

Boone Fork Loop

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Boone Fork Trail crisscrosses several tributaries of Boone Fork through quiet woods filled with rhododendron, which explode with color in midsummer. Taking this trail clockwise lets you walk the challenging section through huge boulders and cascades first and arrive at Boone Fork itself toward the end of the hike. The trail takes you into the backwoods, away from the Blue Ridge Parkway, while remaining on Parkway land. This gives you the excellent and unusual combination of a backcountry trail (no road noise) that's well-signed. The mileage is posted every half-mile, going the opposite way from this hike description.

Rules/Facilities: Pets must be on a leash. Picnic tables and restrooms.

Closest town: Blowing Rock

Website: www.nps.gov/blri

Related book: *Boone: A Biography* by Robert Morgan

Type of hike: Loop

Distance: 5.0 miles

Total ascent: 650 ft.

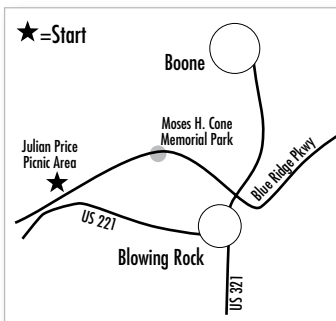
Starting elevation: 3,350 ft

Highlights: Water, cascades, pasture

USGS map: Boone

Trail map: Available on an information board at the start of the hike

Land managed by: Blue Ridge Parkway



Getting to the trailhead:

The trail starts at the Julian Price Picnic Area on the Blue Ridge Parkway at milepost 296.5.

The Hike

Boone Fork Trail [red diamond blazes] starts to the right of the restrooms in the picnic area and crosses a creek on a wooden bridge. Go across the field and head west through rhododendron and the constant sound of water. Early in the morning, you might see a great blue heron take off from the river banks. Soon you leave the babble of the creek behind, heading into a silent forest with Price Lake to your left, on the other side of the Parkway. Ignore a side trail to your left, pass a couple of picnic tables to your right, and go between two buildings toward a campground section for travel trailers.

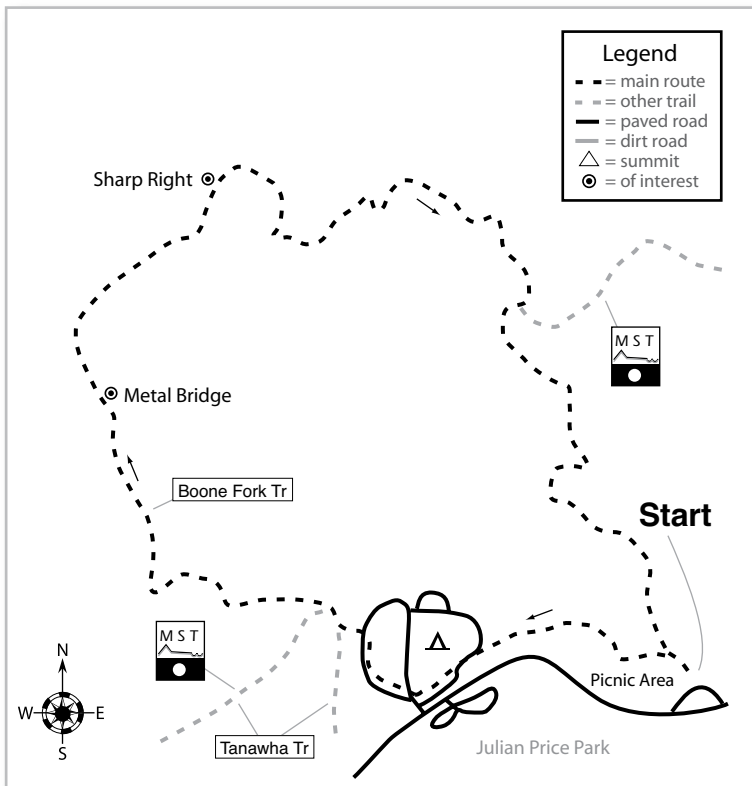
At 1.1 miles (3,500 ft. elev.), the Tanawha Trail (see Tanawha Trail hike, p. 102) joins Boone Fork Trail from the left and quickly leaves in the same direction. Continue right where the Mountains-to-Sea

Trail, heading trail east, now joins Boone Fork Trail. You're climbing out of the forest into open grazing land as the trail ascends. There's a good view of Grandfather Mountain on your left, looking southwest.

The trail turns sharply right, leaving the pasture, and heads downhill, becoming rough and eroded. You'll be close to water for the rest of the hike. Pass huge slanted limestone boulders fringed by hemlocks and cross Bee Tree Creek, a tributary of Boone Fork, while passing another huge limestone slab. You'll cross

the creek several times—on a metal bridge, on flat rocks, on a split-log wooden bridge, and sometimes through the water. You'll be deep in a fresh green forest filled with rhododendron and hemlock. The remnants of a stone bridge lie in the water as you rock hop on flat rocks on the side of the creek and sometimes in the creek itself.

At 2.1 miles, cross a small metal bridge over the creek. The creek widens, gathers strength, and forms cascades and small waterfalls as you follow it downstream on rocky steps.



Heritage

Julian Price, Insurance Magnate

Julian Price Memorial Park lies between the cultivated Moses H. Cone Memorial Park and wild Grandfather Mountain. Julian Price, head of the Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company in Greensboro for over 30 years, bought this land in the late 1930s as a recreational retreat for his employees. When he died in a car accident in 1946, the firm donated the land to the Parkway. Price didn't found Jefferson Standard, but he expanded it into a national insurance company. In the 1920s, he built a skyscraper in downtown Greensboro for its headquarters, a bold move at the time. Jefferson-Pilot, as it was later known, is no more; it was bought out by another insurance company, Lincoln Financial.

The park has a picnic area, campground, and Price Lake, created in Julian Price's honor. (See Blowing Rock Drive, p. 84.)

At 2.5 miles, the half-way point, cross the creek on flat stones and quickly cross it again, passing a large stone cavern. In the spring when the water is high, you'll get your feet wet. In another 0.2 mile, watch for a sharp right turn where you'll cross the creek again. This may be a challenging crossing when the water is high, but

there are a couple of rock slabs to help you get across.

Soon you'll leave the creek as it bubbles below you on the left. Follow the flat road for a short while, then work your way through rocks above the rushing Boone Fork and climb up with a help of a wooden banister on a wide trail. Then go down again on stone steps.

At this point Boone Fork is a wide stream, split by an island of roots and rock jumble. Go up a stone stairway with an old wooden banister. After crossing several tiny tributaries, you'll head northeast on a wide, drier trail. Below, Boone Fork crashes through massive rocks, creating cascades below.

At 3.3 miles, make a right past several boulders and ascend on stone steps through



Evidence of beaver work on the trail.



Crossing Boone Fork.

a tight squeeze between rocks. The trail turns left and passes an open cave formation. Go down a wooden ladder. At this point, there are few boulders and you enter an idyllic rhododendron forest.

Up to this point, you'll probably have the loop to yourself. But soon you'll see more casual hikers coming toward you from the other direction, because the trail is good and they haven't had to cross the creek yet. You'll come out into the open with the slow-moving stream and grassy bank below. But the water isn't slow moving for long—it forms a waterfall just before the trail goes back into the woods.

The MST leaves Boone Fork Trail on the left at 3.9 miles

and crosses Boone Fork, now a wide river, heading toward Moses H. Cone Memorial Park. Continue straight on, where beavers have been busy at the edge of the slow-moving water. Go up and around a set of boulders once more. Toward the end of the hike, the area is flat and the river languid. A signboard about beaver work is askew, almost falling into the stream; the beavers have changed the course of the water.

The trail follows the grassy banks of Boone Fork. The hike ends in a flat area, through scrub and plenty of beaver activity. Close the loop at the Julian Price information board and make a left across the bridge back to your car.