

Hiking Review

The Nuwati Trail

*By Jason Reagan
The Summer Times*

Visiting the High Country without communing with its variety of natural wonders is kind of like driving to the Grand Canyon and never leaving a video arcade.

One of the best ways to enjoy the splendor and pageantry of the mountains is by taking a hike along one of several local trails.

Many travelers prefer to skip a local hike because of a perceived lack of trail experience — it wouldn't do to ruin one's vacation with an elaborate helicopter rescue. So, that's where I, your outdoorsy guinea pig, come into play. If an amateur like me can experience the joy of nature and still avoid the pitfalls of the wild, anyone can venture down our local trails with the confidence of Grizzly Adams — minus the cheesy lumberjack shirt.

For our experiment, I chose one of the 11 hiking trails that snake across and around Grandfather Mountain (www.grandfathermountain.com).

Located near the junction of N.C. 105 and U.S. 221 south of Boone, Grandfather Mountain boasts some of the grandest views and most diverse flora and fauna in the area. Since the trails are funded by the cost of permits, the area is professionally maintained and monitored without the funding worries of federal or state budget constraints. One of the most serene and easiest hiking trails is the Nuwati Trail, one of Grandfather's East Side trails.

While perusing the Grandfather Mountain Back Country Trail Guide, my eyes immediately targeted the word “easy” under the Nuwati description. I decided to test the limits of easiness and hit the trail in my moderately out-of-shape splendor.

One of my pet peeves in the current outdoors movement is the trend towards extravagant equipment driven mostly by the magazine industry. I can't count how many articles I've perused about buying the “perfect” gear in *Men's Health* and *Men's Journal*. Do you really need a solar-powered, gold-plated, portable, nose-hair clipper with GPS tracker (\$4,345 plus shipping and your first-born)? Should a day-trip backpack cost more than tires that bring you to the trailhead? I decided to tackle the Nuwati with simplicity (read “cheapness”) in mind — Mr. Thoreau in a Subaru.

I found my daypack purchased locally for about \$20. A downloaded trail map from Grandfather Mountain's Web site served me just fine (cost: eight sheets of paper and ink). My compass was a freebie courtesy of the N.C. Forestry Council obtained at some past trade show. Clothing? A free “Freakonomics” T-shirt from the Watauga County

Public Library's Summer Reading campaign. Shorts? four-year-old khaki pair (probably \$20) purchased locally and cheaply.

My backpack also held a pocketknife purchased illegally from a Tennessee flea market at age 11 — I assumed it was illegal to sell knives to preteens; as well as two bottles of spring water (\$.50 per bottle in bulk) and two Clif Bars (\$1.50 each at Bare Essentials in Boone). My boots were also purchased on the cheap right here in Boone — they felt fine. My one regret after the hike was not investing a little more in socks — I soon replaced my white tube socks for some Columbia Hikers.

In all, I probably had \$60 invested in this hike, not counting gas and permit cost. Take that, Sharper Image.

The Nuwati trail can be reached at two trailheads. The best is probably the Boone Fork parking area at mile marker 300 of the Blue Ridge Parkway — a couple of miles south of Moses Cone Manor.

The other is the Asutsi Trail via the Serenity Farms parking area (for more information about this access point, call Grandfather Mountain).

From the Boone fork parking lot, I entered the Parkway's Tanawha Trail and walked south through acres of tranquil forest, encountering only about four other hikers along the way. Since the National Parks Service owns the Tanawha trail there is no charge but no camping is allowed. Although the trail is sometimes not clearly visible, the Tanawha is blazed with small feather signs on some trees.

In just a few minutes I met the junction of the Tanawha and Nuwati and I could immediately see the difference in maintenance. The staff at Grandfather Mountain keeps the trail ways quite clear and provides several easily visible blue trail blazes to keep hikers on track. Along the way, I met a Grandfather Mountain employee who answered several of my navigational questions.

The Nuwati — Cherokee for “medicine” — roughly follows the track of a former logging road for 1.2 miles.

Although the trail is ranked easy there are some a few steep climbs and at least one large stream crossing where caution is advised. But overall the trail is even albeit rocky. Of course, even the act of stepping on the many circular and rough-hewn rocks becomes sacred when you realize many rocks in the range are more than one billion years old. The path of the Nuwati describes a partial arc through Boone Bowl, a U-shaped valley roughly bisected by musical Boone Fork Creek. Photographers wanting to practice the rare skill of capturing cascades will have several chances along the creek.

Due to the timing of my early spring hike, I missed the colorful show performed by the areas trilliums, lilies and pantheon of rich mountain wildflowers. However, I experienced the rich feeling of green — yes, at this point green becomes more than a visual stimulus

— as canopies of hardwood trees, mosses, and plant life too rich to adequately describe here enveloped me.

Along the way, evidence of the old logging days are still visible with remnants of rusty cables protruding from some trees. The lone stand of Quaking Aspens should not be missed.

Rustic campsites provide weary hikers with nice clearings to enjoy a Clif Bar or chug some H2O. See the end of the article for information about campsites.

Instead of sore feet, sweat and that nagging “I-gotta-hike-this-back!” feeling that can sometimes accompany a hiker (at least out-of-shape hikers like me), the Nuwati offers a bonus at the hiking faithful — a spectacular view of the Boone Bowl from Storyteller’s Rock.

Jutting out about 70 feet off the ground, the mostly bare, flat rock got its name after Grandfather Mountain trail employee and history buff Ed Schultz began to tell interpretive “Living History” stories from the rock’s summit in 1990.

To reach the top, hikers should climb carefully and follow the blue blazes to the top. From there, the shape of the valley is evident and hikers can trace the line of the Boone Fork as well — a grand payoff for a one-mile walk. The Nuwati trail truly earns its Cherokee name as it gave at least one cheapskate hiker a string dose of spiritual medicine.

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More information and safety tips from the folks at Grandfather Mountain

Backcountry Hiking Trails

Grandfather's backcountry is very different from other areas in the South.

- * Trails take you through forests usually found in Canadian climates.
 - * Many of the trails use ladders and cables to climb sheer cliff faces.
 - * Grandfather is home to 16 distinct natural communities (ecosystems).
 - * Is home to 66 rare or endangered species, including 11 that are globally imperiled.
 - * Portions of the backcountry are sheltered within a Nature Conservancy trust.
 - * Grandfather is part of the United Nation's international network of Biosphere Reserves
- * Hikers access trails only by paying user fees.
 - * Hiking is included as part of your attraction admission . Guests who purchase a ticket to the attraction may access the trails from inside the gates.

* Guests who visit for hiking only may access the trails from off-mountain trailheads and must purchase hiking permits for one-half the regular gate admission price.

If you want to enter the Backcountry from the Swinging Bridge area

* Hiking is included in the price of admission. To access the start of the Grandfather Trail, please park at the Hiker's Parking Area, a quarter mile below the summit.

* Please return to your vehicle at least one hour before closing time. If, in an emergency, you leave your car on the mountain, please call (828) 733-2800 (Top Shop), (828) 733-4337 (Gate) or (828) 733-1059 (Nature Museum) as soon as possible to notify Grandfather Mountain staff. If you do not call, we will send out a search party.

If you want only to hike without going through the Entrance Gate

* Guests wishing only to hike can begin at one of the two off-mountain trailheads located either on US 221 or NC 105. A trail map will be supplied when you purchase your permit.

* If you park at an off-mountain trailhead, plan on hiking back to your car

* If you plan to have someone pick you up at the Hiker's Parking Area, the driver of the pick-up vehicle will be charged regular gate admission to come in to pick you up.

* Grandfather Mountain is not able to provide rides to or from trailheads.

Source: Grandfather Mountain

SIDEBAR

Grandfather Permit Rates and Info
Rates & Hiking Permits

Grandfather Mountain is privately owned and operated. Since the Mountain is not supported by tax dollars, hiking fees are charged to finance trail maintenance and construction and to insure conservation efforts.

Hiking is included in the price of park admission. However, should you desire to come to Grandfather for hiking only, you may purchase a hiking permit to access the trails from trailheads located outside of the attraction. The following reflects the full range of individual and group fees for hiking access to Grandfather Mountain from trailheads at the base of the Mountain.

Rates for Individuals

Adults \$5 per day

Child (4-12 years) \$3 per day

Child ages 3 and younger Free
Backpacking / Camping Rates

Backpackers pay for each day on the mountain. For example, an adult camping one night would be on the Mountain two days.

Adult Overnight (2 days) \$10

Child Overnight (2 days) \$6
Rates for Groups (10 or more people)

Adults \$4 per day

Child (4-12 years) \$2 per day
Annual Hiking Passes

Passes are valid for one year from the date of purchase and may be purchased at any permit outlet.

Adult Individual Annual Pass (includes all park facilities) \$35

Child Individual Annual Pass (includes all park facilities) \$15

Group Annual Hiking Pass (Passholder + 5) \$60
Where To Find Permits

The High Country outlets listed below sell hiking permits. For more information about trails, fees and outlet locations, write:

Grandfather Mountain Backcountry Manager
P.O. Box 129
Linville, NC 28646 .
Or Email: hiking@grandfather.com
Or call 828-737-0833
At Grandfather Mountain:

* Grandfather Mountain Entrance, US 221, Linville

Closest to Profile Trail:

- * Invershiel Exxon, Intersection of NC 105 & NC 184, Banner Elk
- * Extreme Snowboard & Ski, Hwy 184, Sugar Mountain (closed in April)
- * Seven Devils Exxon, NC Highway 105, Foscoe

Closest to Nuwati and Daniel Boone Scout Trails:

- * Grandfather Mountain Market, Jct. of US 221 and Holloway Mtn. Road
- * Footsloggers, US 221 & Main Street, Blowing Rock

Other Area Outlets:

- * Footsloggers, 139 Depot Street, Boone
- * Mast General Store, King Street, Boone
- * Mast General Store Annex, Hwy 194, Valle Crucis

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Please use good judgment in taking the following safety tips into account:

- * Equipment- Trails here are often steep, rocky, uneven, and slippery. Hikers should wear sturdy boots and carry a daypack with food, water, first aid supplies, rain gear, flashlight, cellular phone, trail map, and users permit.
 - * Please do not attempt these trails wearing sandals, street shoes, or smooth soles.
 - * Lightning- Peaks, ridges, ledges, and shallow overhangs are all high-risk areas for lightning strikes. Stay alert for changing weather patterns (thunderstorms can arrive suddenly in the afternoon) and stay clear of risk areas in an electrical storm.
 - * Hypothermia- A cold summer rain can be as dangerous as an arctic windstorm. Carry appropriate weatherproof garments, even in summer months.
 - * Trail Conditions- In wet or wintry weather, backcountry trails can be slick, muddy, and treacherous. Upper trails in winter often glaze over with ice. Hiking under these conditions falls in the domain of well-equipped experts.
 - * Water- All untreated water should be purified. Giardia, bacteria and other contaminants cannot be easily detected. You can purify water by boiling it for 10 minutes, by using purification chemicals, or through use of a filtering device.
 - * Watching Children- Adults should lead and follow their hiking groups with their young children in the middle. If the hiking party decides to split up, make plans to rejoin at a prearranged time and place to avoid confusion and the possibility of after-dark searches for lost hikers.
 - * Health Considerations- Hikers with breathing or heart conditions should be cautious of strenuous activity, especially at Grandfather Mountain's higher altitudes.
 - * In Case Of Emergency, Dial 911.
- Source: Grandfather Mountain