

Naked Ground, Haoe & Hangover Hike



At almost 2000 feet in elevation and just over 6 miles you'll have to work at getting to the top and back down, but boy it's worth getting to the hangover!

You'll see sheer drop offs for thousands of feet, grand vistas looking into NC. And finally the Hangover is what its name implies, a rocky outcropping with full 360 degree views of the surrounding mountains.

Directions: Take the Cherohala Skyway (NC 143) to the turn off to go to Joyce Kilmer. Immediately after turning, turn left again on FS 81. This is a relatively good FS road requiring 4WD, watch out for some deep pot holes.



Take FS 81 quite a ways and turn right on Wolf Laurel Rd (look for small wooden sign). This road climbs and twists quite a bit, again a 4WD vehicle highly recommended... once again, watch for pot holes. Take the road to the very end and park.

You will see a trail angling sharply to the left. Take that trail. There is a trail intersection not far up when you see the yellow wilderness boundary sign.

Go left there and follow that trail all the way up to the gap between Stratton Bald and Naked Ground. Naked Ground, Haoe & Hangover will be on the trail to the right, Stratton & Bob Balds will be on the trail going to the left.

One confusing spot toward Hangover... don't take the "Hangover Lead" trail, that trail would take you away toward Slickrock Creek.... take the trail to the right at that point and then the one to the left, that takes you to the Hangover Rock.

Description and other options:

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness is an alternative to the overcrowded Great Smoky Mountains National Park just to the north. Beautiful southern Appalachian views, waterfalls, swimming holes and solitude await those fortunate enough to venture into this wild and remote gem of Wilderness Area.

There are many trailheads leading into the wilderness on either the Tennessee or North Carolina side. My favorite is the Big Fat Gap trail on the North Carolina side at an elevation of 3,060'. To see the best of what this area has to offer take the Hangover Lead South Trail to the 5,180' Hangover, where you have a 360-degree view of the surrounding mountains. Early mornings here are typically enshrouded in fog, giving one the feeling of waking up above the clouds. A few campsites can be found near the Hangover.

Take the Haoe Lead Trail west for about 1.5 miles until you come to a trail junction at Naked Ground. From here find the Slickrock Creek Trail and follow it north until you finally reach Slickrock Creek. A few more miles downstream and numerous stream crossings later you will pass the Big Fat Gap Trail. Continue downstream until you reach Wildcat Falls, find a campsite and enjoy a unique three-tiered waterfall made for swimming and basking in the sun. A nice day hike to Lower Falls is worth the extra miles. To complete the loop backtrack upstream to the Big Fat Gap Trail and hike the 2.5 miles back to the car.

This area is full of wildlife...bears, wild boars, deer and the streams are full of trout. I would advise avoiding the area during fall bear hunts on weekends.

The 17,013-acre wilderness straddles Tennessee and North Carolina. Just to the west is the Citico Creek Wilderness creating a contiguous 33,000-acre area between the 2 federally protected Wilderness Areas without any roads.

Another highlight of the area is the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest in the southeast corner on the North Carolina side. The forest named after the journalist/poet Joyce Kilmer protects the largest stands of virgin hardwood left in the east. It's worth a visit to see these massive giants still standing. Make sure you read his poem "Trees" before visiting.

This is a very wild, rugged and remote area. The trailheads are mostly on gravel roads far from civilization. Be prepared, get the map, grab your camera and spend a few days away from the crowds of the National Park and enjoy one of the southeast's roadless gems.

Step by Step Navigation:

0.0 mi - Trailhead - The Hangover Lead Trail goes both north and south from this trailhead. You're heading south, so take the trail next to the information board on the left side of the road.

0.62 mi - Stay Straight - The Locust Ridge Trail heads off to the left, stay straight. Unless you're looking for it, you won't even notice this side trail.

1.57 mi - Campsite on Right, Keep straight at the campsite.

2.3 mi - Turn Left, side trail on right, turn left on the wider path.

2.42 mi - Open Views, side trail on right, You'll get your first view here. Don't miss the narrow side trail on the right leads to even better views.

2.72 mi - Turn Left, Then Straight - Turn left at the sign for the Hangover Lead Alt. Trail #56A. Shortly afterward stay straight at another signed intersection with the Deep Creek Trail on the right.

2.96 mi - The Hangover - Keep straight through campsites and small side trails until the main trail dead ends at the Hangover. A couple side trails here lead to even more views.