

Falls Lake Nature Trail

By Walker Blanchard
May 05, 2008

Introduction

I have lived in this area for over 22 years. I have hiked / biked (back when you used to be allowed) the falls lake nature trail, too many times to remember. I always wanted a good map / directions for the trails.... The parks and recreation department has some maps, but they are kind of sketchy... unless you know the area really well.

So – I figured there should be some free information out there on the internet. There are several good books (so I am told) that go into detail on these trails. I wanted free maps! Information! Details!

Since I never could find any information – this is my attempt at providing *some* detail on the trails... at the very least, a few good maps, instructions for parking, some fun things to see along the way... and real world distances over various sections of the trail.

What I did was sold some electronic doodads on ebay – used the money on a GPS, and started walking the trails. This means parking, hiking one way, then hiking back. Downloading the data once I get home, and making it look nice. A real pain.

The good news is – these maps are fairly accurate. I won't say to the square meter, but they are pretty close. The distances I trust more than the little wooden posts you find at the trail heads. Occasionally, they will re-route a section of trail – but it shouldn't change the overall distances involved.

This information is free to the public, and should stay that way.

Falls Lake Trail

From what I can tell – this trail is 23 miles long. The official distance is 26 miles long. This trail is part of the North Carolina Mountains to the Sea trail. These sections collectively are section 29 of the Mountains to the Sea trail. See <http://www.ncmst.org/> for more details.

The reservoir itself wasn't filled until 1981 – so many of these trails will go past old roads and farmhouses that were here around the turn of the 20th century. I have marked a few of these in the document.

Trail Markings:

TIP: the trail is always marked by these little white dots on trees or posts. Sometimes it is painted, sometimes it is an actual reflector. One dot means the trail goes along past the tree it is painted on. Two dots means the trail takes a turn at that tree (left or right).

Sections of the Trail:

I have arbitrarily divided the trail into sections, because it is easier for me to hike them that way. I don't know if there are official designations for parts of the trail – not important. The trail itself goes from highway 50 (Creedmoor road) all the way to falls dam. I hiked it from Falls Dam - so my sections start at the damn, and work their way north. The other benefit of this (at this time) is that, as new sections open from Highway 50 towards the mountains, I can hike those and add them.

Each section below will have a small submap, and a terrain profile. Also, there will be information on elevations, etc. If you are working your way from north to south, then simply reverse the numbers – for example:

Section 1 - Falls Dam to Raven Ridge Road

Linear Distance	2.64 miles
Terrain Distance	2.65 miles
Climbing Elevation	280 feet
Descending Elevation	277 feet
Climbing Distance	1.24 miles
Descending Distance	1.40 miles

BUT, if you hiked it from Raven Ridge Road to Falls Dam, then:

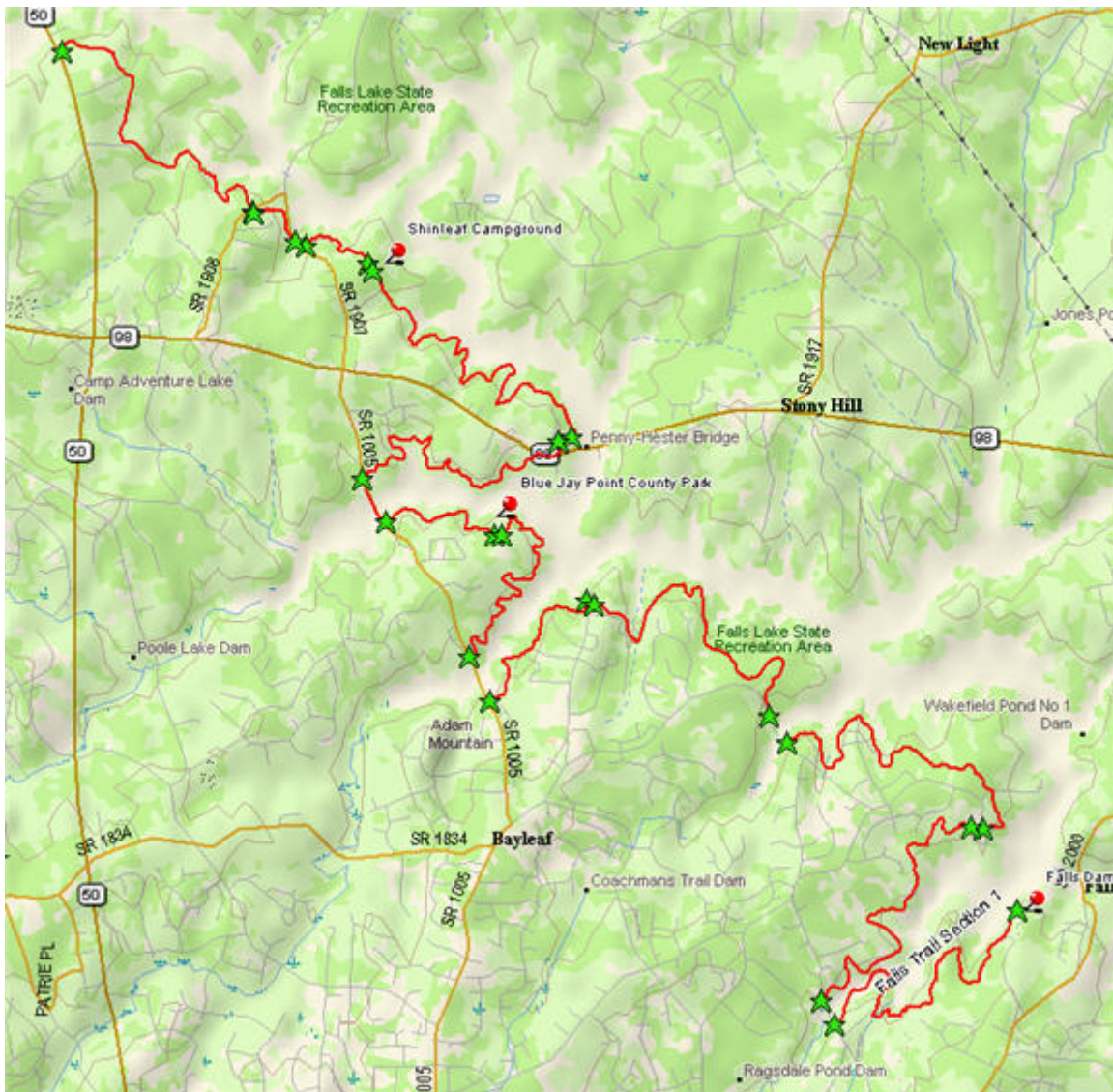
Linear Distance	2.64 miles
Terrain Distance	2.65 miles
Climbing Elevation	277 feet
Descending Elevation	280 feet
Climbing Distance	1.40 miles
Descending Distance	1.24 miles

Note the change in **RED**. This is because the terrain is reversed, if you have hiked it the opposite way. Not a big deal. Most people hike up, then back down a trail. Say you hiked this trail down, then back. Add the climbing and descending distances together – then your climbing and descending distance is actually the same. Makes sense – you started at a certain elevation, and returned to where you started. In the above example you would have a combined climbing distance of 657 feet. Your combined descending distance would be the same.

Overview Falls Trail - Falls Dam to Highway 50 (sections 1-12. Other sections are at the end of the document)

Linear Distance	23.16 miles
Terrain Distance	23.18 miles
Climbing Elevation	2348 feet
Descending Elevation	2336 feet
Climbing Distance	11.16 miles
Descending Distance	12.02 miles

Overview Map



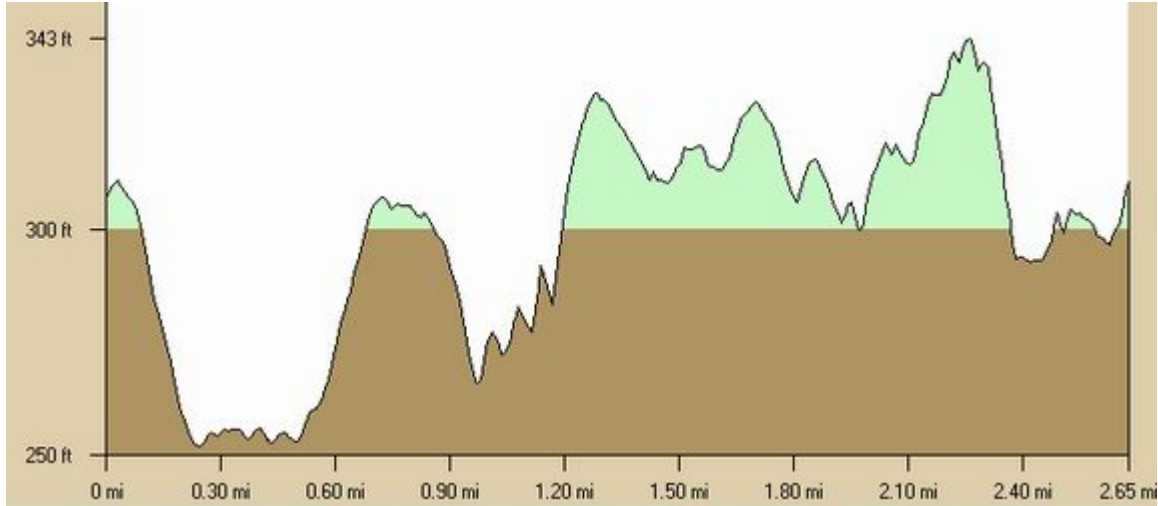
Section 1 - Falls Dam to Raven Ridge Road

Linear Distance	2.64 miles
Terrain Distance	2.65 miles
Climbing Elevation	280 feet
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Climbing Distance	1.24 miles
Descending Distance	1.40 miles

Section 1 Trail



Vertical Profile



This section varies on distances listed. There are several trail heads and paths to take. I figured from the information sign at the ranger building there at Falls Dam Management Area. This is the parking circle inside the park itself. There is parking available out front, and it is about a third of a mile to hike along the road to get to the trail heads. The reason I mention this is that the park gates are not open on Sundays, and they close at around 6pm or something (it is printed on the gate). I have had my car locked in the park before, so it's important to get out in time! You may also park along Raven Ridge Road – the trail head is at the beginning of the first bridge you run across. You may park on the gravel areas at either side of the bridge – many people are always parked there for hiking and fishing. Remember – if you are fishing, you need a permit, unless you are a resident of wake county, and you are using live bait only (then no permit is necessary!).

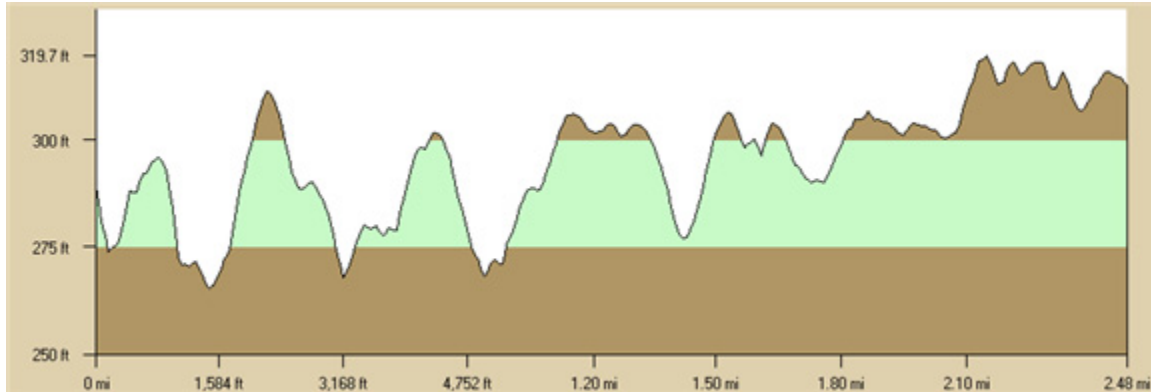
Section 2 – Raven Ridge Road to Possum Track Road

Linear Distance	2.48 miles
Terrain Distance	2.48 miles
Climbing Elevation	255 feet
Descending Elevation	232 feet
Climbing Distance	1.31 miles
Descending Distance	1.17 miles

Section 2 Trail



Vertical Profile



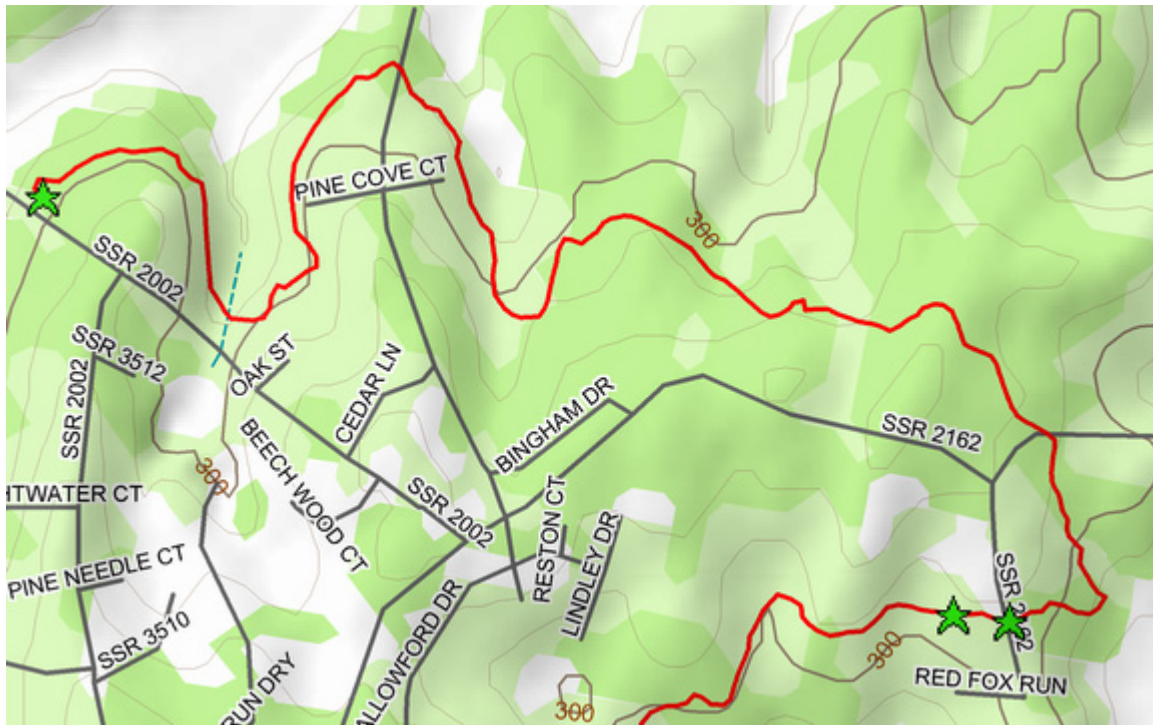
This one is a good hike. Some good views of the lake. The trail winds around some large private neighborhoods – not close enough to get a good look at the houses though. The trail head at Possum Track is kind of strange – the road it comes out on looks like a private driveway, but it isn't – it's really a small road named Red Fox Run. This is confusing if you drive to the end of Possum Track to park.... You will have difficulty finding this trail head. Just walk down Red Fox Run, and you will see the trail head next to an old phone pole with a sodium vapor lamp on it.

At the end of Possum Track is a small hill you can climb over to get a nice view of the dam. Lots of trash and stuff around – used to be a local hangout at night I guess – judging by all the beer cans and trash and evidence of old bonfires...

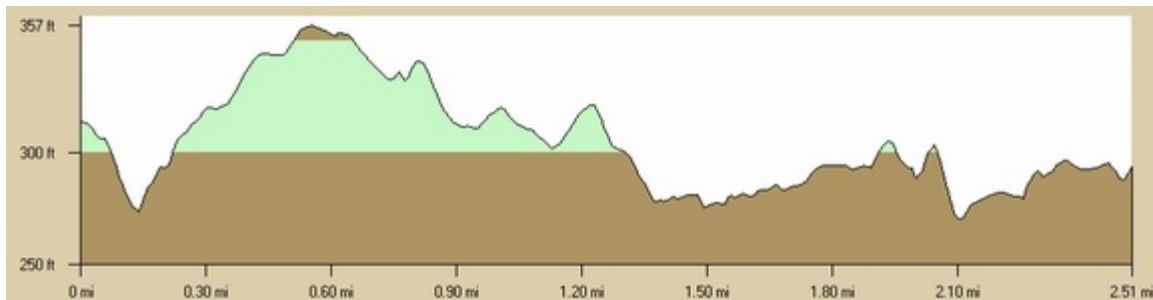
Section 3 – Possum Track Road to Possum Track Road

Linear Distance	2.50 miles
Terrain Distance	2.51 miles
Climbing Elevation	225 feet
Descending Elevation	245 feet
Climbing Distance	1.28 miles
Descending Distance	1.23 miles

Section 3 Trail



Vertical Profile



This one is an interesting hike too – the beginning at where Possum Track ends, there is an old road bed that cuts down to the lake to your right – this is just as you start walking along the trail from the end of possum track. Go down about 200 yards and there is a FANTASTIC view of falls dam!



Attractions: Latitude: N35° 57' 3.10" Longitude: W78° 35' 38.85"

There is an old Pontiac wagon in the woods. Probably an old homestead used to be here (there are a couple of old grave markers near the trail too). 0.73 miles into the trail from the end of possum track.

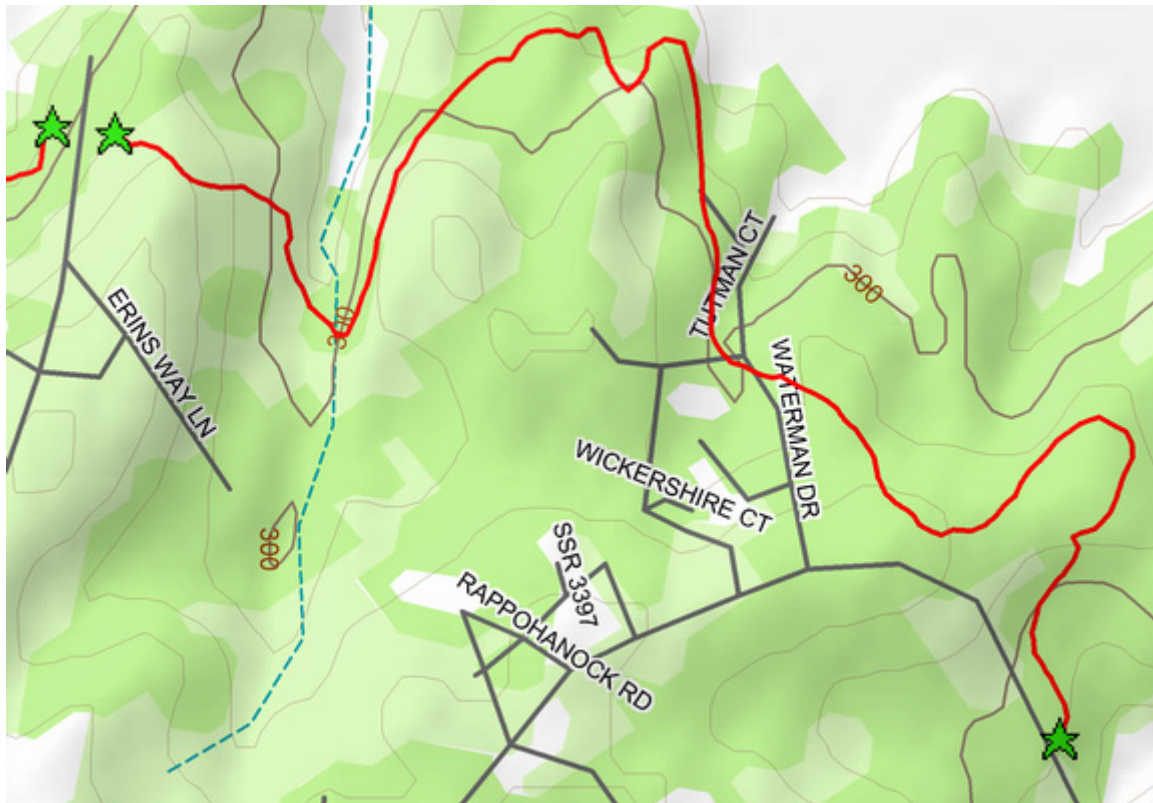


Near the other end of the trail are some very exclusive houses – the trail will go along the side of a hill, then down over a nice small river (just more than a creek). The houses that are along this section are nice (they are far off the trail, but you can see them). This section is well traveled as it is near some subdivisions, and has easy access from the middle section of Possum Track Road.

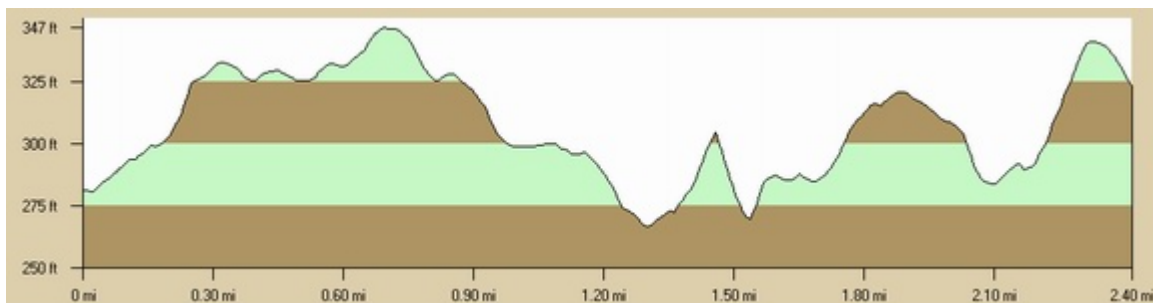
Section 4 – Possum Track Road to Bayleaf Church Road

Linear Distance	2.40 miles
Terrain Distance	2.40 miles
Climbing Elevation	240 feet
Descending Elevation	198 feet
Climbing Distance	1.26 miles
Descending Distance	1.14 miles

Section 4 Trail



Vertical Profile



This section is neat – but parts can be flooded when the lake is really high. This section goes from game lands to national wildlife preserve areas. This is true for lots of sections, so during the late fall and early winter – wear bright clothes! (deer season).

The section starts out close to some neighborhoods – so you might get a dog or two barking at you from people's backyards (They are generally 200 yards or so off some sections of the trail).

The section of the trail that is near Bayleaf Church Road is in the wildlife preserve, and is less traveled. It is a challenge because you go up a hill and then back down. Not too intense though ☺ Some old road beds to be found here – they date back before automobiles – judging by the trees growing up and the ruts that are evident in the old road beds.

This trail is one of the more varied ones – it starts out in a newer strand of pine trees – fairly open and you can see the sky – then it dives right into dense pine and hardwoods, wrapping around and finally coming out on a rise that is very wooded, but rocky as opposed to a nice lush mat of pine needles. This is a good hike!

Attractions: Latitude: Latitude: N35° 57' 30.3" Longitude: W78° 36' 52.6"

This is an old cement foundation. Also some other junk in the woods. An older house. There are thick vines growing up in the trees here – this is because the land was cleared and the vines kind of took over – normally the woods would be too dense for these things to grow – any time you see vines and relatively clear undergrowth, it was probably an old homesite.

Update: Dec. 20, 2005 – the old house, and Hudson are gone. There is a large swath cut through the woods at this point about halfway on this trail. The trail is hard to follow – just maintain your direction when the trail exits onto the nice clear cut woods ☹ and you will see the trail on the other side. Look for the white markers on trees to find your way... if I get a chance, I'll update the GPS co-ordinates for where the trail is obscured.

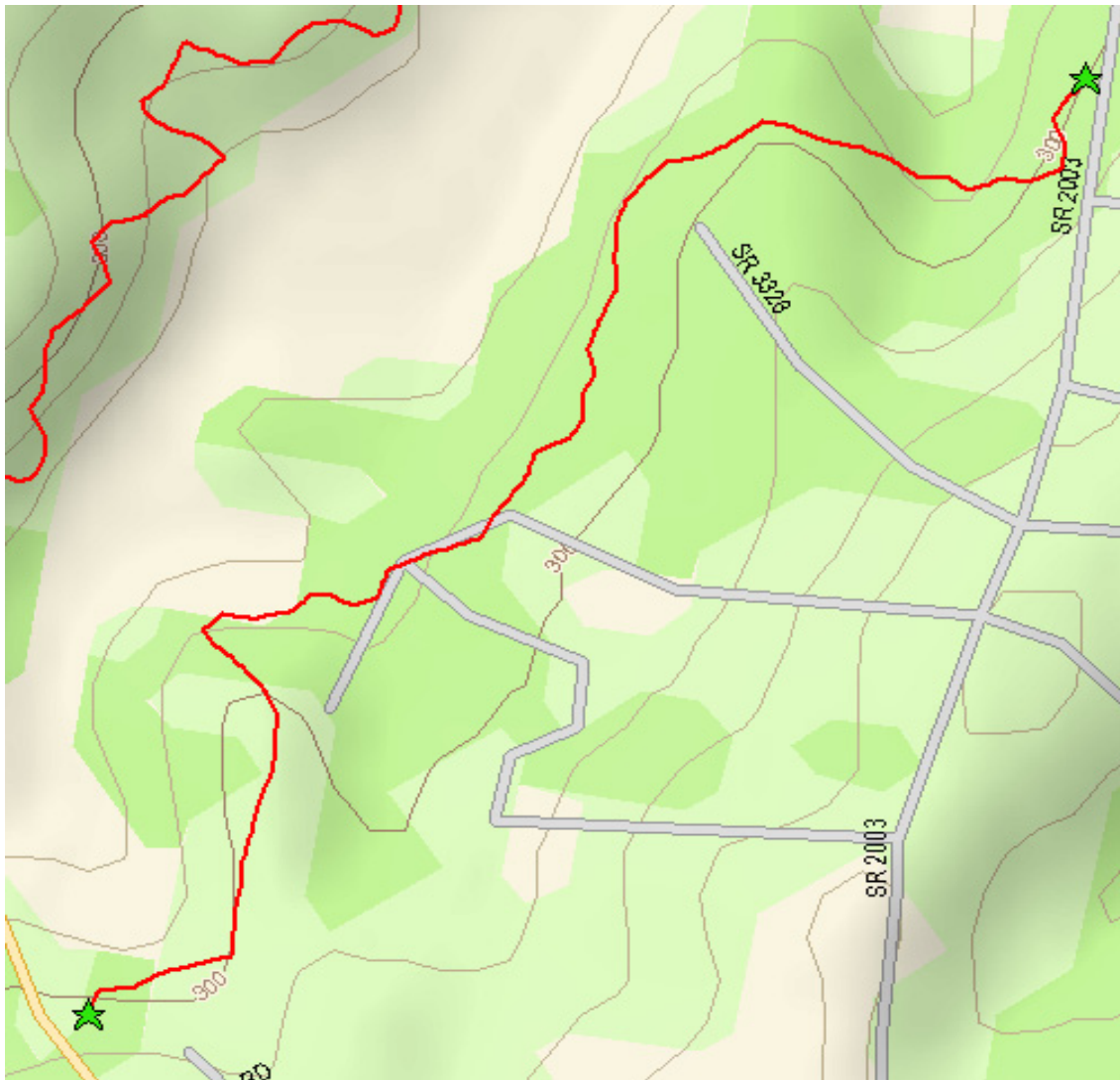
Estimated location: Latitude: N35° 57.632' Longitude: W78° 37.066' (From a topo map – I marked the old Hudson with a GPS a few years ago).

This entire area is zoned for housing (R80 watershed so the county says). Possibly a new subdivision?

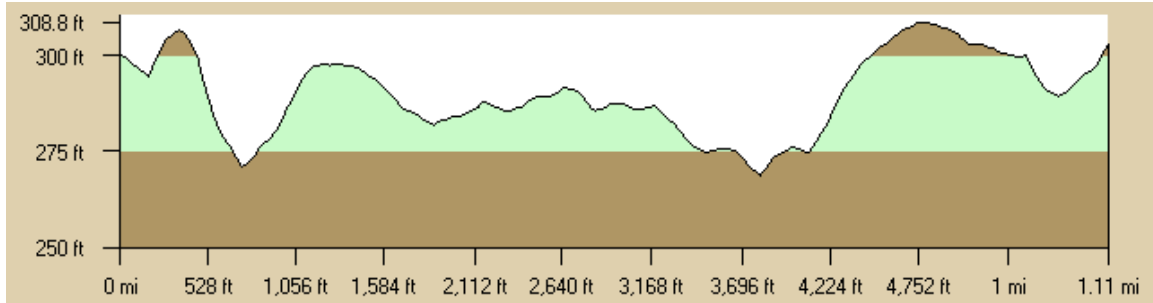
Section 5 – Bayleaf Church Road to Six Forks Road

Linear Distance	1.11 miles
Terrain Distance	1.11 miles
Climbing Elevation	112 feet
Descending Elevation	108 feet
Climbing Distance	2937 feet
Descending Distance	2924 feet

Section 5 Trail



Vertical Profile



You can park on either end of this section – right along the road – again, on the gravel on the shoulders of the road. At the end of possum track – watch for that fence when you park, if you are inside it, you might get locked in if you stay too long. It's easiest to park outside the gate and walk the 100 feet to the trail heads.

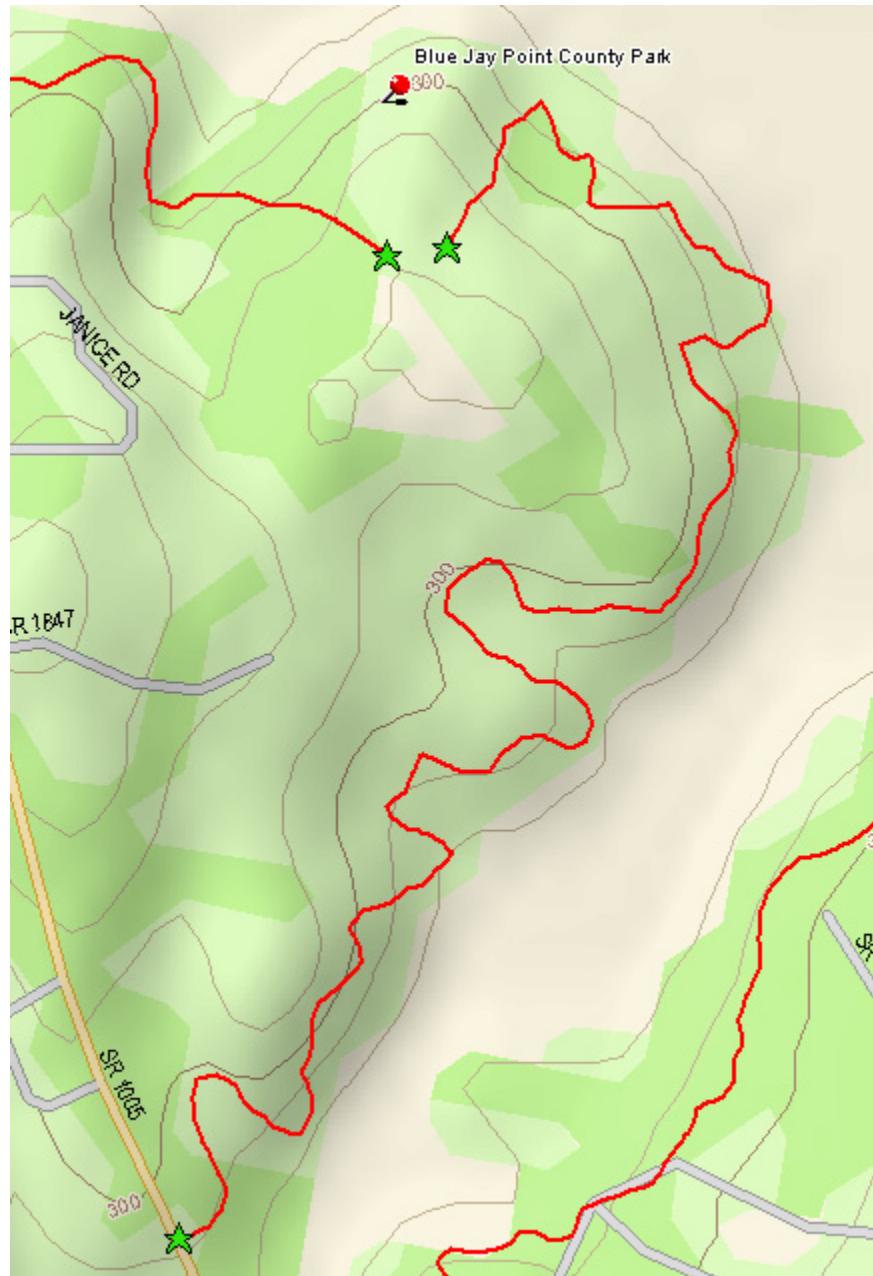
This is a fairly easy section – only one large hill, then a gradual grade upwards to Six Forks Road. Fairly quiet section of trail – not as popular as the one near the dam or section 3.

Attractions: none. There are some old road beds, and various old barb wire fences – so if you insist, look for the old barb wire fence at Latitude: N35° 57' 34.7" Longitude: W78° 38' 26.1". This used to be all old farmland – like in “ponderosa” kinds of farms, so there are all kinds of old fences that are grown into trees, etc, all along these areas.

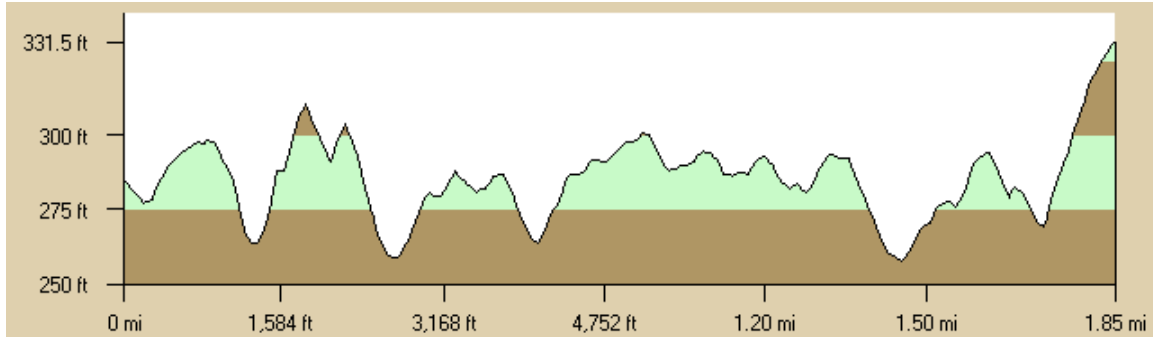
Section 6 – Six Forks Road to Blue Jay Point Park

Linear Distance	1.85 miles
Terrain Distance	1.85 miles
Climbing Elevation	290 feet
Descending Elevation	243 feet
Climbing Distance	1.04 miles
Descending Distance	4301 feet

Section 6 Trail



Vertical Profile



This section can be confusing at Blue Jay Point Park. There are several trail heads, and many smaller trails that loop back around near the picnic areas. This section gets BUSY during the spring and summer – there are soccer fields, a playground with bathroom facilities and many picnic tables. Finding your way around the actual point can be confusing – but all the trails are clearly marked. There is a neat nature center here as well if you have time to visit. If you wish to park your car in the park itself, note the time the gates close (this particular park is at dusk – usually between 7pm and 8pm – depends on the time of the year).

No attractions – just a good trail.

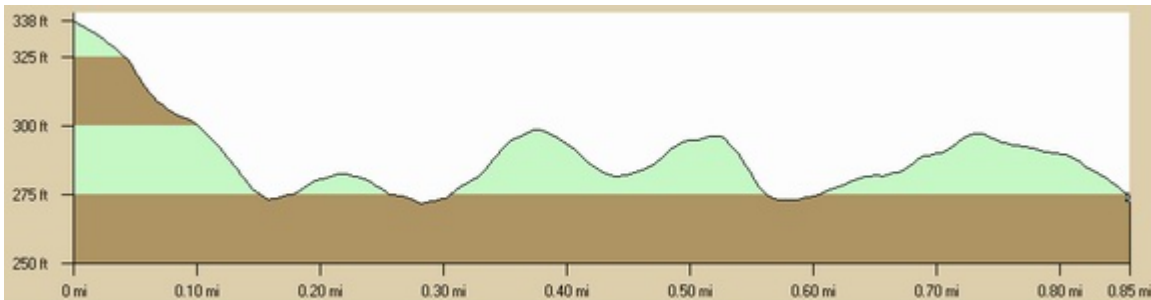
Section 7 – Blue Jay Point Park to Six Forks

Linear Distance	0.86 miles
Terrain Distance	0.86 miles
Climbing Elevation	75 feet
Descending Elevation	141 feet
Climbing Distance	0.37 miles
Descending Distance	0.49 miles

Section 7 Trail



Vertical Profile



This section I rarely hike by itself – I usually do this one along with the next section. This is important to note because there are connectors – usually bridges – that I haven't included here – these are just trail sections from trail head to trail head. Marching across a bridge will get you some extra distance, obviously.

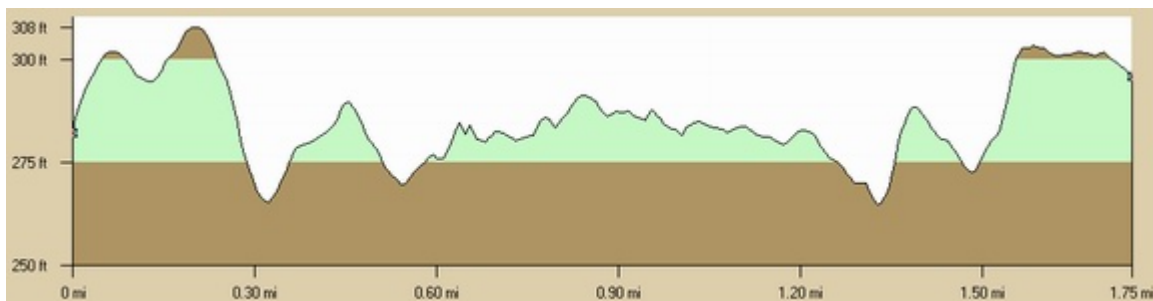
Section 8 – Six Forks Road Boatramp to Highway 98

Linear Distance	1.74 miles
Terrain Distance	1.75 miles
Climbing Elevation	160 feet
Descending Elevation	146 feet
Climbing Distance	0.83 miles
Descending Distance	0.91 miles

Section 8 Trail



Vertical Profile



There are three confusing things on this trail. The first is the trail head at Six Forks Road. It starts into the woods – and then abruptly ends up at the top part of the boat ramp parking area. The trail continues at the very top of the parking area - looks like an old grass clearing or maybe old road. It's not marked too well. As you are in the parking lot, facing away from the boat ramp – at the top right hand corner of the upper parking lot – this is where the other trail head is.



The next confusing spot occurs just before the trail ends on highway 98. The trail will come up on an old closed section of asphalt. The trail follows this road for about 100 yards before cutting back into the woods to the north towards highway 98. It's easy to find if you look for trees that have been cut as they fall across the road, and there are white dots with arrows painted on the road...

The third confusing spot occurs if you come from Six Forks Road – the trail will wander around near the lake – then you hit a section that goes back in the woods towards a neighborhood. It is well traveled – kids and parents come down to the lake quite a bit here. Now – the trail takes an abrupt right turn back towards the lake. Look **CAREFULLY** for the white dots on the trees that mark the trail – when you see **TWO** dots on a tree, you need to make a 90 degree turn! If you miss it – you just end up in the neighborhood – it will be obvious. Backtrack until you see the trail markers. This is where you lost your way.

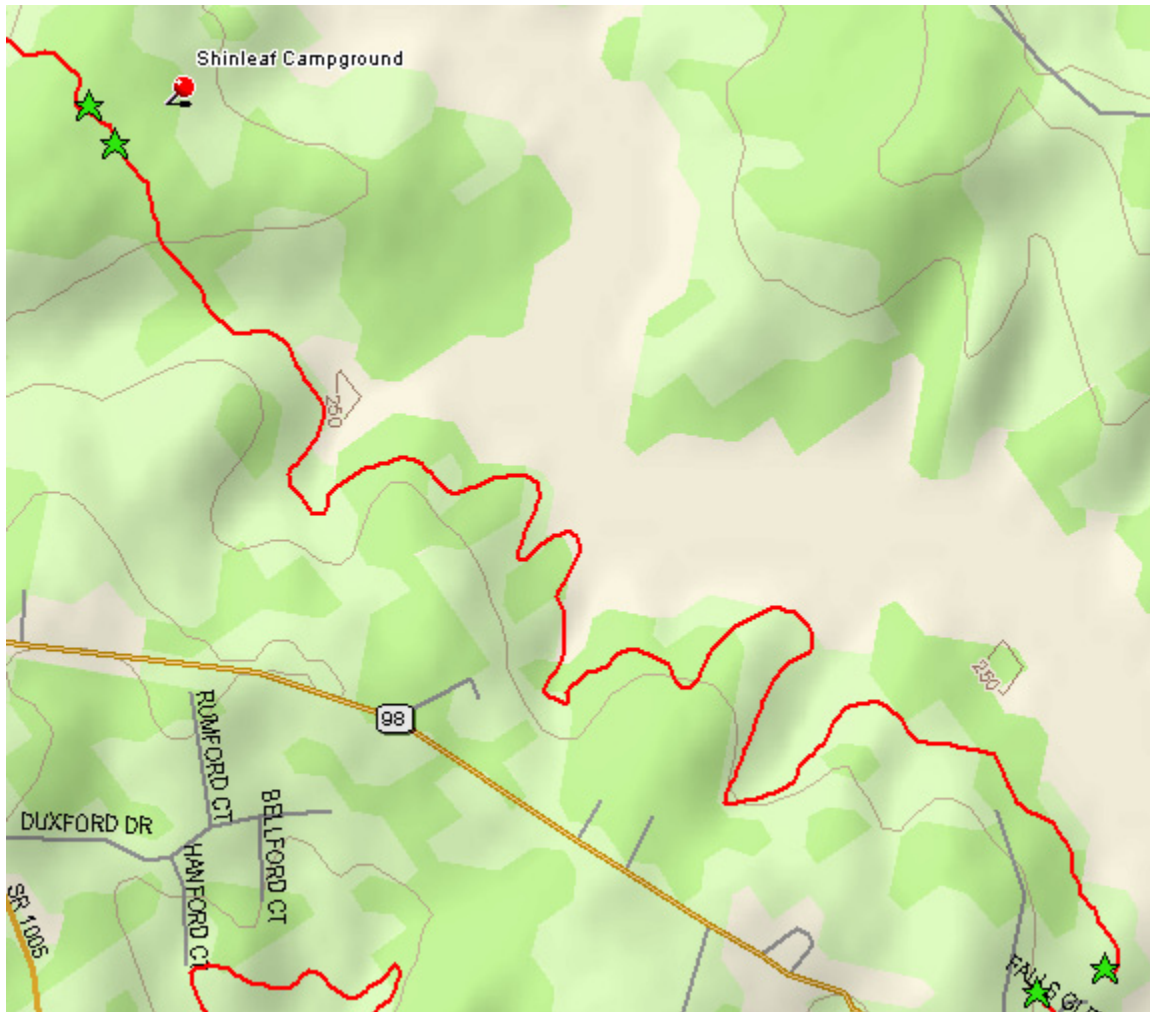
When the lake is high, this section will flood, so a slight detour is necessary at times – which is why you might miss the trail. Don't get discouraged – this is a nice remote section of trail that has some neat scenery!



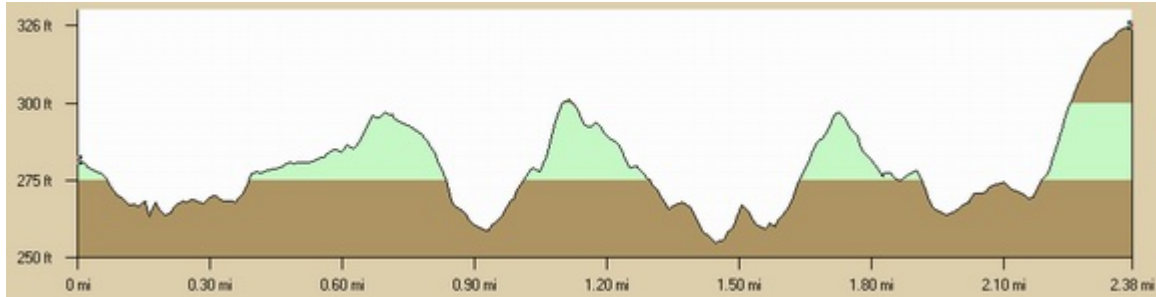
Section 9 – Highway 98 to Shinleaf Campground

Linear Distance	2.38 miles
Terrain Distance	2.38 miles
Climbing Elevation	219 feet
Descending Elevation	175 feet
Climbing Distance	1.24 miles
Descending Distance	1.14 miles

Section 9 Trail



Vertical Profile



Nifty trail – a nice hike. Nothing to note on this one – very similar to other areas of the lake – although this one is a bit less traveled – which is nice. Of course, go out in 22 degree or below weather around here and there won't be anyone else on the trails! (My favorite time to hike! Middle of the winter!).

The trail starts at highway 98, you see a house or two as you cross past the power lines – then into the woods – nothing to see until you reach the campground. The campground is a primitive campground – foot traffic only kind of thing – park in the lot, and hike your tent and supplies to the campsites. A bath house with water fountain if you need some water.



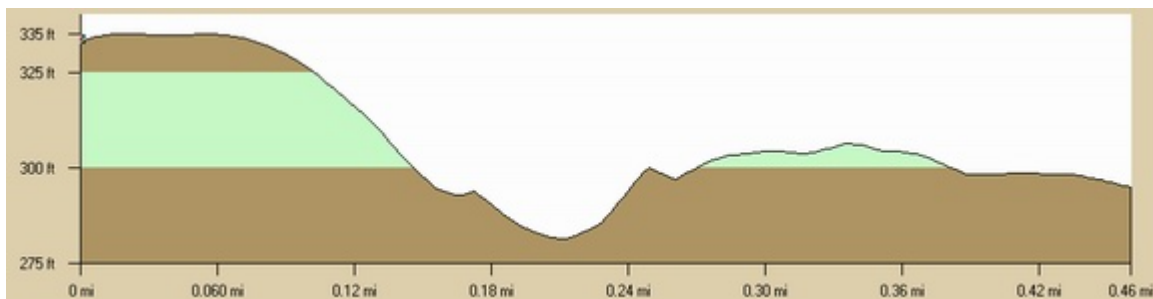
Section 10 – Shinleaf Campground to New Light Road

Linear Distance	0.46 miles
Terrain Distance	0.46 miles
Climbing Elevation	33 feet
Descending Elevation	72 feet
Climbing Distance	0.16 miles
Descending Distance	0.30 miles

Section 10 Trail



Vertical Profile



The transition from the previous section to this one is tricky – the trail head is towards the entrance of the park – you will want to head towards the bath house and parking lot, but you find the trail head at the base of the parking lot away from the bath house – almost

like you are going to follow the road back out of the park away from the campground. You can't clearly see it from where the last trail exits.

This trail is a quick trip from the campground to New Light Road. There is parking along new light road (normal gravel areas near the trail heads). The only trick is the transition from this section to the next section if you are coming from the campground – the next trailhead is about 100 yards down the road from where you come out on new light road – just turn to the right, following the guard rail – the lake is to your right – and the next trail head is on the left after 200 feet or so.

Attractions: Latitude: N35° 59' 40.29" Longitude: W78° 39' 22.48"

Right at the trail head, just off the parking lot is an old family graveyard. Birthdates in the early 1800's, and most died before the turn of the century. Hey – you will run across a lot of these smaller family cemeteries if you hike around this area...





Section 11 - New Light Road to Ghoston Road

Linear Distance	0.41 miles
Terrain Distance	0.41 miles
Climbing Elevation	57 feet
Descending Elevation	13 feet
Climbing Distance	0.30 miles
Descending Distance	0.11 miles

Section 11 Trail



Vertical Profile

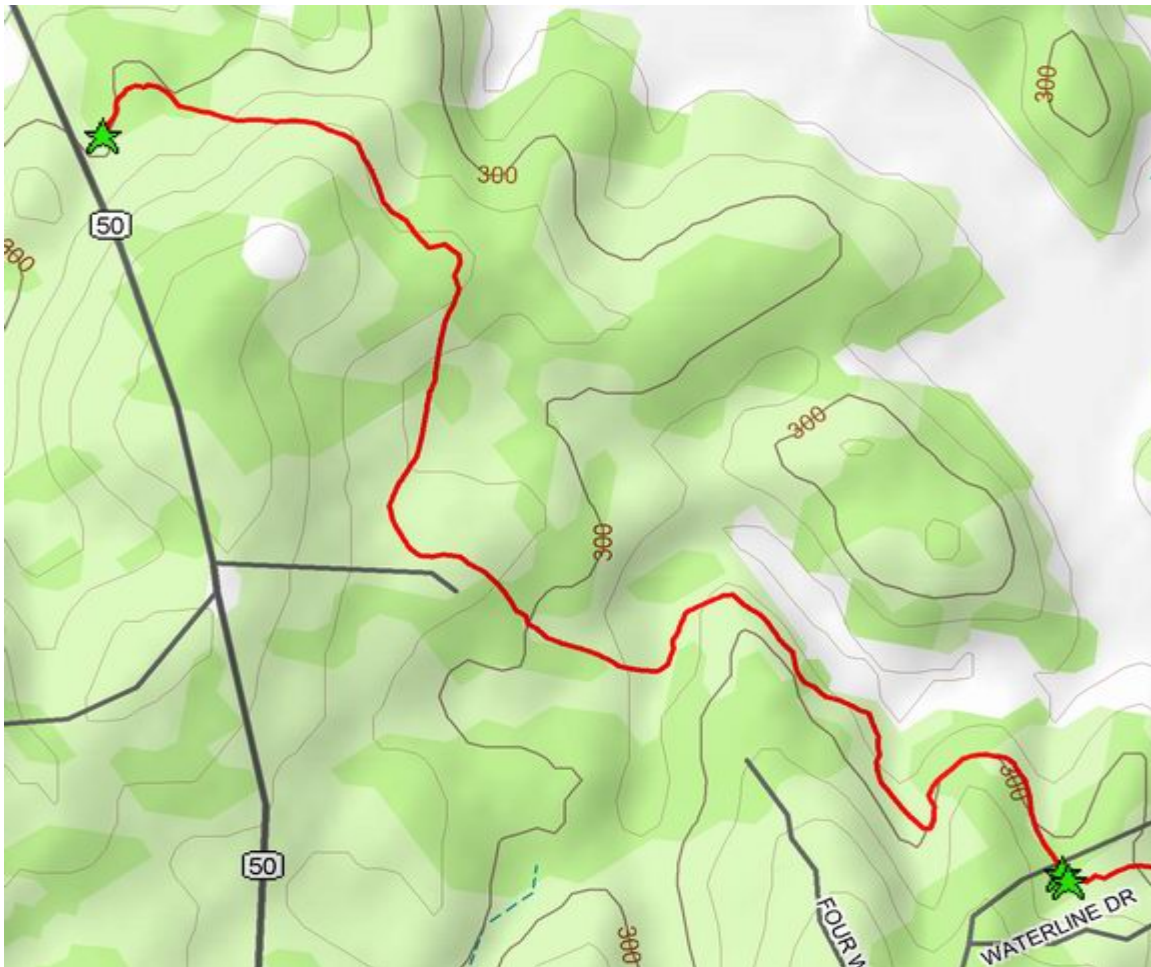


Not much to this section at all. A short, uphill climb to get to the next section. I count any section as a section if there is a trail head that ends in a road or a park.... There is parking along New Light Road – and plenty of it – but there is **NO PARKING** along Ghoston road – not that it is not allowed – but there isn't much of a shoulder on the road, so you would be hard pressed to keep your car far enough off the road to keep it from getting hit.

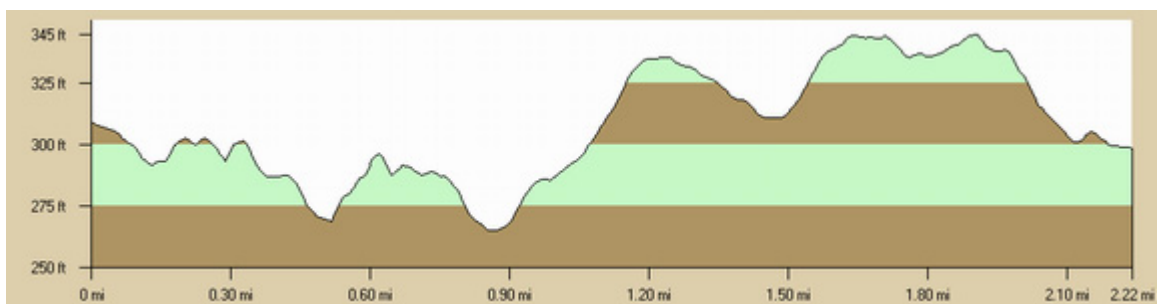
Section 12 – Ghoston Road to Highway 50 (creedmoor road)

Linear Distance	2.22 miles
Terrain Distance	2.22 miles
Climbing Elevation	177.39 feet
Descending Elevation	188.21 feet
Climbing Distance	1.05 miles
Descending Distance	1.18 miles

Section 12 Trail



Vertical Profile



This section isn't bad. There is parking at New Light road, and you can walk the short distance to Ghoston road. There IS NO PARKING on ghoston road. The shoulder is small and there are signs that say you shouldn't park there.

Not a bad hike – fairly remote – the end of this trail gets a bit worn, as it is near highway 50 and the start of this entire trail system. Up until you enter the top part of the park, the trail is quite nice. It meanders through the woods quite a bit – doesn't really follow the lake like some of the other sections. You pass near a few homes, but not near enough to be bothered by dogs or anything else.

Attractions: Latitude: N36° 0' 11.8" Longitude: W78° 40' 41.9"

Some old stone markers in the woods. I believe these types of markers were used to survey and mark old family graveyards. This is near an old homestead that was abandoned sometime in the 1950's (judging by the age of the junk around it).

Latitude: N36° 0' 15.21" Longitude: W78° 40' 50.84"

This is the “center” of the foundation. There is crap all around – and you can't figure out where the house used to be. CAREFUL – there are garbage pits and some older foundations that are lower than the surrounding woods. This is bad because you might hurt yourself. So take care when hiking around the crap left in the woods (old tires, appliances, etc).

Latitude: N36° 0' 18.45" Longitude: W78° 40' 57.05"

Not sure what this stuff is. Parts of an old farm, judging by the spacing of the old building remnants (you have to look hard to see where they used to be – nothing standing but a small livestock fence and feeder trough). The trail will hike right through all this crap, so you don't have to go far. I haven't hiked through it all – it's mostly what is left over when people leave – garbage. Rusted tin roofs and appliances. Barb wire.

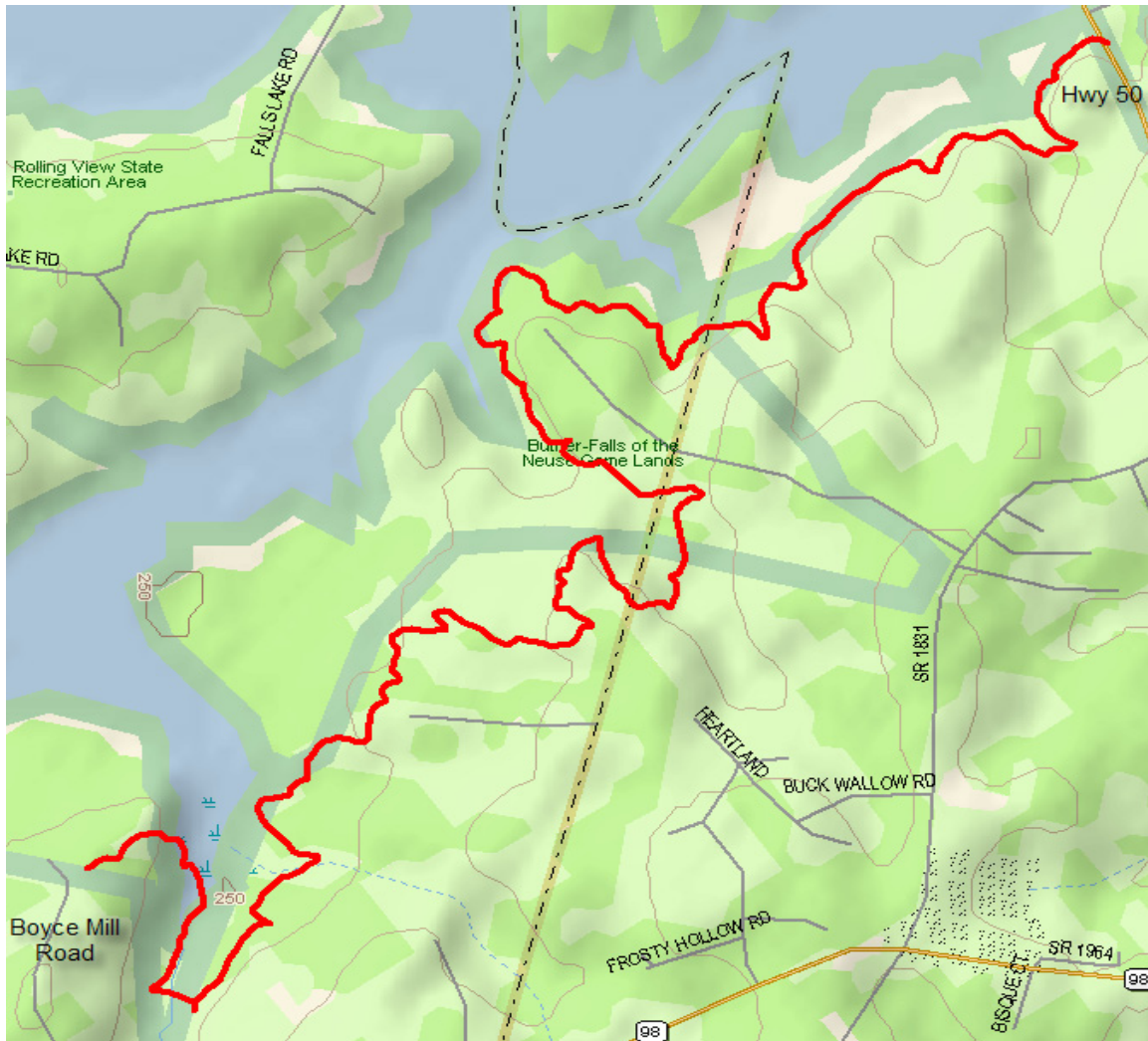
There is a good view of the lake from the bridge at highway 50 at the end of the trail (or the beginning, depending on which way you went. Well, a good view for this lake, as it is not the prettiest lake I have ever seen!



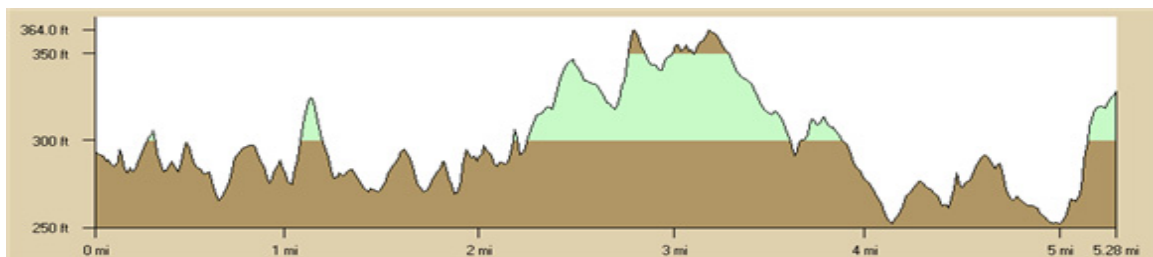
Section 13 – Highway 50 (creedmoor road) to Boyce Mill Road

Linear Distance	5.28 miles
Terrain Distance	5.28 miles
Climbing Elevation	576.4 feet
Descending Elevation	541.4 feet
Climbing Distance	2.42 miles
Descending Distance	2.86 miles

Section 13 Trail



Vertical Profile



This section of trail is “new” as of mid 2007. There are several intersecting “unofficial” sections of trails here that have been hiked and mountain biked for several years. The trailhead here starts on the opposite side of highway 50 – that’s the left side if you are heading away from Raleigh (trail heads west). Across the street you can see the big sign that is the start of the Falls Lake Nature Trail.

These sections are connectors – not sure if it’s part of the official falls trail or not. Don’t really care – I’m just hiking and mapping it ☺. These are supposed to connect all the way over to Eno at some point. I’ll hike them and add them as I get time.

Several interesting things to see here – a nice stream, near the Boyce Mill Road area you have to cross it on foot – not deep, but the rocks are angled funny and a bit moss covered – so watch your footing! (and, if you have a dog, it’s hard to persuade them not to lay down on the rocks where the water runs past).

Several intermediate trailheads are difficult to spot – you come out on cleared area and have to walk along the treeline to find the next one. Remember – the first time, the trail enters back to the right, the second – it’s straight across – the 3rd, it’s uphill and on the opposite side (about 150 feet). They’re all marked with the white dots or the metal stake telling you not to ride motorcycles, horses, etc...

Several old houses / farm buildings. I don’t find these particularly interesting, although one is still standing and in “relatively nice shape”.



Big “thank you” to the following people for feedback which has improved this document:

- Matt for pointing out a few errors when this was first created.
- Mike G for the Blue Jay Point correction – it’s a Wake County Park, not a State Park!
- All those who write periodically, just when I think about getting rid of any web stuff out there ☺

I’m just a computer geek with a GPS that likes to hike.... Drop me a line, let me know what you think. walker@intrex.net

NOTE: [I have also been uploading the data to Google Earth](#), if anyone cares. Also uploaded most of Umstead from older maps to google earth as well.