

Outline Southern Loop High Country Back Roads Tour



1 - 0.0 Boone to Vilas / 194

Watauga County Courthouse

0.5 Historic Lovill House Inn to the right

1.8 Hilltop Drive-In restaurant

2.0 Stoplight at 105 Bypass

Farms, barns and horses, Note modern log “cabins” on the hilltops

2- 4.9 Vilas on 194 to Valle Crucis

Turn left on state route 194, a NC Scenic Byway. This is a winding road not recommended for vehicles over 35-feet long, like large motor homes. This is generally a 20-25 mph road.

7.3 The Watauga River is on your right.

The large barn with windows used to be a tobacco curing barn. This land, like many farms in the High Country, has been converted from growing tobacco to organic broccoli with support from the Golden Leaf Foundation using money from the tobacco settlement.

8.3 This area is Valle Crucis. Mast General Store was founded in 1889 and carries everything you would expect from a general store. It even has a post office. The Valle Crucis Elementary school on the left is an active school in Watauga County and was originally built as a Work Project Administration (WPA) project.

3 - 8.5 Valle Crucis on 194 to Banner Elk

Turn right to continue on state route 194. This follows Dutch Creek, which forms the “Vale of the Cross” as it joins the Watauga river, giving the area its name Valle Crucis. This area was subject to major flooding during the hurricanes of September 2004.

9.0 Chadi Farms, a horse farm where you can ride. And the Amish Country Store

9.2 Inn at Taylor House, one of the many Bed and Breakfast Inns in the area.

9.4 The Apple Barn

9.7 NC Historical Marker N-9, Episcopal Mission

An overview pull-off

11.8 Matney community and “Matney Mall”

Carender Barn, circa 1879

13.8 County Line - Watauga/Avery

15.0 Entering town of Banner Elk

4 - 15.7 Banner Elk on 184 to Tynecastle and 105

Banner Elk is the home of Lees-McRae college and numerous shops and nice restaurants. Banner Elk School is another WPA school.

At the stoplight in Banner Elk, turn left on state route 184

As you leave Banner Elk you will pass Mill Pond on the right.

17.0 Sugar Mountain – the large condominium apartment on top was built in 1981 and public reaction to it precipitated “Ridge Laws” to limit building on the tops of ridges.

17.5 Great Train Robbery collection of shops

18.4 From this entrance, Ski Sugar is visible as snow white ski slopes into April and green areas in the summer and fall.

5 - 20.0 Tynecastle on 105 to Linville US 221

You are facing Grandfather Mountain at this intersection and it will be on your left as you travel 105 South along its western foot with Grandfather Mountain Golf Course also on your left. At a few points you can see the “Mile-High Swinging Bridge” on top.

Linville Ridge development is on your right.

23.3 When you reach the turn at Linville, you have an opportunity to visit Hampton General store if you want to turn right, and right again in about ½ mile. It is a general store and serves food and soft drinks. OTHERWISE turn left on to US 221 South.

6 - 23.3 Linville to Grandfather Mt entrance on US 221

At this point you are climbing over Grandfather Mountain itself, the highest peak in the Blue Ridge. This climb is steep and curvy, and is the route of “The Bear” a foot race from the bottom at Linville to the swinging bridge on top of the mountain. It is called “the Bear” with very good reason!

25.6 MacRae Meadows is on the left, and is the site of the annual Highland Games in July when thousands of Scottish Ancestry gather to toss the caber and enjoy other Scottish sports.

7 - 25.8 Grandfather Mt Entrance to Blowing Rock on US 221

If you care to visit, Grandfather Mountain is a nature preserve, the only privately-owned International Biosphere designated by the United Nations. There is a nature museum, animal habitat, restaurant and of course the Mile-High Swinging Bridge. There is an admission charge to support the facilities.

26.9 Historical Marker N-22 commemorates Andre Michaux who visited the mountain and catalogued its plants in 1794.

The peak occasionally visible to the right that has a TV tower on it is “Grandmother Mountain.”

8 - 27.0 At this point, you pass under the Blue Ridge Parkway on US-221, the original “old highway.” This back road, also a NC Scenic Byway nicknamed “Little Parkway”, goes to Blowing Rock parallel to, and below, the Parkway facilitating some beautiful views on the east side of Grandfather Mountain. There are several opportunities to pull off on an overlook to enjoy the spectacular views, and there are numerous small waterfalls coming down the mountain on your left.

Overlook

Large turnout where you can look back at the Linn Cove Viaduct from below.

Nice Overlook

County Line Caldwell/Avery

9 - 34.0 County Line Watauga/Caldwell and a nice waterfall!
34.7 Eastern Continental Divide (3900 feet). The continental divide is the point where rain falling on the east side joins rivers going to the Atlantic Ocean and rain falling on the west side flows ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico.

The artist Elliott Daingerfield (1859-1932), whose work is exhibited in the National Gallery, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and others, built this mountain retreat which is now operated as Westglow Spa. Historical marker N-25

10 - 40.0 Rest area with toilet facilities and picnic area.

41.0 Blowing Rock city limits

41.3 Bass Lake, part of the estate of Moses H. Cone, now operated by the National Park Service, is a beautiful small lake with a walking path around it, and connects to 25 miles of trails on the Cone Estate.

11 - 41.8 Blowing Rock to Boone on 221/321

41.8 Main St. stoplight in Blowing Rock. Turn right and enjoy downtown Blowing Rock's shops and restaurants. Then turn left at the next light, Sunset Dr. and left on US-321 (mile 42.3)

42.5 Blowing Rock performing arts center.

42.6 Chetola Lake on your left and the Tanger Shoppes on the Parkway outlet mall.

43.5 Pass under the Blue Ridge Parkway again. Reach Moses Cone's manor about two miles south of here on the Parkway, at milepost 294. Just double back to this point after your visit there, to continue to Boone.

43.7 In the ski season (November through March) this is the entrance to Appalachian Ski Mountain.

45.2 Mystery Hill and Appalachian Heritage Museum.

45.7 Tweetsie Railroad, open May through October.

12 - 47.6 Boone Town limits and entrance to Boone Golf Club, a public course. As you drive through Boone, you will pass restaurants and hotels of every sort.

49.4 Entrance sign to *Horn in the West* and Dan'l Boone Native Gardens.

13 - 49.5 Appalachian State University

49.8 Intersection with US 421 and NC 194. Dan'l Boone Inn restaurant is on your left. Turn left toward downtown Boone.

50.0 As you pass ASU's Turchin Center art gallery, you enter downtown Boone with its many shops restaurants, historic Jones House and WPA-built post office.

14 - 50.0 The whole loop should take about 2 hours and we certainly hope you enjoy it.