

Land Conservancy Hike - Bearwallow

Driving Directions: From Asheville:

From I-40 take US-74 south (Exit 53) to Gerton. Turn Right onto Bearwallow Mountain Rd. on the right just before Gerton Post Office. Bearwallow Mountain Rd turns slightly left and becomes Bearwallow Rd. Continue onto Bearwallow Mountain Rd. to trailhead on mountain crest.

From Hendersonville: Exit 49 from I-26 east toward Bat Cave. At Bat Cave turn left onto US-74 Alt W. Just past Gerton Post Office (on right) turn left onto Bearwallow Mountain Road. Bearwallow Mountain Rd turns slightly left and becomes Bear Wallow Rd. Continue onto Bearwallow Mountain Rd. to trailhead on mountain crest.

Hiking Directions

The trailhead is at the crest of Bearwallow Mountain Rd. where the pavement turns to gravel. Once at the trailhead, park on the road making sure not to block the gate or road. Space is available for only a few cars at the trailhead, so multiple hikers should consider carpooling. Trail begins beyond an old rusted gate; walk around it and look for the beginning of the trail on the right. The trail switchbacks several times to begin its climb upon entering the forest. At 0.4 mi., ascend a set of elaborate, switch backed rock stairs constructed by the Carolina Mountain Club. The trail switchbacks sharply at 0.5 mi. and levels out to provide a breather as it curves around Bearwallow's western ridge. Once on the mountain's northern slopes, climb several more sets of rock stairs at 0.7 mi. At 0.8 mi., the trail emerges into Bearwallow's beautiful mountaintop meadow. In the summer you will share the grassy bald with cattle. Intersect the gravel road just beyond and walk to its end at the summit and fire tower.

Alternative Routes: Hike the gravel access road to the summit or use the trail and the road to make a loop hike.

Information:

At 4,252 ft. above sea level, Bearwallow Mountain stands as the highest peak in the widely visible Bearwallow Highlands range. Straddling the Eastern Continental Divide and the rim of the Hickory Nut Gorge, it is

crowned with a grassy meadow at its summit and a nearly 360-degree view. Some of the Appalachians highest peaks including Mt. Mitchell and Mt. Pisgah can be viewed. The trail will one day be incorporated into the Upper Hickory Nut Gorge Trail.

Bearwallow is a recently acquired conservation easement on 171 acres at the summit of Bearwallow. The goal is to add an additional 300 acres to the conserved area. A conservation easement is an entirely voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust that permanently limits uses of the land—such as building structures, commercial logging, excavation, and other rights—in order to protect its conservation values, including natural heritage, water quality, scenic views, wildlife habitat, and many more. It allows landowners to continue to own and use their land—like grazing cattle atop Bearwallow Mountain—and they can also sell it or pass it on to heirs.

Bearwallow is a common Appalachian place name. The name refers to an area where a bear rolls around on the ground near mud or water in an effort to cool or bath itself. Bear wallows are prevalent in the forests of the mountains. If you're lucky, you'll see one in use by a black bear.

The fire tower on Bearwallow Mountain was erected in 1934 and manned by the North Carolina Forest Service until the 1990's. The lookout provided fire detection for Henderson, Buncombe, and Rutherford counties. There is a small cabin owned by the NCFS in which the caretaker and his family lived. Today, the mountain and the road leading to the lookout are privately owned, and the tower site is leased by the state. Several antennas are privately owned and leased by private owners.

The Bearwallow Lookout tower is listed on the National Historic Lookout Register. It has been a popular hiking destination for many years.