



Rays and ridges from Waterrock Knob  
Photo by Robert Stephens

## The Balsams—MST Segment 2

### **WATERROCK KNOB TO PISGAH INN**

**By Jim Grode**

This 63-mile segment, located in one of the most biodiverse areas of the world, showcases that diversity. Nearly all the major plant communities of the southern Appalachians are represented, from spruce-fir forests typically found in Canada to rich cove forests, and from rhododendron thickets to heath balds—and even a little of the rare spray cliff community. Around every corner is a view greater than the one before it. And the myriad streams and waterfalls provide delightful coolness even on the hottest summer day.

This segment is also one of the least accessible parts of the MST—although it generally parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP). Segment 2 crosses a paved road only 7 times in the 54 miles between the US 74 crossing (Eastbound (EB) Mile 9.4, Westbound (WB) Mile 54.2) and its eastern end. The segment is also rugged: elevations range from over 5,800 feet to less than 3,500 feet in less than 10 miles, and there is almost 25,000 feet of climbing and descending over the entire length of the segment. The trail is often rocky, muddy, or indistinct, making travel sometimes difficult. Almost all of Segment 2 is on federally owned land, encompassing the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests and the BRP. As a result, there is virtually no development and no opportunity for resupply on the segment.

### HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- The four-state views from Waterrock Knob, at 6,292 feet the highest point on Segment 2 and the third-highest point on the entire MST
- Skinny Dip Falls, a popular waterfall and swimming hole
- The nearly trackless expanse of the Middle Prong Wilderness Area
- The views over the ghost forest of Graveyard Fields
- The tourist haven of the Pisgah Inn, with its famous restaurant

**Total Distance: 63.6 miles (59.9 on trail, 1.9 on gravel roads, and 1.8 on paved roads)**

**Difficulty: Strenuous, with significant elevation changes involving steep climbs and descents, difficult trail tread, and long stretches with no road crossings.**

---

## Trail Updates

When planning your trip using this guide, take a moment to see whether Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (Friends) has posted any updates about the trail route by visiting Friends' "Trail Updates" page at [MountaintoSeaTrail.org/updates](http://MountaintoSeaTrail.org/updates).

## Trail Angels

The MST is fortunate to have many Trail Angels: friendly people who have volunteered to provide assistance to long-distance hikers ranging from local information to lodging and food. We greatly appreciate our Trail Angels' willingness to give back to the hiking community and the MST. For information about Trail Angels in Segment 2 and the services they can provide, see [MountaintoSeaTrail.org/the-trail/trail-angels](http://MountaintoSeaTrail.org/the-trail/trail-angels).

## Special Note Regarding Access

The BRP is often closed in the winter, especially during and after inclement weather, affecting access to the MST. Wintertime hiking in this segment will require careful planning. The National Park Service posts real-time closure information at [www.nps.gov/blri/playourvisit/roadclosures.htm](http://www.nps.gov/blri/playourvisit/roadclosures.htm).

## Backcountry Camping

Camping is **prohibited** on all BRP property except in designated campgrounds. Except as noted below, primitive camping is allowed anywhere in the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests. Before setting up a backcountry camp, please confirm that you are in a legal camping area.

Areas in Segment 2 where the trail is on National Forest land and camping is allowed include:

EB Miles 20.8-35.1, 36.0-37.5, 37.7-45.2, 46.2-46.6, and 56.7-63.2.

WB Miles 0.4-6.9, 17.0-17.4, 19.3-25.9, 26.1-27.6, and 28.5-42.8.

In addition, in most places where the trail is on BRP land, the corridor is fairly narrow and it may be fairly easy to reach the National Forest to camp. Again, please use accurate maps and/or GPS data to confirm you are on National Forest land before setting up a camp.

*Note:* A number of the most obvious backcountry sites are noted in the hiking directions below, but there has been no attempt to completely catalog all suitable sites. In the directions, the beginnings of sections where camping is legal are marked with a tent icon but, again, this does not imply there are suitable campsites in these stretches.

Camping in the Middle Prong Wilderness Area (EB Miles 37.7-42.3; WB Miles 21.4-25.9) is limited to groups of 10 or fewer people and campfires are not permitted.

Backcountry campers may leave cars at BRP overlooks overnight, but must call the BRP Comm Center (828-298-2491) the day before or the morning they leave to provide details.

Also check Friends' "Trail Angels" page at [MountainstoSeaTrail.org/the-trail/trail-angels](http://MountainstoSeaTrail.org/the-trail/trail-angels) for additional camping and lodging options.

### **Special Note Regarding Bear Activity and Requirements**

Because of aggressive bear activity, the US Forest Service requires all backpackers to carry bear canisters in the Shining Rock Wilderness Area and nearby Forest Service lands to the northwest of the BRP. This area encompasses parts of Segments 2 and 3 of the MST. As a practical matter for MST thru-hikers, this will probably require carrying canisters between Cherokee (Segment 1) and Asheville (Segment 3), as these are the nearest resupply points. For more information, see [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/alerts-notice/?cid=stelprd3832543](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/alerts-notice/?cid=stelprd3832543).

In addition, because of the bear activity, camping is currently prohibited in the Graveyard Fields area (EB Miles 46.6-53.4; WB Miles 10.2-17.0).

## Campgrounds and Lodging

*Note:* All prices listed in this guide are for comparison only and are subject to change at any time.

The only campgrounds and hotel on or near the trail are listed below. Additional lodging is available in Waynesville, 7 miles northeast on US 74 from EB Mile 9.4; WB Mile 54.2.

Near EB Mile 9.4; WB Mile 54.2

Moonshine Creek Campground, 2486 Dark Ridge Rd., Sylva, 28779, 828-586-6666; [moonshinecreek.com](http://moonshinecreek.com). Approximately 1.5 miles from the trail. Campsites have fire rings, picnic tables, water, and electricity, and the campground has a camp store, laundry, and heated bathhouse. Tent sites are \$29-\$34/night. Cabins are also available for \$44-\$119/night.

EB Mile 63.6; WB Mile 0.0

Mt. Pisgah Campground, BRP Milepost (MP) 408.6, 828-648-2644. The campground is open between late April and the end of October. The campground has water, restrooms, and showers, and sites are \$20/night. For online reservations, go to [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) and search for Mt. Pisgah Campground.

EB Mile 63.6; WB Mile 0.0

Pisgah Inn, MP 408.6, 828-235-8228; [www.pisgahinn.com](http://www.pisgahinn.com). The inn is open April 1 to October 31; rooms range from \$180 to \$244/night.

## Food/Supplies/Post Office

There are almost no facilities on this segment. The nearest town is Waynesville, 7 miles northeast on US 74 from EB Mile 9.4; WB Mile 54.2.

EB Mile 0.0; WB Mile 63.6

The Waterrock Knob Visitor Center, open 10:00 AM-4:00 PM seasonally, has a small selection of snacks.

EB Mile 9.6; WB Mile 54.0

The Balsam post office is approximately 0.3 mile from the trail. To reach the post office, cross the railroad tracks, then turn left on the shoulder of US 74. Take the second left onto Candle Stick Ln. (there may not be a road sign), then the first left onto Cabin Flats Rd. The

post office is on the left after you cross the railroad tracks again.

EB Mile 63.6; WB Mile 0.0

The Pisgah Inn has a convenience store with a wider selection of food and supplies, as well as a restaurant.

## Water/Restrooms

Water is generally abundant in this segment, and this guide does not attempt to catalog every potential source, keeping in mind that a decent-sized stream in wet weather may completely stop flowing in dry periods. Only larger, named creeks; those useful for wayfinding; and water sources in areas where they are more widely scattered are listed here. **All surface water should be treated before drinking.**

In addition to surface water on the trail, water is available at the Pisgah Inn, which is the eastern end of this segment.

## Hunting

Hunting is allowed throughout the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests during the hunting season and is prohibited on BRP property. See [www.ncwildlife.org/hunting](http://www.ncwildlife.org/hunting) for information about seasons and licenses.

## Signs/Blazing

With the exception of the trail within the Middle Prong Wilderness Area, the MST in Segment 2 is generally well marked with the MST blaze—a 3-inch white circle—either painted on or affixed to trees or signposts. Within the Wilderness Area (EB Miles 37.7 to 42.3; WB Miles 21.4 to 25.9), there are no blazes because they are not permitted by wilderness law. Throughout this segment, the tread of the trail can be indistinct and difficult to follow in places.

## Dogs

Dogs are allowed on this segment of the MST, but should be on leashes at all times.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Friends office: 919-825-0297 or [info@MountainstoSeaTrail.org](mailto:info@MountainstoSeaTrail.org)

Walt Weber and “the Gang” for the Carolina Mountain Club have published an excellent, highly detailed, set of maps and profiles for this segment of the MST entitled *Trail Profiles and Maps: From Clingmans Dome to Mount Mitchell and Beyond*. The book is available on Amazon or through a number of outlets in the Asheville area.

### Trail Maps

Google map of the entire MST: [MountainstoSeaTrail.org/map](http://MountainstoSeaTrail.org/map)

BRP map: [www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/maps.htm](http://www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/maps.htm)

National Geographic map 785 (Nantahala and Cullasaja Gorges) and map 780 (Pisgah Ranger District), available at [www.natgeomaps.com/trail-maps/trails-illustrated-maps/north-carolina](http://www.natgeomaps.com/trail-maps/trails-illustrated-maps/north-carolina)

### Federal Land Management Agency Sites

BRP: [www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri)

BRP road and trail closures:

[www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/roadclosures.htm](http://www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/roadclosures.htm)

National Forests in North Carolina: [www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc](http://www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc)

Links for other points and organizations of interest

Pisgah Inn: [www.pisgahinn.com](http://www.pisgahinn.com)

Carolina Mountain Club (trail maintainers in this segment):  
[www.carolinamountainclub.org](http://www.carolinamountainclub.org)

Haywood County Tourism: [visitncsmokies.com](http://visitncsmokies.com)

Downtown Waynesville: [www.downtownwaynesville.com](http://www.downtownwaynesville.com)

### Biodiversity websites

[highlandsbiological.org/nature-center/  
biodiversity-of-the-southern-appalachians](http://highlandsbiological.org/nature-center/biodiversity-of-the-southern-appalachians)

[www.worldwildlife.org/ecoregions/na0403](http://www.worldwildlife.org/ecoregions/na0403)

For more detailed information about the plant communities of this area, Timothy P. Spira’s *Wildflowers and Plant Communities of the Southern Appalachian Mountains and Piedmont* is an excellent and understandable resource.

## PRIMARY PARKING LOCATIONS

### Waterrock Knob Parking Area (BRP Milepost [MP] 451.2)

EB Mile 0.0; WB Mile 63.6



N35.45999, W83.14132

### Fork Ridge Overlook (MP 449.0)

EB Mile 2.5; WB Mile 61.1



N35.45940, W83.11724

### BRP Maintenance Area near US 74 Crossing

EB Mile 9.6; WB Mile 54.0



N35.43263, W83.07852

### Grassy Ridge Mine Overlook (MP 436.8)

EB Mile 17.8; WB Mile 45.8



N35.40998, W83.04501

### MP 426.5

EB Mile 35.8; WB Mile 27.8



N35.31348, W82.95407

### NC 215 Crossing

EB Mile 42.3; WB Mile 21.4



N35.30380, W82.90911

### Black Balsam Knob Rd. (FR 816) Crossing

EB Mile 46.6; WB Mile 17.0



N35.32077, W82.87599

### Graveyard Fields Parking Lot (MP 418.8; 0.4 Mile from Trail)

EB Mile 49.9; WB Mile 13.7



N35.32005, W82.84718

### Looking Glass Rock Overlook (MP 417.0)

EB Mile 51.9; WB Mile 11.7



N35.32182, W82.82812

### Cherry Cove Overlook (MP 415.7)

EB Mile 53.4; WB Mile 10.2



N35.33598, W82.81519

### US 276 Crossing

EB Mile 57.0; WB Mile 6.7



N35.36602, W82.78956

### Pisgah Inn (MP 408.6)

EB Mile 63.6; WB Mile 0.0



N35.40360, W82.75425



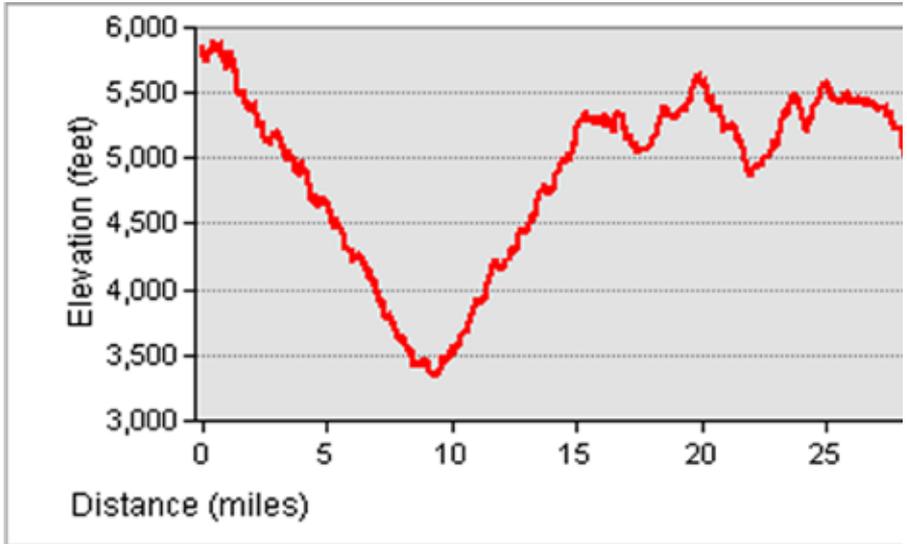
A foggy day on the trail  
Photo by Jim Grode

## Hiking Directions, Eastbound

- 0.0 Segment 2 begins at a trail junction just above the Waterrock Knob Overlook (BRP MP 451.2). If continuing a hike from Segment 1, turn left from the paved path onto a trail marked with the MST blaze to begin Segment 2. Continue down a long set of wooden steps. *Note:* The overlook has parking, a visitor center with a small convenience store (open seasonally), and restrooms. There is no water. If you continue straight up the paved path, the summit of Waterrock Knob, with spectacular views, is 0.5 mile ahead.   
- 0.2 Cross a small streambed that is often dry. Over the next two miles, there are several such crossings.
- 0.3 Ascend a set of wooden steps.
- 1.1 Descend a set of rock steps.
- 2.4 Pass a fence on the right with views of Fork Ridge Overlook.
- 2.5 Descend a short set of wooden steps and begin walking along the North Fork of Scott Creek, more easily heard than seen from the

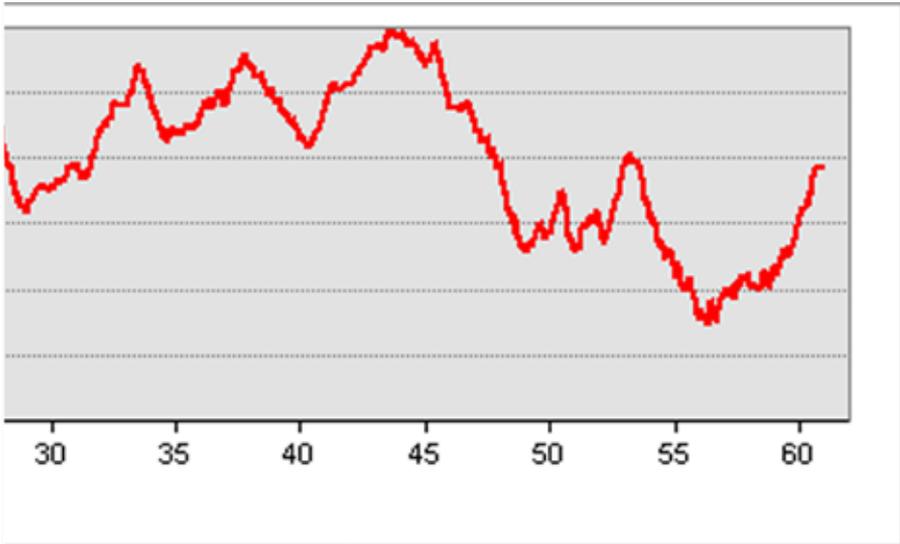
- trail. Reach BRP at Fork Ridge Overlook (BRP MP 449.0) and turn left to walk alongside the road.  
- 3.1 Enter woods on trail marked with signpost with white blaze and MST logo. The trail will begin climbing up switchbacks.
  - 5.0 Cross footbridge over Woodfin Creek and then pass blue-blazed spur trail to BRP on right. 
  - 5.6 Cross small creek. 
  - 5.7 Emerge onto old roadbed and bear right.
  - 5.8 Emerge onto a gravel road and bear right (downhill). *Note:* You will be on the gravel road for the next 1.9 miles.
  - 5.9 Pass through a gate.
  - 6.1 Pass an overgrown track on left.
  - 6.7 Continue straight where an old road comes in from left.
  - 7.7 Continue straight where Rosemount Rd. comes in from left, then turn right at a signpost with white marker and arrow pointing right. You will cross to a parking lot, then turn right and go down the paved road. 
  - 7.8 At T-intersection, turn left onto BRP. *Note:* For the next 0.9 mile, you will be on the shoulder of the BRP, so use caution.
  - 8.3 Pass MP 444.
  - 8.7 Just past gate, turn right into the woods at MST signpost.
  - 9.4 Turn right onto BRP at Balsam Gap sign, then cross bridge over US 74. *Note:* Camping is available at Moonshine Creek Campground approximately 1.5 miles from the trail. See the “Campgrounds and Lodging” section for this segment for more information.  
  - 9.5 Pass BRP MP 443 then, just before road to BRP maintenance facility, turn right on small trail.
  - 9.6 At T-intersection, turn right on single-lane paved road then, just before crossing railroad tracks, bear left on grassy track into woods. *Note:* At the T-intersection, turn left up the hill to reach a parking area. The Balsam post office is approximately 0.3 mile from the trail at this point. See the “Food/Supplies/Post Office” section for this segment for directions. 
  - 9.7 Cross wooden bridge.
  - 10.8 Cross creek on log bridge. 

## Segment 2 Eastbound



- 11.1 Cross gravel road at a downhill angle, returning to the trail near a tree with a painted purple rectangle.
- 11.7 Cross a log bridge over a small seep.
- 12.0 Cross Redbank Branch. 💧
- 12.5 Cross bridge over small stream, which may not always have water. 💧
- 17.8 Pass short spur trail to Grassy Ridge Mine Overlook (MP 436.8) on left. 🅑
- 18.8 Cross log bridge over small gully.
- 19.0 Pass short spur trail on left, leading to Licklog Gap Overlook (MP 435.7). 🅑
- 19.6 At sign with white markers, continue straight past short spur trail on left to Doubletop Mtn. Overlook (MP 435.3). 🅑
- 20.8 Bear right at MST sign, then continue straight onto an old roadbed (largely overgrown here, but it soon widens). *Note:* The trail to the left leads approximately 0.1 mile to a small parking area on the BRP at MP 434.2. As you continue on the MST, you are entering the Nantahala National Forest, where camping is allowed for the next 14.3 miles. 🅑 🏕️
- 21.2 Continue straight past clearing on left.

## Elevation Profile



- 21.4 Just before reaching clearing, make sharp left onto another old roadbed.
- 21.6 Reach an open grassy area and continue on old roadbed straight past trail on left, then turn left at MST sign and return to woods.
- 22.0 Turn right at an open area that appears to be a former power-line cut, then turn left on old roadbed at post with white markers.
- 22.1 Turn sharply left onto a singletrack trail at post with white markers.
- 22.3 Cross Mill Creek. 💧
- 22.6 Continue straight onto an old roadbed.
- 22.9 Pass a campsite on the right. 🏕️
- 23.0 Turn left at T-intersection with white marker.
- 23.7 Pass a campsite on the right. 🏕️
- 24.1 Continue straight onto singletrack trail. *Note:* The trail becomes much more rocky and difficult here; the next two miles are among the most difficult on the entire MST.
- 25.9 Continue straight onto old, mostly overgrown roadbed.
- 26.2 Cross Beechflat Creek, then continue straight where trail comes in from left. 💧
- 26.8 Pass frame structure on right as trail bears left.



Camping



Lodging



Parking



Food



Restrooms



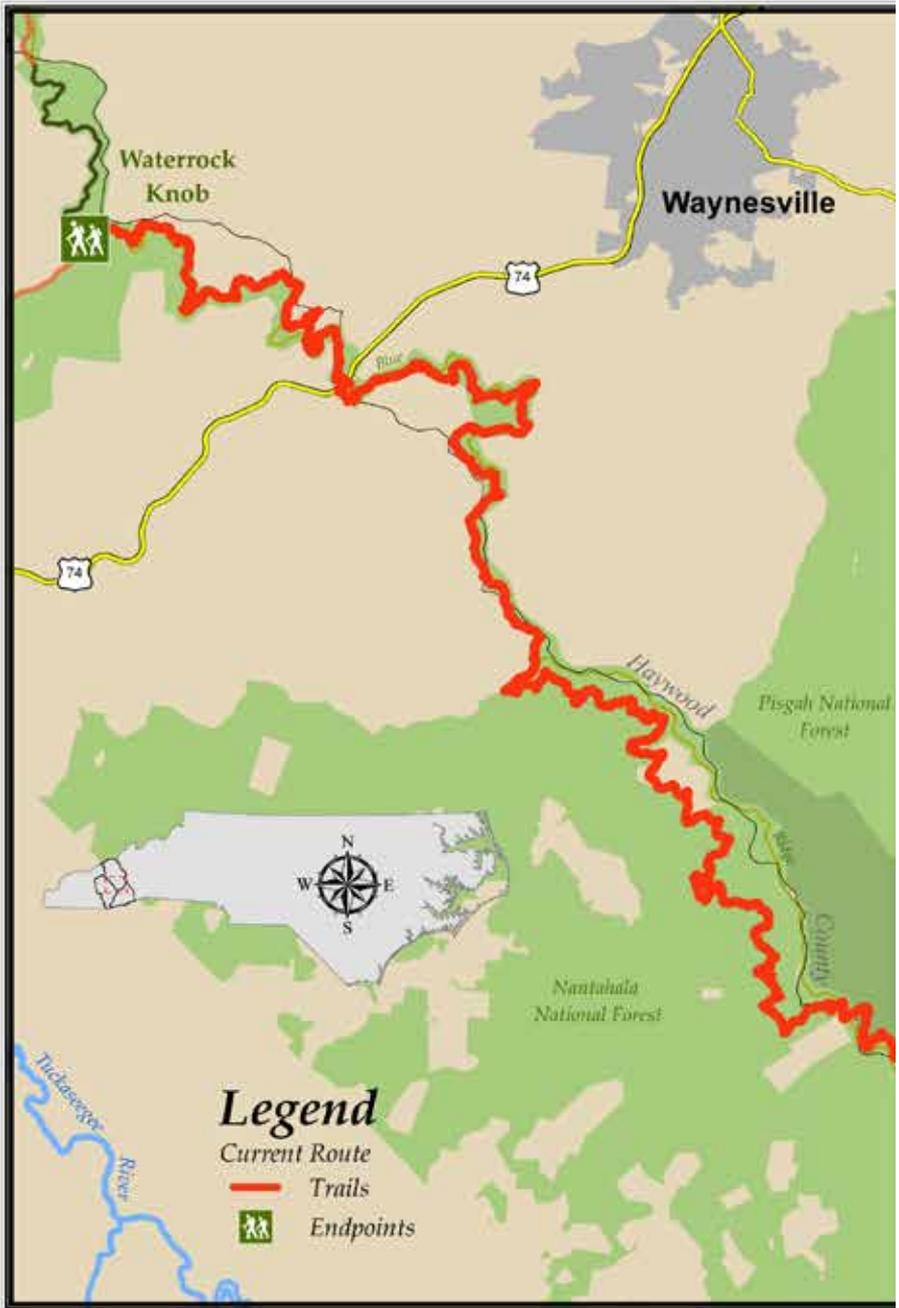
Supplies



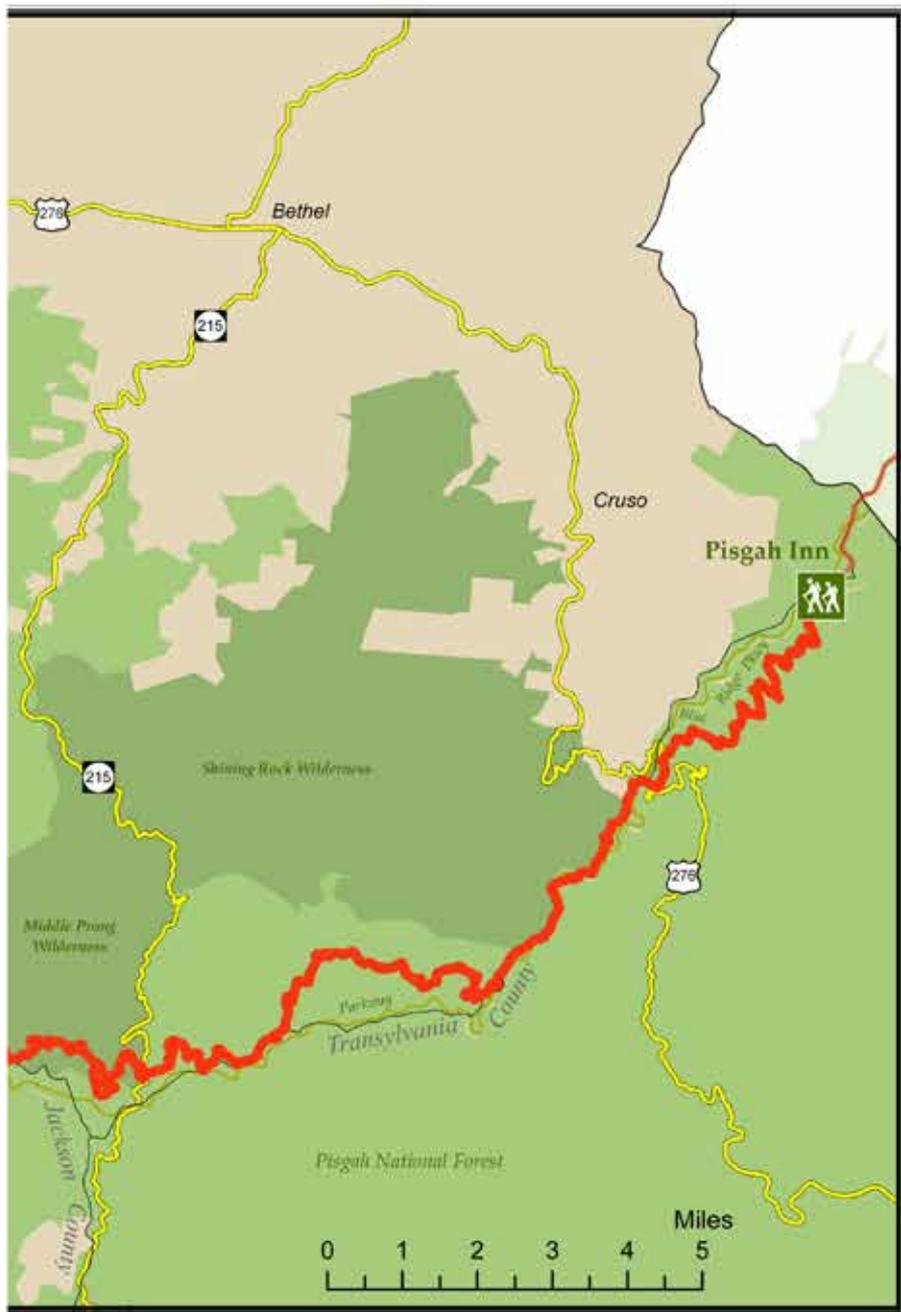
Water



Picnic



Map and elevation profile produced for Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail by Curtis Belyea, 2019.





Butterfly on milkweed

Photo by PJ Wetzel, [www.pjwetzel.com](http://www.pjwetzel.com)

- 29.6 Where a trail appears to continue straight, take switchback to the left to stay on main trail.
- 29.7 Pass through gate.
- 29.9 Turn left at T-intersection.
- 30.4 At Y-intersection just before trail enters a deeply embanked section, bear left, then turn left at T-intersection.
- 30.7 Cross Birch Ridge Creek. 💧
- 31.3 Continue straight onto an old roadbed joining the trail from the right.
- 31.5 Cross Piney Mtn. Creek. 💧
- 31.7 Pass trail on the left to campsite with limited flat space. 🏕️
- 33.0 Bear left at MST sign onto singletrack trail.
- 33.1 Turn left from singletrack trail to return to old roadbed.
- 33.8 Ascend to old road marked with MST sign and bear right onto the road. Pass between the metal posts of an old gate. *Note:* The road to the left leads 0.6 mile to parking at Bear Pen Gap parking area (MP 427.6). 🅅



Camping



Lodging



Parking



Food



Restrooms



Supplies



Water



Picnic

- 34.2 Cross a set of “speed bumps” in the trail designed to discourage ATV traffic.
- 34.3 Reach clearing and turn left on trail marked with MST sign. *Note:* Continuing straight leads a few hundred feet to a campsite suitable for large groups. Another, smaller campsite is farther along the same path, and water is available about 0.2 mile away on a side path to the right between the campsites.  
- 35.1 Enter BRP property (no sign), where camping is prohibited.
- 35.8 Cross BRP at a gravel parking area at Haywood Gap (MP 426.5), then turn right at T-intersection with MST sign. 
- 36.0 Pass National Park Service Boundary Line sign. You are entering the Pisgah National Forest, where camping is allowed for the next 1.5 miles. 
- 37.5 Pass National Park Service Boundary Line sign. You are entering BRP property, where camping is prohibited.
- 37.7 Enter Middle Prong Wilderness Area; camping is allowed for the next 7.5 miles, but see the “Primitive Camping” section for this segment for restrictions. *Note:* The trail is not blazed through the wilderness area and can be difficult to follow. 
- 38.7 Cross Buckeye Creek. 
- 38.8 At Y-intersection, where trail narrows significantly, bear right (up-hill), then pass trail to campsite on right. 
- 38.9 Continue straight along lower edge of a heath bald.
- 39.3 Pass an MST sign, then cross logs over a boggy area.
- 39.4 Pass campsite on the left. 
- 41.2 Reach the West Fork of the Pigeon River and cross a small tributary, keeping the main stream on your left, then return to the woods. 
- 41.7 Pass through clearing with campsite on the left. 
- 42.0 Pass unmarked trail on left just before MST sign, then pass campsite on right. 
- 42.2 Cross Bubbling Spring Branch, then bear left. 
- 42.3 Leave Middle Prong Wilderness Area, then cross NC 215. 
- 42.4 Pass campsite on right. 
- 42.7 At a tree marked with a double white blaze, turn left, looking for a tree 10 feet ahead with a single white blaze, then cross log bridge over creek. 



Skinny Dip Falls

Photo by PJ Wetzel, [www.pjwetzel.com](http://www.pjwetzel.com)

- 44.0 Pass several campsites on the right and left. ▲
- 44.2 Cross small stream on wooden bridge. 💧
- 44.3 Pass wooden boardwalk, then pass Devil's Courthouse Connector Trail on right.
- 44.4 Cross two wooden bridges. 💧
- 44.5 Pass Little Sam Trail on left and campsite on right. ▲
- 44.9 Cross a pair of wooden bridges.
- 45.2 Enter BRP property (no sign), where camping is prohibited.
- 45.3 Pass side trail to rock outcrop overlook on right.
- 45.5 Pass Art Loeb Trail on right.



Camping



Lodging



Parking



Food



Restrooms



Supplies



Water



Picnic

- 46.2 Enter the Pisgah National Forest (no sign), where camping is allowed for the next 0.4 mile. 
- 46.4 Pass trail to campsite on left. 
- 46.6 Cross Black Balsam Knob Rd. (FR 816) and turn right just before Art Loeb Trail sign. At Y-intersection where the more obvious trail goes left, bear right into spruce forest, following white-painted blazes. *Note:* As noted in the introductory materials, the US Forest Service has prohibited camping in the Graveyard Fields area (Miles 46.6-53.4), which you are entering. Although these directions identify campsites in this area as wayfinding guides, do not camp there. 
- 46.7 Cross the first in a series of 13 wooden bridges and boardwalks over a network of streams in the next 0.3 mile. 
- 47.0 Bear right at top of rock outcropping.
- 47.2 Begin descending a series of switchbacks.
- 47.5 Reach clearing with significant trail intersection and campsite. Continue straight, following MST blaze and sign toward “BRP MP 417 Looking Glass Overlook.” 
- 48.2 Continue straight past Graveyard Ridge Trail on right.
- 48.6 Pass campsite on right. 
- 49.9 Turn left at T-intersection with sign to “BRP MP 417 Looking Glass Overlook.” *Note:* If you turn right instead, you will reach the Graveyard Fields parking lot (MP 418.8) in 0.4 mile. 
- 50.1 Pass campsite on right. 
- 50.2 Bear left at Y-intersection where right fork is marked to campsites. 
- 51.4 Pass campsite on left. 
- 51.6 Cross wooden bridge over Yellowstone Prong just below Skinny Dip Falls, then ascend stairs and cross small stream on wooden bridge. 
- 51.9 Pass side trail on right to parking at Looking Glass Rock Overlook 400 feet away (MP 417). 
- 52.2 At sign where Bridges Camp Gap Trail continues straight ahead, turn right.
- 52.5 Pass campsite on right. 
- 53.4 Turn left on BRP at Cherry Cove Overlook (MP 415.7) and walk along shoulder. 
- 53.5 Return to trail at Cherry Gap sign.
- 54.1 Cross BRP (with small parking area) at MP 415. 



Indian Pipe

Photo by PJ Wetzel, [www.pjwetzel.com](http://www.pjwetzel.com)

- 54.5 Continue straight past trail to viewpoint on right.
- 54.6 Turn right on BRP at Bennett Gap.
- 54.7 Cross BRP and return to trail at MST sign.
- 55.7 Pass through cleft in rocks, then pass between NPS benchmark on left and large boulder on right.
- 56.6 Cross BRP at Pigeon Gap (MP 412.5), near a power-line cut and small grassy parking area. 
- 56.7 Enter the Pisgah National Forest (no sign), where camping is allowed for the next 6.5 miles. 
- 57.0 Cross US 276. *Note:* There is a small parking area 50 yards to the right. 
- 57.4 Cross stream on log bridge. 
- 58.0 Cross creek on log bridge. 

- 58.5 Turn left at T-intersection then cross stream on log. *Note:* The trail here becomes known as the Buck Spring Trail, which continues on your right as well. 💧
- 58.7 Continue straight past Barnett Branch Trail on right.
- 59.0 Cross Barnett Branch. 💧
- 60.3 Cross Poplar Creek. 💧
- 60.6 Pass campsite on left. 🏕️
- 63.1 Begin ascending a series of switchbacks.
- 63.2 Enter BRP property (no sign), where camping is prohibited.
- 63.4 Continue onto grassy path.
- 63.5 At a seating area with a fence, turn left and go up the stairs, then turn right on the sidewalk next to the Pisgah Inn office.
- 63.6 Reach parking lot for the Pisgah Inn (MP 408.6) and eastern end of Segment 2. *Note:* The Pisgah Inn, open seasonally, has lodging, a restaurant, and a store with general supplies. The Mt. Pisgah Campground is nearby; to reach it, turn left on the BRP and walk approximately 0.1 mile to the entrance on the right. See the “Campgrounds and Lodging” section for this segment for more information. 🚫🏠🛏️💧🅅️🚻🏕️



In the Balsams

Photo by Danny Bernstein

## Hiking Directions, Westbound

- 0.0 Begin Segment 2 at parking lot for the Pisgah Inn (BRP MP 408.6). From the back right corner of the parking lot (as viewed from the BRP), turn right on the sidewalk, and then left just beyond the inn office, and go down a flight of stairs. *Note:* The Pisgah Inn, open seasonally, has lodging, a restaurant, and a store with general supplies. The Mt. Pisgah Campground is nearby; to reach it, turn left on the

BRP and walk approximately 0.1 mile to the entrance on the right. See the “Campgrounds and Lodging” section for this segment for more information.       

- 0.1 At a seating area with a fence, turn right onto the grassy path.
- 0.2 At end of grassy path, continue onto singletrack trail also known as the Buck Spring Trail.
- 0.3 Begin descending a series of switchbacks.
- 0.4 Enter the Pisgah National Forest (no sign), where camping is allowed for the next 6.5 miles. 
- 3.0 Pass campsite on right. 
- 3.3 Cross Poplar Creek. 
- 4.6 Cross Barnett Branch. 
- 4.9 Continue straight past Barnett Branch Trail on left.
- 5.1 Cross stream on log then turn right at sign where Buck Spring Trail continues straight. 
- 5.6 Cross creek on log bridge. 
- 6.3 Cross stream on log bridge. 
- 6.7 Cross US 276. *Note:* There is a small parking area 50 yards to the left. 
- 6.9 Enter BRP property (no sign), where camping is prohibited.
- 7.0 Cross BRP at Pigeon Gap (MP 412.5), near a power-line cut and small grassy parking area. 
- 8.0 Pass between NPS benchmark on right and large boulder on right, then down through cleft in rocks.
- 8.9 Turn right on BRP at Bennett Gap.
- 9.0 Return to trail at MST sign.
- 9.1 Continue straight past trail to viewpoint on left.
- 9.5 Cross BRP (with small parking area) at MP 415. 
- 10.1 Turn right on BRP at Cherry Gap and walk along shoulder.
- 10.2 Return to trail on right just beyond Cherry Cove Overlook (MP 415.7). *Note:* As noted in the introductory materials, the US Forest Service has prohibited camping in the Graveyard Fields area (Miles 10.2-17.0). Although these directions identify campsites in this area as wayfinding guides, do not camp there. 
- 11.1 Pass campsite on left. 

- 11.4 At T-intersection with MST marker, turn left. The trail on your right is the Bridges Camp Gap Trail.
- 11.7 Pass side trail on left to parking at Looking Glass Rock Overlook 400 feet away (MP 417). 
- 12.0 Cross small stream on wooden bridge, then descend stairs and cross wooden bridge over Yellowstone Prong just below Skinny Dip Falls. 
- 12.3 Pass campsite on right.
- 13.4 Where trail to campsites comes in on left, continue straight along trail marked “Connector” and “Graveyard Fields Parking.”
- 13.5 Pass campsite on right.
- 13.7 Turn right where sign points to Graveyard Fields parking lot straight ahead. *Note:* If you continue straight, you will reach the parking lot in 0.4 mile (MP 418.8). 
- 15.0 Pass campsite on left.
- 15.5 Continue straight past Graveyard Ridge Trail on left.
- 16.2 Reach clearing with significant trail intersection and campsite. Continue straight, following MST blaze and sign toward “Black Bal. Rd. FSR 816.” You will begin to ascend a series of switchbacks shortly.
- 16.6 Cross rock outcropping and head down a series of switchbacks.
- 16.7 Cross the first in a series of 13 wooden bridges and boardwalks over a network of streams in the next 0.3 mile. 
- 17.0 Continue straight past trail on right, then turn left at T-intersection, where the trail to the right is the Art Loeb Trail and cross Black Balsam Knob Rd. (FR 816). *Note:* You are leaving the area the US Forest Service has closed to camping because of bear activity; camping is allowed for the next 0.4 mile.  
- 17.2 Pass trail to campsite on right. 
- 17.4 Enter BRP property (no sign), where camping is prohibited.
- 18.1 Pass Art Loeb Trail on left.
- 18.3 Pass side trail to rock outcrop overlook on left.
- 18.5 Enter the Pisgah National Forest; camping is allowed for the next 7.5 miles, but see the “Backcountry Camping” section for this segment for restrictions. 
- 18.8 Cross a pair of wooden bridges.
- 19.1 Pass Little Sam Trail on right and campsite on left. 

- 19.2 Cross two wooden bridges. 💧
- 19.3 Pass Devil's Courthouse Connector Trail on left, then cross wooden boardwalk.
- 19.4 Cross small stream on wooden bridge. 💧
- 19.6 Pass several campsites on the right and left. ▲
- 20.9 Cross log bridge over creek. At faint T-intersection, turn right and go downhill. 💧
- 21.3 Pass campsite on left. ▲
- 21.4 Cross NC 215 and enter Middle Prong Wilderness Area. *Note:* The trail is not blazed through the wilderness area and can be difficult to follow. Ⓟ
- 21.5 Cross Bubbling Spring Branch, then continue uphill, parallel to road. 💧
- 21.6 Pass campsite on left, then unmarked trail on right just after MST sign. ▲
- 21.9 Pass through clearing with campsite on the right. ▲
- 22.4 Reach the West Fork of the Pigeon River and cross a small tributary, keeping the main stream on your right, then return to the woods. 💧
- 23.5 Cross a stream then, less than 50 feet ahead, bear left at a faint Y-intersection (the right fork may be blocked by branches). 💧
- 24.2 Pass campsite on the right. ▲
- 24.3 Cross logs over a boggy area, then bear right. If you look back at the end of the logs, you will see an MST sign.
- 24.8 Continue straight along lower edge of a heath bald.
- 24.9 Pass trail to campsite on left, then turn left on wider trail. ▲
- 25.0 Cross Buckeye Creek. 💧
- 25.9 Leave Middle Prong Wilderness Area. You are entering BRP property, where camping is prohibited.
- 26.1 Pass National Park Service boundary line sign. You are entering the Pisgah National Forest, where camping is allowed for the next 1.5 miles. ▲
- 27.6 Pass National Park Service boundary line sign. You are entering BRP property, where camping is prohibited.
- 27.8 Turn left at MST sign, then cross BRP at a gravel parking area at Haywood Gap (MP 426.5). Ⓟ

- 28.5 Enter the Nantahala National Forest (no sign), where camping is permitted for the next 14.3 miles. 
- 29.3 Turn right at T-intersection in clearing. *Note:* The left fork leads a few hundred feet to a campsite suitable for large groups. Another, smaller campsite is farther along the same path, and water is available about 0.2 mile away on a side path to the right between the campsites.  
- 29.4 Cross a set of “speed bumps” in the trail designed to discourage ATV traffic.
- 29.8 Pass between the metal posts of an old gate.
- 29.9 Bear left at Y-intersection marked with MST sign. *Note:* The right fork leads 0.6 mile to parking at Bear Pen Gap parking area (MP 427.6). 
- 30.5 Turn right off old roadbed onto singletrack trail.
- 30.6 Bear right at MST sign and return to old roadbed.
- 32.0 Pass trail on the right to campsite with limited flat space. 
- 32.2 Cross Piney Mtn. Creek. 
- 32.4 At Y-intersection, take right fork; the trail will soon narrow.
- 32.9 Cross Birch Ridge Creek. 
- 33.2 At Y-intersection, where trail is deeply embanked, take right fork.
- 33.7 At trail intersection, where the trail continuing straight begins to descend, turn right to continue uphill.
- 33.9 Pass through gate.
- 34.0 Where a trail appears to go left, take switchback to the right to stay on main trail.
- 36.8 Pass frame structure on left as trail bears right.
- 37.4 Continue straight where trail comes in from right, then cross Beech-flat Creek. 
- 37.7 Bear right off old roadbed (which by this point is mostly overgrown) onto singletrack trail at MST sign. *Note:* The tread of the trail will soon become much more rocky and difficult; the next two miles are among the most difficult on the entire MST.
- 39.5 Continue onto old roadbed.
- 39.9 Pass a campsite on the left. 
- 40.6 Turn right to continue on roadbed, heading uphill at white marker.
- 40.7 Pass a campsite on the left. 



Rhododendron tunnel

Photo by PJ Wetzel, [www.pjwetzel.com](http://www.pjwetzel.com)

- 41.0 Leave the roadbed and continue straight on a singletrack trail.
- 41.4 Cross Mill Creek. 💧
- 41.6 Turn sharply right onto an overgrown roadbed at post with white markers.
- 41.7 At open area that appears to be a former power-line cut, turn right at post with white marker to head uphill for about 100 feet, then bear left into woods. *Note:* The marker may be obscured by growth and somewhat difficult to see.
- 42.1 Bear right at open grassy area with MST sign, then continue on old roadbed straight past trail on right.
- 42.2 Just before reaching clearing, make sharp right onto another old roadbed.
- 42.4 Continue straight past clearing on right.
- 42.8 Bear left to leave roadbed just before earthen barrier, then take left fork at Y-intersection with MST sign. *Note:* The right fork leads approximately 0.1 mile to a small parking area on the BRP at MP



Camping



Lodging



Parking



Food



Restrooms



Supplies



Water



Picnic

- 434.2. As you continue on the MST, you are entering BRP property, where camping is prohibited. 
- 44.0 At sign with white markers, continue straight past short spur trail on right to Doubletop Mtn. Overlook (MP 435.3). 
- 44.6 Pass short spur trail on right, leading to Licklog Gap Overlook (MP 435.7). 
- 44.8 Cross log bridge over small gully.
- 45.8 Pass short spur trail to Grassy Ridge Mine Overlook (MP 436.8) on left. 
- 51.1 Cross bridge over small stream, which may not always have water. 
- 51.7 Cross Redbank Branch. 
- 52.0 Cross a log bridge over a small seep.
- 52.5 Cross gravel road at an uphill angle, aiming at a tree with a white blaze painted on it.
- 52.8 Cross creek on log bridge. 
- 53.9 Cross wooden bridge.
- 54.0 Turn right onto single-lane paved road paralleling railroad tracks. Just before reaching T-intersection, turn left onto trail and cross over stone footbridge. *Note:* Continue straight up the hill to reach a parking area. The Balsam post office is approximately 0.3 mile from the trail at this point. See the “Food/Supplies/Post Office” section for this segment for directions. 
- 54.1 Turn left on BRP and pass MP 443.
- 54.2 Just after crossing bridge over US 74 at Balsam Gap, turn left into woods at MST signpost. *Note:* Camping is available at Moonshine Creek Campground approximately 1.5 miles from the trail. See the “Campgrounds and Lodging” section for this segment for more information.  
- 54.9 Turn left on BRP and go through the gate. *Note:* For the next 0.9 mile, you will be on the shoulder of the BRP, so use caution.
- 55.3 Pass MP 444.
- 55.8 Just beyond “Overlook Ahead” sign, turn right at MST signpost onto road with yield sign and single yellow stripe.
- 55.9 When you reach a parking lot, turn right onto a small path through the woods at the lower end of the parking lot, leading to a gravel road. Turn left on the gravel road, then stay left on Greenspire Dr. at

- a Y-intersection with Rosemount Rd. *Note:* You will be on the gravel road for the next 1.9 miles. 
- 56.9 Continue straight where an old road heads up to the right.
- 57.5 At Y-intersection with overgrown track, stay left on main road.
- 57.7 Pass through a gate.
- 57.8 At a hairpin turn in the gravel road, head into the woods on a trail marked with a white-blazed signpost.
- 57.9 Where the roadbed you are traveling on becomes overgrown, bear left onto trail heading slightly downhill.
- 58.0 Cross small creek. 
- 58.6 Pass blue-blazed spur trail to BRP on left, then cross footbridge over Woodfin Creek. 
- 60.5 Reach BRP and turn right to walk along the road.
- 61.1 Turn right into the woods at the white-blazed signpost just before Fork Ridge Overlook (BRP MP 449.0). Walk along the North Fork of Scott Creek, more easily heard than seen from the trail.  
- 61.2 Turn away from the creek and ascend a short set of wooden steps. Pass a fence on the left with views of Fork Ridge Overlook.
- 61.4 Cross a small streambed that is often dry. Over the next two miles, there are several such crossings.
- 62.5 Ascend a set of rock steps.
- 63.3 Descend a set of wooden steps.
- 63.6 Climb a long set of wooden steps and reach the western end of Segment 2 at a T-intersection with a paved path. Turn right to begin hiking Segment 1, or turn left to reach the Waterrock Knob parking lot (at MP 451.2). *Note:* The overlook has parking, a visitor center with a small convenience store (open seasonally), and restrooms. There is no water. If you turn right onto the paved path, the summit of Waterrock Knob, with spectacular views, is 0.5 mile ahead. 

