

Hanging Rock Trail - A Self-Guided Hike

1.2 miles one way, moderate

The trail begins near the far end of the first parking lot. To fully enjoy this hike, allow at least two hours. Mountain laurel (small oval-leaved evergreen) and rhododendron (larger, longer leaves) are found in abundance along this trail. A wildflower guide will list blooming dates.

Leave the parking lot and follow the trail marked with orange dots down the hill to Indian Creek. The rusty appearance of the water is caused by iron. When the water is underground, it dissolves a small amount of iron from soil and rocks. Then, when it reaches the surface, oxygen in the air causes the water to turn reddish brown by the development of iron-oxide. Although the water appears clean, never drink from an open stream. Leaving Indian Creek, begin climbing the steep hill toward the ridge.

The knife-edged ridge is an interesting geologic feature and is a preview of what the Hanging Rock ridge will look like in the distant future — a future so distant that it will not likely involve any of us. There is no doubt that at one time the knife edge was a continuation of the Hanging

Rock ridge and was capped with the same durable quartzite that forms Hanging Rock. Underlying the quartzite is sandstone, a softer rock that weathers more easily than quartzite. Over time, as the valleys on each side of the ridge were cut deeper

and wider, they eroded the soft rock, undermining the quartzite top. The quartzite broke off in great blocks and boulders, exposing more of the softer rock. Through this continuous process, the quartzite was gradually destroyed, leaving only an unusually steep-sided ridge as evidence of its past existence. Since the ridge is not much lower than the base of the quartzite layer that caps Hanging Rock, the knife edge in its present form is not too old, from a geological standpoint.

Continuing along the ridge, you can view the lay of the land to the east and west, but better views are closer to the rock. As you make the last little climb to the foot of the cliffs, between the trees you begin to glimpse Hanging Rock itself, which juts 200 feet above the ground. Once at the base of the rock, the trail turns to the right and winds its way around the rock and eventually up the back side of the formation to the top.

From the top of Hanging Rock, a grand view of the park



and all the surrounding countryside is available. The little mountain just to the east that tapers off toward the north is Flat Shoal Mountain. Farther to the east it is possible to see a break in the topography roughly running north and south, which marks the western edge of the Triassic Basin. For millions of years, a shallow sea existed in the area and deposited sand-formed sandstone and eventually quartzite. Geologic forces pushed the entire area up and destroyed the sea. Erosion then sculptured the land by removing the soft sandstone and exposing the more resistant quartzite, forming the peaks and ledges of the Sauratown mountain. Walnut Cove, which can be seen from Hanging Rock, and Town Creek are in the Triassic Basin.

On clear days the Reynolds Building and Winston-Salem can be seen in the southeast. On unusually clear days, Greensboro is barely visible far to the east on the horizon. Of course, Moore's Knob with its tower is visible to the west. Though it is difficult to distinguish the Dan River, you can see its valley to the northwest and the hills becoming larger toward the Virginia border. The Blue Ridge Mountains can be seen in the distant northwest.

Cook's Wall Trail

2.2 miles one way, moderate

This trail begins at the edge of the woods behind the bathhouse. At the first fork, turn left on the Chestnut Oak Nature Trail and follow the trail to the next fork. Turn left and proceed to the top of the ridge on the trail marked with white dots. At the top, the trail splits. The left trail goes north 800-900 feet to Wolf Rock, which is composed of sheer cliffs that form the eastern rim of the ridge. This trail then follows the ridge to Hanging Rock Trail. The right trail goes south to House Rock and is a gentle up-and-down walk that eventually reaches the flat-topped cliff. The trail turns sharply to the right to begin the climb to Cook's Wall, which consists of a long series of vertical cliffs that are several hundred feet tall.

Moore's Wall Loop Trail

4.2 miles, strenuous

Begin at the same point as Cook's Wall Trail. Keep to the right at the fork and continue along the edge of the lake. After crossing the footbridge, keep to the left. Follow the red dots up the hardwood valley to the top of Moore's Wall Ridge and then to Moore's Knob, the highest point in the Sauratown Mountain range at 2,572 feet. The observation tower is part of a fire tower once manned by the N.C. Forest Service. Balance Rock is found on the left on the descending trail and appears to be precariously attached to a large boulder. Continue to follow the steep trail down

the mountain, cross the creek and take a sharp left on the trail, which passes behind the amphitheater. Then turn right, and walk to the campground road. Follow the red dots on the roadway and pick up the return trail near site 39, at the "Lake" sign. The trail returns to its beginning at the bathhouse.

Chestnut Oak Self-Guided Nature Trail

0.75 miles, easy

All trails in the park are nature trails, but this trail is self-guided with numbered stops and a corresponding booklet. The trail is accessible from the parking lot behind the bathhouse. Booklets are dispensed at a distribution box or may be obtained from the park office.

This loop trail is .75 miles in length and includes 25 stops that exhibit the typical flora of the park. Please remember that the flora will change from season to season and from year to year.

Indian Creek Trail

3.7 miles one way, moderate

This trail begins at the base of Window Falls and ends near the parking area in the Dan River section of the park. It is marked with orange squares. After leaving Window Falls, the trail winds its way along Indian Creek, crossing the creek several times before eventually joining an old road bed. Watch carefully as the trail takes a sharp right — leaving the old road bed — and continues along the creek. Eventually the trail will cross Hanging Rock Road outside the main park gate. Cross the road to continue the trail to the Dan River. On its way, the trail crosses Indian Creek several more times. Indian Creek is a protected watershed that begins and ends within the park. The trail passes through several different plant communities, making it an excellent area to study a variety of habitats, as well as the diverse flora and fauna found within each.

Lower Cascades Trail

0.3 miles one way, easy

The beautiful Lower Cascades Falls must be reached via roads that wind around the northern boundary of the park. Leaving the park gate, turn left onto Moore's Spring Road. Take the next left (Hall Road) to a parking lot on the right. The trail begins at the far end of this parking lot. A short hike will take you to the edge of the gorge. A steep and somewhat rugged climb down will take you to the bottom of the falls. In this area, Cascade Creek becomes a series of falls that extend for 120 feet. The creek then disappears downstream between rock walls and eventually flows into the Dan River.

Upper Cascades Trail

0.2 miles one way, easy

This trail begins at the lower left corner of the first parking lot. After leaving the parking area, the trail crosses the main park road and works its way down into the gorge. An observation deck near the falls offers breathtaking views. An interesting assortment of plants, including some of the park's hemlock trees, can be seen along the trail.



Window Falls and Hidden Falls

0.6 miles, moderate

Park at the far end of the first parking lot and walk through the picnic area. The trail is marked with orange squares, and after .2 miles the trail forks. To the right, nestled in among the rhododendron and mountain laurel is Hidden Falls. Continue left .4 miles to a ridge top, then travel down the stone steps for about 100 feet. From the viewing area, find a view of the water-cut "window." The rushing sound from a waterfall behind the window can be heard. Continuing down the steps, a second set of falls appears.

Tory's Den and Tory's Falls

By hiking trail - 4.2 miles one way, moderate

Leaving the bathhouse, follow the trail along the lake shoreline. Turn right and cross the footbridge. Keep left on Moore's Wall Trail, which follows the creek and then ascends up the mountain gap. At the second trail intersection, go left and hike across Huckleberry Ridge. The trail, marked with blue dots, crosses Charlie Young Road to the parking lot. Continue a half mile from the parking lot to the den and falls.

By vehicle - 0.5 miles one way, moderate

Leave the park gate and turn left onto Moore's Springs Road. Drive three to four miles and turn left on SR 2011 (Mickey Road). Turn on the second road on the left (Charlie Young Road) and proceed to the parking lot. Marked with blue dots, the .5-mile trail leaves the parking lot and crosses a creek. To the left is Tory's Falls and to the right is Tory's Den. At Tory's Falls, water drops about 240 feet over a series of rock terraces before becoming a peaceful brook in the valley below. Tory's Den is a cave about 20 feet deep. Legends about its uses date to the Revolutionary War.