

# 2025 Appalachian Field Trip

This is an annual trip started many years ago by George McClellan and Don Hyatt to see native azaleas in bloom, other flora, and wonderful sights. This year's trip is complicated by the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, resulting in road closures and damaged habitat. Though we have tried to check and anticipate possible issues, we may still run into problems that we did not catch. We will just roll with the flow and adjust as necessary.

As in the past, the procedures are as follows:

- You may join us on part or all of the itinerary.
- You must let me know what you plan to do so we will be expecting you.
- Provide me your cell phone number so we can communicate if necessary during the trip.
- You are responsible for your own motel reservations (see motel for each base location).
- On each day's event, we may car pool to reduce the number of vehicles.
- Plan to provide for your lunch needs while we are out each day.
- Be prepared for hiking, photographing, and all weather conditions.

Charlie Andrews, [candrews@mindspring.com](mailto:candrews@mindspring.com) (770) 630-9798

## Itinerary

Saturday, June 14, 2025

**Graham County Flame Azalea Festival and Hooper Bald.** We will have a booth and tent at the festival in Robbinsville NC, promoting azaleas and both the Azalea Society of America and the American Rhododendron Society. The festival runs from 10 am to 6 pm and is full of arts, crafts, live music, food, workshops, Cherokee demonstrations, and more. Check out the website <<https://grahamcountytravel.com/flame-azalea-festival/>>. Hooper Bald is nearby up on the Cherohala Skyway. The bald is only a quarter mile walk from the parking area off the skyway. Hooper is known for its colorful variety of large-flowered *Rhododendron calendulaceum*. This is the only azalea species on the bald, but they exist in quantity.



Don Hyatt, Ralf Bauer, &  
George McLellan

There are not many places to stay in Robbinsville, and it may be full with the festival and motorcyclists, who like to ride the Tail of the Dragon. Recommend you plan to overnight on Friday, June 13 in Andrews, NC, which is about 20 miles away, at the Quality Inn, 138 Country Hearth Inn Dr, Andrews, NC, 28901. The Tapoco Lodge, 14981 Tapoco Rd, Robbinsville, NC 28771, is closer, but more expensive.

Saturday evening we will drive to Franklin, NC, where our headquarters for two nights will be the Quality Inn, 313 Cunningham Rd, Franklin, NC, 28734.

Sunday, June 15, 2025

**Wine Spring Bald and Wayah Bald.** On Forest Road 69 off Wayah Rd are two locations for *R. arborescens*, *Kalmia latifolia*, and *R. calendulaceum*. Flame azaleas and mountain laurel are usually at peak this time of year, with the sweet azalea at near peak. Both the Appalachian Trail and the Bartram Trail cross Wayah Bald. A fire in 2016 severely burned portions of Wayah Bald, but the azaleas are recovering. This hike is not long. Total distance is maybe 2 miles or so.



Wine Spring Bald  
*R. arborescens*



Wine Spring Bald  
*R. calendulaceum*



Wine Spring Bald  
*R. calendulaceum* & *Kalmia latifolia*



Wayah Bald *R. calendulaceum*



Wayah Bald *R. calendulaceum*



Wayah Bald *R. calendulaceum*

We return to Franklin for the night.

Monday, June 16, 2025

**Copper Ridge Bald-Tellico Gap NC.** This area is in the Nantahala Mountains north of Wayah Bald and east of Nantahala Lake. It is a fairly strenuous hike similar to our annual Roan Highlands hike where we go from Carvers Gap out to Grassy Ridge and back (about 6.2 mi. round trip). Copper Ridge Bald is accessed from Burningtown Gap at the end of Ben Creek Road after a hike of 1.7 miles up a little over 1,000 feet in elevation to 5,256 feet on the Appalachian Trail (AT). We then continue on the AT up and down (mostly down) past 3 more peaks to Tellico Gap, where the AT crosses Otter Creek Road. The total distance is a little less than 5 miles. Last year we saw *R. arborescens*, *R. calendulaceum*, *R. cumberlandense*, *R. × furbishii*, (*cumberlandense* × *arborescens*) and an amazing variety of various wildflowers. We plan to leave vehicles waiting for us at our Tellico Gap destination.





Copper Ridge *R. arborescens*



Copper Ridge *R. arborescens*  
hybrid



Copper Ridge  
*R. calendulaceum*

From Tellico Gap we drive to Townsend, TN, staying at the Best Western Cades Cove Inn 7824 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Townsend, TN, 37882 for two nights.

Tuesday, June 17, 2025

**Gregory Bald, TN/NC.** Well known for its hybrid swarm of azaleas, Gregory Bald is on the Tennessee-North Carolina border above Cades Cove. The azaleas appear to be mostly orange to red *R. cumberlandense*, but about 10-15% are an outstanding mixture of what may include *R. arborescens* and *R. viscosum*. Just off the bald at Sheep Pen Gap, where one trail forks off to Parsons Bald, one can find *R. calendulaceum*.

**The Gregory Bald hike will depend on the weather.** Walking around on top of a 5,000-ft bald in a thunderstorm is not a smart thing to do.

We plan to use the Parsons Branch Road trail because it is a mile shorter (only 4.5 mi one way) and 1,000 ft less climb in elevation (2,300 ft). Confusingly, the authorities call this the trail the Gregory Bald Trail and the other, longer trail the Gregory Ridge Trail. I prefer to call this the Parsons Branch Trail and the other the Forge Creek Trail, because it initially goes up Forge Creek.

We have to arrive at Cades Cove 30 minutes before dawn. The gate opens at dawn, and if we get behind people stopping to take pictures of deer and bears, we will be significantly delayed getting to the trail head. We need to be first in line and car pool in the fewest number of vehicles. There is limited parking space at the trail head. The dirt Parsons Branch Road is off Forge Creek Road, which is off the one-way loop road.





After coming down from the bald to the trail head, we have to continue out the one-way Parsons Branch Road. The road ends at US 129. To return to Townsend, take US 129 to US 411 to Maryville, TN and then US 321 to Townsend. This is a distance of about 50 miles. We will spend another night in Townsend.

On Wednesday, we will travel to visit J Jackson and Lindy Johnson in Trade, TN. It will be about a 4-hour drive.

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

**J & Lindy's, Trade TN.** J Jackson and Lindy Johnson live in Trade, the oldest unincorporated community in Tennessee, between Mountain City, TN and Boone, NC. It was an 18<sup>th</sup> century trading outpost. Lindy was the former seed chair of the Azalea Society seed exchange. She and J once owned a deciduous native plant nursery, Appalachian Native Plants. They have an outstanding collection of plants in their garden. At this time of year as you stroll among the plants, the delightful fragrance of *R. arborescens* and hybrids wafts through the air. 843 Wallace Rd, Trade, TN 37691.



We may eat Wednesday evening at Suba's Restaurant in Mountain City or in Boone, NC. Plan to spend Wednesday night in Boone at the Comfort Suites - University area, 1184 Highway 105, Boone, NC, 28607

Thursday, June 19, 2025

**Whitetop Mtn. VA.** Whitetop Mountain is the second highest in Virginia (5,100 ft). The Appalachian Trail crosses at a parking lot before the peak (36.637, -81.607), and along the trail for less than a quarter of a mile is where one can see thousands of *R. calendulaceum* plants, more than one finds at the Roan Highlands. This is the only azalea species present at Whitetop. You will notice that there are many small seedlings, indicating that these azaleas are prospering here. Whitetop is about an hours' drive from Boone.





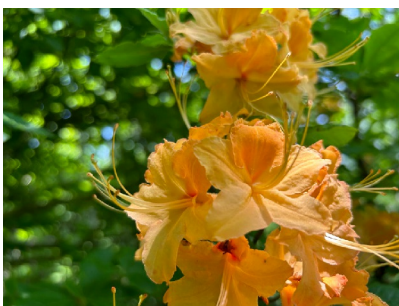
Thursday Night: Comfort Suites - University area, 1184 Highway 105, Boone, NC, 28607

Friday, June 20, 2025

**Travel Day, maybe Blue Ridge Parkway.** Friday will be a long travel day down to Blairsville, GA. It is a little over 200 miles and more if we decide to inspect the azaleas on the Blue Ridge Parkway along the way. The parkway is closed in various sections due to Hurricane Helene. We can access it at NC 151 from Candler south of Asheville and via US 276 from Woodrow/Waynesville. This allows us to see the section from Mt. Pisgah to Black Balsam Road. This includes The Mt. Pisgah Trail, the trails at the Pisgah Inn, Frying Pan Gap, Graveyard Fields, and Black Balsam Road. Here are *R. viscosum* var. *montanum*, *R. arborescens*, hybrids between the two, *R. calendulaceum*, *R. catawbiense*, and many other interesting plants.



Frying Pan Gap *R. arborescens*  
× *R. viscosum* var. *montanum*



Mt. Pisgah Inn area  
*R. calendulaceum*



Frying Pan Gap  
*R. calendulaceum*

Friday night: Comfort Inn, 90 Fisher Street, Blairsville, GA, 30512

Saturday, June 21, 2025

**Byron Reece Trail/Appalachian Trail to Blood Mt. GA.** the Appalachian Trail (AT) crosses US 19 south of Vogel State Park. The Byron Reece Trail up to the AT, and then right along the AT toward Blood Mountain are locations to see *R. calendulaceum*, *R. arborescens*, *R. cumberlandense*, and natural hybrids. We will gather at the Byron Reece trail head parking area, a half mile north of Neals Gap on US 19. **There are only 38 parking spaces, so we must get there early (7:00 am) and car pool!** It is a rocky, steep trail, about 3/4 mile to the AT. The round trip to the rock shelter (built by the CCC in the 1930s) and back is about 4.5 miles. There are azaleas to see a short distance beyond the shelter. Hiking pole recommended.



From here we all head home, with many photos and memories, but exhausted.