

## USAF 50 SUMMITS

### FINAL ITINERARY AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOUR-STATE SUMMIT (NC, SC, TN, GA)

10-12 October 2014

#### **Friday, 10 Oct**

1700-2200 – Arrive Briar Bottom Group CG, **RED OAK** Site (near Asheville, NC)

#### **NOTES**

- This is a tent-only campground; no wheeled camping units or RVs permitted
- Campground open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.; notify campground of late arrivals by calling 828-675-5616
- Campers must enter through Black Mountain Campground to reach this facility
- Daily fees are for up to 50 people and 10 vehicles per site
- No public address systems are allowed
- This facility is located within a bear sanctuary; keep all food out of site in containers or locked inside a hard-sided vehicle, secure trash in provided bins and remove all food from area after eating
- This campground is managed by the Cradle of Forestry In America Interpretive Association
- Don't Move Firewood: Help protect our forests! Prevent the spread of tree-killing pests by obtaining firewood at or near your destination and burning it on-site. Moving firewood is illegal in some states.

#### **DIRECTIONS**

From Asheville, North Carolina, take I-26 west to exit 9 onto 19 east toward Burnsville. Follow 19 to Micaville and turn right onto Highway 80. Continue south approximately 12-14 miles to Mount Mitchell Golf Course. Turn right on South Toe River Road and follow signs to Black Mountain Campground. Campers must enter through the main gate at Black Mountain Campground to get to Briar Bottom.

#### **OTHER ALERTS**

Campground: Jan 1 2007 - Dec 31 2050 : Briar Bottom access gate closes at 10 pm, opens at 7am. Please notify campground of late arrivals by calling (828)675.5616. This campground is restricted to tents only. Parking space is limited.

Reservation under Armentrout (2-29998016) – Site holds 50 people, 10 cars

**\* Cars must be shuttled to top of Mt Mitchell by drivers on Saturday morning or prepositioned Friday night. To preposition, park cars here: 35.717911,-82.278714 (35.717911, -82.278714) or here 35.753513,-82.27365 (35.753513, -82.273650) , and carpool to the campground. There is not time Saturday to return to the campground to pick up cars.**

#### **Saturday, 11 Oct**

0630 – Breakfast, Briar Bottom Group CG

0800 – Mt Mitchell climbers start from CG (5.6 mile climb)

1130 – Mt Mitchell summit

1200 – Mt Mitchell lunch and photos

1230 – Depart Mt Mitchell

1500 – Arrive Sassafrass Mt., SC (2:15 driving time)

1515 – Sassafrass Mt. Summit photos

1545 – Depart Sassafrass

1830 – Arrive Great Smokies NP, Deep Creek CG **Site 202**, Bryson City, TN) (2:45 driving time) Dinner on your own

## NOTES

### • **National Park entrance is free with Military ID**

- Bear Habitat!! All food and items used to store or prepare food, including coolers, MUST be stored in the trunk or cab of your vehicle/s at all times when not in use.
- Dispose of garbage promptly in bear-proof dumpsters. This rule is strictly enforced!
- Firewood quarantines are in effect!
- The possession of any firewood originating from any location for which a federal or state firewood quarantine is in effect is prohibited. The movement of firewood into the park from counties adjacent to the park for which a federal or state quarantine is in place is prohibited even if the quarantine allows for movement within the county.
- There are no showers or electric, water or sewer hook-ups in the park. Some group sites are accessible.
- Quiet hours are in effect from 10 PM to 6 AM. Generator use is prohibited in group camps.
- Fires are allowed in fire rings only!
- A minimum of 7 people is required for group site use. Maximum site capacity varies from 15 to 30 people. The park stay limit is 14 consecutive days.
- A Tennessee or North Carolina fishing license is required to fish in the park. Special regulations apply in the park.
- Pets are permitted but cannot be left unattended. All pets must be kept on a leash at all times. Pets are not allowed on trails.
- For additional park information call 865-436-1200 or visit [www.nps.gov/grsm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm)

## DIRECTIONS

Seasonal phone is 828-488-3184

From downtown Bryson City, NC: Follow signs to Deep Creek, 3 miles away.

## OTHER ALERTS

Campground: Nov 9 2006 - Dec 31 2050 : Food storage regulations are strictly enforced. Pets are allowed in the campground but must be on a leash no longer than 6 feet. Pets are not allowed on trails. Reasonable generator use is permitted between 8 AM and 8 PM.

Group Site 202 under Armentrout (2-29998014) – 20 people, 4 cars

## **Sunday, 12 Oct**

0700 – Breakfast, Deep Creek CG

0800 – Depart for Clingmans Dome

0830 – Clingmans Dome climbers assemble in parking lot

0900 – Clingmans Dome Summit Photo

0930 – Depart Clingmans Dome

1230 – Arrive Brasstown Bald, GA (2:30 driving time)

1245 – Brasstown Bald Summit Photo and lunch

1330 – Depart Brasstown Bald

**Team Contact Info**

Overall Team Leader – Lt Col Jeff Armentrout, [usaf4southeastsummits@gmail.com](mailto:usaf4southeastsummits@gmail.com)

**Weather Forecast (Asheville)**

**Fri Oct 10**



77° 59°

PM T-Storms

Chance of rain: 50%

**Sat Oct 11**



77° 57°

PM T-Storms

Chance of rain: 50%

**Sun Oct 12**



77° 58°

Partly Cloudy

Chance of rain: 20%

## Gear Recommendations

### Miscellaneous Gear

- “personal” items
  - flash light or head lamp
  - pocket knife
  - lighter
  - toothbrush/toothpaste
  - medicine
  - lip balm
  - small roll of toilet tissue
  - small towel
- sleeping bag
- tent
- foam sleeping pad (closed cell or Therma-Rest)
- eating
  - deep bowl (small, plastic or aluminum)
  - cup (measuring style if possible)
  - spoon
- 2 one quart water bottles
- Day pack
- Camera
- Folding chair for camp

### Clothing

#### Layer A (Hiking Clothes – All year)

- hiking boots or sturdy walking shoes
- 2 pairs heavy “hiking” socks
- 1 change of underwear
- 1 pair hiking shorts
- 2 short sleeve “wicking” shirts
- 1 hat or cap--flexible, with brim.

#### Layer B (Cool Evenings – March, April, October, November). All of the above plus:

- 1 long sleeve shirt (wool or flannel)
- 1 long pants (polypro or nylon, not heavy, not cotton)
- 1 pair insulated underwear (polypro) --optional
- Fleece or “puffy” jacket

#### Layer C (Cold, Wet, or Windy – All year, every trip)

- 1 sturdy rain suit

### Shared Items

- Camp stove
- Cook pots/pans
- Cooking utensils
- Spices
- Biodegradable soap/scrubber for cleaning
- Cooler with perishables
- Paper towels
- Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner X 2

Suggestions include items you can cook/heat easily on stove or campfire/briquettes:

- Breakfast: oatmeal, cereal bars, pop tarts
- Lunch: summer sausage, bagels, cheese/crackers, jerky (no cooking for lunches), trail mix
- Dinner: hot dogs, soups, canned stew/chili, “foil pack” dinner (meat and veggies)

## MAPS

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zEFlqAfSRq10.kTtrVLZiEF8s>

<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msid=212717656936544989309.0005000e5dca56cea0249&msa=0>

### **Mt Mitchell Climb Description:**

Mount Mitchell is the highest peak east of the Mississippi river at 6,684' in elevation. Part of the appeal of this hike is "summiting" this superior peak. This hike qualifies as an accepted route for the **South Beyond 6000 Program** by the Carolina Mountain Club, which recognizes members who climb all 40 peaks above 6000' in the Southern Appalachians. This is also one of the highest elevation changes of any single trail in the area, ascending more than 3,600' from the Black Mountain Campground to the summit, so it is quite difficult.

You could start at the top and hike down, but if you don't have a vehicle shuttle you'll have to hike back up anyway. One good option to lessen the strain, but still make for quite an achievement, would be to leave a vehicle shuttle at the summit parking area and hike up, then avoid the strain on the knees by driving back down. This hike's description assumes you're starting at the bottom going up.

Begin the hike by crossing the bridge leading into the campground. Bear left at the first intersection onto a campground loop road; from here, follow the signs for the Mount Mitchell trail all the way to the top. The easy Briar Bottom/Mount Mitchell trail angles left off the campground loop and winds up by the S. Toe River. Follow it for a few yards to the intersection on the right with the Mount Mitchell trail, back across the gravel road.

Now on the Mt. Mitchell trail proper, the climbing begins immediately. At this elevation, the forest is mostly cove hardwoods with a few hemlocks thrown in for good measure, though they are dead or dying. You are ascending through a small cove which is eating into Long Arm Ridge. Toward the back of the cove you'll bear right through the first of many switchbacks encountered along the way. The trail in this area heads generally north, though at any given moment you may be facing any of the cardinal directions due to the way it switches back upon itself. The trail climbs up the side of Long Arm Ridge.

Some very large trees grow in the forest here, and as you gain elevation on the ridgeline you enter a mixed oak hardwood forest. A few small Red Spruce trees grow here, although they're out-of-place at this low of an elevation and will likely be shaded

out before reaching maturity. The footing on this section is mostly good, with a few rocky or rooty sections.

After achieving the top of Long Arm Ridge, the trail ascends its spine, swinging back and forth across it. You'll break the 4000' mark on this section of trail and begin heading in a westerly direction. The trees along the ridgeline - predominantly oaks and maples - are shorter. They're comparatively stunted by the exposure; the shallow, rocky soil; and lack of water as the steep slopes drain quickly. Some rougher sections of trail appear, although it's still the climb more than the surface that makes it challenging.

Before long the ridge will sort of melt into a high, steep slope of "Little Mountain", which you'll traverse. The mountain won't seem very little at this point, however. You'll reach a trail junction shortly and you can take either fork. Both trails come back together eventually; the left fork is called the Higgins Bald trail while straight ahead is the Mount Mitchell trail. You could also save the Higgins Bald trail for the way back down, but I like the scenery so much I go that way on the way up.

The Higgins Bald trail extends the hike by about 1/4 mile but takes you through the scenic, eponymous meadow. Climbing rapidly, the trail generally passes into the northern hardwood forest zone in this area. You'll cross the upper reaches of Setrock Creek, an easy hop at this point. There are some cascades downhill from the trail, but they're not really worth expending effort to try and see. Then you enter Higgins Bald itself. Roughly halfway to the top, this clearing - which sits on a gentler slope above Flynn Ridge - lets you look down and see how far up you've come, and also look up to see how far you have left to go! Commissary Ridge looms above this field, which you'll soon begin to climb, and which culminates at the summit of Mount Mitchell itself. Lots of dead hemlocks stand in the forest encircling Higgins Bald.

You'll re-enter the forest on the other side of Higgins Bald, and then join back with the Mount Mitchell trail after a short distance; bear left. The trail curves to a more northwesterly direction in general, just after crossing the 5000' contour. You're now well into the spruce-fir forest zone. You'll walk through a spectacular virgin forest of tall, straight Red Spruce. Seeing them growing here gives you a glimpse of what forests all over the Black Mountain range used to look like, and a glimpse at why the forest was so valuable to loggers. The straight, resilient spruce wood was seemingly plentiful, so these trees were prize timber. Luckily, some patches such as this one survived, and other areas of spruce are starting to re-grow.

As you continue to climb through a series of switchbacks - and some of the steepest sections of trail on the hike - you'll cross under the power line right-of-way a few times, where there are some limited views. Then you'll pop out of the forest onto the old railroad grade that encircles much of Mount Mitchell and provided a way for the loggers to get the fruits of their labor off the mountain. Turn left at this intersection.

The path for the next few yards is shared with the Buncombe Horse Range Trail as it follows the railroad grade on a nearly level course, just shy of 5800' in elevation. As you swing around toward the south side of the ridge, you'll reach a great campsite. You'll need to turn right to begin the final 900' climb up Commissary Ridge to the top of Mt. Mitchell. The trail is well-signed and blazed in this area so it shouldn't be hard to follow, unless it's foggy and the fog is extremely dense.

The patch of forest past the intersection mostly composed of imported Norway spruces. Native Red Spruce and Fraser Fir soon take back over, however. You climb above the 6000' contour not far beyond the second switchback you encounter beyond the railroad grade. The ridge in this area is pretty rugged, and you'll pass one nice, deep fracture cave on the way up through the switchbacks. Open glades with spruces all around give the area an alpine feeling.

You'll climb up onto the crest of the ridge after a relatively rough and eroded section of trail, and the forest becomes composed of almost pure Fraser Fir and some mountain ash. The trees get shorter near the top, attesting to their young age. These stands of Fir are ravaged by high winds, poor soil, and - within the last 50 years or so - the Balsam Woolly Adelgid infestation. 90% of the mature Firs are killed by the adelgids, which are related to the Hemlock Woolly Adelgids wiping out the hemlocks further down the mountain. Luckily for the firs - and unlike the hemlocks - they are able to survive long enough to reproduce before the adelgids kill them, and large areas of lush, young firs still grow up here.

Once you reach a flatter section of trail with puncheon (sticks) laid across it to keep your feet out of the mud, you know you're getting close to the summit! You are on Mount Mitchell State park property now, having been on the National forest most of the route. (You may notice the sign welcoming you to the state park, but I didn't last time I hiked this.) Next, you'll reach the intersection with the Balsam nature trail, which leaves to the right.

Continue straight ahead; from here the trail sees a good bit more use and you may share it with more adventurous tourists and kids. You'll pass by an enormous, free-standing boulder on your right and a neat cave on the left. You never really get a view of the summit until you're right below it; at this point you're nearly done with the hike as you come out near a park building and a paved path. Turn left on the paved path and climb a few more feet to the summit.