

Laurel Creek Lowland Loop

Loop Hike

Anthony Creek, Crib Gap, Turkey Pen Ridge, Schoolhouse Gap, Bote Mountain, and Finley Cane Trails

Trail Map



Elevation Profile



Trailhead

From the Townsend Wye, take the Laurel Creek Road to the Cades Cove entrance. When you reach the cove turn left toward the picnic area, Rangers station, and campground. Then take the first left into the picnic area and drive to the parking area at the far end. There you will find a bulletin board and a gated road on the right. The gate is the trailhead for the Anthony Creek Trail, the starting point of this hike. (Note that overnight parking here is prohibited. If you are planning a multi-day hike you must park in the large parking area at the start of the Cades Cove Loop Road.)

Waypoints

- 1) The hike begins at the back of the Cades Cove picnic area on the Anthony Creek Trail. Shortly after your hike begins, turn left on Crib Gap Trail. (Note: The Anthony Creek Trail provides good access to the upper Bote Mountain Trail and the AT and Spence Field.
- 2) Junction with the Turkey Pen Ridge Trail. Turn left.
- 3) Junction with the Schoolhouse Gap Trail. Turn right and follow the trail to the parking area on Laurel Creek Road. Then cross the road, turn left and hike a short distance to the Bote Mountain Trail.
- 4) Turn right on the Bote Mountain Trail.
- 5) Junction of the West Prong Trail with the Bote Mountain Trail. Turn right to stay on the Bote Mountain Trail.
- 6) Junction with the Finley Cane Trail. Turn right and return to Waypoint 2, the Crib Gap Trail.

Hike Description

This is a moderate 12.7-mile hike with a series of four elevation gain/loss cycles of $\pm 500'$. I have frequently recommended this hike as an excellent break-in hike for those preparing for a multi-day hike. Somewhat on the downside, the trails utilized on this loop are designated as both horse and hiking trails. That said, most of the negative impact of horse use will be on the Crib Gap Trail, and at the start of the Turkeypen Ridge Trail, and then largely confined to wet weather.

There are two small stream crossings soon after joining the Turkeypen Ridge Trail as well as an old home site on the left. There are also several rock piles, evidence of land clearing by the farmer who lived in the home. The trail then begins to climb gently to the ridge and, in about a mile, crosses Pinkroot Branch. Whiteoak Sinks will now be on your left all the way to the Turkeypen Ridge Trail junction with the Schoolhouse Gap Trail. There are some good late fall, winter, and early spring views. It is also a good spring wildflower hike and azalea/rhododendron trail in late spring.

At the Schoolhouse Gap Trail, turn right and follow it to the parking lot on the Laurel Creek Road. Turn left and follow the road a short distance to the Bote Mountain Trailhead across the road on your right. Follow the Bote Mountain Trail 1.2 miles to the junction with the West Prong Trail coming in on your left from Backcountry Campsite 18 & The Tremont Institute. Continue on the Bote Mountain Trail to your right a short distance to the junction with the Finley Cane Trail. Take the Finley Cane Trail to the Laurel Creek Road, cross the road and rejoin the Turkeypen Ridge Trail at Waypoint 2 (a junction you passed earlier in your hike). Turn left on the Crib Gap Trail and then right on the Anthony Creek Trail to return to the Cades Cove Picnic ground.

Comments

Of the trails on this loop hike, my favorite has always been the Finley Cane Trail. There is more evidence of human activity on this one than all of the others combined. Unfortunately, one of the most interesting is not relegated to memory. About 0.5 miles after you leave the Bote Mountain Trail and are headed back to the junction with the Turkeypen Ridge and Crib Gap Trails you will come to a small clearing with a hitching post in a small gap on the right of the trail. On the other side of the trail, opposite the hitching post you will notice a small pile of more or less flat rocks. In the early 2000's there were two, what I will describe as pillars, at that location. I don't know who built them or who took them down. I sure wish I would have taken some pictures...