

Day Hikes to High Points in Southwest Virginia

Hike #4: Fox Creek to Pine Mountain and return. 7 miles total. Moderate to difficult. In and out.

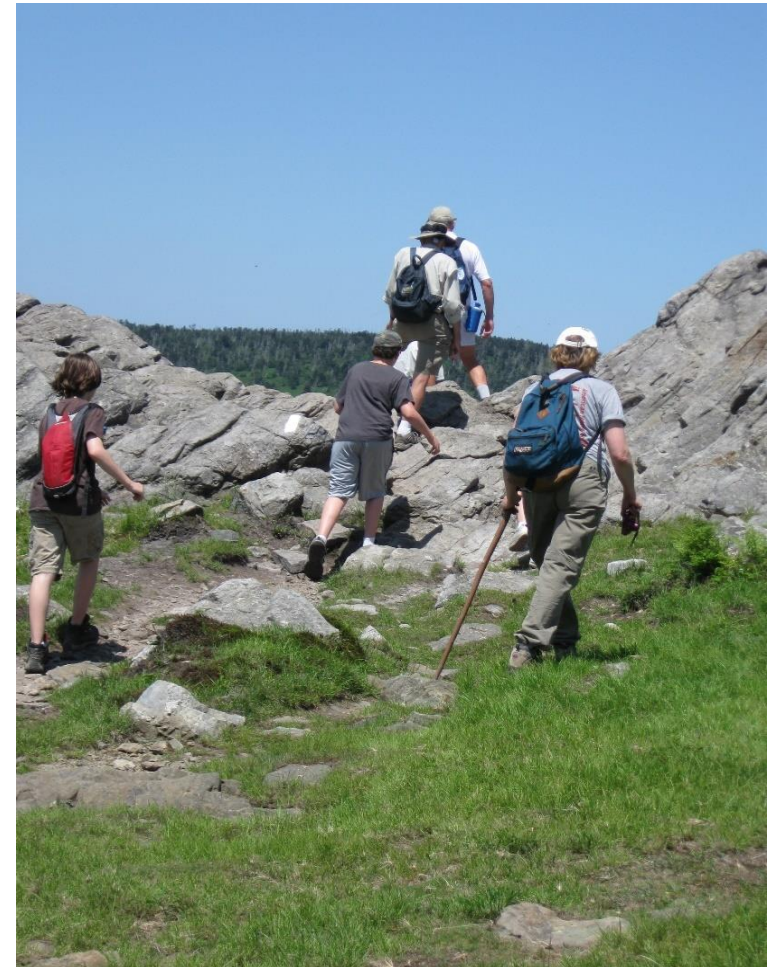
From I-81, take Exit 35 (762/600), Whitetop Road about 10 miles. Turn left onto Rte. 603, Laurel Valley Rd. and drive 7 miles to the Appalachian Trail crossing (Fox Creek pkg. lot). Hike south on the AT passing Old Orchard Shelter in 1.5 miles. Continue, ascending, until you reach the Pine Mtn. Trail intersection in 2 more miles. (**Elev. 5000 ft.**) Optional continuation on the AT to The Scales adds 1.5 miles in each direction. Turn around and retrace your steps to the parking lot.



Old Orchard Shelter



The Scales



(Note: Good maps that show these hikes and variations of them include the National Geographic maps of the Mt. Rogers area (#786 and #318) and the *All Trails* app.)

Hikes selected by the Mt. Rogers Appalachian Trail Club, mratc.org.

Hike #1: Whitetop and return. 5 miles total. Moderate. In and out.

Take I-81 to Exit 35, Chilhowie, then take Rte. 762/600 about 8 miles south, then bear left and continue on 600 about 5 more miles to the Elk Garden

Appalachian Trail parking lot. (N36.6462/ W81.5831)

Hike on the Appalachian Trail southbound about 2.5 miles to Whitetop Mtn. Rd. (FS 89).

Optional: Continue south about ¾ mile farther on the AT to Buzzard Rock for panoramic views. (**Elev. 5080 ft.**). This adds 1 ½ miles to the hike.

Retrace your steps down the AT (northbound) to your car.

In the spring, there will be abundant trillium and other wildflowers near the Elk Garden parking lot, which is **4434** feet in elevation.

Hike #2: Elk Garden to Mt. Rogers and return. 9 miles total, with optional shorter version of 6 miles. Moderate to difficult. In and out.

As with hike #1, take I-81 to Exit 35, Chilhowie, then take Rte. 762/600 about 8 miles, then bear left and continue on 600 about 5 more miles to the Elk Garden Appalachian Trail parking lot.

Hike on the Appalachian Trail northbound, up and over a hill, and enter the woods. Continue through a small open area (Deep Gap), around a switchback, where the old Mt. Rogers Trail comes in, and follow the sign on the AT uphill toward a side trail to the summit of Mt. Rogers.



Buzzard Rock, Whitetop Mtn.

If you wish, after another mile, you can turn around at Briar Ridge, an open area with boulders, and return by walking past the boulders and turning right on the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail, hiking down to Deep Gap, and from there, 2 miles farther to the parking lot.

But if you wish to continue to the summit of Mt. Rogers:

About a mile farther on the AT from Briar Ridge you will see a sign directing you to a half mile side trail. Metal disks in rocks indicate the summit.

You will have hiked 4 ½ miles. To return, you may opt to switch to the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail at Briar Ridge, hike through Deep Gap, and continue on the horse trail two more miles back to the parking lot.

Hike #3: Skulls Gap to Beartree. 7.75 miles. Moderate. One-way (linear): Need a car at both ends.

Drive east on Rte. 58 from Damascus and park a car at Beartree Recreation Area's Fishermen's parking lot, the first lot on the right after entering Beartree Recreation Area. (36.6678757/81.6786586)

Then take the second car to the start of the hike by continuing east on Rte. 58, then 3 miles straight on Rte. 603 to Rte. 600, then left on 600 to the Skulls Gap Overlook pkg. lot (36.70976, 81.619985), with a view overlooking Chilhowie and mountains to the west.

Hike on the 1 mile long Skulls Gap Trail to the Iron Mtn. Trail. Turn right to continue about 1 more mile to Straight Branch Shelter. Then hike 3 miles to Shaw Gap and bear left on the Beartree Gap Trail for 1 ½ miles, then continue right on that trail 1 more mile to reach the Beartree Gap Campground Road. Cross it and reach your car in about ¼ mile.



Straight Branch Shelter on the Iron Mtn. Trail