

---

## RockHouse Creek Self-Guided Hike

This trail is a favorite of Callie Moore, our Western Regional Director. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did!



### Overview

This self-guided hike describes the first ~1.8 miles of the Rockhouse Creek Trail. This trail is accessed from a small parking area at a gate across FS 340A in the Fires Creek Wildlife Management Area (elevation: 2250'). The trail follows an old logging road grade, so the elevation gain of approximately 1,000 feet is fairly evenly distributed across the length. Although horses are allowed, there is not enough room at the 340A parking area for horse trailers. Additionally, the last part of FS 340A is in need of road maintenance and currently requires high clearance vehicles.

The trail follows Rockhouse Creek upstream toward its headwaters at the rim of the Fires Creek watershed. The stream has many beautiful chutes, slides and small waterfalls. Wildflowers abound, especially in April & May. There are also several large trees, including two big buckeyes. Just before the turnaround at an upper crossing of Rockhouse Creek, there is a scenic forest “glade.” There is one wet stream crossing of moderate difficulty. We recommend long pants due to the abundance of nettles and poison ivy along this trail!

*Beyond the 1.5-mile length highlighted here, the trail continues for another 0.8 miles to the Fires Creek Rim Trail at mile marker 7.9 (elevation: 4250'). This junction is on the southeastern flank of Big Stamp. This section of trail is very steep and often slick, gaining 850 feet of elevation in the last 0.6 miles. After leaf off (November-March), there are good views into the Valley River valley from Big Stamp (elevation: 4437'). There are concrete pillars and a very small storm shelter associated with an old fire lookout tower. To access the peak of Big Stamp, continue across the Rim Trail and up the old fire tower road. In summer, the old road is often covered with high vegetation and blackberry brambles and views are extremely limited.*



### Start!

Parking area! (limited parking, please don't block gate) This trail is technically FS Road 387.

### 1- Rockhouse

Rockhouse creek is on the right, and a large boulder appears on the left at this spot. Rockhouse is a common name for places with a cave overhang, and this one has a very shallow overhang that might barely qualify as a rockhouse. There is some nettle here- coarsely toothed leaves with fine hairs on the undersides that deliver a painful sting. However, most of the “nettle” on this trail is actually false nettle: a larger, more purple-stemmed variety. It does not sting!

---



---

## 2- Foamflower & Hydrangea

There is a small creek cascade and wild hydrangeas on the right here. If you're here in May/June, look for blooming foamflowers mostly on the left side of the trail. In the picture on the right, you can see the fluffy foamflowers and the tiny fruits that follow them lower down on the stem.

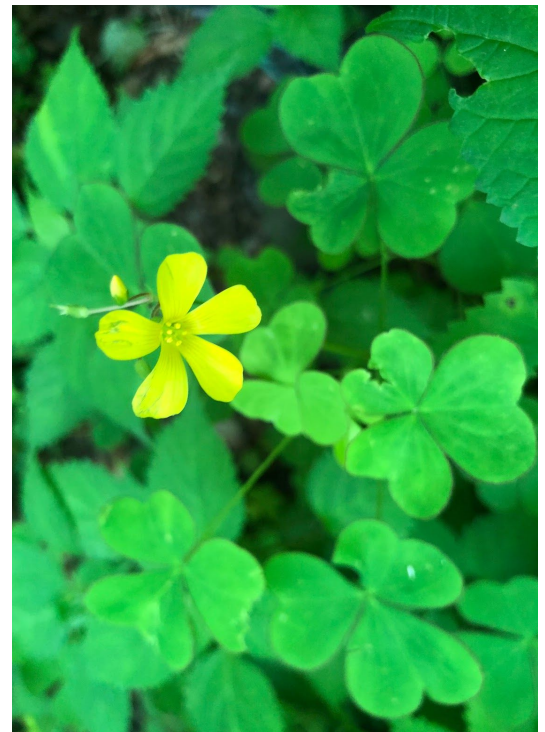


## 3- Mayapples

The large leaves of these mayapples can hide their flowers and fruits, which appear in May and June. Photo on left.

## 4- Sorrel

There is a large patch of sorrel on the right. Often mistaken for clover, this plant actually has three heart-shaped leaves and small yellow flowers in May/June.



## 5- Stream Crossing!

We found it helpful to traverse the stream a little above where the path would suggest you cross. There is also a small campsite just across the creek.

---



---

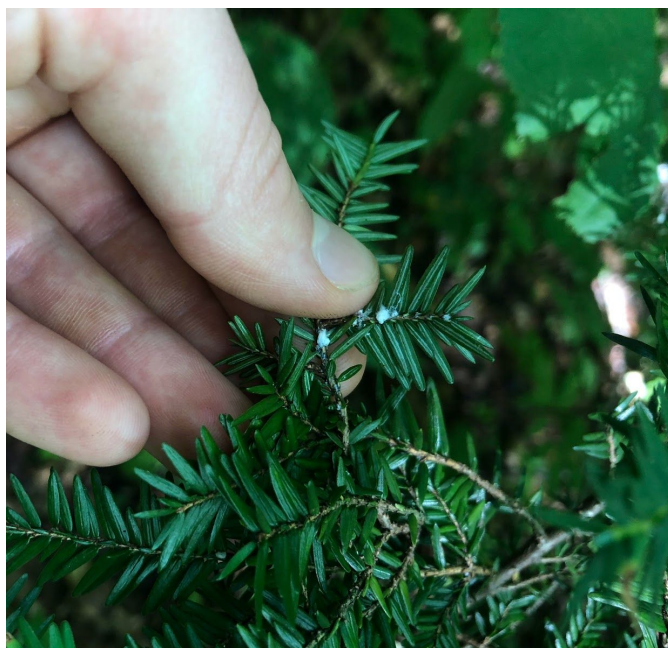
## 6- Lush Understory

On the left: Maidenhair fern, New York fern, and bloodroot. On the right: wild yam, sweet white violet, and black cohosh. Maidenhair ferns have a unique look with delicate and frilly fronds and black stipes and rachises (stems). See the photo on the right that shows the appearance of a splayed circle of fronds. New York ferns have a blade that is widest in the middle and tapers at both ends (some say because New Yorkers burn the candle at both ends!). Bloodroot is a favorite spring flower that generally has one large leaf with 3-9 lobes (picture below). Sweet white violet (shown below and to the right) has heart shaped leaves and purple veins in the throat of the flower.



## 7- Hemlocks and Witch Hazel

These baby hemlocks may have escaped the woolly adelgid for now, but check them in winter for white fuzzy dots- the winter coats of the deadly insects. You'll be able to see many dead hemlocks as you hike along. Because of this, this area of forest is likely more open than it once was. Hemlocks are also considered a foundation species, meaning they have an outsized impact on the ecosystem. It is possible we will see a shift in the plants we find here with the loss of the hemlocks. Witch hazel also appears periodically on the left side. Witch hazel is well known as an astringent, which is typically made from the bark.





---

### 8- Small Swimming Hole and Wild Yams

On the left you will see a kid-sized swimming hole. You may also notice the papery seed pods and heart-shaped leaves of wild yam. Wild yams contain a phytoestrogen, which was used in the first birth control pills. However, these yams do not produce an edible root like their botanical relation, the sweet potato.



### 9- Hemlock and Spiderwort

There is a large dead hemlock here, one of many that have fallen due to the hemlock woolly adelgid. You may also see spiderwort blooming in the early summer. Its lovely, purplish flower is shown on the left.



### 10- False Goatsbeard

False Goatsbeard, often mistaken for black cohosh, has white fluffy plumes of flowers in early June. Both plants tend to have three to five leaflets that look very similar, but the flowers can help differentiate them. The cohosh (right and center photos) tends to have one or two racemes (stalks with flowers), while the false goatsbeard (lower left) has more stalks off the main branch. Black cohosh has a rich medicinal history, being used to alleviate menstrual cramps and symptoms of menopause.



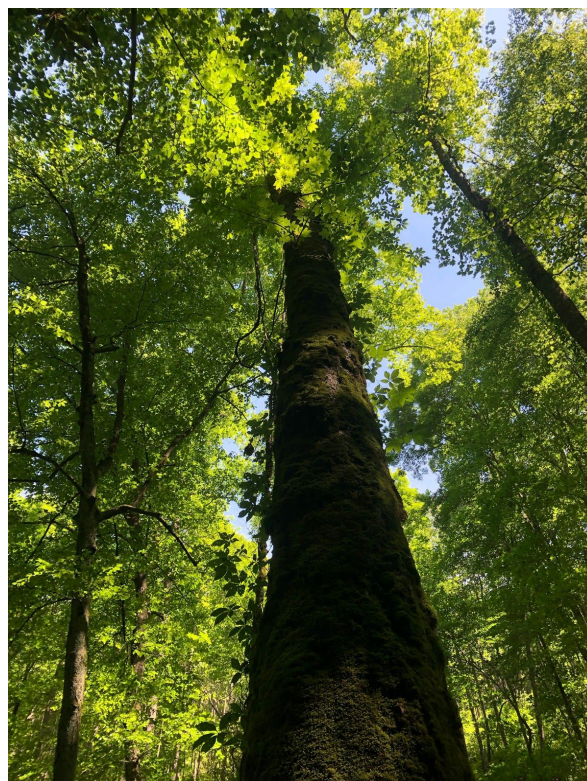


---

## 11- Large Buckeyes



Keep an eye out for a few large buckeyes along the trail. One in particular lies just across the creek at this spot (photo right). Buckeyes have five leaflets arranged palmately, as shown on the right on a smaller tree.



## 12- Milkweed

We believe this yet-to-flower beauty is poke milkweed, one of nine native milkweeds in our mountain region. Hope you're able to catch it blooming in mid-June! (Photo on left.) Monarch butterflies lay their eggs on milkweed plants because this is the only species of plant that their caterpillars will eat. No milkweed, no beautiful Monarchs!

## 13- Mountain Meadow Rue

Keep an eye out for the delicate leaves of mountain meadow rue (shown lower right). In spring you can see the white fluffy round blooms in many places along this walk. There are many species of rues that look similar, but they can sometimes be differentiated by subtle differences in the leaf shapes or flowers.







#### **14- Trillium**

If you're here in spring, keep an eye out for trilliums! This area has a lovely open midstory and is reminiscent of a forest glade. However, this is likely not a natural condition and due to timber harvesting several decades ago. The road you are hiking on used to be a very small gauge railroad used for logging, part of a large network throughout the Fires Creek watershed.

#### **Turnaround Spot**

The next crossing of Rockhouse Creek is where we chose to end our short hike and have a snack before turning back. Thank you for joining us on this little adventure!

*If you enjoyed this hike, visit [MountainTrue.org](https://MountainTrue.org) for more information on how to protect our special places and for ideas on activities to get you outside and learning more about our wonderful region.*

