



2024 Gathering of Friends Hikes & Excursions

Registration for hikes and excursions is open for those attending the Gathering of Friends. You will receive a link with registrations details for hikes and excursions after you have registered for the Gathering. Group sizes will be limited on the hikes, so ***please only sign up for hikes you know you can attend.***

Hike Glassmine Falls Overlook to Graybeard Overlook on the MST

Friday, May 3, 8:30am

Enjoy Great Day Hike #7 on the MST! A lovely ramble and enjoyable in-and-out hike on the MST with good views and an interesting variety of trees and shrubs. This time of year, there should be a wide variety of wildflowers! A big thanks to Carolina Mountain Club for leading this hike.

Mileage: 5 miles

Hike Mt. Mitchell Loop

Friday, May 3, 8:30am

Hike Mt. Mitchell, the highest mountain east of the Mississippi at 6,684 feet. We will start from the paved summit trail and take the Old Mitchell Trail to Stepps Gap. At the Ranger Station, we'll turn on Commissary Trail and take the Camp Alice Trail up to where it meets the Old Mitchell Trail back to the summit. We'll visit the observation platform with magnificent 360-degree long range views before or after depending on visibility. This is not a beginner hike. Thanks to Carolina Mountain Club for leading this hike!

Mileage: 4.2 miles

Hike Montreat, Graybeard Trail to Walker's Knob

Friday, May 3, 8:45am

Join us for this 8-mile hike at beautiful Montreat! We'll hike Graybeard Trail up to Walker's Knob and back. The hike is a steady 1,800-foot climb with a wonderful view of the Montreat and Black Mountain Valley at Walker's Knob. There are a number of challenging sections of steep and rocky terrain plus areas with lots of roots to negotiate. The four water crossings are usually easy if it has not recently rained. Poles and sturdy hiking shoes/boots are recommended. Thank you to Carolina Mountain Club for leading this hike!

Mileage: 8 miles

MST Trail Workday

Friday, May 3, 9:00am-3:00pm

If you are interested in learning new trail maintenance skills or improving your skills, please join us for this workshop. We will start in a classroom setting and describe why and how we work on the trail. We will then hike to our worksite on the campus of the Blue Ridge Assembly to work on one of their trails.

Crafting a Sense of Place

Friday, May 3, 9am-11:30am

We will forage for art materials and make a craft project out of our discoveries. This will be a keepsake for your time at the Gathering. This excursion is suitable for beginners and adventurous stitchers.

RootEd in WNC – McDowell County Schools Learning Trail

Friday, May 3, 9:00am-12:00pm

McDowell High School students have redesigned a nature and learning trail behind their school. They will be launching the trail on May 3rd as part of the RootEd in WNC Community Learning Expo, and students from local schools will have learning stations set up along the trail for students and community members. Come on this walk to find out how local students are using this trail to learn about plants, wildlife, and more!

Mileage: 1 mile

Hike Folk Art Center to Lunch Rock/Haw Creek Overlook on MST

Friday, May 3, 9:30am

This favorite moderate wildflower hike on the MST rewards hikers with great views of the Haw Creek Valley at Lunch Rock. We will hike from the Folk Art Center located on the Blue Ridge Parkway to Lunch Rock. After the hike, take advantage of the wonderful art on display at the Folk Art Center. Thanks to Carolina Mountain Club for leading this hike!

Mileage: 5 miles

Black History Tour of McDowell County

Friday, May 3, 11:00am – 1:00pm

Welcome at Old Fort: Gather at Old Fort (exact location TBD), where our journey begins. Here, we'll introduce the tour and set the stage for our exploration.

West Marion Inc.; We'll visit the first and only Black-led nonprofit organization in McDowell County. Learn about its mission, initiatives, and contributions to the community.

Visit to West Marion Community: Explore the West Marion Community, home to the Keeping It Fresh Community Garden and other notable landmarks. Learn about the community's history and initiatives that have shaped its identity.

Future West Marion Technology Center and Museum: Visit the site of the future West Marion Technology Center and Museum, which holds significance as the former Black community school prior to desegregation. Discover the plans for this transformative space and its impact on the community.

Marion East Community: Journey to the Marion East Community and discover the Marion East Recreational Complex. Learn about recent upgrades on the Peavine Trail, connecting historic landmarks such as the African American Morehead Cemetery to Oak Grove Cemetery.

Final Stop: Return to Old Fort to see a mural commissioned to honor Albert Joyner, a man before his time. Then we conclude our tour with reflections on the experiences shared and the importance of community engagement and collaboration.

Hike Bernard Mountain

Friday, May 3, 12:00-4:00pm

Join us on this 5-mile hike as we explore some of Old Fort's newest trails and enjoy the views of the ridge and railroad tunnel. Old Fort is located 30 minutes east of Blue Ridge Assembly, so if you're traveling from the east for the Gathering this is a great hike to catch! McDowell Trails Association is leading this hike.

Mileage: approximately 5 miles

Hike Carolina Loop at Blue Ridge Assembly

Friday, May 3, 1:00-3:00pm

Stretch your legs with Friends of the MST staffers Betsy Brown and Jim Grode on site at Blue Ridge Assembly on this moderate 2.2-mile hike. While not as challenging as many hikes in the area, the Carolina Loop has enough hills to remind you that you are in the high country. There will be an option to tack on another 1.5 mile moderate loop through the Wolfpit Circle, for 3.7 total miles.

Mileage: 2.2 miles, with option to add on additional 1.5 miles

Exploring the Arts and Crafts of Downtown Black Mountain

Friday, May 3, 12:30-4:00pm

Join us as we explore and play in downtown Black Mountain! We will explore craft galleries, the fabulous yarn shop, Black Mountain Center for the Arts featuring outdoor murals, excellent book shop with delicious coffee and the Roberta Flack mural.

Archery Class at Blue Ridge Assembly

Friday, May 3, 3:00-4:30pm

Join us for a 90-minute archery class on the campus of Blue Ridge Assembly! Staff will guide you through archery skills and help you hit your mark!

Group Run in The Oaks with Mountain Running Company

Saturday, May 4, 6:30-7:30am

We are thrilled to partner with Mountain Running Company for a 3-5 mile morning run before the Gathering on Saturday! We'll explore the Montreat College trail system and challenge course. You'll be back in plenty of time for breakfast and the morning meeting.

Star Gazing "Wonders of the Spring Night"

Saturday, May 4, 9:00pm

We are excited to partner with the Astronomy Club of Asheville as they conduct an evening class in star gazing and exploring the wonders of the spring night. Club members will lead us through a naked eye tour of the night sky pointing out objects of interest with their special pointers and then we'll have an opportunity to look through 4 different telescopes and view a number of beautiful deep sky objects.

Hike Hickory Branch Trail

Sunday, May 5, 8:30am

Join us for a leisurely paced in and out hike in the Curtis Creek area to a waterfall near Old Fort. We'll enjoy wildflowers and have a snack break near the falls. There are 6 stream crossings, usually done by rock-hop but possibly wet if the water level is high. Those who want to get to the base of the falls need to do a short scramble and step into the stream. Thanks to Carolina Mountain Club for leading this fantastic hike!

Mileage: 5 miles

Hike Point Lookout Trail from Mill Creek Road, Old Fort

Sunday, May 5, 9:15am

Join us as we hike the Point Lookout Trail for this 7.2-mile out and back on a paved section of Old 70 used for hiking and biking. The trail offers scenic views of mountains and features a train tunnel that provides a cool photo opportunity. Trail travels steadily downhill and is uphill all the way back. Since this is a relatively easy out and back on the last day, hikers can return if they need to depart early. Thanks to Carolina Mountain Club for leading this hike!

Mileage: 7.2 miles

Hike Montreat, Lookout Rock Loop

Sunday, May 5, 9:15am

This hike begins with a moderately steep ascent of approximately 900 feet and a short but steep rock scramble on the Lookout Trail up to Lookout Rock, where we will stop to take in the long-range views. We will continue on with a gentle climb on the Mt. Mitchell Toll Rd. to Sourwood Gap and return on the Old Trestle Rd. Anticipate seeing many wildflowers. Thanks to Carolina Mountain Club for leading this hike!

Mileage: 5 miles

Hike lower trails at Blue Ridge Assembly

Sunday, May 5, 9:30am

Join a group of Gathering attendees to hike the lower trails at Blue Ridge Assembly. There are four trails to choose from – The Blue Ridge Loop (orange blaze), Rhododendron Run (red blaze), Weatherford Trail (magenta blaze) and Washburn Trail (dark purple blaze) – walk one or all. This is a group hike, not a guided hike, so the group can walk all together or split off to tackle different trails at different paces.

Mileage: varies depending upon how many of the trails you hike

Hike upper trails at Blue Ridge Assembly

Sunday, May 5, 9:30am

Join a group of Gathering attendees to hike the upper trails at Blue Ridge Assembly. High Windy Trail (red blaze) is Blue Ridge Assembly's most challenging and popular trail (5 miles out and back), which offers a spectacular vista overlooking the mountains from atop the Eastern Continental Divide and is *a private trail only open to hikers that are part of an event at Blue Ridge Assembly*. With 1,600 feet of elevation gain, this exclusive trail is challenging and exciting for sure!

The Carolina Loop (orange blaze) isn't quite as challenging but still has enough elevation to remind you that you are nearly 3,600 feet above sea level (2.2 mile loop). The Wolfpit Circle (green blaze), Old Reservoir Loop (magenta) and Steve Franks Memorial Trail (bright purple) are shorter, with less elevation change and could be looped together for a nice couple of miles. These are group hikes, not guided, so hikers can choose the trail that is best suited for them and walk with others of their similar pace.

Mileage: High Windy 5 miles, Carolina Loop 2.2 miles, Wolfpit Hike 1.5 miles, Steve Franks Memorial Trail .5 miles. Total mileage varies depending upon how many of the trails you hike.