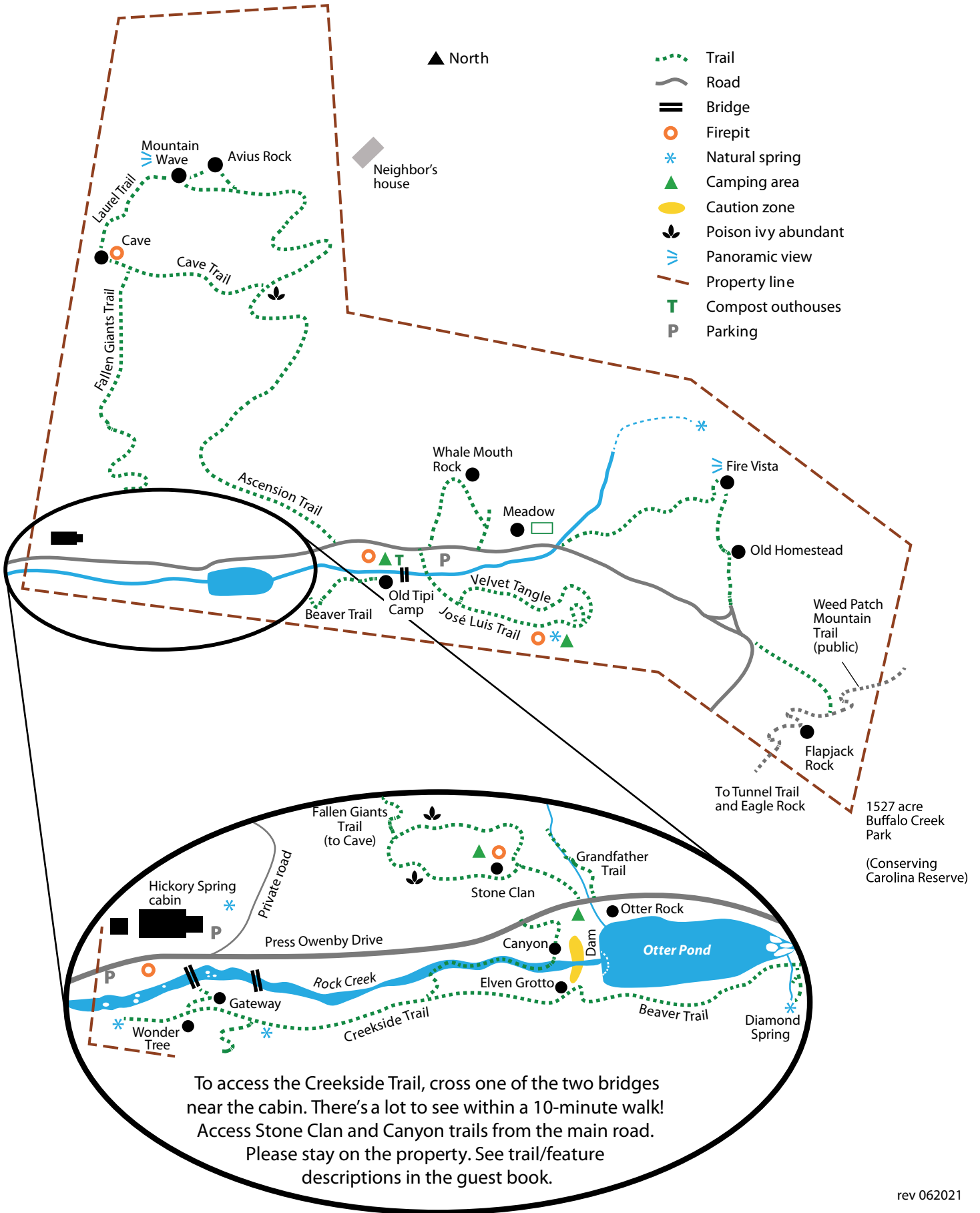


Hickory Spring Trails/Features

Simplified - not to scale



To access the Creekside Trail, cross one of the two bridges near the cabin. There's a lot to see within a 10-minute walk! Access Stone Clan and Canyon trails from the main road. Please stay on the property. See trail/feature descriptions in the guest book.

Many of the trails on this 152-acre sanctuary are old logging roads from the 1920s up to the 50s. Before this area was settled, Cherokee roamed and lived on these lands and many of the rock overhangs and crevices were used as temporary shelter. There was a homestead on the far side of the property where a family lived and farmed before the Depression. As well, there was a small sawmill up at the meadow in the early days. Closer to the house there was a barn with cattle that grazed on a cleared hillside above. A spring behind the house provided drinking water.

Trail Ratings

- **Easy** Mostly level or gently sloping footpath
- **Moderate** Occasional sloped segments, steps, creek crossings
- **Steep** Occasional steep segments, steps, uneven ground. Perhaps avoid if you have ankle or knee issues.

Creekside Trail

● **0.1 mi. (5 min. to Elven Grotto from cabin)** To get to this shady trail, cross either of the two bridges near the cabin. Near the bigger bridge, a short trail leads up to a lookout with a view of the cabin and creek. Farther up the trail, you'll see another path that veers off to the left where you can access the Canyon. The Creekside Trail is the old road that used to pass through the property. You'll pass by rhododendrons (which bloom in mid-June), many of which have died in recent years from unknown causes. Some of them hung on and they appear again to be thriving.

Gateway

This idyllic spot with the cascading waters across from the cabin is a welcoming place to wade in the creek or chill after a long journey. A small bridge connects to the Creekside Trail. In warmer months, there's a ladder to make it easy to take a dip. The pool is a couple of feet deep and has a sandy floor. The water is pretty chilly all year long, but it's an awesome refresher after a sweaty summer hike. Careful getting in and out. The creek here was mostly covered with dead and living overgrowth when we first came to the property in 2008. In the early days, there used to be a barn right behind this spot, and cattle would roam along the old road. We removed quite a bit of rusty barbed wire stapled to the trees.

Wonder Tree

Just up from the Gateway bridge on the right, you'll see a tree that seems to defy all logic. We first noticed this poor mountain laurel pinched beside a massive fallen birch and gave it up for dead. We removed the birch, and lo and behold, the little laurel tree kept on going! Without a proper trunk for nutrient transfer, it's a mystery how this tree sustains itself. The tree is completely asymmetrical with little visible means of support, yet every mid-May it produces a full bouquet of blossoms and appears to love its home by the stream. (Please be gentle with her and no climbing!)

Elven Grotto

On your left near the end of the Creekside Trail, watch for an opening in the earth. Moss-covered rocks, hanging roots, and massive boulders line this magical hollow. If you're careful, you can climb down and explore. You can even walk straight through to the Canyon by taking the passageway under the big boulder. Watch your head!

Avoid the area directly beyond the Elven Grotto on the left with all the caution tape. This is the section below the dam being eroded by the creek. The ground is unstable and possibly dangerous.

Beaver Trail	<p>●● 0.4 mi. (15 min. from Elven Grotto to Old Tipi Camp) From the end of the Creekside Trail, follow the trail up to the right then around to the left, looking for the orange trail markers. In the summer this area is filled with stinging nettle, so stick to the trail! The steep slope ahead of you with all the giant boulders is Guardian Hill. The trail winds along the shoreline, and you'll see plenty of evidence of the beavers at work. Notice all the beaver superhighways heading up into forest from the pond. Cross the small creek past the pond, climb a few stairs and take a short detour to the right to visit the Diamond Spring. Retrace your steps to the Beaver Trail and follow it up and over to a mossy hollow with a small waterfall. Cross the creek and head back down to the Old Tipi Camp.</p>
Diamond Spring	<p>●● 0.1 mi. (2 min. from Beaver Trail) A short uphill trail brings you first to a delicate waterfall in a shady grotto on the right. Continue up the trail to some steps that descend to the creek bed which leads up to the Diamond Spring. We drink from this spring almost daily, so fill your water bottles and enjoy pure water straight from the mountain!</p>
Canyon Trail	<p>●● 0.1 mi. (2 min. from main road) A short hike down from the road, this cool canyon features a small waterfall and giant boulders. If you're adventurous, you can hike down the stream a bit and explore some of the rocks and crevices. Just come back to the road by the same trail or venture through the passageway under the giant boulder to the Elven Grotto, or head downstream and connect with the Creekside Trail.</p>
Dam / Otter Pond	<p>This man-made dam was originally built in the 1960s, and over several years after 2009 the dam slowly failed, reducing the size of the pond to a small area of open water. The gaping hole of the dam had been gradually increasing in size because of the action of the water. In the fall of 2017, a blessed pair of beavers moved in and built a new dam at the opening. Now the pond has returned! In the summer, you can swim in the pond. Best place to enter is just below Otter Rock, where there's a kind of gravelly beach from silt deposits. The water is chilly, but very refreshing after a hike. There's also a one-person kayak to use. Please use your own lifejacket.</p>
Otter Rock	<p>This wide rock, a short walk from the road, offers a shady place to sit on a hot afternoon. From here, savor all the life that swirls around the pond! Several years in a row, we have spotted river otters playing in the water and partaking of the generous frog population. It's a great place to come on a summer night to listen to the symphony of sounds created by the pond dwellers. In early summer there will be a magical display of thousands of fireflies.</p>
Stone Clan Trail	<p>●● 0.3 mi. (10 min. from main road and return via loop) A short, vigorous climb up log steps from the road leads you past a view of the pond on your left, then to a picturesque plateau with a fire pit. From there, follow the loop trail to visit all the rock clusters (clans). Off the path and on certain of the rocks, this area can be pretty thick with poison ivy, so be sure to stick to the trail. At the far end of the loop is the beginning of the Fallen Giants Trail.</p>
Grandfather Trail	<p>●● 0.1 mi. (3 min. from main road) This short path starts at the road and winds through a lush and rocky seasonal creek hollow lined with ferns and rhododendron. Note the giant grandfather white oak that graces the stream on the left and a bench to take in the view. In the last part of the trail, you'll actually walk up the rocky stream bed. We're still working on connecting this trail to the Ascension Trail, so best to retrace your steps back to the main road.</p>

Fallen Giants Trail	●●● 0.3 mi. (15 min. from Stone Clan Trail to Cave) Elevation gain 200 ft. From the far end of the Stone Clan loop trail, this scenic and often steep and adventurous trail climbs over and by many large, fallen trees. This is an alternate and more interesting trail to get to the Cave, and features massive rocks and forest lookouts. This trail is easier to climb than to descend, so coming back via the Ascension Trail may be a little easier on the ankles.
Ascension Trail	●● 0.4 mi. (15 min. from Mountain Wave back to main road). Elevation gain 300 ft. This old logging road winds up to 3100' at the top of the property. It's a steady, but not too steep climb through lush forest. In summer the abundant growth may obscure certain sections of the trail, though we do our best to keep it cleared. There's poison ivy in parts, which can usually be avoided. Just make sure to follow the orange/pink ribbon trail markers. There are six major switchbacks to the top; you'll notice a neighbor's house just over the property line near the 5th switchback, so be sure to stay to the left. An alternate and more interesting route to the top is taking Stone Clan / Fallen Giants / Laurel trails.
Cave Trail	●● 0.2 mi. (10 min. from Ascension Trail to Cave). The entrance to this trail is on the left just after the 4th switchback. There is some poison ivy in this area, so step gently. Once you're in the woods, you'll see no more of it. The may be slippery with leaves in places, so watch your footing. Just follow the ribbon trail markers.
Cave	Not a true cave, but a huge, cantilevered rock overhang. You'll be protected from rain under here and you could even bring a picnic when the weather is cold or drizzly. If you're going to build a fire, be sure open fires are allowed and that you bring enough water to extinguish.
Laurel Trail	●●● 0.2 mi. (10 min. from Cave to Mountain Wave) Elevation gain 100 ft. This steep and rocky trail climbs through laurel and rhododendron forest to the wide rock overlook at Mountain Wave. Most of the trail itself is spongy underfoot from decades of leaf fall, so in spite of the slope, it's not too hard on the feet.
Mountain Wave	This is a short diversion from the Ascension Trail at the 6th switchback near the top and also accessible from the Laurel Trail. Here's where you can have a seat and catch a magnificent view of the neighboring mountains. Continue on this short trail to the right and cut through to Avius Rock, which is the highest point on the property.
Avius Rock	This rock caps the property at about 3,100 feet elevation. Note all the amazing mosses and lichens up here. There's not much of a view except in winter...it's just a quiet place to sit for a while and rest from your hike. We have plans to continue a trail to the north part of the property.
Old Tipi Camp	This scenic area by the creek is well-suited for tent camping. In the past, we have hosted groups of campers and workshops here.. The large, empty platforms you see used to support two tipis that collapsed after several years in this humid atmosphere. Please don't walk on the platforms as they're giving way in places. You are also welcome to camp in this area (at your own risk). And it's a great place for an afternoon picnic by the stream since the wading is easy.

José Luis Trail

●● 0.3 mi. (10 min. from main road to top) Elevation gain 100 ft. This trail is named after Eduardo's father, whose entrepreneurial spirit made the purchase of this land possible. A former logging road, this trail climbs through mountain laurel and rhododendron, many of which were burned or damaged by the fire in the fall of 2016. Part way up, you'll notice a level area on the right which has a rough fire pit and level area for camping. When you reach the top of the hill there is a loop which will rejoin the trail. Come back down on the same way you went up or come down via the more adventurous Velvet Tangle Trail.

Velvet Tangle Trail

●●● 0.3 mi. (15 min. from high point of Jose Luis Trail back to beginning above road) Elevation gain 150 ft. This is an alternate and more interesting trail to get to the top of the Jose Luis Trail or to descend back to the beginning of the trail. Steep in places, this mossy trail features massive boulders and forest lookouts, and tangled mountain laurel forest. Most of the trees were killed by the heat of the 2016 fire, but they're resprouting from the bases.

Whale Mouth Loop Trail

●● 0.2 mi. (10 min. from main road and looping back to meadow) This gentle trail climbs alongside a seasonal creek. As the switchback turns to the right, you'll see a massive stone formation that's not unlike the mouth of a huge marine mammal. We call it Whale Mouth Rock. If you're feeling adventurous, you can climb up into the whale's mouth. Just take normal precautions as always climbing on rocks and watch for critters. The trail continues up a gentle incline, then when you meet another trail, turn right and the trail takes you downhill past a cistern to the meadow and the road.

Meadow

The open meadow past the Whale Mouth Loop trailhead is where you'll find an amazing array of wildflowers in the warmer months. On the right is our woodshed where we store much of the milled wood that has been harvested from this land. We use tulip poplar, hemlock, ash, pine, white and red oak, locust and other species for furniture and building projects. In the old days, there used to be a sawmill in this meadow. On the left is our garden, which in a good year even has vegetables! As well, you'll see the beginnings of our orchard with apple, pear, persimmon and other fruit trees.

Fire Vista Trail

●●● 0.4 mi. (15 min. from main road and cascade up to Fire Vista lookout then past Old Homestead to end of main road). Elevation gain 200 ft. Follow the main road past the meadow and past where the creek crosses under the road, you'll see a white pipe emptying into the creek. This is the overflow from the cistern that feeds the faucet by the garden. This steep trail starts with a bench and a picturesque cascading creek, then winds up through a hillside that was burned in 2016 and parts of it again in 2020. Now it's in a state of renewal, and amid the chaos of dead and fallen trees, you'll see thousands of tiny saplings repopulating the forest. As well, you'll see mountain laurels and other trees resprouting from their bases. On the way up you'll visit rock clusters and at the top you'll be greeted by a panoramic view. Follow the trail at the top around to the right and down to reach the Old Homestead site. The trail continues on an old road to join the end of the main road.

Old Homestead

From the Fire Vista lookout, follow the path down through cool forest and come to the site of two rock piles where a cabin once stood. It was before the Depression and likely an Appalachian-style cabin with two rooms, each with a fireplace. Note the leveled area which was likely cleared of trees for a garden. From here the trail turns into an old road. Go straight then you can continue on to the Flapjack Rock Trail or turn back and take the main road back to the meadow.

Flapjack Rock Trail

●● 0.2 mi. (10 min. from end of main road down to Flapjack Rock) Elevation drop 100 ft. From the end of the main road or Fire Vista Trail, look for a big boulder on the left with a sign to Flapjack Rock. Follow the trail down the hill and then you'll come to a mountain bike-friendly back country public trail, the **Weed Patch Mountain Trail ●●**, and go to the right. Follow this trail down and you'll see ahead a magnificent rock (marker 201) that's like a stack of pancakes. With care you can climb on the rock and get a view of Eagle Rock, the closest peak to the south. Flapjack Rock is near the property line and borders the 1527-acre Buffalo Creek Park reserve. Look for our trail (marker 198) with the "Private" sign on your way back. When you get back to the road, stay to the left, or go back via Old Homestead and the Fire Vista Trail.