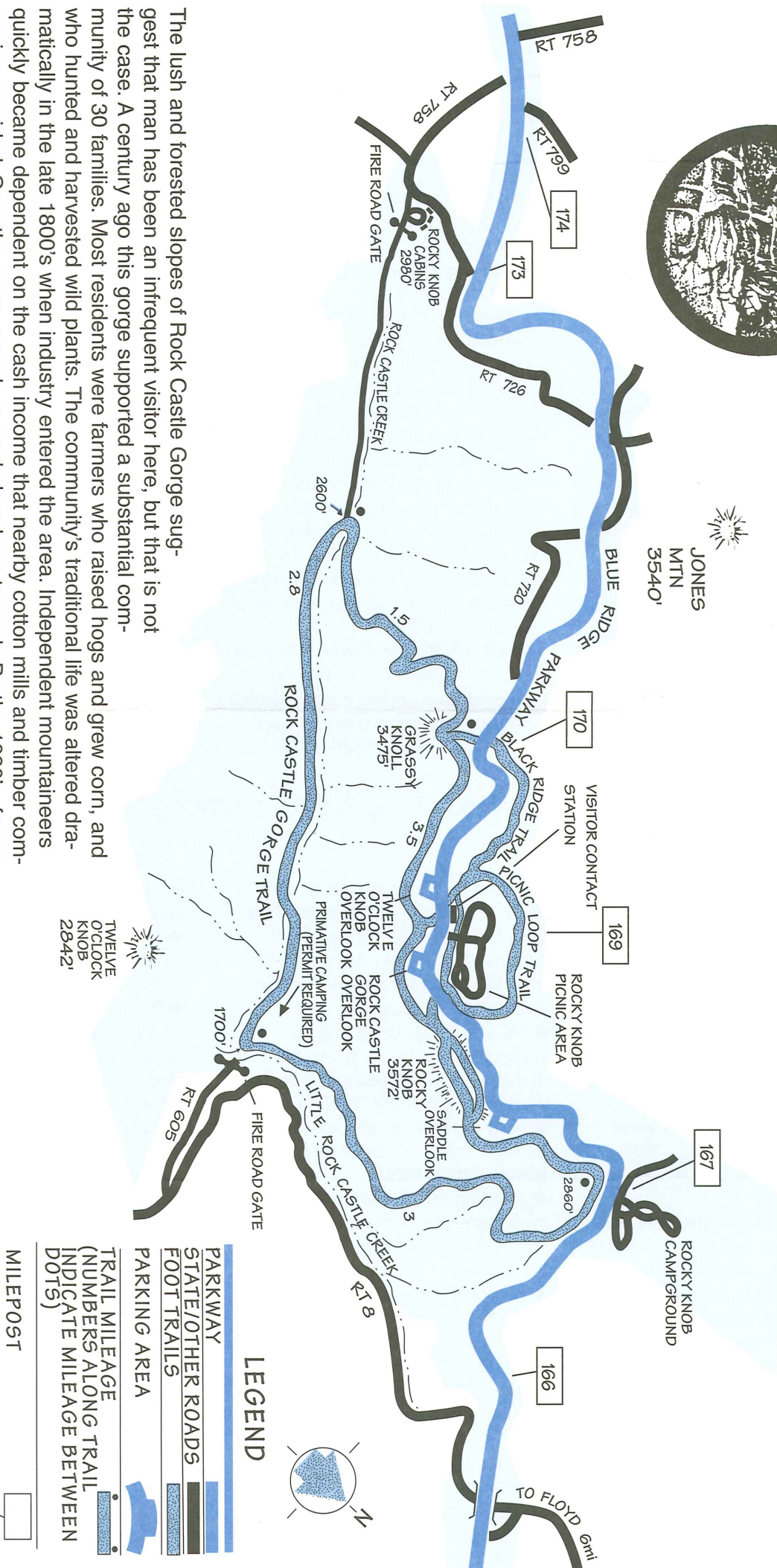




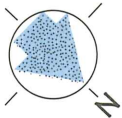
Rocky Knob Trails

The lush and forested slopes of Rock Castle Gorge suggest that man has been an infrequent visitor here, but that is not the case. A century ago this gorge supported a substantial community of 30 families. Most residents were farmers who raised hogs and grew corn, and who hunted and harvested wild plants. The community's traditional life was altered dramatically in the late 1800's when industry entered the area. Independent mountaineers quickly became dependent on the cash income that nearby cotton mills and timber companies provided. Over the years, people moved elsewhere to work. By the 1920's, fewer and fewer families called these rugged "hollers" home.

In the decades that followed, nature reclaimed the gorge. Today, more than 60 species of native trees, 25 species of delicate ferns and over 200 species of wildflowers shade and color the gorge and its remnants of old home sites and gristmills. Wild turkey, fox, deer, bobcat and other animals roam the forest, plying their ancient patterns and rhythms of life. In 1984, the Rock Castle Gorge Loop Trail was designated a National Scenic Trail in recognition of its outstanding features.



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Rocky Knob Trails

The **Rock Castle Gorge Trail**, blazed with green, is a moderate to strenuous 10.8 mile loop with elevations ranging from 3,572 feet at Rocky Knob to 1,700 feet at the confluence of Rock Castle and Little Rock Castle Creeks. Parts of the trail are rocky and several sections are quite steep. To avoid the most strenuous uphill sections, hikers can begin at the Rocky Knob Campground and head downhill toward Rock Castle Creek.

From the campground, the trail descends over 1,000 feet in 3 miles, passing through a cove hardwood forest of oaks, hickories, tuliptrees, basswoods, maples, magnolias and a stand of bigtooth aspens. Along the ridge, there is a beautiful display of mountain laurel. This is a good place to look for evidence of homesites.

The 2.8-mile section of trail along Rock Castle Creek follows the gated fire road. Within .5, it passes a back-country campground on the site of a former Civilian Conservation Corps complex. A permit is required and may be obtained free from the Rocky Knob Campground, Ranger Station or Visitor Center. Camping in Rock Castle Gorge is permitted only at this designated back-country site.

The large white house on the left is privately owned and is not open to the public. After steadily climbing beyond the house, there are excellent views of the creek,

100 feet below. This area has a fabulous display of wildflowers in April and early May. Rock Castle Cascades on the left is a prominent landmark.

Turn right at the trail junction where the trail passes through a mesic-hardwood forest. This forest type occurs in ravines and along bases of slopes in the gorge. Here soil is moist, deep and rich. It supports a highly diverse herbaceous layer, as well as unusual cove tree species like black maple. The Rock Castle Gorge Trail gains 875 feet in the next 1.5 miles. After .5 mile, the trail goes through an extensive boulder field known as the Bare Rocks, and a ridge near the rim of the gorge has an impressive stand of Catawba rhododendron and mountain laurel.

From Grassy Knoll back to the campground the trail parallels the Parkway and presents views of Rock Castle Gorge, the Piedmont, and the countryside north of Floyd, Virginia. The trail to Rocky Knob is narrow and steep, and affords outstanding views. Just downhill from Rocky Knob, an Appalachian Trail shelter serves as a reminder that the famous "AT" used to wend its way along this part of the Blue Ridge Parkway before its relocation to the west in the 1950s.

The **Black Ridge Trail**, blazed with blue, is a moderate 3-mile loop that is most conveniently started and finished at the Rocky Knob Visitor Center. Passing through second

growth forest to a seldom-used gravel road, it includes good views to the north from atop Black Ridge, then crosses the Parkway to join the Rock Castle Gorge Trail for its return to the Visitor Center. There are excellent views from this section of trail into Rock Castle Gorge and the Piedmont.

The **Rocky Knob Picnic Area Trail** (yellow blaze) is an easy 1-mile loop and offers a pleasant walk through a mature forest of large oaks, ashes, hickories, Fraser magnolias, hemlocks, and other native trees and shrubs. The area is excellent for bird watching, particularly in the nesting season.

To avoid confusion, the major trails in the Rocky Knob area have blaze markings in different colors. All connecting trails are blazed in red.

Several miles north of Rocky Knob (milepost 154.5), the **Smart View Trail**, an easy to moderate 2.6-mile loop around the Smart View Picnic Area, offers good views into Piedmont Virginia. The trail is level for the most part and is generally dry and smooth underfoot. For most of the 2.6 miles, the trail passes through mature woods and has a good display of wildflowers in April and May. Several signs mark access points from the Picnic Area to the trail. Two hours should be allowed for its completion.

IMPORTANT ADVICE

- Lock valuables in the trunk of your car or take them with you.
- Hiking shoes or boots are recommended for most trails, especially for the most strenuous ones. Steep and rocky areas and slippery stream crossings require extra attention and careful footing. Even for trails marked "easy," it is advisable to wear flat or rubber-soled shoes for comfort and good traction. Wearing sandals, "flip-flops," or high heels can result in accidents.
- Sudden changes in weather are common in these mountains. Even in mild seasons, rapid dips in temperature and unexpected thunderstorms frequently occur, and at higher elevations the wind and temperature can carry a surprising chill. Be prepared for weather changes by bringing along suitable clothing.
- For your safety and the protection of the resources, stay on established trails. Shortcutting at switchbacks causes soil erosion, disfigures the trail, and makes it

difficult for other hikers to find their way. Take advantage of log walkways, steps, or other trail construction. They are there to minimize human impact on the natural environment.

- Do not drink the water in streams or springs. Bacterial diseases can be contracted by drinking untreated "wild" waters.
- Lost and found articles should be reported to a Park Ranger.

REGULATIONS

- Parking is limited to designated parking areas or road shoulders. All four wheels must be off the pavement.
- Bicycles, horses and motor vehicles are not permitted on trails. Camping is permitted only in park campgrounds or designated back-country sites.
- Fires are allowed only in fireplace grills.
- Dogs and other pets must be on a leash or under physical restraint at all times while in the park. The territorial instinct of dogs can lead to fights with other dogs on the

trail. Dogs also frighten hikers and chase wildlife.

- Deposit all litter in trash cans or recycling bins.
- Metal detectors are prohibited.
- Natural resources are protected by Federal law. Do not disturb animal and plant life in any way. Hunting, trapping and carrying weapons are prohibited. Do not interfere with animals by feeding, touching, or frightening them. Do not cut, deface, or damage trees. Leave wildflowers and other vegetation in their natural condition for other hikers to enjoy.
- Historic resources are protected by federal law. Do not damage, deface, or remove any of these structures, furnishings, or exhibits.

For Emergencies call:
1-800-PARKWATCH

(1-800-727-5928)

For general Parkway
information, call:

(828) 298-0398 or visit

www.nps.gov/blri on the Internet.