trailhead on Catawba River Road NC1274. 35.61355, -82.23067					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)



By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

Thanks to an acquisition by the Foothills Conservancy and subsequent purchase by the US Forest Service, access to the beautiful Catawba Falls is open to the public and saved from private development. Located in Pisgah National Forest only a few miles from Old Fort, access to this short trail is easy and thus quite popular year-round. The round trip to Catawba Falls is almost flat as it follows a road grade that was previously used for a power plant. Along the way you'll pass by an old dam at the top of Lower Catawba Falls, a little gem that comes as a surprise if you find the side trail. The trail ends at the base of Catawba Falls, a tall, multi-drop waterfall plunging more than 150 feet.

It is highly recommended to try to visit this waterfall after recent rain. During drought conditions the water is barely visible on the lower drop as it is funneled through seams in the cliff. A "trail" continues climbing up the right side of the waterfall to multiple overlooks of the upper drops. The trail vacillates between being opened and closed. The forest service has removed the rope at the most daunting section, proceed at your own risk. The scramble path leads to Upper Catawba Falls, a beautiful freefall into a large pool that is seen by few hikers. For most hikers the short 3-mile round trip to Catawba Falls is a perfect outing.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – From the Catawba Falls parking lot take the Catawba Falls Trail (*no blaze*) west into the forest as it slowly approaches the Catawba River on the right.
- ▶ **Mile 0.2** –The original trail forded Catawba River at this point, turn left before the river to use the new footbridge.
- ▶ **Mile 0.3** - Cross footbridge over Catawba River beside an old building.
- ▶ **Mile 0.9** – Trail rock hops over Clover Patch Branch. There is a sizeable cascade upstream. Directly below the main trail you can scramble to the base of a nice cascade between rock walls.
- ▶ **Mile 1.1** – As you approach an old dam on the river look for a steep scramble path leading left down to the river. The path leads to the base of Lower Catawba Falls, a diagonal slide from the dam culminating in a powerful 15 foot drop beneath an overhanging cliff. Although this waterfall is directly beside the trail, most people never see the short scramble path.
- ▶ **Mile 1.2** – The trail follows the cliff above the waterfall with a good view of the initial slide. You can walk right up to the old dam which was built in 1923 as part of a hydroelectric facility. The old dam does not affect the flow of the waterfall.
- ▶ **Mile 1.3** – The road grade ends and the trail splits in multiple directions around a peninsula between Catawba River and Chestnut Branch. Look for an open section to rock hop across Chestnut Branch heading left.
- ▶ **Mile 1.4** – Reach the base of Catawba Falls. This multi-tiered waterfall drops more than 150 feet from the gorge. The upper drops are barely visible from the base while the lowest drop is a beautifully varied ~70 foot cascade. Due to the flow split over many rocks and seams, there is an enormous difference in the look and feel of this waterfall during low and high water flow. We highly recommend seeing this waterfall after a rain event.

****WARNING UPDATE****

This is the turn around point for the 3.0 mile hike.

The Upper Catawba Falls trail has been marked CLOSED. This section is very dangerous, and there have been serious injuries here

- ▶ **Mile 1.5** – The trail continues climbing up the right side of Catawba Falls. There are many warning signs against heading up this trail. It is a very steep, eroded path with sheer drops over open rock faces. There used to be a rope anchored at the top of a vertical rock face but that has been removed. At multiple spots along this climb there are side paths to view the upper drops of Catawba Falls up close. When you reach the top of Catawba Falls the hazardous portion ends and the trail climbs moderately along the bank of the river.
- ▶ **Mile 1.9** – The main trail peters out at a large pool at the base of Upper Catawba Falls. The river freefalls ~50 feet onto large moss-covered boulders before cascading into a dark, shimmering pool. Enclosed by an amphitheater of cliffs and trees, this is an incredible scene and a very inviting swimming hole.
- ▶ **Mile 2.2** – Use extreme caution downclimbing the trail beside Catawba Falls.
- ▶ **Mile 3.9** – Hike ends back at the parking lot.