

## Welcome

Located in the Meat Camp area of Watauga County sits Elk Knob State Park, one of the tallest mountains in the county. Elk Knob is an amphibolite mountain with grass-covered grounds beneath a canopy of trees. Whether it's a hike to the summit of the mountain or a peaceful picnic in the woods, you're sure to experience a sense of awe. Here, the four seasons can be enjoyed at a calm and gentle pace. In the spring, you will see many wildflowers, which provide a colorful blanket to the earth's floor. Summer allows for spectacular hiking and a meal with family and friends in the picnic area. The fall season showcases the process nature takes to shed old growth and protect itself for the harsh winter ahead. It's now that you can begin to see deep into the woods and find new sites that were once covered by the plentiful foliage. The winter winds bring snow covered grounds and bright blue skies that allow you to see for many miles away. Some of the best views are during the winter months after it snows and the sky is clear of dust and haze. On days like this a view of over 60 miles may be enjoyed from the summit.

## Pack A Picnic

If you are not interested in hiking, then fire up the charcoal and enjoy a meal with family and friends, or just spend a lazy afternoon at one of eleven picnic sites nestled in a remote, shaded area of the park. Each site has a charcoal grill and a picnic table. Two of the eleven sites are handicapped accessible.

## Geology

Here in the Blue Ridge Mountains, part of the Appalachian Mountain Range, is a peak named Elk Knob, one of a dozen peaks that are a bit different in appearance from the others in this range. The Appalachians are believed to have occurred from a collision that happened about 270 million years ago involving the present day continents of Africa and North America. When the edges of these two continental plates collided, it caused sedimentary and igneous rock to press together and push upwards creating the mountains we know today as the Appalachians.

So what makes Elk Knob different from the rest of the Appalachians? Elk Knob is created from a rock type known as amphibolite. Amphibolite is a mix of amphibole, hornblende and plagioclase feldspar and appears as a typically heavy, dark, flaky rock structure. You may sometimes even find a bit of quartz mixed in with it causing it to have a salt and pepper appearance. But the key difference between the dozen amphibolite peaks and the rest of the Appalachians is that amphibolite was once igneous (volcanic) rock that has changed to metamorphic rock due to heat and pressure. When weathering and decomposition of amphibolite takes place, it produces a rich or "sweet" soil that provides an excellent habitat for several rare and endangered plants.

## History Highlights

Elk Knob is one of a dozen amphibolite peaks in Watauga and Ashe counties. It was considered for a housing development during the late 1990s and early 2000s, until a group of concerned citizens, land owners and the Nature Conservancy worked together to purchase Elk Knob. In 2003, it was deeded to the State of North Carolina, under the management of the Division of Parks and Recreation. Elk Knob State Park helps to protect the headwaters of the North Fork of the New River, one of the oldest rivers in the world. Its many species of flora and fauna, which include several rare and endangered species, will now be protected from development.

At an elevation of 5,520 feet above sea level, Elk Knob is one of the tallest peaks in Watauga County and offers spectacular views of the surrounding landscape. Standing on the summit of Elk Knob, hikers can look out over the land with panoramic views and imagine a time many years ago when elk grazed the valleys below in abundant herds. Unfortunately, elk no longer roam these mountains as they were extirpated from this region by over-hunting and loss of habitat. The last native elk in North Carolina were believed to have been killed in the late 1700s.

Several historic mountain communities, from Meat Camp to Sutherland, surround Elk Knob State Park. From the 1850s until the late 20th century, people from the surrounding communities and from miles away would bring their goods to the Winebarger Grist Mill in the Meat Camp community to be processed. Just a few miles away, Sutherland had its thriving business in the cattle industry. Each of these small bustling, dynamic communities had at least one general store, post office, school and church, and they provided a rich history to this area of Watauga County.

Every September, Elk Knob State Park hosts a Community Day event at which residents of the shrinking communities gather to share a meal, pass down their history and share photos of earlier days, demonstrate how things were done before more modern inventions were developed, and enjoy live music. This free event, which is open to the public and gives visitors a chance to learn about practices that were common throughout the history of the Elk Knob area.

## Nature's Classroom

North Carolina State Parks hold the key to many of nature's best kept secrets. Unlock the door to nature's classroom and watch the mysteries begin to unfold. Our rangers will guide you on exciting explorations where you'll uncover fascinating natural surroundings and make great discoveries about the world in which we live to help bring our state's rich natural and cultural heritage alive. Embark on a learning adventure at Elk Knob State Park and discover the wonders of an amphibolite ecosystem.

## Flora & Fauna

A rich diversity of natural communities, many of them uncommon or rare can be found in the park due to its very high elevation and the rich, "sweet" soils produced by the weathering of amphibolite. The growth of acid loving plants, such as rhododendron and evergreens, is restricted. Rare and endangered plants such as Gray's lily, meehania, Roan rattlesnake root, trailing wolfsbane and large purple fringed orchid thrive in rich sweet soils and can be found in the park. Other flowers and plants that can be seen are wake robin trillium, blazing star, jewel weed, turk's-cap lily, black-eyed susan, bluets, flame azalea, trout lily and many more.

Elk Knob contains an excellent example of a northern hardwood forest typically found above 4000 feet in elevation which consists primarily of sugar maple, Northern red oak, yellow birch, American beech, and yellow buckeye. Due to the "sweet" soils mentioned above, you will find the understory is relatively open and free of woody growth. Trees growing on the northern slopes and on the summit of Elk Knob are gnarled and stunted by the harsh weather conditions and fierce winds.

The forests and rock outcrops support breeding ravens and a number of neotropical songbirds such as chestnut-sided warbler, black-throated blue warbler, ovenbird, scarlet tanager, and Canada warbler. Broad-winged hawks can be seen soaring overhead and occasionally a ruffed grouse can be heard drumming during the breeding season. Other native animals include black bear, bobcat, wild turkey and white-tailed deer.

Elk Knob is also home to many species of salamanders including spotted salamander, red spotted newt (Red Eft), northern dusky salamander and the endangered pigmy salamander.

## Hiking Trails

Visitors can hike up the summit trail to an elevation of 5,520 feet to see panoramic views of the valleys below. Upon reaching the summit, there are Northern and Southern display panels that name the visible mountains, their elevations and their distances. Beneath the panoramic picture displays are brief descriptions about the formation of the Appalachian mountain range. Please sign the trail log located at the start of the trail when hiking on the summit trail. Park staff and volunteers have been rigorously working to finish the new 2 mile trail so that restoration can begin to stabilize badly eroded and washed out areas of the old roadbed currently serving as the summit trail.

## Rules & Regulations

Make your visit a safe and rewarding experience. Some of our rules are posted throughout the park for the protection of our park and our visitors. A complete list is available at the park office. Help preserve our natural resources by observing the following:

- Trail closes 15 minutes before the park entrance gate is locked.
- Do not leave vehicles in the park after posted hours.
- The removal of any plant, rock, mineral or animal is prohibited.
- The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- All state parks are wildlife preserves. Hunting or trapping is not permitted. Do not feed or approach wildlife.
- Firearms and fireworks are not permitted.
- Fires are not permitted. Charcoal fires are allowed in grills in the picnic area.
- Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- Do not litter. Place trash in proper receptacles. State law requires aluminum cans and plastic bottles be put in recycling containers.
- North Carolina motor vehicle and traffic laws apply in the park.
- Camping is not permitted.

## For Your Safety

To prevent accidents, please remember these safety tips.

- Dress properly. The climate of Elk Knob is quite cold and temperatures can fluctuate drastically in all seasons. To guard against hypothermia, please have warm clothing, rain gear and adequate food and water available.
- When hiking, stay on designated trails and away from cliff faces.
- Remember daylight hours are shorter in the fall and winter. Allow plenty of time for a hike to avoid being caught by darkness.
- Be alert to approaching storms and seek appropriate shelter.
- During winter months, be sure to contact the park office before making a trip to the park. Elk Knob may close when icy conditions make park roads impassable.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or for an explanation of park rules.

## Park Information

### Hours of Operation:

November-February	8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
March - May, September & October	8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
June - August	8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Closed Christmas Day	











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www.ncparks.gov

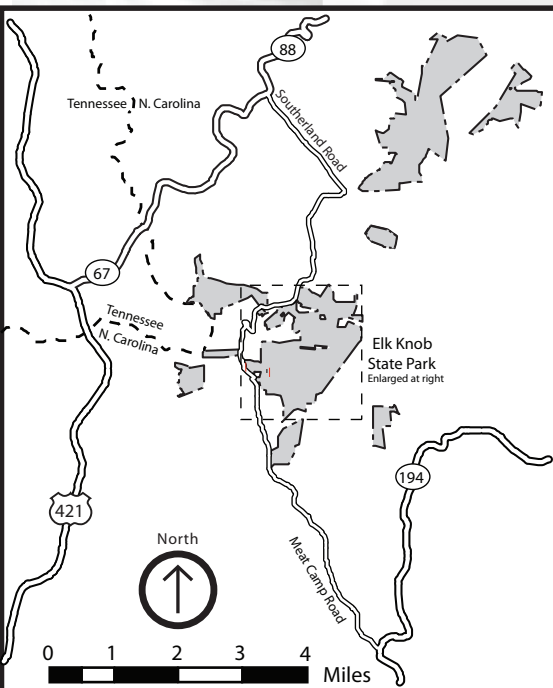
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# ELK KNOB STATE PARK

## LEGEND

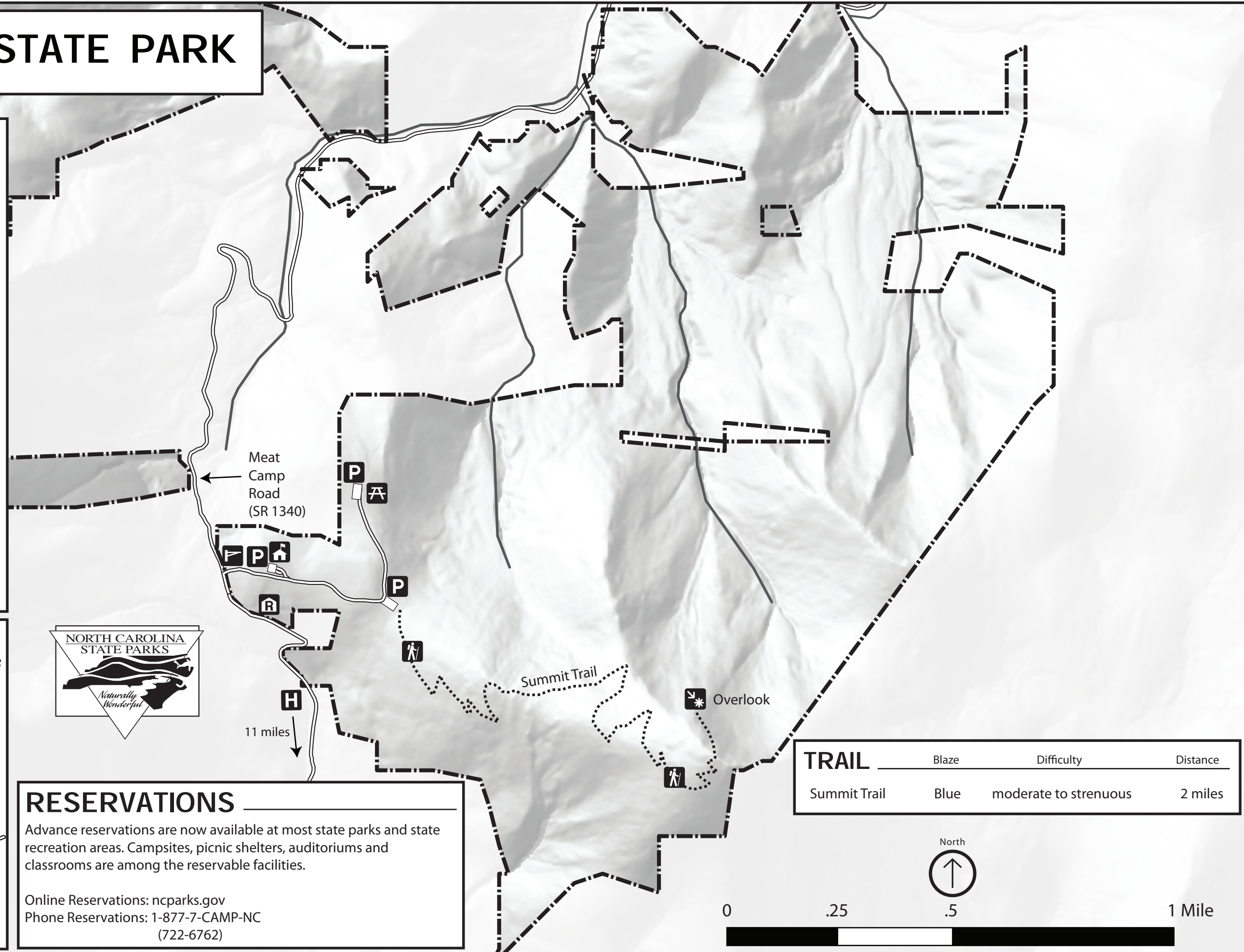
-  Hiking Trails    .....
-  Hospital - Watauga Medical Center - 828-262-4100  
Emergency Dial 911
-  Park Boundary    - . - . - .
-  Park Gate
-  Park Office
-  Parking
-  Picnic Area
-  Point of Interest
-  Ranger Residence
-  Roads    = = = = =



## RESERVATIONS

Advance reservations are now available at most state parks and state recreation areas. Campsites, picnic shelters, auditoriums and classrooms are among the reservable facilities.

Online Reservations: [ncparks.gov](http://ncparks.gov)  
 Phone Reservations: 1-877-7-CAMP-NC  
 (722-6762)



TRAIL	Blaze	Difficulty	Distance
Summit Trail	Blue	moderate to strenuous	2 miles