

June 2019 Mountain Hikes

**Middle Atlantic, Potomac Valley,
and Azalea Chapters ARS
Northern Virginia Chapter ASA**

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Destination: North Carolina and Tennessee

Dates: June 10 – 19, 2019

Changing weather conditions can often cause adjustments to our schedules but this itinerary is our best guess for where we will be this year. The warming climate seems to have shifted peak season earlier than what we experienced even a decade ago. We try to stay in the same motel for several days and take longer hikes when the weather is the best. Come for part of the trip, or try it all. None of the organizers will likely to do everything this year. If you want to join us, contact George, Don, Rick, or Charlie. We will help you find the group and alert them to your presence. For info on past hikes, check out Potomac Valley newsletters (www.arspvc.org/newsletter.html) or Don Hyatt's website (www.donaldhyatt.com/natives.html).

1. Mt. Rogers - Marion, VA: *Sunday, June 9* (optional)

Hotel: Econo Lodge in Marion, 1420 N Main St, Marion, VA 24354

Phone: (276) 783-6031

Focus: Mount Rogers and Grayson Highlands.

In past years, those of us heading to Roan from points north will often meet on Sunday at Grayson Highlands State Park (829 Grayson Highland Ln, Mouth of Wilson, VA). There are excellent *R. calendulaceum* forms at the General Store near the camping area. Our hike goes from the Massie Gap parking area to the Appalachian Trail and Wilburn Ridge which is not hard. The *R. catawbiense* has nice variations there and a herd of wild ponies can be very entertaining. We will spend the night in Marion.



Dining: Most restaurants in Marion are closed on Sunday so we usually dine at Mi Puerto Mexican Restaurant (1321 N. Main St., Marion). It is nearby and has American options, too.

2. Roan - Mountain City, TN: *Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, June 10 - 12*

Hotel: Americourt Hotel, 450 Dotson Lane, Mountain City, TN 37683

Phone: (423) 727-7311

Focus: Roan Mountain, Upper Blue Ridge Parkway

This is the start of our main trip. There is so much to see in this area that we often spend three or more days at the Americourt Hotel as our home base. We want to hike Roan on the day with the clearest weather since the views are spectacular. We will park at Carver's Gap near the entrance to the Roan Rhododendron Park, walk across the road, and hike north on the Appalachian Trail. The gravel path to the top of Round Bald (part of Roan) is easy and winds through rhododendrons, spruce trees, and open areas. The views are phenomenal. Just



over the crest of the bald is Engine Gap where the *R. calendulaceum* begins in earnest and continues for several miles. The trail to the next hump on Roan (Jane Bald) is steeper and rocky in places, so wear good hiking boots and bring a hiking pole. Dress in layers, wear sun screen, and pack plenty of fluids. At Jane Bald we will take a side trail to the right up the mountain to Grassy Ridge Bald where we eat lunch. Then we'll hike to the final hump on Roan, Grassy Ridge Point. It can turn purple when the rhododendrons are in bloom. Then we'll return to the motel and make plans for dinner.



On the other days, we can explore a new trail to Elk Knob (5564 Meat Camp Rd, Todd, NC), or drive the Blue Ridge Parkway heading south from Boone. Some may wish to visit the Moses Cone Manor craft center. There are many scenic overlooks or trails, and Linville Falls. We may drive all the way to Mount Mitchell to check on the “Red Max” but it won’t bloom until July.

Dining: Suba’s Restaurant is excellent and adjacent to our motel but it is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. We should make reservations for Wednesday. On Monday night, some people eat at the Panda Garden Chinese Buffet or Poblanos Mexican Grill which are in a small shopping center across from Food Lion. On Tuesday, we can go into Boone, NC, which is about 25 miles away. It has many good restaurants. On long travel days, sometimes we have eaten on the road in Bakersville, NC, or Elizabethton, TN. Please note that Mountain City is in a “dry county” so if you like a cocktail or wine before dinner, bring something with you and have it in the hotel before we go to dinner.

3. Hooper - Robbinsville, NC: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, June 13 - 15

Hotel: Quality Inn Robbinsville, 111 Rodney Orr Bypass, Robbinsville, NC 28771

Phone: (828) 479-6772

Hotel: Tapoco Lodge Robbinsville, 14981 Tapoco Rd, Robbinsville, NC 28771

Phone: (828) 498-2800

Hotel Alternate: Microtel Inn Franklin, 81 Allman Dr, Franklin, NC 28734

Phone: (828) 349-9000

Focus: Hooper Bald and other sights

The Quality Inn Robbinsville is very popular with motorcyclists who like to drive the Cherohala Skyway and the “Tail of the Dragon,” a very curvy section of US 129 south of the Smokies. The hotel can fill up on weekends so people may need to look for alternative lodging. The Tapoco Lodge is a popular option outside of town in a scenic area but it is more expensive. Lodging is also available in Franklin, NC, or Bryson City, NC, which are not too far away.



On Thursday morning, we will leave Mountain City and head toward Asheville to get on the lower Blue Ridge Parkway. The final 70-mile stretch is one of the most scenic parts of the Parkway. We will not likely go all the way to the terminus at Cherokee but will exit at Balsam Gap so we can get to Robbinsville at a decent hour. If we arrive by early afternoon, we may go up to Hooper Bald to check on the azalea bloom.

Graham County is having its second annual Azalea Festival in Robbinsville on Friday and Saturday. Many of our ASA members including all of the coordinators of this trip will be involved. For those who may not want to participate in all of the festival activities, there are

other attractions nearby including Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, Bald River Falls near Tellico Plains, TN, the Cherohala Parkway and Hooper Bald, or Highlands, NC, to the south. On Sunday, some of us want to visit Wayah Bald to check on recovery from devastating wildfires in the fall of 2016 that charred the mountaintop. The magnificent stand of *R. arborescens* on Wayah seems to be regenerating from the base. Adjacent Wine Spring Bald did avoid the fires.

Dining: Fine dining in Robbinsville is rather limited. We have eaten at the Willow Tree, a small place adjacent to the Quality Inn but space is very limited. El Pacifico (429 Rodney Orr Bypass) has good Mexican food. Lynn's Place (237 E Main St.) has good American cuisine. The Tapoco Lodge has an excellent restaurant with outdoor dining along a rushing stream. Those staying elsewhere may make dinner reservations there one evening. Robbinsville has many fast food options including a Huddle House (610 Tallulah Rd.) when a hearty breakfast is desired.

4. Great Smoky Mountains: Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, June 16 - 18

Hotel – Best Western Cades Cove Inn

7824 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Townsend, TN 37882

Phone: (865) 448-9000

Hotel – Super 8 by Wyndham, Sevierville

1410 Winfield Dunn Pkwy, Sevierville, TN 37867

Phone: (865) 280-0950

Focus: Gregory Bald and the Smokies.

Gregory Bald is our most difficult hike, 3.5 to 4 hours each way, so some may skip that. Charlie Andrews does plan to lead a hike on whatever day has the best weather. It is not wise to be on the mountain during a thunderstorm! We don't attempt Gregory on a Wednesday or a Saturday because the park closes the road in Cades Cove until 10:00AM to everyone except bicyclists. That means we cannot get to the trailhead until perhaps 11:00 AM which doesn't provide enough time for a day-hike.



The Best Western is the preferred spot for staging the Gregory Bald hike. It is not far from Cades Cove and allows an early arrival at the gate which opens at sunrise, about 7:00 AM. Other options in the Smokies include Clingman's Dome, Andrews Bald, or the Appalachian Trail at Newfound Gap where *R. minus* "Smokianun" grows. Traffic can be heavy on the weekends so it will be better during the week. For those who want to buy plants, we often stay in Sevierville at the Super 8 Motel so we can visit Vivian Abney's East Fork Nursery in the morning. Sevierville is outside of the chaos of Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge, and Dollywood. Vivian has the best selection of native azaleas including tissue culture clones, species, and many other woody plants.

Dining: In Townsend, there are several restaurants along East Lamar Alexander Parkway and we usually go the Trailhead Steakhouse at least one night. Sevierville is close to Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, so dining options in that area are practically limitless.

Native Azalea Source:

East Fork Nursery – Vivian Abney

2769 Bethel Church Road, Sevierville, TN 37876

Phone: (865) 453-6108

Vivian Abney is usually open on weekdays from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM but we recommend that you give her a call in advance if you want to stop by her nursery. Most of her business is with wholesale customers so it is wise to see if she will be available for retail sales.