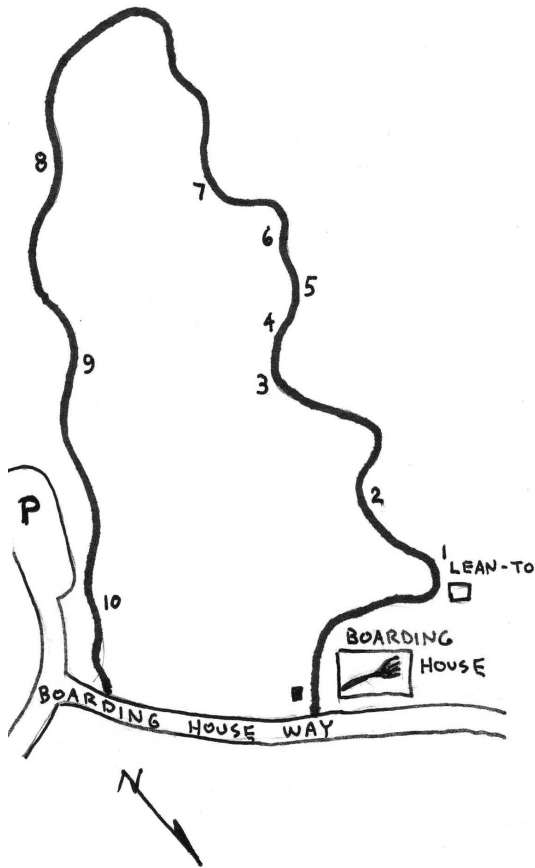


Boarding House Loop Trail 5

Map not to scale



- | | | | |
|--------------------|--|--------------------|--|
| TRAIL | | ROADS | |
| INTERPRETIVE BOXES | | INTERPRETIVE POSTS | |
| STREAMS | | PARKING AREAS | |

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



Boarding House Loop Trail 5



Mountain laurel

Kalmia latifolia

Terrain: Mountain terrain with gradual uphill and downhill climbs; some log stairs and foot bridges

Trail elevation: Very slight elevation change from starting point of 3600'

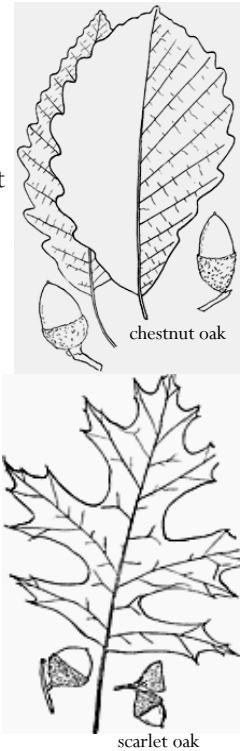
Trail length: Loop is 0.42 miles

Trail Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Must see: Adirondack-style Lean-to shelter at start of trail

1) The **lean-to** is a structure that provides shelter from weather extremes while also being open-ended for ease of entry and enjoyment of the outdoors. This peaceful roost is popular for contemplative summer days, a private resting spot or a group gathering place. A visit during spring may reward you with abundant wildflowers.

2) This sunny slope is covered by an oak-heath plant community. The **chestnut oak** (*Quercus montana*) and **scarlet oak** (*Quercus coccinea*) are most dominant. The understory is dense with heath family members like **sourwood** (*Oxydendrum arboreum*) and **mountain laurel** (*Kalmia latifolia*). Other plants adapted to acidic, well-drained soils also grow here, but to survive long-term they must also be tolerant of occasional drought conditions imposed by facing west and the heat of summer sun.



3) Crossing this shallow ravine, you should notice the forest canopy changes to include a more mixed hardwood component. Only slight differences in soil conditions and microclimate are needed to shift plant components of a forest. The moist environment here is partly due to cooler air moving down the drainage, which has enabled **white ash** (*Fraxinus americana*), the broken tree upslope, to become established. There is also a fairly diverse herb layer that differs from that of the drier slopes above.



4) Standing at the trail edge an old **striped maple** (*Acer pensylvanicum*) spreads its large leaves overhead. Where the bark is thin, a white-striped pattern that accounts for the name can be seen. This type of maple is a small tree adapted to live in shady forest understories.

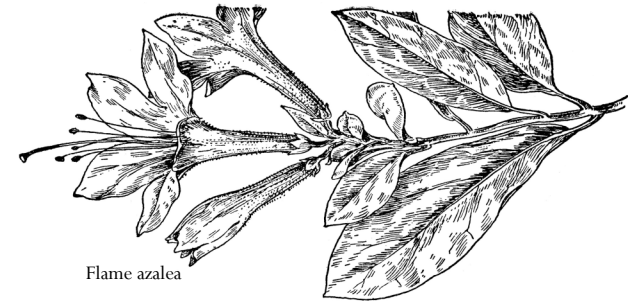
It rarely attains a size or age in excess of the one seen here.

5) The **deerberry** (*Vaccinium stamineum*) is a type of native blueberry but its fruit lacks the sweet, delectable taste we normally associate with the latter. Leaves are whitened on their lower sides, and the greenish or red-purple fruits hang on slender stems. This common shrub has a wide natural range in North Carolina, from mountains to coast.

6) Look carefully at the swollen base of the trailside **rosebay rhododendron** (*Rhododendron maximum*). This is a lignotuber, popularly called a burl. Its swirl of wood grain is favored for carving by woodworkers. Many dormant buds, capable of producing new sprouts to rejuvenate the plant after fire or breakage, lie inside the burl. For this purpose, a burl may far outlive other parts of a rhododendron plant.

7) Dominating this patch of forest canopy is a **northern red oak** (*Quercus rubra*). This particular type of oak is our most valuable commercial oak species in terms of timber production. It is also one of 3 kinds of red oak that grow on the mountain slopes here. The northern red, often simply called "red oak" is most common in higher elevations and in moist soils. Its large acorns are an important food source for forest animals like turkey, bear, and deer.

8) Vines use other plants for support and access to sunlight. Forest vines must be able to extend high into the canopy to reach adequate light. Different methods of climbing are used and you can see two here. The **summer grape** (*Vitis aestivalis*), seen upslope with its shredding brown bark, climbs with tendrils on its twigs- still attaching to small host branches in this way far above your head. Its older stem is swinging free. The **pipevine** (*Aristolochia macrophylla*) has a gray twining stem, able to ascend other stems by twisting around them.



9) Several examples of the **flame azalea** (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) grow nearby. A deciduous relative of the rhododendron, this tall shrub bears yellow, orange or reddish flowers, usually in May. They are showy and famously in demand for mountain horticultural landscaping. Like other members of the heath family, they need acidic soil to survive.

10) The **mountain laurel** (*Kalmia latifolia*) is tall and vigorous here, due partly to the long absence of fire on the ridge. It is part of the natural tendency of dry slopes that periodic fires burn back understory shrubs. This would create temporary openings for other plants and tree regeneration. Notice how this thick stand of mountain laurel casts a deep shade and few plants can be seen growing beneath them. The dense accumulation of laurel stems block sunlight from the forest floor, and also present a high fuel hazard. Some conservation lands manage laurel using controlled burns.