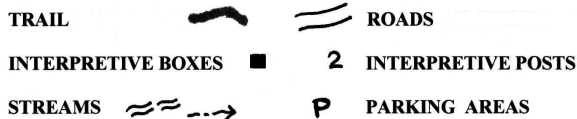
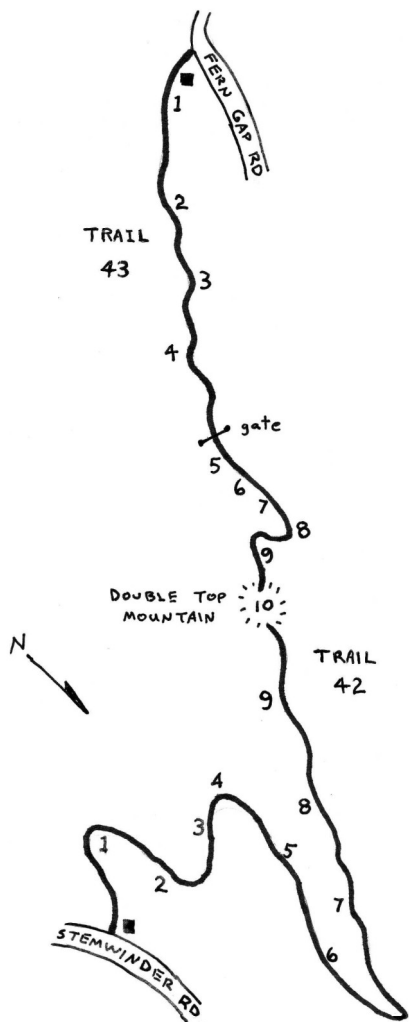


# Double Top Mountain Trails 42 & 43

Map not to scale



## HIKING SAFETY GUIDELINES

- Carry water with you
- Stay on designated trail
- Inform a friend of your hiking plans
- Hike with another person
- Leash your pet
- Carry a cell phone with fully charged and extra battery
- Carry important medication/first aid
- Call Security or the Trust Nature Center if you need help



Balsam Mountain Trust  
Phone: (828)631-1060

BMP Security  
Phone: (828)631-1011

## Interpretive Trail Guide

FOLLOWING NUMBERED POSTS PLACED  
ALONG TRAIL



## Over the Double Top Trail 43



Norway spruce *Picea abies*

Terrain: Old logging road along ridgetop from Cold Springs Gap (Fern Gap) to summit of Doubletop Mountain

Trail elevation: 780 ft elevation difference between each end

Trail length: One way is 0.85 miles

Trail Difficulty: Strenuous

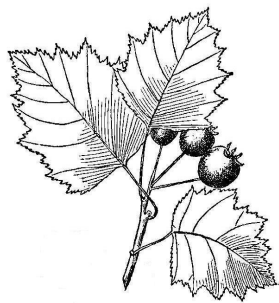
Must see: Sweeping view from tower on the summit

1) The tall conifers here are **Norway spruce** (*Picea abies*), native to Europe but extensively planted in the U.S. for ornament and timber. These trees are remnants from forestry plantings made since the last logging in the immediate area about 1924. The drooping side twigs on the branches and 6-inch cones distinguish this spruce from native red spruce (*Picea rubens*) of the high elevations, which don't have drooping twigs and bear shorter, 1-inch cones.

2) The double-trunked tree nearby is **Allegheny serviceberry** (*Amelanchier laevis*), a member of the rose family and an important fruit-producing tree for wildlife. The small, apple-like fruits are juicy and sweet, maturing in July at this elevation. Normally the serviceberries are shrubs or small trees but this species attains the largest dimensions of all, particularly at elevations above 3000 ft. Several large specimens grow along the trails near Fern Gap, such as the one here.



3) Numerous **Eastern hawthorns** (*Crataegus macrocarpa*) growing in this vicinity hint that at one time this ridgetop was much more open than it is today. Hawthorns spread and thrive best in sunny or sparsely wooded habitats, gradually declining when thick forests return. Patches of these thorny plants are remnants from times when livestock grazing, fires or logging kept some of the high places in a frequent disturbance cycle. Today only storms provide the occasional interruption to tree growth along this ridge.



4) The large oak trees along this portion of ridge are **white oaks** (*Quercus alba*). Their ravaged crowns and stocky trunks tell a story of constant battles against high winds and storms which bring ice and lightning. Ridge tops and peaks are harsh sites for growth and trees are constantly stressed, beaten and broken. Growing tall is not an option so a short, stout habit is necessary to hold onto life here. White oak is a particularly sturdy, resilient oak species.



5) On the rock outcropping several plant species and lichens thrive in increased available light. Near the top, fringing carpets of **Galax** (*Galax urceolata*) seasonally suffer stresses from sunlight, as this is a shade-loving evergreen groundcover. During a combination of low temperatures and high light intensity, such as in winter, red anthocyanin pigments in the leaves are produced. The anthocyanin saturation protects leaf tissues from oxidation and injury by excessive light, as well as increasing soluble sugar content which acts as an antifreeze. The shift from summer green to winter wine-red and back to green again could happen throughout the 2- to 3-year life span of each leaf.

6) The sparse forest canopy here has allowed many understory shrubs to flourish. Notice the abundance of **flame azaleas** (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) and **blueberries** (*Vaccinium* spp); the blueberries are the ones with greenish or reddish stems. The flame azaleas can be expected to flower in mid-to late May at this elevation.

7) Within this high elevation red oak forest are skeletal reminders that here too the **American chestnut** once grew strong and plentiful. The gray, weathered remnants of chestnuts that died over 70 years ago linger on, reminding us that the ubiquitous chestnut

of the Appalachians prior to 1900 is part of a tale now delegated to history. The trees are not extinct, but are no longer a part of the tall canopy due to continued attacks of a fungal blight.



8) This sunny, level area is an inviting rest stop, particularly during July-August when the **Canada blackberry** (*Rubus canadensis*) may have ripened fruit. This species of blackberry has very few prickles on the stems, and is a resident of high elevations in these mountains. Ample sunlight prompts a blackberry colony to flower and set fruit more heavily than in shaded situations. Perhaps you may find an edible treat if you arrive at an opportune time, and bears have not preceded you to this bramble patch.

9) The **alternate leaf dogwood** (*Cornus alternifolia*) is the only type of dogwood likely to be found in these mountains above 4000 ft. in elevation. Cool, partially shaded habitats are its preference. It suffers when overheated by direct sun in lower elevations. The thin bark is quite different from the blocky bark of the widespread and heat-tolerant flowering dogwood which is common in lower elevations.

10) The observation tower on the 5481 ft. summit of Double Top Mountain was hand-built in 2002 of local woods, mostly locust, mountain laurel, oak and tuliptree (bark). It affords a grand view from its platform.

North is the Plott Balsam range; east are the Great Balsams; south and west are the Cowee Mtns and the Nantahala National Forest. To the north and east, long extending ridges suggest slightly lower "tops" when viewed distantly, hence the name.

