

Grandfather Mountain/Profile Trail - Linville, North Carolina

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
11.3 mls	6	1	6	2	4
Hiking Time:	8 hours and 40 minutes with 2 hours and 50 minutes of breaks				
Elev. Gain:	4,035 ft				
Parking:	The Profile Trail, Banner Elk, NC 28604. 36.1198, -81.8350				

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)



By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

Grandfather Mountain is one of the most beautiful, rugged landscapes in North Carolina but hiking it for free is an all-day affair filled with grand views, steep climbs, and some physical hardships. If you'd rather take the easier route, you can drive up to the tourist attraction for \$20/person and hike the Grandfather Trail out-and-back for a hearty mountain experience of only 5 miles (Grandfather.com). Otherwise the bold hikers can hike the mountain via the Profile Trail below or the previously described Daniel Boone Scout Trail.

Although shorter, the Profile Trail is arguably the toughest ascent due to the steep inclines and long stretches of boulder-strewn paths. You can cut 1.2 miles by avoiding the out-and-back to Calloway Peak which has the least impressive views, but you'll be missing out on the high point of this famed mountain. Unlike the Daniel Boone Scout Trail the biodiversity isn't as impressive on this side of the mountain as you continuously climb due to the western exposure. However, the trail adds a few different flavors like an initial stroll along the peaceful Watauga River, massive boulders trailside, and a bird's eye view of the Grandfather Profile. Just make sure to hike as far as Attic Window Peak and MacRae Peak, which offer some of the best views and exciting rock scrambles in the region.

July 2017 Parking Update: The Profile Trail, Banner Elk, NC 28604. 36.1198, -81.8350

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Profile Trail (*orange diamond blaze*) begins at the end of the parking lot. The trail dips and immediately crosses the Watauga River and follows the river on the right side.
- ▶ **Mile 0.3** – Trail leaves the Watauga River.
- ▶ **Mile 0.4** – At a U-turn an unmarked side trail continues straight.
- ▶ **Mile 0.9** – Rock crossing over Shanty Spring Branch. On the other side the trail passes through large boulders.
- ▶ **Mile 1.6** – Arrive at the Foscoe View, a window through the trees with a view north of Snake Mountain and Elk Knob. The trail begins a steep climb from here towards the Profile Campsite.
- ▶ **Mile 1.9** – Profile Campsite offers a few spaces for tents below the towering Grandfather Profile. From here it is difficult to discern the unique features of the Profile through the trees.
- ▶ **Mile 2.1** – Reach the Profile View, a bird's eye perspective of the Grandfather Profile for which the mountain got its name. From this planar view the massive cliff looks like a craggy, old face. After the Profile View the tread becomes rockier as the trail begins climbing through spruce forest.
- ▶ **Mile 2.5** – Historic Shanty Spring is one of the only reliable water sources near the crest of Grandfather Mountain. Fill up here if you did not pack in much water. The next 0.3-mi is a rough ascent over a jumble of large boulders.
- ▶ **Mile 2.8** – Profile Trail ends at a T-junction with the Grandfather Trail (*blue diamond blaze*) at Calloway Gap. Turn left to hike up to Calloway Peak, a steep section with many roots and rocks.
- ▶ **Mile 2.9** – Ledge Cliffside Campsite on the right side of the trail with a grass floor and a small view. This is your second closest option for camping near Shanty Spring.
- ▶ **Mile 3.1** – At a T-junction turn left to see the Watauga View. From this cliff you have a panoramic view of the Roan Highlands and also the Amphibolite Range rising high above Boone.
- ▶ **Mile 3.2** – Back on the Grandfather Trail turn left to make the final climb to Calloway Peak. You will have to climb over one rock ledge and use two small ladders along a narrow ridge with cliff views to the left.
- ▶ **Mile 3.3** – Grandfather Trail ends at Calloway Peak, the tallest summit on the Grandfather Mountain massif at 5,946 feet. The view south encompasses the rugged crest of Grandfather Mountain leading to Attic Window Peak, the Rough Ridge and Linn Cove Viaduct sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the peaks of Linville Gorge and the Black Mountains in the distance.

Follow the Daniel Boone Scout Trail (*white diamond blaze*) east for an optional out-and-back to the site of an airplane crash just below the summit. The way down is assisted by a cable section and three ladders.

- ▶ **Mile 3.4** – Shortly after the base of the third ladder look left through the trees for the remnants of a small airplane crash. The crash occurred in 1978. The parts of the airplane are spread out over a few hundred feet.

Turn around and head up to Calloway Peak to take the Grandfather Trail down to Calloway Gap.

- ▶ **Mile 4.0** – After passing Calloway Gap the Calloway Gap Campsite is located on the left side of the trail and offers platform tent sites. This is your closest option for camping near Shanty Spring.
- ▶ **Mile 4.1** – Multiple user paths on the right lead to views on the west side of the trail of Calloway Peak, Beech Mountain, and your future path.

- ▶ **Mile 4.2** – First section of exposed cliffs. The blazes are painted directly on the rocks, generally stick to the left side. Looking back is an incredible view of the conifer-covered Calloway Peak. Beyond the rock scramble there are occasional panorama views on the right of your future hike.
- ▶ **Mile 4.4** – Alpine Meadow Campsite on the left side of the trail. The trail ascends to the second section of exposed cliffs. The scramble is easier here as the trail passes through krummholz with panorama views.
- ▶ **Mile 4.6** – At base of a ladder is a T-junction with a side trail to Indian House Cave.
- ▶ **Mile 4.7** – Spur trail ends at Indian House Cave, an old shelter for Native Americans with a flat dirt floor and massive walls.
- ▶ **Mile 4.8** – Attic Window Peak at 5,880 feet is one of the highlights of the Grandfather Trail. Looking north you'll have great views of Calloway Peak and the Boone region. The Roan Highlands and Sugar Mountain dominate the western horizon. Due south you'll see your next destination, MacRae Peak where hikers look vulnerable on the exposed rock summit.
- ▶ **Mile 4.9** – Below Attic Window Peak the trail passes by the Attic Window Campsite before seemingly disappearing at a giant cleft between cliffs. This is the Attic Window and the hike continues down the chasm via a steep rock scramble. The trail curves left out of sight after the initial scramble.
- ▶ **Mile 5.0** – The trail dives under small caves created by huge fallen boulders in a section known as The Chute.
- ▶ **Mile 5.1** – Y-junction with Underwood Trail (*yellow diamond blaze*) at MacRae Gap. Veer left to continue following the Grandfather Trail to the top of MacRae Peak. As an alternative you can bypass the climb over MacRae Peak using the Underwood Trail. This hike climbs MacRae Peak twice. Initially the climb is steep and assisted by long cable sections and multiple ladders.
- ▶ **Mile 5.2** – A lone ladder assists you on the final climb to the rock summit of MacRae Peak. At 5,844 feet, MacRae Peak is the 3rd highest peak on Grandfather Mountain but it may be the most spectacular. The small, exposed rock summit has unparalleled 360° views of the Roan Highlands west, the Black Mountains and Linville Gorge south, and an astounding view of the sheer cliffs of Attic Window Peak north.

Continue following the Grandfather Trail south below the summit along a narrow ridge with high exposure. You'll have a great view of both MacRae Peak and Attic Window Peak and after quickly ducking through forest the trail seems to drop off a cliff. Follow the blazes down the rocks with your first big view of Linville Peak and the mile-high swinging bridge.

- ▶ **Mile 5.5** – Reach the top of famous ladders section on the south side of MacRae Peak. Carefully downclimb multiple ladders anchored on almost vertical cliffs. At the base of the 4th ladder pass through a rock chute and continue descending down the mountain.
- ▶ **Mile 5.7** – Y-junction with Underwood Trail (*yellow diamond blaze*) at Grandfather Gap. Continue following the Grandfather Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 5.9** – T-junction with Grandfather Trail Extension (*red diamond blaze*) on the left.
- ▶ **Mile 6.2** – Grandfather Trail ends at the parking area for gift shop and Mile High Swinging Bridge. Cross the parking lot to climb the stairs to the swinging bridge and the cliffs of Linville Peak. Although the bridge is at an elevation of 1 mile, it only stands 80 feet above ground.
- ▶ **Mile 6.4** – Linville Peak is the 4th named peak on Grandfather Mountain, and at 5,295 feet is by far the shortest. However you get expansive views south and west and a unique view of MacRae Peak towering above the swinging bridge. Turn around and begin your trek back along the Grandfather Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 7.2** – At Y-junction with Underwood Trail (*yellow diamond blaze*) turn right following the Grandfather Trail up to MacRae Peak. You can bypass the climb over MacRae Peak if you wish by following the Underwood Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 8.5** – Turn left onto the Profile Trail (*orange diamond blaze*) at Calloway Gap.
- ▶ **Mile 11.3** – Hike ends at Profile Trail parking area.