

Rattlesnake Lodge Hike



Hike to a beautiful overlook view and the ruins of Rattlesnake Lodge, a 1900s summer estate, following the Mountains to Sea Trail.

4 MILES (ROUND TRIP)

RELATIVELY MODERATE

Just off the Blue Ridge Parkway north of Asheville

Compared to other view-packed hikes along the Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville, this hike to Rattlesnake Lodge lacks the breathtaking summit views of the likes of Craggy Pinnacle or Black Balsam Knob. But what it lacks in views, this hike makes up in scenic beauty and history, trekking through a beautiful hardwood forest along a narrow, historic road to the remains of an estate from the early 1900s. And, unlike many other trails along the Parkway, this is a lesser-traveled, often-quiet route, thanks to its limited views and limited parking.



This is a scenic hike throughout the year, but especially so in autumn, when fall's colorful display paints the surrounding hardwood forest in vibrant hues of red, orange, and gold. Along the way to Rattlesnake Lodge,

the Mountains to Sea Trail catches a rather beautiful view from a broad rock outcrop just above the Parkway. And reaching the former site of the lodge, the remains are fully worthy of exploration: a collection of stacked-stone foundations are all that remain of the lodge, barn, tool house, spring house, swimming pool, and several surrounding buildings from the estate.

The lodge was built in 1904 by the Dr. Chase Ambler as a family summer house near Asheville, and was named for its infamous living room ceiling covered in rattlesnake skins. The family later sold the lodge before it was destroyed in a fire in the 1920s. (Read more about the lodge's history and view historical photos on the family's website: rattlesnakelodge.com.)

Rattlesnake Lodge: the hike



The adventure begins at one of two small parking areas just off Ox Creek Road at Bull Gap (view maps and driving directions), following the Mountains to Sea Trail eastbound. (This hike departs from the western of the two trailheads, closest to the Blue Ridge Parkway access from the Elk Mountain Scenic Highway.) The hike reaches Bull Gap at .4 mile, passing the rock foundation of the Rattlesnake Lodge carriage house and the alternate parking area.



The Mountains to Sea Trail ascends from Bull Gap, following its iconic, white circular trail blazes and climbing through a series of sharp switchbacks, following the original access road to Rattlesnake Lodge from Bull Gap. The road to the lodge is exceptionally narrow, and relatively moderate, leveled by stacked-stone walls scattered throughout its length.

Exiting the switchbacks, the hike catches through-the-trees views of a neighboring ridge. The trail carves through another set of switchbacks at just under 1 mile, passing through a rocky terrain with several enormous, lichen-covered boulders. The hike scores its only noteworthy view from a broad, smooth outcrop just above the Blue Ridge Parkway at 1.1 miles, stretching south to the Bull Creek valley and Swan Mountain.

The hike passes through a grove of leathery-leaved, gnarly-branched mountain laurel at 1.5 miles. Shortly after, the trail reaches the first of the scattered remains of Rattlesnake Lodge, passing the stacked-stone foundation and a hewn timber from the lodge's barn.



Part of our Fall 50 Challenge

Continuing eastbound, the Mountains to Sea Trail passes the stone remains of the lodge's shallow spring-fed pool. The trail reaches the remains of the flat, terraced yard at 1.75 miles, exploring the foundation of Rattlesnake Lodge to the left of the trail. Continuing east, the trail hugs the contours of a stacked-stone wall, reaching the remains of the tool shed on the trail's right, and the spring house on the trail's left at 1.85 miles. An enormous fallen tree lies just before the circular stone spring.

Reaching the foundations of the caretaker's cabins and potato house, this route turns around to retrace its steps to the trailhead, following the outbound hike in reverse. It's a nearly continuous descent from the lodge to the trailhead along the Mountains to Sea Trail, making for an easy return hike through the particularly scenic forest. The hike passes through Bull Gap and then reaches the trailhead at just 4 miles, completing the adventure.

35.668067, -82.476050

Moving Time
01:49:23

Distance
3.59 mi

Ascent
558 ft

Speed
2.0 mph

