

*Mountains-to-Sea Trail
below Linn Cove Viaduct*
PHOTO BY SHELTON WILDER

THE HIGH COUNTRY

BEACON HEIGHTS NEAR GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN TO US 421 NEAR DEEP GAP

by Carolyn Sakowski

This 43-mile segment offers the hiker some of the most astounding scenery in northwestern North Carolina. This part of the trail, which travels along the ridge line where elevations range from 3,400 to 4,300 feet, offers views looking down the escarpment into the North Carolina piedmont.

Most of this section runs parallel to the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP). It begins at Beacon Heights and follows the Tanawha Trail as it travels along the base of Grandfather Mountain, which is one of only 553 certified biosphere reserves in the world.

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE

- The Linn Cove Viaduct, a 1,243-foot concrete engineering marvel that carries the BRP around the base of Grandfather Mountain.
- Views of Grandfather Mountain, Table Rock, Hawksbill, and Pisgah National Forest that can encompass over 50 miles on a clear day.
- Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, where the MST uses the park's former carriage trails and passes by Flat Top Manor, which now serves as the parkway's craft center.
- Scenic long-range views, pastoral meadows, picturesque creeks, tranquil forests, and intriguing rock formations

The nearby resort towns of Linville, Blowing Rock, and Boone offer all amenities. They also make it easy to break this segment into several day hikes.

NOTES

At mile 15.7, MST crosses Boone Fork, which requires wading. Depending on the water level, you will probably wade in water up to your knees. It is worth the hassle as the MST from the creek crossing to Shulls Mill Road offers an easy stroll along an old turnpike road through the forest. FMST is trying to raise money to build a bridge here, so feel free to make contributions.

A re-route of the MST in the Boone Fork area near Price Park should be completed and signed by summer 2014. FMST will update these directions to reflect the new trail route as it is completed.

Total Distance: 42.9 miles (2.9 on road shoulder; 40 miles on trail)

Difficulty: Easy to moderate with only a few strenuous parts

Camping

Mile 7.6-7.8

Grandfather Mountain State Park

<http://www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/grmo/main.php>

Mile 13.0

Julian Price Memorial Park Campground

<http://www.blueridgeparkway.org/v.php?pg=36>

Mile 15.9

Backcountry site; get permit from Price Park Campground office

Food

Mile 0.0

Town of Linville is 3 miles south of BRP from Beacon Heights on US 221.

<http://www.averycounty.com/>

Mile 18.4 or 25.1

Town of Blowing Rock is 1.0 mile or less from MST

<http://www.blowingrock.com/>

Mile 38.7

Blue Ridge Diner; 828-265-1999; closed Sunday

Lodging/Supplies/Services/Post Office

Mile 0.0

Town of Linville is 3 miles south of Beacon Heights on US 221.

<http://www.averycounty.com/>

Mile 18.4 or 25.1

Town of Blowing Rock is 1.0 mile or less from MST

<http://www.blowingrock.com/>

Water/Restrooms

Mile 1.6

Linn Cove visitors center

Mile 13.0

Julian Price Memorial Park picnic area and campground

Mile 21.2

Moses H. Cone Memorial Park

Hunting

Hunting is not allowed on any of this segment.

Signs/Blazing

The MST runs conjunctively with the Tanawha Trail for the first 13 miles of this segment. The Tanawha Trail uses a white feather as signage. The MST uses a three-inch white dot on signs and trees. The section that follows carriage trails in Moses H. Cone Memorial Park has good signage but limited reference to MST.

Special Considerations

There are several different locations using the name Boone Fork or Raven Rocks. Make sure you get the right location when looking for a specific overlook.

Some National Park Service facilities are closed from November to April. Consult the websites before planning your trip.

This section offers many opportunities for shorter day hikes, especially if you use shuttles between parking areas.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact:

FMST office: info@ncmst.org or 919-698-9024

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Blue Ridge Parkway

<http://www.blueridgeparkway.org/>

Grandfather Mountain trails map

http://www.grandfather.com/pdf/07trail_map.pdf

Grandfather Mtn State Park

<http://www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/grmo/main.php>

Price Park trails map

<http://www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/upload/Price%20Park%20Trails.pdf>

Moses H. Cone carriage trails map

<http://www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/upload/Cone%20Park%20Carriage%20Trails.pdf>

Tanawha Trail

<http://www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/upload/Tanawha%20Trail.pdf>

High Country Host

highcountryhost.com/

Avery County Chamber of Commerce

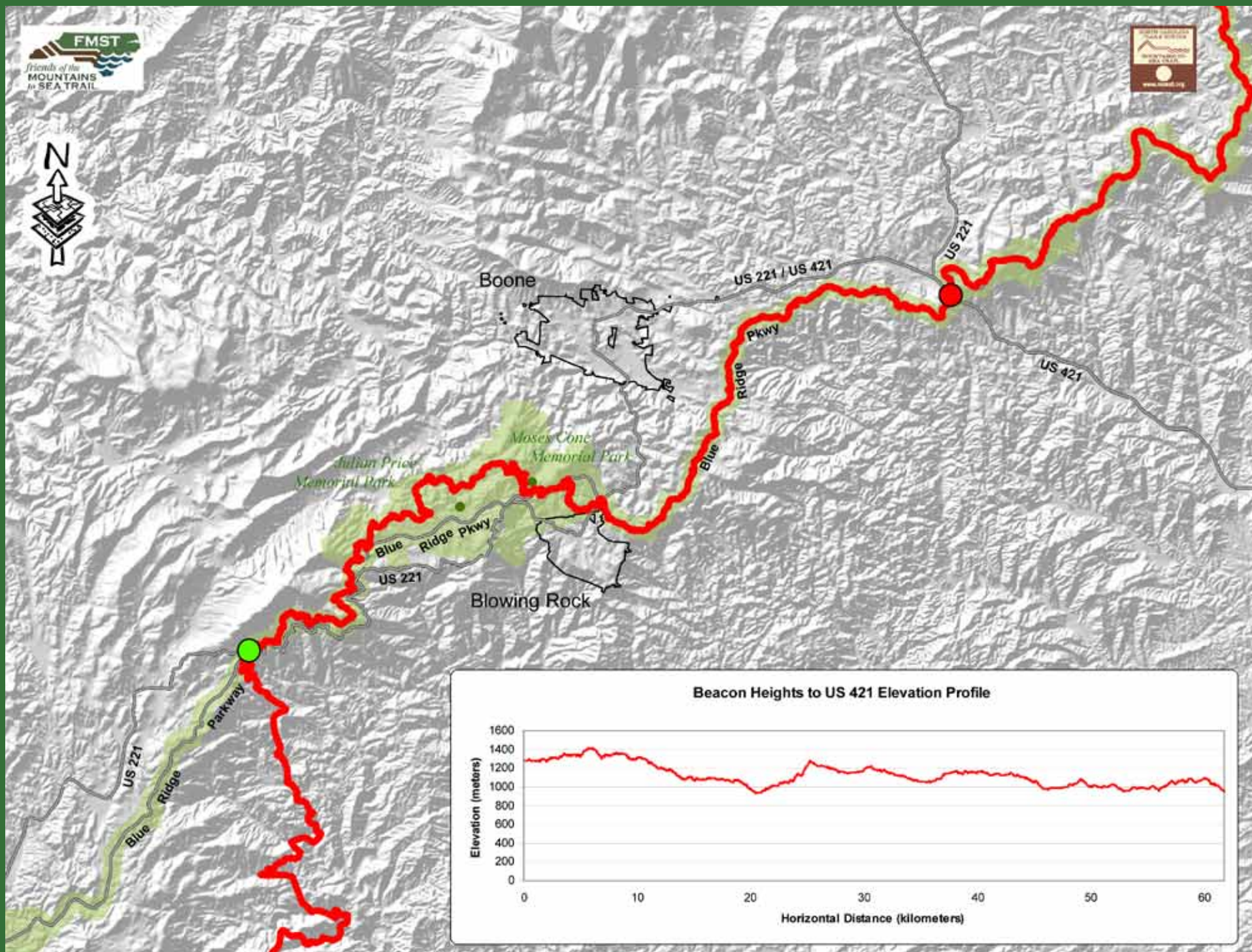
<http://www.averycounty.com/>

Visit Blowing Rock

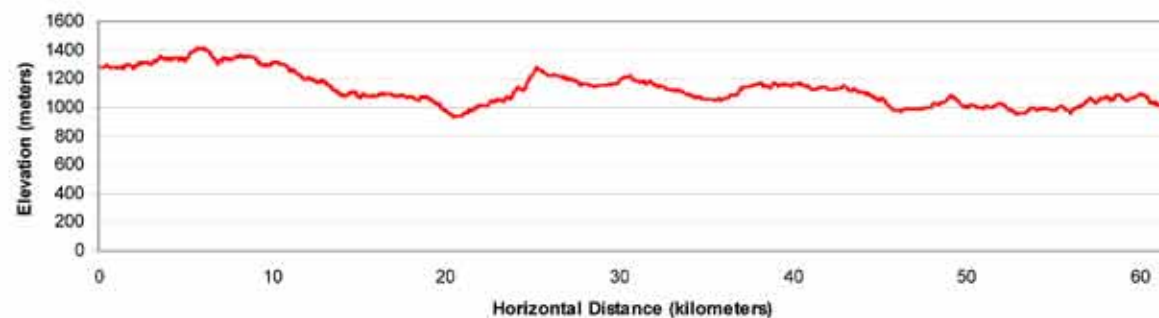
<http://www.blowingrock.com/>

PRIMARY PARKING LOCATIONS

Locations to Access Trail	Segment Mile	Available	Coordinates
Beacon Heights parking area	0		N36.083667 W81.82895
Stack Rock parking area	0.9		N36.088633 W81.82226
Linn Cove Visitor Center	1.6		N36.090133 W81.8146
Wilson Creek Overlook	2.9		M36.101283 W81.807767
Rough Ridge parking area	4.4		N36.0993, W81.800717
Raven Rocks parking area	5.1		
Boone Fork parking area	8.1		N36.1199 W81.78145
Cold Prong parking area	9.8		N81.772517 W36.127583
Holloway Mountain Rd. parking lot	11.9		N81.7574 W36.139783 check this
Julian Price Park Campground	13		N36.14413 W81.737595
Trout Lake parking area	20.1		N36.152569 W81.6994
Cone manor house parking area	21.2		N36.149067 W81.69245
US 321/221 at BRP	25.1		M36.085315 W81.829432
Thunder Hill Overlook	28.5		N36.136142 W81.641035
Raven Rock Overlook	29.4		N36.140578 W81.637516
Boone's Trace Overlook	33.7		N36.179662 W81.609192
Grandview Overlook	38.3		N36.227267 W81.567283
Osborne Mountain Overlook	41.6		N36.224783 W81.513033
BRP 0.2 mile south of US 421 access	42.9		N36.228683 W81.499317



Beacon Heights to US 421 Elevation Profile










Goshen Creek between Aho and Bamboo valleys
PHOTO BY SHELTON WILDER

Hiking Directions, Eastbound

- 0.0 From parking area (MP 305.2), cross paved road and follow signs to Beacon Heights Trail, heading into the woods (P)
- 0.1 Intersection with Tanawha Trail, which runs concurrent with MST on this segment. Turn left (north).
- 0.4 Cross paved US 221.
- 0.5 Ascend to area with large boulders. Come to boardwalk next to stone parkway retainer wall. Leave boulder field.
- 0.9 Ascend steps. Trail forks. MST goes right. Stack Rock parking area (MP 304.8) 90 feet to left. (P)
- 1.1 Ascend and then descend to wooden stairway and boardwalk that goes around giant rock formation.

- 1.2 Cross bridge over Stack Rock Creek and pass waterfall.
- 1.3 Ascend wooden and stone steps. (This section is strenuous.)
- 1.5 Pass storage buildings on left.
- 1.6 Linn Cove Viaduct parking area and visitor center (MP 304.4). Follow paved path around outside of parking lot. (P) (H) (W)
- 1.7 Linn Cove Viaduct sign.
- 1.9 Pass under viaduct and follow steps through large boulders to continue on MST/Tanawha Trail.
- 2.0 Bridge crosses Linn Cove Branch.
- 2.2 Side trail goes right 60 feet to rock outcrop with good view of viaduct, Table Rock, Hawksbill, and Pisgah Forest.
- 2.5 Cross footbridge.
- 2.8 Balanced Rock is on right.
- 2.9 Trail to Wilson Creek Overlook (MP 303.6) on right. Continue left and cross bridge over Wilson Creek. Next 1.23 miles ascend through large boulders. (P)
- 3.8 Side trail on right to rock outcrop with good views. Continue left on main trail.
- 4.2 Rough Ridge boardwalk.
- 4.4 Trail to Rough Ridge parking area (MP 302.8) goes right. Stay on main trail. (P)
- 4.6 Cross Little Wilson Creek on arched footbridge.
- 5.1 Side trail on right leads to Raven Rocks parking area (MP 302.4) but stay left. (P)
- 6.6 Cross footbridge.
- 7.6 Daniel Boone Scout Trail goes to left. Stay straight on main trail.
- 7.8 Grandfather Trail Extension, which used to be named Nuwati Trail, goes to left. Stay right for MST.
- 8.0 Cross Upper Boone Fork bridge. US 221 is 0.4 mile on right.
- 8.1 Boone Fork parking area (MP 299.9) is 400 feet to right. Go left to continue on MST. *Note:* Don't confuse this overlook with Boone Fork Trail in Price Park. (P)
- 9.5 Cross bridge.
- 9.7 Cross another bridge.
- 9.8 Trail to Cold Prong Pond parking area (MP 299) on right. Follow Tanawha Trail sign directing toward Price Lake. You rock-hop 4 creeks in this segment. (P)





- 10.7 Pass through stile to enter meadow. Go 50 yards and follow Tanawha Trail signs to make right turn. Walk 50 yards to enter woods, following MST sign.
- 10.9 Leave woods and enter field. Follow Tanawha Trail markers as trail veers left.
- 11.1 Go through wooded area to reach another meadow. Trail goes left (north) up the hill. On right, at bottom of hill, is graveled Holloway Mountain Rd. As you approach woods at top of hill, you'll see markers on the trees.
- 11.3 Trail goes in and out of wooded areas. Trail curves to left in field; gate at top of hill, but continue on trail.
- 11.4 Go through stile and enter meadow with good views of Grandfather Mtn. to right. At top of hill, there is tree-sheltered area with rock firepit. Signs for Tanawha Trail direct you to turn right here. You can follow that trail or head straight over the hill. *Note:* new signage may be coming in future
- 11.9 Descend downhill to Holloway Mtn. Rd. parking area. *Note:* This parking area is 1.0 mile from BRP. The intersection with BRP is 6 miles west of Blowing Rock. Access MST through a stile across gravel road from the lot or go left for 30 yards to gated dirt road and follow that road. The two options merge later. 
- 12.2 Follow Tanawha Trail signs to right; another trail goes left.
- 12.3 Trail appears to fork. Leave old roadbed and go left onto single track.
- 12.4 Go through stile and join old roadbed. At fork, stay right for few yards, where you skirt and then walk through meadow.
- 12.8 Leave meadow and cross bridge.
- 12.9 Just after passing by stile on right is a second bridge.
- 13.0 Tanawha Trail intersects with Boone Fork Trail (BFT). It is 0.5 mile right to Julian Price Park Campground. Continue left on BFT.    
- 13.3 Cross meadow. At top of meadow, sign for BFT. Continue straight, following old roadbed into rhododendron thicket.

THIS IS WHERE A NEW RE-ROUTE IS PRESENTLY UNDERWAY. COMPLETED BUT NOT SIGNED. NEW DIRECTIONS TO FOLLOW SHORTLY.



- 13.5 Reach headwaters of Bee Tree Creek. There will be three creek crossings via rocks.
- 13.7 Cross bridge.
- 13.9 Cross second bridge.
- 14.2 Cross 2 bridges across creek.
- 14.5 Go right to cross creek. In quick succession, you'll cross 3 creeks, a plank bridge, follow steps down to right to cross creek. As you climb up and down hills, you'll see series of cascades in creek on left, followed by 3 sets of wooden steps in next 0.2 mile.
- 14.7 Cross metal bridge, just past BFT milepost sign. Within few yards, 2 easy creek crossings.
- 14.8 Trail goes right, following stone walkway uphill and around large rock formation. Few yards to wooden ladder leading down rocks, followed by BFT milepost sign.
- 15.3 Side trail to Hebron Falls on left, but stay on main trail.
- 15.5 Old dam site on left.
- 15.7 Leave BFT at large rock outcrop. Cross Boone Fork on left. This is a major crossing that requires wading, at least up to your knees. Turn right after crossing creek. Climb over large boulders for 75 yards. At top of hill, stay right.




Mountains-to-Sea Trail as it runs through heritage apple orchard near Grandview Overlook
PHOTO BY SHELTON WILDER

- 15.9 Backcountry campsite with bench and firepit with grate but no amenities. Permit required from Price Park campground office. Maximum of 6 campers allowed.
- 16.3 Follow old roadbed. Side trail on left. Keep on main trail.
- 16.4 Turn left as trail leaves old roadbed. Watch closely for trail sign on right, indicating left turn up the hill.
- 17.2 Pass gate to reach Shulls Mill Rd. Turn right and walk 75 yards on road's shoulder. On left, take wooden steps up the hillside, into the woods. The trail climbs 500 feet in elevation in next half-mile.
- 17.7 Climb over step stile to reach gravel road, which is part of Moses H. Cone Memorial Park's carriage trail system. Turn right onto that road. You are on Rich Mountain Trail.
- 18.3 At trail intersection in pasture, turn right.
- 18.4 Turn left onto trail leading to Trout Lake.
- 18.7 In next one-third mile, trail crosses over 3 streams before reaching gate. You do not ford these streams, as trail crosses over them.
- 19.4 There is short side trail to stream on north near small dam. Continue on main trail.
- 20.1 Go left when trail forks to continue on MST. *Note:* To end the day-trip if you arranged for shuttle at Trout Lake, turn right and cross the bridge. The trail leads to the Trout Lake parking area. To continue on MST, cross over dam and continue to right on carriage trail along lake. Take left fork going to manor house. Cross road (Flannery Fork Rd.) to follow trail toward manor house. 
- 21.2 At trail intersection, go right through tunnel under parkway. The trail passes in front of carriage house.   
- 21.4 Take trail to left before reaching manor house. It is an unsigned trail.
- 22.0 The carriage trail curves right. Continue straight, following signs to Watkin Rd.
- 24.1 Watkin Rd. intersects with Black Bottom Rd., which comes in from right. Follow signs to US 321.
- 24.8 There is lake on right.
- 24.9 Cross creek by rock hopping. Go right on gravel Old Camp Catawba Rd. You are walking through an area with some traffic.
- 25.1 Reach US 221 (MP 291.9). It is 1.0 mile to Blowing Rock to right; 7 miles to Boone on left. To continue on MST, turn left

and walk 200 feet on shoulder and up entrance ramp to BRP. Convenience store 1.0 mile.    

- 25.4 Reach BRP and turn right (north). There is space at this entrance ramp to park several cars. 
- 25.6 Walk on shoulder of BRP to where trail goes into woods on right, just after crossing bridge over US 221/321.
- 25.8 Follow trail along hillside to stile, after which trail bears left and follows barbed-wire fence to pasture.
- 25.9 Continue through pasture and enter woods near fence along BRP.
- 26.8 Emerging from woods, trail cuts right across pasture to point below a pine tree on far side of pasture. Trail then travels along top of hill, down to two bridges. After the second bridge, trail goes through section of clearing. Continue into woods to another stile.
- 27.3 Hike uphill and into rhododendron thicket before reaching another stile at top of ridge.
- 27.5 In pasture, trail bears left along BRP through short section of woods and out to pasture.
- 27.7 Cross pasture to angled treeline that borders dirt farm road, leading into trees again. Bear left at fork and go into another pasture.
- 28.3 Out of woods, angle right (away from BRP) to stile at Greenhill Rd. next to farm gate. Climb over stile and go left (west) 200 feet to the BRP (MP 290.7), then turn right (north) and walk 500 feet. Cross the BRP and go through stile. Follow trail uphill through meadow, then go right. Go to top of hill and then head downhill toward overlook.
- 28.5 Thunder Hill Overlook (MP 290.3) is across BRP at bottom of hill. It is 1.6 miles south to US 221/321. Go through a stile across from overlook and turn left. 
- 29.1 Walk along fence and then on shoulder to reach side road on left. Enter woods on north side of side road.
- 29.4 Walk 450 feet uphill. At top of hill, trail bears right, going steeply uphill then leveling off. Trail goes up and down hills. At one point, it goes sharply left and downhill away from BRP. At bottom of hill, take sharp right onto old forest road. After topping a hill, log bench on left on way down. Trail continues downhill, curving back towards BRP before turning away. One final uphill section to




Raven Rock parking area (MP 289.5). 

- 29.8 From north side of overlook, continue north on BRP shoulder for 900 feet. At “Overlook Ahead” sign, trail goes left into woods. Trail veers right, meandering through woods for 800 feet before reaching stile. Climb over stile and go through pasture close to fence, which parallels BRP on right. Sometimes there are cows in this field, but they are no bother. A protective mule may be interested in your dog. At top of hill, you can see old cattle pens and Blackberry Rd. at bottom of hill. Follow fence line to stile in right corner. Climb stile, continue few feet to bridge and go up steps to Blackberry Rd.
- 30.1 Cross Blackberry Rd. and climb stile into pasture. Walk uphill, staying near fence along BRP. Skirt to left of family cemetery near top of hill. At times, there are horses here; one horse may be aggressive to dogs. Continue 250 feet to stile.
- 30.4 Cross stile. Trail winds through woods and wetlands, crossing 3 bridges before coming out to BRP shoulder. Turn left and walk shoulder 80 feet. Cross BRP to Sampson Rd. Walk on right



Bamboo Valley in the fall
PHOTO BY SHELTON WILDER

shoulder of Sampson Rd. for 300 feet. Turn left onto George Hayes Rd.

- 30.8 Walk along shoulder for 2,400 feet to set of wooden steps on left. Go down steps through boggy pasture, bearing right to bridge. Cross bridge and go uphill to left. Trail winds across ridgeline.
- 31.5 Easy creek crossing by rock hopping.
- 31.8 Trail goes under large fallen tree, immediately followed by creek crossing, which requires rock hopping and may dampen your shoes.
- 32.2 Cross bridge over cascading Goshen Creek. *Note:* Good photo opportunities from bridge.
- 32.3 A few yards past the bridge, a well-used trail leads uphill on left to a pull-out area on BRP, just south of Goshen Creek Viaduct. The pull-out can accommodate several cars. Continue straight. 
- 32.4 Follow path along scenic creekbed. Cross stile under Goshen Creek Viaduct; BRP is overhead. Cross pasture under bridge. Cross over second stile to reach Bamboo Rd.
- 33.3 Turn right and walk along shoulder of paved Bamboo Rd., which becomes gravel. Pass George Hayes Rd. After intersection of Bamboo and Little Laurel Rds., walk straight along shoulder of Bamboo Rd. for 180 feet before trail goes right into pasture. In pasture, trail curves right into woods. Follow trail to BRP.
- 33.6 From MP 285.5, turn left and walk shoulder of BRP beside meadow until trail enters woods on left.
- 33.7 Trail goes through woods and back to BRP. Turn left and walk shoulder 97 feet north to Boone’s Trace Overlook on right side (MP 285.1). From the overlook, walk north 900+ feet to where trail goes right into woods.  
- 34.1 Trail returns to BRP. Turn right and walk north 0.1 mile to MP 284.5. Trail goes into woods on left (west) side of BRP.
- 34.6 Cross BRP to where trail enters woods on east side. It climbs ridge, goes through rhododendron thicket, and follows switchbacks to creek crossing. Ascend up hill. FMST trail workers call this section the “enchanted forest.”
- 35.9 Come out of woods at private driveway. Cross drive and continue into woods. At pasture, turn left and walk inside split rail fence.





Mountains-to-Sea Trail near Osborne Mountain Overlook
PHOTO BY SHELTON WILDER

A large home sits atop hill. A third of way through pasture, watch for sinkholes. At end of fence, jog left through fence, turn right and walk shoulder of BRP north for 240 feet to MP 283.2. Cross BRP; trail goes left into woods.

- 36.4 Trail crosses bridge and goes to Don Hayes Rd. at MP 283. Turn right on road; walk through tunnel that goes under BRP. Walk 355 feet and turn left to the bridge leading into woods on east side of BRP.
- 36.7 At BRP, turn right and walk north to MP 282.3. At end of wide cleared area on right, trail goes right into woods.
- 37.3 Walk north on east side of BRP. Cross ridgeline, through switchbacks down and over Elk Creek Rd. Cross road onto service road paralleling BRP. Follow service road to pasture at top of hill.

Before entering pasture, trail goes left into woods.

- 38.3 On BRP, walk north to MP 281.2. Pass Grandview Overlook on right (MP 281.2). Walk 800 feet north of overlook to where trail goes right into woods. You pass a heritage apple orchard.
- 38.7 Walk in woods about 600 feet to service road. Turn left on service road, walk 225 feet and go through gate to BRP. You can see Parkway Elementary School across BRP. Turn right and walk 650 feet on shoulder. Turn right into woods on east side. After 838 feet, trail crosses open area near Old US 421 and continues north. Trail comes back to BRP near speed limit sign. *Note:* For food, access Old US 421 and travel right (north) past Parkway Elementary School for 0.15 mile to Blue Ridge Diner, open every day except Sunday. 
- 39.6 At BRP, turn right and hike north to MP 279.6. After hiking past two pastures on left, trail goes left into woods at MP 279.6.
- 40.9 Trail goes through small glade and uphill to landscaped driveway after 600 feet. Turn left on drive and walk 97 feet to road (Wildcat Rd.). Cross road onto another driveway and go 83 feet to right turn onto service road entering woods. Service road goes uphill; turn right into woods as service road curves left. Trail goes downhill near BRP, then back up before descending again. The Wilder Bench is on trail as you head downhill to BRP.
- 41.6 Cross BRP and enter woods on east side. Go uphill to white pines, then down switchbacks and back uphill to BRP. Turn right and walk on shoulder for 472 feet to Osborne Mountain Overlook (MP 278). 
- 42.9 At north end of Osborne Mountain Overlook, go into grassy field on west side of BRP, then uphill into woods. The next 1.25 miles follow switchbacks to the ramp at US 421 on the west side of the BRP. Parking space is available in flat grassy area on BRP 0.2 mile south of entrance ramp. 