

Cold Mountain

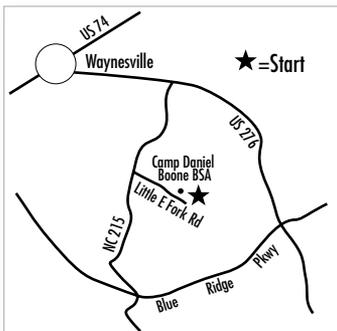
The hike starts at the northern end of the Art Loeb Trail. At Deep Gap, it heads north on the Cold Mountain Trail to the top of the mountain. On this hike, you will travel from 3,200 ft. elev. at the trailhead to 6,030 ft. at the top, through several zones of vegetation.

Your hike up is like going back to an earlier season. In spring, flowers past their prime at lower elevations are still waiting to bloom up top. In early autumn, trees at the summit have already changed color, while foliage is still green at the trailhead.

Since this hike is in a Wilderness Area, the trails are not blazed. However, because of the increased fame of Cold Mountain brought on by the book and movie, there is now a wand and sign at the Forest Service information board.

Getting to the trailhead:

From Waynesville, take US 276 south for 6.5 miles. Turn right onto NC 215 south in Bethel. Drive 5.3 miles and turn left on Little East Fork



Rd. (SR 1129) and proceed 4 miles until it deadends into Camp Daniel Boone. Once in the camp stay to the left, drive past the buildings and onto the forest road, and park on the right side of the road. The trail starts at the Forest Service sign on the left.

Type of hike: Out and back

Distance: 9.8 miles

Total ascent: 3,500 ft.

Highlights: Views, flowers, literary reference, SB6K in the Wilderness Area

USGS map: Waynesville, Cruso, NC

Trail map: Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest, National Geographic Trails Illustrated #780

Land managed by: Pisgah National Forest, Pisgah District

Related book & movie: *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier and the 2003 film of the same name, with Nicole Kidman

The Hike

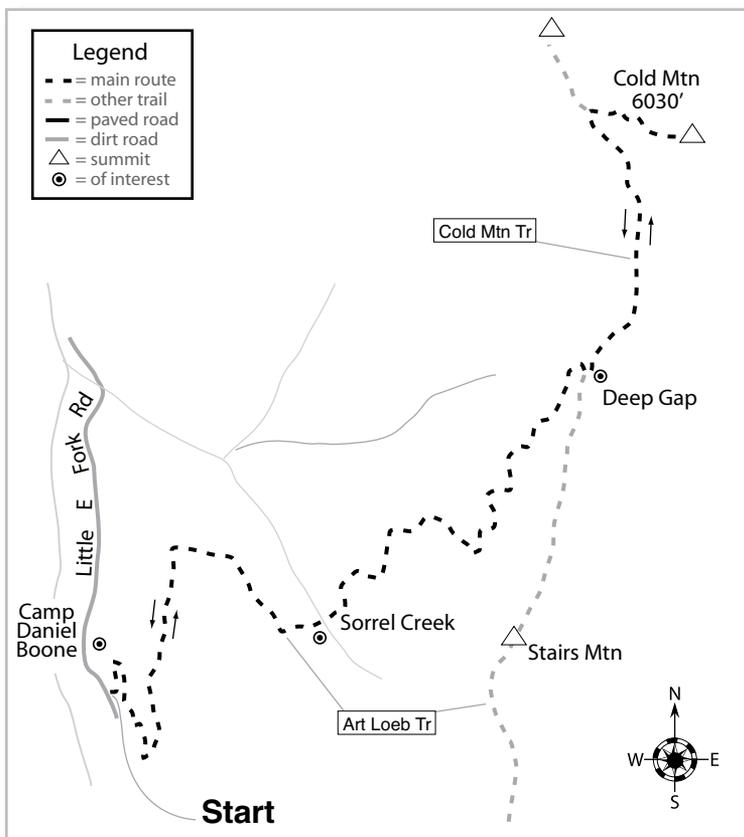
The Art Loeb Trail [#146 – no trail blazes in this section] starts out rocky and steep. Umbrella leaf, mayapple, trillium, ferns, bluet-like houstonia, Vasey trillium, bloodroot, and squaw root are plentiful at the start—and so is poison ivy. You'll pass a large boulder with rock tripe on your left as the trail switchbacks. Shortly after, the trail flattens among

rhododendron, mountain laurel, hemlock, and oak, and crosses a creek at 0.3 mile.

As you go up, bellwort, speckled wood lilies, and yellow mandarin appear along with flame azalea. You'll reach an old road bed at 0.9 mile; make a left turn to stay on the Art Loeb Trail. At 1.1 miles, go down a wooden step ladder. You may see some Jack-in-the-pulpit. At 1.4 miles, the trail makes a left as an overgrown road comes in from the right.

At 1.7 miles and 4,080 ft. elev., you'll cross Sorrel Creek, whose water cascades down to Sorrel Creek Rd. You may see an almond millipede, so named because of the almond smell it emits when it feels threatened, crawling across a trail. Pass two large chestnut oaks on the right and another one close by. Cross a minor creek at 1.9 miles among Carolina silverbells.

At 4,100 ft. elev., the trail turns north and changes





The upper reaches of Cold Mountain are rugged, with many unusual rock outcroppings.

direction. The wildflowers seem to have left the trail for a moment as you walk through a galax, rhododendron, and mountain laurel thicket.

Soon you have an obstructed eastern view of one end of Cold Mountain. At 2.3 miles, you'll cross a minor creek. The trail meanders, then climbs steeply, heading north as the vegetation

decreases. Before you turn right, there are good but obstructed views to the west. At 4,700 ft. elev., striped maples and ramps grow close to a muddy and rocky spot.

As you get close to Deep Gap, mint and blackberry cane abound. You'll reach Deep Gap at 3.4 miles (5,010 ft. elev.)—a large flat area, once a grassy bald where

cattle grazed in the summer. It has not been kept cleared for years, and hardwood trees have moved in. Several trails fan out of the gap in different directions. The Art Loeb Trail takes off southwest and goes through the Narrows (the spine between Cold Mountain and Shining Rock), leading to Shining Rock Gap.

Make a left on the Cold Mountain Trail [#141], an obvious but unmarked trail. The Cold Mountain Trail is steeper than the Art Loeb Trail: over 1,000 ft. of climbing in 1.5 miles. Here you pass

Frazier's Cold Mountain

Inman had pointed out to Swimmer that he had climbed Cold Mountain to its top...Mountains did not get much higher than those, and Inman had seen no upper realm from their summits.

—from *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier

We now know there are at least 30 mountains in western North Carolina higher than Cold Mountain. However, thanks to Charles Frazier's best-selling book, no mountain is more famous. Most content themselves with seeing it from the Blue Ridge Parkway at the Cold Mountain Overlook (milepost 411.8). Hikers reaching the top will enjoy 180-degree views deep into the Shining Rock Wilderness.

blackberry cane and Turk's-cap lilies. Look to your right (due east) for Mt. Pisgah with its identifying tower.

When the trees have not completely leafed out, you can see your goal. This can seem daunting because it's a long way up to the summit. More flowers—cinquefoil, stonecrop, wild strawberries, and purple violets flank the trail. Turk's-cap lilies and lobelia bloom in the second half of August at 5,350 ft. elev.

You'll climb over some downed tree trunks; maintenance is more difficult because trail crews can't use chainsaws in the Shining Rock Wilderness. Notice the orange markers, which are the wilderness boundaries. Enjoy a flat section with southern views on your left. On the right, you'll pass a rock formation with its "finger" pointing up at 4.1 miles (5,600 ft. elev.), as you continue climbing. A spring, also on the right, supplies water for the campsites further up.

The trail makes a right turn, and several good campsites are evident on the left. Make your last climb in this heath bald. Walk through mint in a meadow filling in with heath plants.

At last you'll reach the ridge on the summit with three rocky outcrops, located to the right of the trail, looking south. The first view is just as you get to the top.



Fraser firs look like soldiers marching on the ridge as you view south across Shining Rock Wilderness from atop Cold Mountain.

The Narrows looks wild and seems to go on forever.

Continue on the trail to a second rock outcropping; you'll have the best views from here. If it's not too windy and you haven't already eaten lunch, this is the place for it. With good binoculars and a good imagination, you can see some rock that shines at the end of the Narrows—Shining Rock. The two peaks of Sam Knob are clearly visible; Mt. Pisgah is at the far left. Dark balsam trees, the classic Christmas trees, dot the near landscape like Ents, the walking trees in *Lord of the Rings*. The magnificent panorama makes all the climbing effort worthwhile.

No roads are visible except for the faint cut of the Blue Ridge Parkway. You are in the heart of a green wilderness with its many ridges and spines.

Continue on the trail for the third view and the official summit at 6,030 ft. As you turn into a small, rocky outcropping that is not very obvious from the trail, look for a survey marker embedded in a bare flat rock at ground level. Congratulations! You've climbed another SB6K.

Retrace your steps to the trailhead to finish the hike. As you return, notice another peak close up in front of you. That's the other top of Cold Mountain, located on private land.