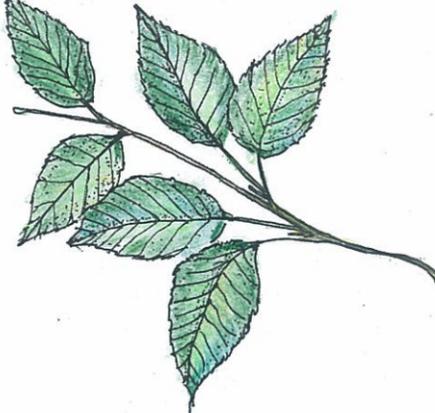


YELLOW BIRCH  
 BETULA ALBA HANINENSIS BRITTON!

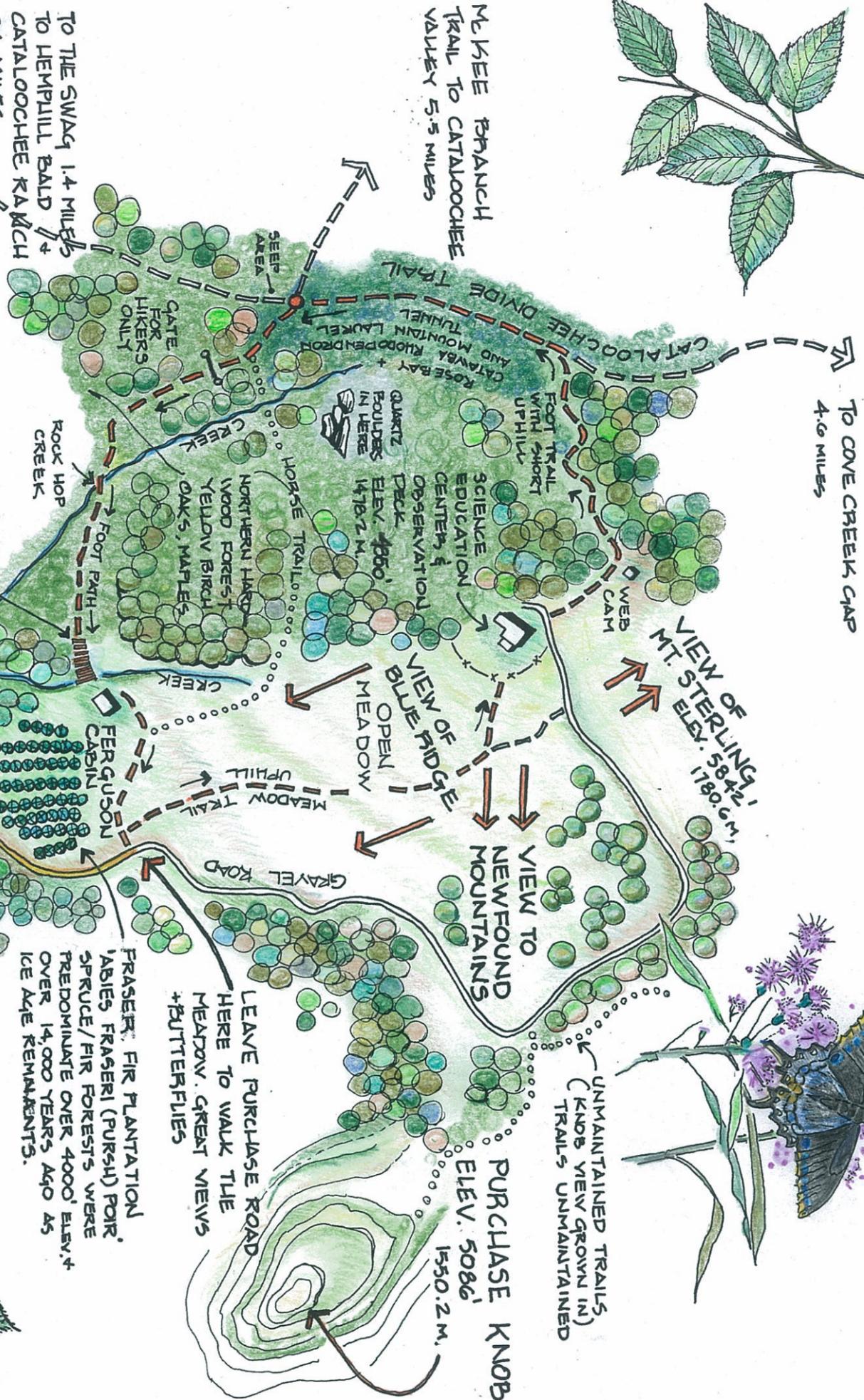


PREVINE SWALLOWTAIL  
 BUTTERFLY



TO COVE CREEK GAP  
 4.6 MILES

MC KEE BRANCH  
 TRAIL TO CATALOCHEE  
 VALLEY 5.5 MILES



FERGUSON CABIN  
 CIRCA 1874



PURCHASE ROAD  
 NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

PARKING ELEV. 4200'  
 PARK ALONG CULVERT

FLOW TO HEMPHILL CREEK



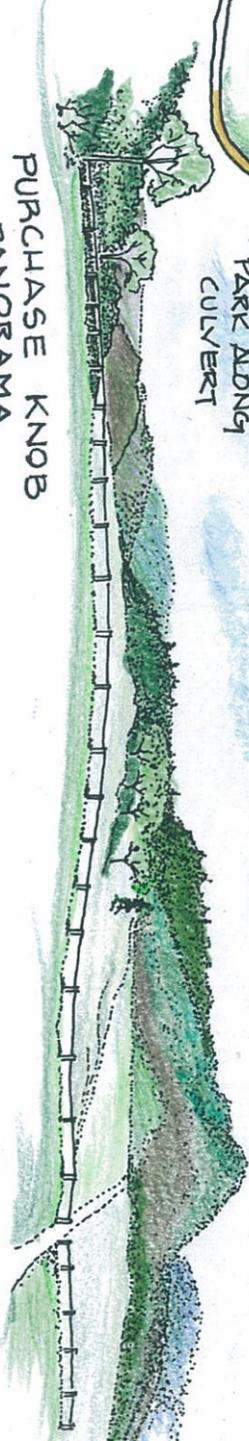
NORTHERN HARDWOOD FOREST: HICKORIES, YELLOW BUCKEYE, MAPLES, WHITE + RED OAKS

MOCKERNUT LICKOR'T  
 'CARYA TOMENTOSA NUTT'

FRASER FIR PLANTATION  
 'ABIES FRASERI (PURSH) POIR'  
 SPRUCE/FIR FORESTS WERE  
 PREDOMINANT OVER 4000' ELEV. +  
 OVER 14,000 YEARS AGO AS  
 ICE AGE REMNANTS.

**Purchase Knob**  
 Great Smoky Mountains

PURCHASE KNOB  
 PANORAMA



## Purchase Knob Symphony

Strolling in delightful shade  
Along broad gentle paths  
Bringing shared wonder alive  
And creating memories that last.

Meandering sunny meadows  
Where butterflies sweetly alight  
Offering dances of intriguing color  
And shimmering sparkles of flight.

Water gently trickling downhill  
Teasing our thirsty ears  
Encouraging climbing to find out  
What other magic nestles near.

Peaks and valleys and long views  
Surround us with a sense of place  
As we realize why we've come here  
To experience sweet vastness of space.

Rainbow flowers explode around us  
In clouds of brilliant cheer  
As we float uphill and downward  
Blessed to have visited here.

By Donna Duffy

## INTRODUCTION

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park offers spectacular beauty and evokes a sense of timelessness for those who wander its trails. Each season brings a renewed appreciation for the biodiversity that makes this region rich with all forms of life. The Cataloochee area is a great place for locals and visitors to take in broad vistas, observe the local flora and fauna and gain an appreciation for the cultural history of the region, all in a half-day hike.

The southern Appalachian region contains more than 2,500 species of flowering plants, 130 species of trees, over 400 species of mosses and approximately 1,500 species of vascular plants. This is more plant diversity than in any other national park. The southern Appalachians support more tree species than any area of comparable size in North America and include pockets of old growth forests with record size trees. The exceptional biodiversity is due to the variety of ecosystems with varying topography, soils and micro-climates. During the last ice age, glaciers scoured the land farther north in the U.S. extending only as far south as the Ohio River. This event caused many plants and animals to migrate south ahead of the ice. When the glaciers retreated, northern species remained here atop the highest peaks preserving their habitats similar to those of the northern territories.

## TRAVEL DIRECTIONS:

N 35° 34' 25" E 83° 55' 28"

17 S 0311934 UTM 3938648

From Waynesville, Haywood County, North Carolina take 276 north. Turn left at the intersection of 19 north and 276. Proceed 2 miles (toward Maggie Valley). Turn right at the next major road intersection (a continuation of 276 north toward I-40). Continue to follow 276 north or Jonathan Creek Road for 2 more miles. Turn left onto Hemphill Road (which becomes Purchase Road). Follow for 5 miles to the end of the road at the National Park gate. You can also follow the signage toward The Swag, only continue past Swag Road all the way to the end. Remember to park your car at the National Park gate.

**TRAIL LENGTH, GRADE AND CONDITIONS:** approximately 5 miles: allow 3 to 4 hours with stops for views and observations. An extended walk from here is possible. Refer to the map. Nearly 900 feet of ascent (274 meters) considered easy-to-moderate grade. Gravel road bed for half the distance; shaded forest, sunny meadow environment and shaded forest trails for the last half. Good family walking. Accessible in all seasons. Restroom facilities are closed November through May.

**WALKING DIRECTIONS:** Park your vehicle **outside** the National Park gate on Purchase Road.

Pass through the gate on foot and follow Purchase Road uphill through a forest on a gradual incline to the first small meadow.

Proceed uphill on the road through a short wooded area to the second and larger meadow on Purchase Road.

Follow the signage toward Ferguson Cabin for a very short distance (a few yards or meters) then continue uphill.

On your immediate right through the meadow pathway (clear but unmarked) the Science Education Center will come into view.

The meadow and Science Education Center offer the best observation points of Purchase Knob, Blue Ridge Parkway, Newfound Mountains and Mount Sterling.

Continue to the rear of the Science Education Center following the signage toward the Cataloochee Divide Trail. When reaching the trail head, veer left toward The Swag Resort (1.4 miles) on the hiking and horse trail.

Walk downhill to the next trail head (McKee Branch). Turn left at the intersection, continuing downhill.

In a few yards, you will come to another trail head. Take the pathway "for hikers only" to Ferguson Cabin. To return, walk to the rear of Ferguson Cabin. Look to the right and cross under the power lines adjacent to a large Red Spruce conifer. Take the short uphill to the meadow along the fence line of the Fir Plantation. This will return you to Purchase Road. From here, it is downhill back to your vehicle.

## DON'T MISS

- Spring, summer and autumn flora. Bring your wild flower guides and field glasses.
- The Science Center Observation Deck offers tremendous views. Cold Mountain and Mt. Pisgah 120° SE, Crabtree Mtn., Sandy Mush and Newfound Mountain range 90° E, Mt. Sterling due N (best seen from roadway). Purchase Knob to the SW.
- Wild turkey, butterflies and bird migrations (spring and fall)
- Hemphill Creek watershed
- Ferguson Cabin
- Fir Plantation

**REFRESHMENTS:** Pack a picnic. **DON'T FORGET WATER!**

## HIKER'S CHECK LIST:

- Check the daily weather forecast.
- Bring suitable clothing, especially boots or shoes for rough terrain.
- Bring this map and/or a field guide for the area.
- Bring a mobile phone for emergency purposes.

## MOUNTAIN FORMATION

The Appalachians were formed approximately 450,000 years ago when at least two continental plates collided. This process, known as "folding", pushed the mountains up to heights of approximately 20,000

feet in elevation (6,100 meters), heights we see today in the Rockies and the Alps. Over time, these plates were softened by tectonic activity and climate change which impacted the flow of ancient rivers causing them to flow side-to-side forming the valleys and coves we appreciate today.

## CATALOOCHEE

Cataloochee is the region in the Great Smoky Mountains composed of three narrow valleys running parallel to one another. These valleys are walled-in at the west by the high perpendicular ridges of the Balsam Mountains. There are also two major parallel ridges. To the north west is Sterling Ridge and to the south east is the Cataloochee Divide both of these rise above 5000 feet (1524 meters). Two lower ridges, Noland Mountain and Big Fork Ridge run parallel between Mount Sterling and the Divide forming the three valleys.

These valleys were favored by the Cherokee as hunting grounds. "Cataloochee" is a Cherokee word meaning "fringe standing erect". This comes from the trees standing along the ridgelines, spines running along the tops of mountains, representing a fringe found on their coats.

## CHEROKEE

The Cherokee inhabited the southern Appalachians for 11,000 years. They were a proud, intelligent and highly spiritual people with democratic values, a deep respect for the land and a strong belief in balance in all aspects of life. Cherokee farmed and hunted in this area until conflicts with European settlers brought about tragedy and forced removal in the 1830's. Today, the Cherokee are working to preserve their culture and a visit to the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in the town of Cherokee, NC provides the visitor with a detailed history of these native peoples. [www.cherokeemuseum.org](http://www.cherokeemuseum.org)

## CATALOCHEE DIVIDE

The Cataloochee Divide is a defined line of mountain ridges separating the Cataloochee drainage basin or valley from the Jonathan Creek drainage basin or Jonathan Valley. Both of these drainage systems flow into the Pigeon River watershed which flows to the French Broad River and eventually into the Mississippi River ending at the Gulf of Mexico.

## PURCHASE KNOB

In the Blue Ridge region, a knob is normally a prominent, isolated, symmetrically rounded hill or mountain. Early settlers had no name for a mountain standing up sharply by itself. So they used the word "knob" from the middle low German "knobble", meaning knot or bud. Knobs are formed by weathering sandstone or granite.

Purchase Knob received the name by Colonel Love who was deeded the track of land after the Civil War and named it "The Purchase Property". The Love family was a prominent family who founded Waynesville shortly after the Revolutionary War.

## BALDS

These are often defined as treeless areas which usually occur between 4,650 feet (1,417 meters) and 6,100 feet (1,859 meters) well below existing tree lines. There is still uncertainty why trees do not tend to flourish in these areas, but test stands planted on balds have not done well compared to those growing around them. Two theories under consideration by scientists are that the soils were climatically impacted

during the Wisconsin glaciation period or that Native Americans either farmed or grazed these areas. The Cherokee Indians used bald locations as lookout posts to guard against raids from rivals.

An old folktale provides a favored explanation for the existence of balds. The devil got drunk and went stumbling through the mountains one dark, moonless night. The balds are nothing more than his footprints where nothing wants to grow!

## JOHN FERGUSON CABIN

From 1874 through 1902, John Love Ferguson lived here on 447 acres. John was a direct descendant of William, the original property owner. It is the highest remaining cabin left in the national park at an elevation near 4,700 feet (1,432 meters). Originally, it was a double pin or dogtrot cabin. The one here today was rebuilt from some of the original timbers in 2000 by Friends of the Smokies.

The cabin is nestled in a naturally protected area along a creek where the family got their daily water supply. The creek (also known as a "crik" in the southeast) drains the watershed downhill into Hemphill Creek flowing into Jonathan Creek. You can still find apple trees near the cabin. Apples were used by early settlers for many purposes such as drink, butter, medicine and more.

## SCIENCE EDUCATION CENTER

This center rests at approximately 4,850 feet (or 1,478 meters) with Purchase Knob just off to the southwest. Its purpose is to perform scientific research in Smoky Mountains National Park, while making it accessible to the public. It is one of the primary locations for studying salamanders, bird migrations and air quality in the Smoky Mountains.

Learn more at [www.nps.gov/grsm/forteachers](http://www.nps.gov/grsm/forteachers)

## WEB CAM

Located at this site is one of two web cams in the national park. If you would like to know the conditions for a good view before you hike, go to [www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm) follow the links to **the web cam at Purchase Knob**.

Produced and Illustrated by Ken Czarnomski, Blue Ridge Naturalist

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For additional information and bibliography go to:  
Facebook at Phoenix2Reach



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