

June 2017 Mountain Trips Middle Atlantic, Potomac Valley, and Azalea Chapters ARS and Azalea Society of America

**George McLellan, Don Hyatt,
and Charlie Andrews**

This is the latest update for our annual mountain hikes to see the native azaleas and rhododendrons in North Carolina and Tennessee this June. Feel free to join us on all or part of our trip, but keep in touch as we may change locations or focus depending upon the weather conditions and what seems to be in flower.



1. Sunday, June 11

Hotel - Econo Lodge in Marion, 1420 N Main St, Marion, VA 24354

Phone: (276) 783-6031

Focus: Mount Rogers and Grayson Highlands.

Meet at Grayson Highlands State Park early that afternoon to admire the diverse *R. catawbiense* variations and also some *R. calendulaceum*. This area is also known for a herd of wild ponies that can be very entertaining. If there is time, we can take a moderate hike out to Rhododendron Gap to see that *R. catawbiense* display. We will spend the night in nearby Marion, VA, at the Econo Lodge Motel. We can decide to visit some other nearby locations the next morning or head to Mountain City.

2. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, June 12 - 14

Hotel - Americourt Hotel, 450 Dotson Lane, Mountain City, TN 37683

Phone: (423) 727-7311 (Mention "PLANT GROUP" to get a room discount!)

Focus: Roan Mountain, Snake Mountain, Upper Blue Ridge Parkway

There is so much to see in this area that we have decided to spend three days at the same motel and use it as our home base. We always like to hike out to Roan Mountain on the day that is the clearest so we can admire the views as well as the extensive stands of *R. calendulaceum* and mountaintops covered with *R. catawbiense*, so we will select which day is best for that hike. On the other days, we can explore the *calendulaceum* forms on Snake Mountain, or the scenic vistas in the Linville Gorge and along the upper portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

3. Thursday, June 15

Microtel Inn Franklin, 81 Allman Dr, Franklin, NC 28734

Phone: (828) 349-9000

Focus: Lower Blue Ridge Parkway, Mt. Toxaway, to Franklin, NC

We will leave early on Thursday and head south of Asheville to get on the Blue Ridge Parkway heading south. This is one of the prettiest sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway and there should be lots of native azaleas, rhododendrons, and wildflowers in bloom. Some may choose to leave the Parkway near Brevard and drive to the top of Mount Toxaway which has easily accessible populations of *R. minus* and other natives. We will all meet up again that evening in Franklin.

4. Friday, and Saturday, June 16 - 17

Hotel - Microtel Inn, 111 Rodney Orr Bypass, Robbinsville, NC

Phone: (828) 479-6772

Focus: Wayah Bald and Hooper Bald

Early Friday morning, we will drive to nearby Wayah Bald to assess last fall's fire damage to the *R. arborescens* display. We will also visit Wine Spring Bald which is part of the same mountain and has rare forms of kalmia as well as native azaleas. That area was apparently not damaged by the fire. We will converge in Robbinsville that evening. If there is time, we can take a quick trip to Hooper Bald but will spend most of the next day up there doing some clearing around the azaleas and admiring the large flowered forms of *R. calendulacum*.

5. Sunday, Monday, and possibly Tuesday, June 18 -20

Focus: Maybe Gregory Bald or other points of interest. (?)

We are not sure about this leg. Some of us may not be hiking up to Gregory Bald at all this year and could decide to do something else. Options include exploring Blood Mountain or Trey Mountain in Northern Georgia, or hiking out to Mount LeConte to see "smokianum."

People who haven't been to Gregory are certainly encouraged to take the hike but realize that it is the most difficult one we usually do. It involves at least 4 hours of hiking in each direction including a 3000 ft elevation exchange, plus a lot of time on top admiring the azaleas. We can provide detailed information but we try to allow 10 to 12 hours to complete the trek. We don't attempt Gregory on a Wednesday or a Saturday because the park closes the loop road in the Cove in the mornings until 10:00AM to everyone except bicyclists. That delays our arrival to the trailhead until perhaps 11:00 AM so it doesn't provide enough time for the hike.

For those hiking in the Smokies, and especially to Gregory Bald, we recommend the following hotel in Townsend, TN. It is not far from the trailhead in Cades Cove and allows an early arrival at the gate which opens at sunrise, about 7:00 AM. We usually spend several days in Townsend and hike Gregory when weather conditions are not threatening. We try other hikes to places like Newfound Gap, Clingman's Dome, or Andrews Bald on the other days.

Hotel - Best Western Cades Cove Inn

7824 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Townsend, TN 37882

Phone: (865) 448-9000

Other Points of Interest:

East Fork Nursery – Vivian Abney

2769 Bethel Church Road, Sevierville, TN 37876

Phone: (865) 453-6108

Be sure to give Vivian Abney a call and visit her nursery to buy native azaleas and other plants before heading home. Great resource!