

I've been hiking in Virginia since the early 1980's. Here is a summary of my personal favorite hikes, listed in order, starting with the most scenic. Mike Vaughn, RATC Hikemaster

Ten Best Day Hikes in Virginia

1. Mount Rogers (7.7 miles)

One of the premiere hikes in the U.S. Most of this hike is on the A.T. and is over 5,000 feet in elevation. This hike starts at Massie Gap in Grayson Highlands State Park. The trail follows the open mountain bald of Wilburn Ridge to the heavily wooded summit of Mount Rogers, at 5,729 feet, the highest point in Virginia. There are many semi-wild ponies in the open meadows along the trail. In addition, a profusion of rhododendron is usually in bloom in June along the trail.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 south for 98 miles to exit 45 (Virginia route 16). Take left (route 16 east, towards Troutdale) for 28 miles to Virginia route 58. Make right on route 58 and go 7 miles to entrance to Grayson Highlands State Park on right. Enter the state park and go 3.4 miles to trailhead parking area on right at Massie Gap.

Trail map: [Mt Rogers Topo map](#)

2. Old Rag Mountain (8.4 miles)

Located in Madison County, north of Charlottesville, this is a strenuous hike up a granite domelike mountain that can be seen for miles around. This trail is usually crowded on the weekends. It begins with a steady climb through hardwood forest. At around 2.5 miles the trail opens up and the rock scrambling begins. From there to the summit at 3.5 miles, there are scrambles over and under boulders and down a 10 foot deep fissure. There is a 360 degree view at the top with picturesque boulders strewn about. The completion of the loop is mostly on forest service roads past two shelters.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 north for 78 miles to I-64. Take I-64 east for 30.6 miles to exit 118B, Virginia route 29 north. Take route 29 north for 30.5 miles to Virginia route 231. Take left on route 231, go 12.5 miles. Turn left on route 602 and follow signs 2.5 miles to trailhead parking lot.

Trail map: [Old Rag Mountain topo map](#)

3. McAfee Knob (7.8 miles)

Located west of Salem in Roanoke County, the hike follows the Appalachian Trail up and back. Extensive cliffs at the top afford unparalleled views of both the Catawba Valley and the city of Roanoke. This is one of the premier day hikes on the entire 2,000+ mile length of the A.T.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 south to exit 141. Go left on Virginia route 419, Electric Road. Go .4 miles to Virginia route 311. Take right and go 5.6 miles to A.T. access parking lot on left at top of Catawba Mountain.

Trail map: [McAfee Knob Topo map](#)

4. Spy Rock/Crab Tree Falls (8.1 miles)

This hike starts at the Montebello Fish hatchery in Nelson County. It is a one way hike and will require leaving a car at the Crab Tree Falls parking lot. From the parking lot, the hike climbs steadily on an old fire road. At 1.0 miles it will intersect the A.T. Head north on the A.T. After a half mile, the short trail to Spy Rock will be on the right. Spy Rock is a granite dome with awesome, 360 degree, views of the Priest Wilderness area and other surrounding mountains. It requires some rock scrambling to get to the top. Continue on the A.T. for another three miles to intersection with fire road. Take left on jeep road and go a quarter mile to Crab Tree Falls trail. There are few camp sites and a parking area here. Go right and continue for two miles to top of Crabtree Falls. At 1,200 feet this falls is the highest east of the Mississippi. Take the steep trail along the falls down 1.6 miles to the parking lot and your vehicle.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 north to exit 205. Turn right on state route 606 and go 1.6 miles to route 11 in Steeles Tavern. Go left on route 11 for one tenth of a mile. Turn right on state route 56. Go 8.36 miles to Montebello Fish Hatchery Road. Go .25 miles on gravel road past fish hatchery to A.T. access parking lot.

Trail map:

5. Old Hotel Trail/Cole Mountain Loop (6.4 miles)

Located in the Mt. Pleasant Scenic Area in Amherst County, 20 miles northeast of Buena Vista, this loop hike offers some of the most outstanding views anywhere in the area. The Old Hotel Trail trailhead is at Hog Camp Gap, roughly 8 miles from route 60 on a dirt and gravel road. The trail climb steadily through woods and an open area, passing an A.T. shelter (during the stagecoach days there was an inn in this area, but nothing remains of it today). The trail intersects the A.T. at Cow Camp Gap. Following the A.T. north, the route climbs Cole (a.k.a. Cold) Mountain. The summit of Cole Mountain is a mountain bald which offers extraordinary views in all directions.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 north to exit 188 (Buena Vista). Turn right on state route 60 and drive 12.2 miles. Make left on Coffeytown Road, state route 634. Go 1.6 miles and turn onto gravel VA755/Wiggins Spring Rd., following the Mount Pleasant sign. In 1.3 miles VA755 enters the GWNF and becomes FS48. In 1.4 miles from entering the GWNF pass a small parking area on the left where the AT crosses the road. It may be necessary to park here if the

seasonal gate is closed. Otherwise continue .2 mile to gravel road on right leading to trail head parking lot.

Trail map: [Cole Mountain Loop topo map](#)

6. Fuller Rocks/Big Rocky Row loop (8.6 miles)

This hike starts on the A.T. crossing on Hercules Road. The hike climbs north on the A.T., reaching Fuller Rocks after a series of 21 switchbacks. There are magnificent views here of the James River and the surrounding mountains. The hike then ascends Big Rocky Row, with additional great views of the valley below. Continue north on the A.T. for one mile to Saddle Gap Trail on right. Descend trail back to Hercules Road. Walk back on Hercules Road 1.5 miles to car.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 north to exit 175. Turn right on state route 11 for 1.75 miles. Make right on state route 130. Go 6.2 miles to state route 501. Turn right and go 5.2 miles to Hercules Road. Take left and go .9 miles to A.T.crossing.

Trail map:

7. Cascades/Barneys Wall (7.6 miles)

Located in Giles County near Pembroke, the hike goes along Little Stony Creek, to the Cascades, a very picturesque waterfall. The trail to the Cascades is registered as as National Scenic Trail. The hike then continues up the Nature Conservancy Trail to Barney's Wall, a cliff that features a 700 foot drop. There is a great view of the New River Valley from Barney's Wall. Retrace steps back to waterfall. Take the fire road above the creek back to the parking lot.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 south to exit 118B (Blacksburg). Stay on state route 460 for 26 miles to town of Pembroke. Turn right on Cascades Drive and go 3.8 miles to parking lot for the Cascades. There is a \$3.00 fee for parking.

Trail map:

8. Tinker Cliffs (7.6 miles)

Located in Botetourt County, the trail ascends Tinker Mountain via the Andy Layne Trail. The hike first crosses meadows (watch out for the cow patties) and Catawba Creek and then starts the ascent via switchbacks to Scorched Earth Gap on the Appalachian Trail. It continues south on the AT for a half mile to Tinker Cliffs, which are made of 250 million year old limestone. Many spots along the cliffs offer excellent views of McAfee Knob and the Catawba Valley.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 south to exit 141. Go left on Virginia route 419, Electric Road. Go .4 miles to Virginia route 311. Take right and go 6.7 miles to state route 779, turn right on Catawba Road and drive 8.3 miles to trail head gravel parking lot on right, just past bridge.

Trail map:

9. Rock Castle Gorge Loop (11.2 miles)

Located in Patrick County, on Blue Ridge Parkway land. After a steep 2,000-foot ascent, the hike parallels the Parkway – passing alternately through woods and open fields with extraordinary views. It then makes steep descent back into the gorge. The hike passes some old cabin sites and a series of interesting rock formations. The last few miles are along Rock Castle Creek – a wild stream with many cataracts. The Rock Castle Loop Trail was designated a national scenic trail in 1984.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take Brambleton Avenue (Route 221) for 34.6 miles south to Floyd, Virginia. Turn left on to state route 8. Go 9.2 miles. Turn right on to state route 605 (Rock Castle Road. Go .7 miles to trailhead parking area.

Trail map: [Rock Castle Gorge Loop](#)

10. Mount Pleasant Loop (5.6 miles)

Located in the Mt. Pleasant Scenic Area in Amherst County (see hike five above). This hike starts on the Henry Lanum Trail. After some level walking, it climbs steeply to the summit of Mount Pleasant. There are two summits on Mount Pleasant, one look east and the other west. Both offer great views. The completion of the loop is on the Pompey Trail back to the parking lot.

Directions to trailhead: (From Roanoke) Take I-81 north to exit 188 (Buena Vista). Turn right on state route 60 and drive 12.2 miles. Make left on Coffeytown Road, state route 634. Go 1.6 miles and turn onto gravel VA755/Wiggins Spring Rd., following the Mount Pleasant sign. In 1.3 miles VA755 enters the GWNF and becomes FS48. In 1.4 miles from entering the GWNF pass a small parking area on the left where the AT crosses the road. It may be necessary to park here if the seasonal gate is closed. Otherwise continue .2 mile to gravel road on right leading to trail head parking lot.

Trail map: [Mount Pleasant Loop](#)

