

LEGEND

ROADS ———

TRAILS - - - - -

NATIONAL FOREST LAND 

LAKES 

PARKING 

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WHITESIDE MOUNTAIN

landmark to discover



Discover a variety of wildflowers and million-year-old rock cliffs that reach to 4930 feet

Nantahala National Forest
 Highlands Ranger District
 NORTH CAROLINA





Enjoy the Experience

A landmark along the eastern continental divide, Whiteside mountain rises to an elevation of 4,930 feet. The mountain's cliffs, look like sheets of ice draped across the mountain. This magnificent rock is about 390 to 460 million years old.

Attractions: A 2-mile loop trail climbs above sheer 750-foot high cliffs and offers outstanding views to the east, south, and west. Whiteside Mountain Trail is rated "more difficult" because of its steepness. Along your journey to the top, you can spot a variety of wildflowers—including false Solomons-seal, white snakeroot, and dwarf dandelion.

Location: Whiteside Mountain is located south of U.S. 64 between Highlands and Cashiers.

Jewel of the Appalachians

When North America joined Africa, millions of years ago, Whiteside Mountain began as a huge pocket of molten rock. Heat, pressure, and uplifting metamorphosized the granite rock into a granitic gneiss (pronounced "nice"). In the following ages, the overlying material eroded to expose barren rock.

You can best see the solid rock foundation of this mountain on the south-facing cliffs, where wind and drier conditions limit plant growth. The exposed rock displays a blue-gray hue. White streaks of quartz and feldspar line the rock face.

Wildflowers flourish on mountain cliffs

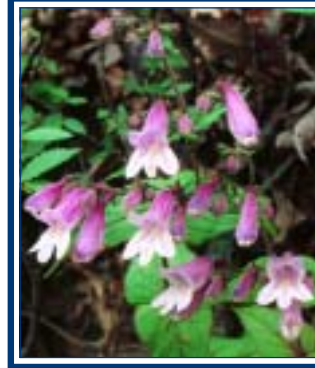
A variety of wildflowers and different plant communities grow on Whiteside Mountain. The mountain's variety of soils, light, and moisture create a mixture of plant habitats.

The north-facing, moist slopes have a northern hardwood forest, where you can walk under yellow and black birch, Canadian hemlock, and Fraser magnolia trees. Scattered in the forest's understory are witch-hazel, minniebush, and wild raisin shrubs. On the forest floor, you can discover speckled wood-lily, white snakeroot, and Curtis's goldenrod. At the summit is an old-growth northern red oak forest. Notice the red oaks' shapes. Strong winds and ice storms shaped the trees into twisted forms. Growing in this forest's understory, you will find serviceberry, false Solomons-seal, wild sarsaparilla, whorled aster, and white wood aster.

Across the southern slopes is a heath bald shrub community. Carolina rhododendron dominates these clusters of shrubs, which includes two highly fragrant plants: smooth clammy azalea.



white wood aster



gray beard-tongue

Blanketing the southern slopes is a fragile rock-face community. Mats of spikemoss and some wildflowers—pale corydalis, dwarf dandelion, gray beard-tongue, and graniticdome-goldenrod carpet the mountain face.

The home of falcons

During the spring and summer, you may see peregrine falcons flying above or sitting on rock outcrops. Through the endangered species program, the falcon was reintroduced in 1985 to Whiteside Mountain, part of the bird's native range.

These birds return annually to nest on the exposed rock faces. During falcon nesting season, normally February 15 to July 15, the rock face is closed to rappelling and climbing. Consider yourself most fortunate if you see a peregrine falcon: one of nature's fastest and most beautiful birds.



peregrine falcon

Whiteside history

Prior to the Seventh Cherokee Treaty of 1819, the mountain was part of the Cherokee Nation.

During the mid-1800's, the State of North Carolina issued more than 20 separate land grants to early settlers along the eastern slope of Whiteside. Following the Civil War, Macon County Land Company purchased the rest of Whiteside Mountain for about 7 cents an acre.

In the early 1900's, the land became part of the enormous estate of the Ravenel family, who summered in the Highlands area.

Later, a private corporation bought the land and used it as a tourist attraction. Shuttle buses carried people to the mountain's peak over a road built for this purpose.

In 1947, the mountain was purchased for its timber and logged. The U.S. Forest Service then acquired the land, and it became part of the Nantahala National Forest.