



Roan Highlands - Pisgah National Forest, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
4.7 mls	★2	N/A	★6	★1	★4
Carver's Gap to Grassy Ridge Bald					
Hiking Time: 2 hours and 30 minutes with 45 minutes of breaks					
Elev. Gain: 1190 ft					
19.3 mls	★6	N/A	★6	★3	★6
Carver's Gap to Hump Mountain					
Hiking Time: 9 hours and 15 minutes with 2 hours of breaks					
Elev. Gain: 4,760 ft					
Parking: Park at Carver's Gap. 36.10628, -82.11047					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)



By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

Frequently cited as the most scenic stretch of the Appalachian Trail in the Southeast, the only way to know for sure is to plan a visit to the Roan Highlands. The area derives its name from the Roan Mountain massif and its resemblance to the treeless highlands of Scotland. In addition to being the longest stretch of grassy balds in the Appalachian Mountains, this region also houses stands of southern Appalachian spruce-fir forest and the world's largest natural rhododendron garden. Starting at Carver's Gap on the North Carolina-Tennessee border, the Appalachian Trail crosses over massive bald summits for miles with outstanding views of the tallest peaks in North Carolina and Virginia. One could spend an entire day meandering around the three balds closest to the parking lot, but this hike summits five balds including the spectacular and difficult to reach Hump Mountain. Check this hike off your bucket list as soon as you can, because you'll want to visit more than once.

This full hike is long and difficult and is best tackled as a backpacking trip or a shuttle hike between Carver's Gap (TN-143 and NC-261) and U.S. 19E. For overnight backpacking the best camping areas are near the Stan Murray Shelter or the Overmountain Shelter. A shuttle hike between Carver's Gap and U.S. 19E is not mapped beyond Hump Mountain but is approximately 15.3 miles including a side trip to Grassy Ridge Bald. The section from Hump Mountain to U.S. 19E is approximately 5 miles of descent. A shuttle hike in reverse starting at U.S. 19E is much more difficult. Mountain Harbour Bed and Breakfast located beside the Appalachian Trail junction with U.S. 19E offers shuttle service to Carver's Gap for \$40. The shorter and more popular option is the relatively easy hike to Grassy Ridge Bald. Expect lots of hikers on this stretch, especially during peak flower blooms in June.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Starting at Carver's Gap, pass through a wood fence and follow the Appalachian Trail (*white blaze*) north. Initially you will pass through Catawba rhododendron lining the trail before entering a small stand of southern Appalachian spruce-fir forest. The Appalachian Trail from Carver's Gap to beyond the summit of Round Bald is mostly gravel and immaculately maintained due to heavy traffic.
- ▶ **Mile 0.7** – Hike over the summit of Round Bald (5,825 feet), the first of the many impressive balds in the Roan Highlands. From this massive grassy bald you will have 360° views of the North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia mountains. Roan High Knob and its expansive spruce-fir forest rises high above Carver's Gap. You can view the outline of the hike starting with the trail over the ridge towards Jane Bald and Grassy Ridge Bald then ending in the distant northeast. Your destination is the large, round grassy mountain in the distance, Hump Mountain.
- ▶ **Mile 1.1** – Walk through Engine Gap which lies between Round Bald and Jane Bald. This windswept gap is arguably as scenic as the surrounding summits. The Appalachian Trail transitions from a wide gravel path to a single file dirt path. From Engine Gap the trail climbs through heath shrubs on heavily eroded roots and rock slabs.
- ▶ **Mile 1.4** – The summit of Jane Bald (5,820 feet) is smaller and less-defined than Round Bald. Heath shrubs are more prominent on this mountain but there are still great views in all directions. A rock on the east side of the summit provides an excellent view of Grassy Ridge Bald. From Jane Bald the trail drops into an unnamed gap below Grassy Ridge Bald then climbs the west ridge with open views throughout.
- ▶ **Mile 1.9** – The Grassy Ridge Bald Trail (*no blaze*) forks off to the right. For the shorter day hike turn right on the spur trail to Grassy Ridge Bald. For the longer day hike, shuttle hike, or backpacking trip continue north on the Appalachian Trail.

The Appalachian Trail follows the west flank of Grassy Ridge Bald through aspen forest then begins a

long switchbacking descent through hardwood forest towards the Stan Murray Shelter. There are multiple campsites beside the trail after the initial descent but no access to water.

- ▶ **Mile 3.5** – At Low Gap below Elk Hollow Ridge of the Yellow Mountain massif sits the Stan Murray Shelter. This is a small shelter but there are multiple campsites in the surrounding area with good tree cover. On busy weekends this area will offer more solitude for campers than the extremely popular Overmountain Shelter 2.3 miles ahead. A spring is located on the east side of the trail.

From Low Gap the trail climbs Elk Hollow Ridge with views southwest of Grassy Ridge Bald. The forest along this ridge is surprisingly sparse. Beyond the ridge the trail drops into beautiful woodlands around Buckeye Gap before the final descent to Yellow Mountain Gap.

- ▶ **Mile 5.5** – Junction with the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVHT) (*white triangle blaze*) at Yellow Mountain Gap. The Overmountain Shelter is 0.3-mi on the east/right side. Before the shelter is a large field that can fit many tents. A spring is located 0.2-mi down the trail as well.

From Yellow Mountain Gap the Appalachian Trail climbs steeply up the northern ridge of Big Yellow Mountain. As you climb you will have increasingly better views of the Roaring Creek Valley with Big Yellow Mountain and Grassy Ridge Bald rising above. The two-story red barn lying in a field far below is the Overmountain Shelter.

- ▶ **Mile 6.5** – At a Y-split a forest road branches right to campsites and an unmaintained trail to Big Yellow Mountain. Stay left on the Appalachian Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 6.7** – Reach a beautiful, unnamed gap below Little Hump Mountain and a small knob with campsites. A spur trail on the right leads to these campsites and an unmaintained trail to Big Yellow Mountain. Continue north on the Appalachian Trail as it majestically climbs Little Hump Mountain. You will have a great view east of Grandfather Mountain from the gap.
- ▶ **Mile 7.1** – The Appalachian Trail crosses Little Hump Mountain (5,460 feet), a grassy bald with outstanding views northeast of the treeless Hump Mountain. Behind you Grassy Ridge Bald rises tall above the region.

Instead of continuing north the Appalachian Trail abruptly heads south away from the summit before turning north through forest along the east side of Little Hump Mountain. Along this stretch there are multiple forested campsites beside the trail and dependable water sources.

- ▶ **Mile 8.3** – Emerging from the forest the trail enters the stunning, windswept Bradley Gap between Little Hump Mountain and Hump Mountain. This gap feels akin to a mountain pass in the Rockies or the Sierra Nevada and is often a destination for hikers who don't wish to climb Hump Mountain. Pause for a minute and watch for hikers who appear as ants ascending the mountain. They're going slow due to the 620+ foot climb in 0.8 miles. It's time to tackle that climb, where the AT plows straight up the mountain without the aid of switchbacks. Luckily however, you will have views for the entire climb.
- ▶ **Mile 9.1** – Hump Mountain (5,587 feet) is the turnaround point of this hike and perhaps the finest bald summit in the Southeast. This peak is a minimum 8 mile roundtrip hike from any trailhead and thus less frequently visited than the balds near Carver's Gap. The 360° views are unparalleled, as you can track your entire hike to this point from Grassy Ridge Bald to the distant Round Bald with murky Roan High Knob rising behind. Mt. Rogers and Whitetop Mountain in Virginia are far to the northeast but the most striking view is due east of the craggy, west face of Grandfather Mountain. The Appalachian Trail descends north from the summit across open meadows. Turn around and head down to Bradley Gap or continue north for the shuttle hike.
- ▶ **Mile 16.5** – Take a left on the Grassy Ridge Bald Trail (*no blaze*) for a short side trip to the tallest bald in the Roan Highlands. At first the heavily eroded trail passes through a tunnel of Catawba rhododendron and blueberry bushes. After the tunnel the trail emerges into the middle of an enormous grassy bald with views west of Roan Mountain and views east of Hump Mountain, Big Yellow Mountain and Grandfather Mountain. The trail briefly climbs through another rhododendron tunnel on its way to the summit.
- ▶ **Mile 17.0** – The summit of Grassy Ridge Bald (6,189 feet) is marked by a rock pile with a bronze plaque for Cornelius Rex Peake. You can continue exploring side paths south if you choose along Grassy Ridge. You can spot the distinctive Hawksbill Mt. and Table Rock Mt. of Linville Gorge to the southeast.
- ▶ **Mile 17.6** – Turn left on the Appalachian Trail heading south back to the parking area at Carver's Gap to finish the hike.
- ▶ **Mile 19.3** – Hike ends at Carver's Gap.