

High Shoals Falls and Shiny Creek – South Mountains State Park, North Carolina

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
8.0 mls					
Hiking Time: 4 hours with 45 minutes of breakss Elev. Gain: 1,745 ft Parking: Park at Jacob Fork parking area. 35.60246, -81.62908					

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By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

South Mountains State Park is the largest state park in North Carolina and has an extensive trail network. Despite the abundance of trails, this park isn't heavily visited outside of its #1 attraction High Shoals Falls. The primary development and trail network begins at the east entrance of the park and covers the Jacob Fork River watershed. You won't get many views on this hike, but you will get a lot of water.

From the parking area the trail gently follows Jacob Fork River towards the rugged gorge below High Shoals Falls. This narrow gorge is chock full of enormous boulders that requires an extensive staircase to navigate. High Shoals Falls is an impressive 50-foot drop over a wide cliff that draws a lot of visitors. Most people turn around and head back to the parking lot or take the loop trail on the other side of the river. Instead continue beyond the waterfall following the Upper Falls Trail along a ridge above Jacob Fork River before descending to Shiny Creek. A remote trail follows this beautiful creek back to Jacob Fork River, along the way passing a small gorge with multiple cascades. Once you near the parking lot make sure to follow the nature trail which closely follows the river and provides many displays about the environment and ecology of the South Mountains.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Hike begins at the Jacob Fork parking area. Follow the High Shoals Falls Loop Trail (*blue circle blaze*) past the picnic area and restrooms.
- ▶ **Mile 0.3** – Pass by junctions with the Hemlock Nature Trail (*white triangle blaze*) and Chestnut Knob Trail (*white diamond blaze*) and continue west on the High Shoals Falls Loop Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 0.5** – After crossing a road bridge over Shiny Creek continue straight through a T-junction with the Headquarters Trail (*orange hexagon blaze*) on the right. Immediately after this junction the High Shoals Falls Loop splits. Stay left following the lower trail beside the river, which transforms from a gravel path to a rocky, single-file dirt trail. There is a viewing platform on the left side of the trail to view Jacob Fork River.
- ▶ **Mile 0.7** – Pass by Hugo Rock on the right side of the trail. The large rock face was created by a landslide during Hurricane Hugo in 1989.
- ▶ **Mile 0.8** – The trail crosses an elaborate wood bridge at the base of Jacob Fork River Gorge. Directly beside the bridge are enormous boulders with the river seemingly gushing through every nook and cranny. This is an impressive site and you may think this is the waterfall, but look high above and you'll see High Shoals Falls in the distance. The gorge is littered with boulders all the way to the waterfall, a result of erosion and floods for thousands of years.
- ▶ **Mile 1.0** – Large viewing platform at the base of High Shoals Falls. Jacob Fork River plunges 50 feet over a beautiful, mossy cliff into a large pool before tumbling hundreds of feet over countless boulders through the gorge. This is the most popular attraction in the park and it is arguably one of the finest waterfalls in North Carolina. Continue climbing an impressive staircase between a tall cliff and the waterfall. During Spring this path is lined with blooming azaleas.
- ▶ **Mile 1.2** – The boardwalk continues beside the upper drop of High Shoals Falls, a river-wide shelf drop. From this spot you can look across the valley towards Chestnut Knob. Cross a wood bridge over the river.
- ▶ **Mile 1.5** – The Upper Falls Trail (*white square blaze*) joins from the left. Upper Falls Trail campsites are located 0.1-mi down the trail. This trail is mixed-use with mountain bikers and horses and is a well-maintained forest road.
- ▶ **Mile 1.7** – Continue left on the Upper Falls Trail (*white square blaze*). The High Shoals Falls Loop Trail (*blue circle blaze*) turns right heading towards the parking area. Begin a steep climb up the ridge.
- ▶ **Mile 2.1** – On the left side of the trail is an open view south of the Jacob Fork River basin.
- ▶ **Mile 2.6** – Junction with the Headquarters Trail (*orange hexagon blaze*) on the right. Turn right here to shorten the hike or continue straight on the Upper Falls Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 3.1** – Junction with the Jacob Branch Trail (*red hexagon blaze*) on the left.
- ▶ **Mile 3.6** – Turn right onto the Shiny Creek Trail (*blue diamond blaze*). This narrow hiker only trail heads steeply down the ridges into the Shiny Creek basin.
- ▶ **Mile 5.3** – Small footbridge over Dark Creek.

- ▶ **Mile 5.4** – Rock hop over Shinny Creek, which is potentially wet in high water. Immediately after the crossing the Possum Trail (*red square blaze*) comes in from the left.
- ▶ **Mile 5.5** – Cross a narrow footbridge over Shinny Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 5.6** – Second rock hop over Shinny Creek. You will likely get wet in above average water flow since the bedrocks are mostly flat.
- ▶ **Mile 5.8** – Shinny Creek Trail ends at the Headquarters Trail beside the sprawling Shinny Creek campsites. Turn left onto the Headquarters Trail (*orange hexagon blaze*).
- ▶ **Mile 6.1** – Vehicle bridge over Shinny Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 6.3** – As Shinny Creek drops away from the trail into a gorge, look for a scramble trail to the left. At the base is an impressive series of cascades that funnels through narrow chutes and potholes before plunging over multiple small waterfalls deeper into the gorge. The waterfalls aren't accessible by trail.
- ▶ **Mile 6.8** – Turn left on the High Shoals Falls Loop Trail heading towards the parking lot.
- ▶ **Mile 7.1** – Turn right onto the Hemlock Nature Trail (*white triangle blaze*) which closely parallels Jacob Fork River all the way to the parking lot. On this beautiful stretch of Jacob Fork River you might run into fly fishermen. Along this wheelchair accessible trail there are eleven displays about the environment and ecology of the South Mountains.
- ▶ **Mile 7.3** – The trail ends at the parking lot. If you are enjoying the easy stroll along the river continue across the footbridge to meander along the River Trail (*red triangle blaze*). Enjoy easy access to many beautiful sites along the river.
- ▶ **Mile 7.6** – Turn around before the trail crosses a bridge over the river to the Cicero Branch parking area.
- ▶ **Mile 8.0** – Hike ends at the Jacob Fork parking area.