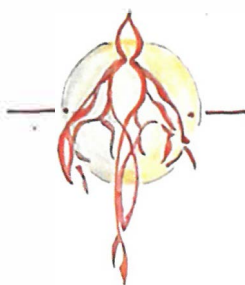


# SAMS' SUMMITS LOOP TRAIL

## SHINING ROCK WILDERNESS

JBPT



SAM KNOB

LITTLE SAM KNOB

PANORAMIC FROM LITTLE SAM TRAIL

ROCK HOP OVER  
FLAT LAUREL CREEK

ROUTE FROM WAYNESVILLE  
BETHEL + CANTON VIA  
STATE ROAD 215

VIEW TO  
COLD MOUNTAIN  
6030'

VIEW TO  
SHINING ROCK  
5940'

VIEW TO  
RICHLAND BALSAM  
6410'

6000'  
SAM KNOB

VIEW TO BLACK  
BALSAM KNOB  
6214'

SAM KNOB SUMMIT  
TRAIL. WELL  
TRAVELED, MANY  
SWITCHBACKS

MOUNTAIN BOG

ROCK HOP OVER  
FLAT LAUREL CREEK

5862'  
LITTLE SAM  
KNOB

FLAT LAUREL CREEK  
TRAIL TO PARKING  
AT BLACK BALSAM  
AREA CAN BE CLOSED  
IN WINTER MONTHS

ROCK HOP

BRIDGE + CASCADE  
FLAT LAUREL CREEK TRAIL

STATE ROAD 215

CONC. BRIDGE  
CASCADE

LOGGING  
CABLES

SPRUCE PLANTATION

LITTLE SAM  
TRAIL

MOUNTAIN TO SEA  
TRAIL CONTINUES

MOUNTAIN ASH RED  
BERRIES IN THE FALL

MT. HARDY  
6110'

BLUE RIDGE PARK  
TO RICHLAND  
BALSAM  
6410'

PARKING

PARKWAY GATES  
OFTEN CLOSED IN  
WINTER

BEECH GAP 5200'  
+ STATE ROAD 215  
REMAINS OPEN IN WINTER

TO BREVARD VIA 215

BLUE RIDGE  
PARKWAY TO  
ASHEVILLE

DEVILS COURTHOUSE  
270° OF PANORAMA  
VIEWS ARE INDICATED  
5100'

"SHINING BONE BOULDERS  
ANCIENT WILD KNOBS CARVING SKY  
HOLDS DEVIL HOSTAGE"  
by DONNA DUFFY



SORBUS AMERICANA  
AMERICAN MTN. ASH  
AMERICAN HAWK TREE

AMERICAN MOUNTAIN ASH IS A SMALL  
TREE WITH MANY STEMS AND A SPREADING  
CROWN. IT'S SHOWY BERRIES CAN OFTEN  
LAST INTO WINTER AND IS LOVED BY BIRDS.  
POAN MOUNTAIN NORTH CAROLINA IS  
NAMED FOR THESE AMERICAN HAWK TREES.



BROAD OR  
NARROW  
CONICAL CROWN



4 ANGLED  
SHARP POINTED

PICEA RUBENS  
RED SPRUCE  
DARK SHINY GREEN  
NEEDLES WITH FINE  
WHITE LINES UNDERSIDE.  
NEEDLES ARE CLUSTERED  
AROUND STEM AND POINT  
FORWARD.



BRANCHES  
ARE NEARLY  
90° TO TRUNK



ROUNDED OR  
FLAT TIPPED

ABIES FRASERI  
FRASER FIR  
STRONG BALSAM ODOR.  
NEEDLES DARK GREEN ON  
TOP ALMOST SILVER  
UNDERSIDE. FIR NEEDLES  
ARE DENSE AND SOFT.  
ONLY NATIVE SOUTHEASTERN  
FIR.

DEVILS COURTHOUSE FROM  
BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



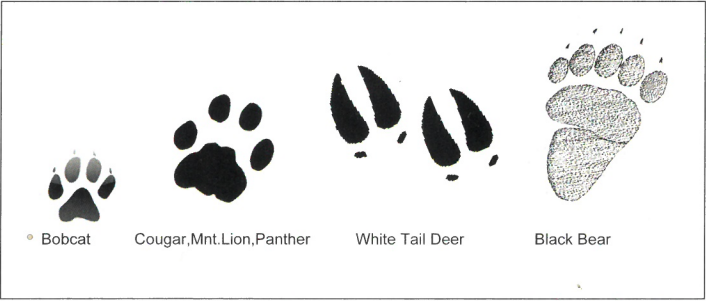
## SAMS’ SUMMITS LOOP TRAIL

Pisgah National Forest and Shining Rock Wilderness is an area full of powerful, stunning landscape contrasts. Rich in cultural history, it has been shaped through the devastation of ecological disasters, evolving into one of the most heavily traversed wilderness locations in the United States. Still, while visiting off-season or walking on weekdays, you can find yourself alone, especially if you leave the trail to satisfy your curiosity.

Delightful in the winter under bright skies, it offers easily visible knobs, cascades and tributaries. In the spring and summer, a hiker is treated to trails that echo with the sounds of tumbling water and exotic flora covering the slopes. Autumn brings the contrast of the pines and the red fruited mountain ash with crisp backgrounds of Carolina clear blue skies.

The Sams’ Summits Loop Trail is not a single trail but is composed of up to six different trails combined in a manner to create a loop if you are inclined to do so. If you do not have the time to walk the entire distance, shorter trails can be selected and looped by referring to the **TRAIL TABLE**.

Two trails are definitely worth the winter walk, if the parkway is closed. The first would be the Mountain to Sea Trail from the parking area to Devil Courthouse and back. The second is the easier walk along the Flat Laurel Creek Trail to the cascades located along Flat Laurel Creek.



## MEMORIES OF A MOUNTAIN TRAPPER

I have had the occasional discussion with a neighbor, Carroll Craig, about his experiences growing up in Haywood County. Carroll is genuine and his humor and history are a real gift. He has a deep appreciation for the unique ecology of Shining Rock and mentions it often in his conversations.

Around 1974, Carroll was hired by the NC Wildlife Commission to introduce brook trout into many of the streams and tributaries located in Shining Rock. He took it upon himself to visit as many sites as possible, no matter how large or small. Perhaps the fish you harvest today are great-great grandchildren of those he introduced, sort of like the Johnny Fish Seed of the mountains.

Carroll is a known tracker and hunter. Even though Shining Rock became one of the first protected wilderness areas in the US, in 1964, his family and friends had hunted there long before. He can tell you where and how a black bear traveled, leaving five clear toe prints or a large mountain cat’s size and approximate weight based on its paw print, “four toes not five”.

Locals have claimed to have seen bobcats and, years ago, panthers, although both are elusive. These cats spring on their prey, such as a rabbit or ground hog, whose size makes no difference.

Carroll had a story about a larger cat experience he witnessed years ago. He heard a cougar pounce on a deer and was trapped on one side of the attack that was so loud and vicious that it frightened away the other hunters who scurried to their vehicles. Carroll had to find a way out without crossing the kill site. He later identified the tracks as a panther, which has larger prints than those of a bobcat and outweighs it by about one hundred pounds.

As the Shining Rock area became more popular, Carroll eventually began to seek out more isolated places. When you talk with him, he brings up his grandfather and mentions that he was the person who really knew the area. He wishes that he had written down some of that lost history. I believe that his memories count and that enjoying the wonder of an era without all of the modern embellishments only reinforces its importance. One thing we both agree on is that nothing like this exists anywhere else around the Blue Ridge. You feel it when you hike there and it continues to draw you in each time with new sensations. Be prepared for a real treat in all seasons.

## TRAVEL DIRECTIONS:

Starting from Downtown Waynesville, take 276 S (Pigeon Street) 6.2 miles. Turn right onto State Road 215 S toward Brevard. Continue for 2.8 miles. At the next intersection and stop sign, turn left to continue on State Road 215. Continue for 14.5 miles, where you will see a gravel parking area on your right hand side. Park here. You will be located about ¼ mile north of where the Blue Ridge Parkway intersects State Road 215 at Beech Gap. For additional directions, refer to the WALKING DIRECTIONS.

## WALKING DIRECTIONS:

Park your vehicle in the trail head parking area located just below Beech Gap and the Blue Ridge Parkway on the right side of 215, [when arriving from Waynesville (highlighted in yellow on the map)]. Be aware that during winter, even though the Blue Ridge Parkway will likely be closed to travel, this parking area still provides an accessible location.

On foot from the parking area, cross over 215 heading northeasterly or slightly downhill. Look for a set of stairs on your right going uphill with the Mountain to Sea Trail, with white blaze indicated. This is the start of your route.

## TRAIL LENGTH, GRADE AND CONDITIONS:

There are several hikes here but the full loop is about 9.5 miles. Allow 4.5 to 6 plus hours with some stopping for views and observations. Extended walks from here are possible. Refer to the map. Ascents vary from easy to moderately severe grades. The largest ascent, at Sam Knob, is around 1450 ft. Old logging roads forge the trails in several locations where evidence of logging and mining is obvious. Trails are well marked at all intersections. The walk is composed of shaded forests, streams (requiring rock hopping), open meadows, and some rocky ascents. Good walking, although weather conditions here can be extreme on rather short notice. Accessible in all seasons. No restroom facilities. (Refer to **TRAIL TABLE** for details.)

## WEB CAM

There is a web cam in the national forest if you would like to know the conditions for weather and view before you hike, <http://webcam.srs.fed.us/webcams/shining.php> Follow the links to **the web cam at Cold Mountain**.

## MOUNTAIN GEOLOGY

The rock formation outcroppings in the Shining Rock Wilderness are complex and ancient. About one billion years ago, these mountains were slowly pushed upwards. After millions of years and several episodes of mountain building, called “orogenies”, these mountains rose to a height of the Rockies.

The mountains we see today are the result of an imbalance of uplift, weathering and erosion, exposing the metamorphosed sedimentary rock layers that were forced up from the ocean floor. This exposure constitutes much of the Shining Rock Wilderness area. Based on geological studies, the area is underlain by mica gneiss. A few quartz veins and small dykes of igneous rock also intrude into the mica creating a large mass of quartz in complex folded veins, the largest being about 1,750 feet long (530 meters) and 30-60 feet (9-18 meters) thick. It is clearly exposed on top of Shining Rock Mountain, where the white quartz can be seen from a long distance, giving the name “shining” to the entire wilderness area.

Generally, the mica here is small, stained by other minerals and wavy; little is of strategic value. Mica was important as an insulator during World War I and II. Afterwards, insulators made of other materials were found to be better and easier to produce, so mica was no longer mined after the wars. There are remnants of a few quarries in the wilderness and in the Middle Prong areas but these contain sedimentary fill material of little value.

The geological area around the Devils Courthouse is valuable, however, not only due to its red tones, a result of red garnet crystals but also because of the botanical bounty of rare alpine lichen and plants usually only found in northern climates. Plus, the eerie sound of the wind blowing through the man-sized fissured caves, created the local legend that the devil is holding court.

## LOGGING

The unique ecology of the area can be attributed to several factors such as mountain formation, lack of glacial exposure, dense fir and spruce forests and the involvement of men harvesting the timber. In the early 1900’s, new processes involved in manufacturing developed entrepreneurial related partnerships to reap the benefits of this area. These overlapping events historically defined the natural outcomes we see today.

In 1907, Champion Fibre Company began purchasing timber land along the headwater of the Pigeon River for about \$5 per acre. Champion was interested in making the first white paper out of pine and the higher elevations in these western mountains of North Carolina yielded the greatest spruce forests in the United States. There is an early description of one such tree as being 5 feet in diameter at a height of 30 feet from the base. Chestnut trees were also important to the paper mill for their tannic acid. The tannic acid made in Canton alone paid for the wood.

Over seventy percent of the countryside had not been harvested in the early 1900’s. One lumber mill located along now State Road 215, identified as Sunburst, was a logging development managed by Champion Lumber Company. Originally, it was located nearly west of Shining Rock at the confluence of three prongs of the West Pigeon River, where 140,000 to 160,000 feet of lumber were milled daily. This model logging village, closed by 1920 when it could no longer keep pulp wood adequately supplied to Canton. In the 1930’s, Sunburst village was dismantled, dammed and flooded and became Lake Logan.

## HIKER’S CHECK LIST:

- Check the daily weather forecast.
- Wear suitable clothing, especially boots or shoes for rough terrain.
- Bring this map and/or a field guide for the area.
- Carry a mobile phone for emergency purposes.
- Bring water.

SAMS' SUMMITS LOOP TRAIL TABLE				
TRAIL	TYPE	MILES	KILO	CONDITIONS
State Road 215 to Mountain to Sea Trail	Moderate	1.9	3.05	Mostly uphill with pine plantation and a stream crossing on log bridge.
To Devils Courthouse Trail				
Devils Courthouse Trail over the Parkway tunnel	Moderate	0.25	0.4	Over the Blue Ridge Parkway road tunnel
Devils Courthouse Trail back to Mountain to Sea Trail				
East bound Mountain to Sea Trail	Easy	0.25	0.4	Spectacular views on a clear day.
To Little Sam Trail		0.25	0.4	Rock formations and camping sites
Little Sam Trail	Moderate	1.25	2.01	Logging remnants and one beautiful stream crossing
To Flat Laurel Creek Trail				
Flat Laurel Creek Trail	Easy	0.75	1.21	Busy intersection. Tourists and children, dogs & stuff.
To Sam Knob Trail				
From Flat Laurel Creek Trail to Top of Sam Knob	Difficult	1.125	1.81	Busy but good vistas on a clear day. First 1/4 mile will be boggy. Look for trail signs to the summit.
Top of Sam Knob back to Flat Laurel Creek Trail		1.125	1.81	
From Sam Knob Trail	Easy	2.25	3.62	Scenic walk all the way with cascades and camping sites.
To State Road 215 via Flat Laurel Creek Trail				
From Flat Laurel Creek Trail	Easy	0.6	1.06	Walk back up and along State Road 215, to parking.
To Parking				
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9.75</b>	<b>15.77</b>	<b>Allow 4.5 to 6.0 hours with stops.</b>

## DON’T MISS

- Views from Sam Knob to Cold Mountain, Richland Balsams, Black Balsam
- Views to South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee from Devils Courthouse
- Wild turkey, butterflies and bird migrations (spring and fall)
- Spring, summer and autumn flora.
- Rare Mountain Ash Trees
- Flat Laurel Creek cascades
- Spruce Plantation



## FIRES

Beginning in 1925, fires began to shape the natural history of what is now Shining Rock Wilderness and Pisgah National Forest. These devastating events were recorded by locals, although not considered important enough to interest local press at the time. A fire which started by a prolonged drought and possibly a spark from a Shay Engine or logging train on August 19, 1925, burned over 25,000 acres (or 1,089,000,000 square feet) in just three days. Accounts by locals involved in this incident reported, “the fire in 1925 burned out the railroad, bridges, and everything else they had up in Sunburst. It burned up bridges and camps and everything else there was on the Sun Crest line. Now today, you take that the biggest part of fir country, that fire burnt it, and it’s just wilderness today. It’s got nearly everything on it but fir.” (quotation by David Sharpe, 1978).

What seemed to make the fire so intense was that with all the fir cut, the big stumps and red spruce roots burned deep into the ground and continued to burn for days. It devastated the earth and erosion did the rest. Some land was so scorched that it will not recover in our lifetime, if ever. Rains came and removed soils, in some places, as deep as seven feet. What grew back was what the locals called “Fire Cherry”, a weak, quick growing tree, capable of slowly rebuilding soil conditions which did start some reforestation.

The pulp wood logging operations ended around 1934 when the U. S. Government incorporated the land into the National Parks System. While part of the Sherwood Wildlife Protection Area, another fire occurred in 1942, burning much of the same acreage again. If there were any spruce or fir trees growing back, they were, once again, destroyed. Although these once-abundant trees completely covered the higher elevations before 1920, only small, isolated stands remain, along with a few areas where spruce have been reintroduced to the Pisgah National Forest region by the U. S. Forest Service.

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