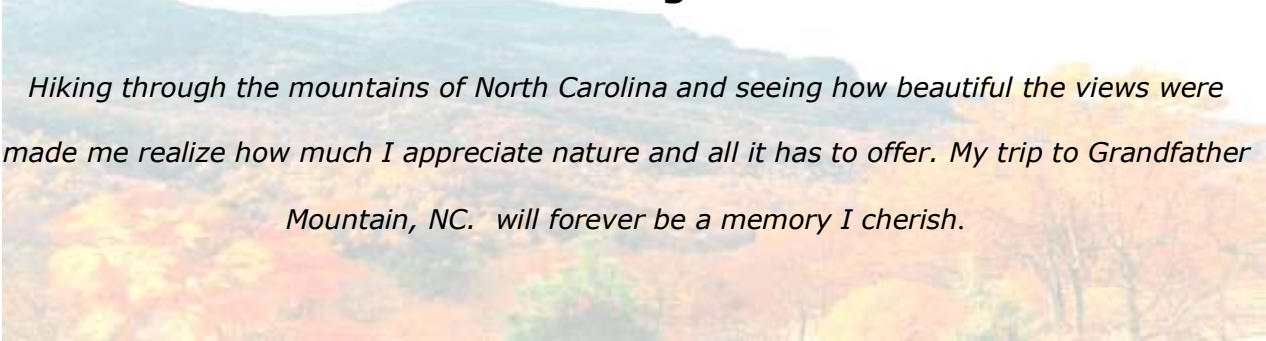


## **An Adventure I Will Never Forget: Grandfather Mountain**



*Hiking through the mountains of North Carolina and seeing how beautiful the views were made me realize how much I appreciate nature and all it has to offer. My trip to Grandfather Mountain, NC. will forever be a memory I cherish.*

by Kati Chafin

for [Advanced Composition, ETSU](#), Nov 30, 2016

On a crisp fall morning, last year, I got an early phone call from my boyfriend wanting to know if I would like to go on a hike with him and his family. I first told him no because I wanted to stay in bed a little longer, but quickly changed my mind when I realized it would be a fun adventure. At 20 years old, and living in a city, I had never gone hiking before because it just did not seem like my kind of thing. I was not against the outdoors. In fact, I love being outside and going on walks with my dogs and enjoying nature.

After getting off the phone, I got myself out of bed and began to get ready. As previously mentioned, I had never been on a hike so I had not the slightest clue what to wear or to bring with me. I mistakenly wore jean shorts, which was an awful idea because they don't have any stretch in them and trying to climb up rocks in them was a challenge. I put on an old t-shirt and hat, then started packing my bag. I only brought one bottle of water and no snacks which was a terrible idea. I should have packed multiple bottles of water and some protein bars or something with me, but I had no clue that we were going to be there for over five hours.

When I arrived at my boyfriend's house, we immediately got in the car to head on down to our hiking destination, Grandfather Mountain— a nature park in North Carolina. From my boyfriend's house in Abingdon, Virginia, to our destination in North Carolina was almost two hours and about 70 miles away. The ride to Grandfather Mountain was awful, full of winding back roads through the mountains. For a second, I thought I would be sick but luckily for me, the winding roads stopped after a while. Upon our arrival to Grandfather Mountain, we saw beautiful mountains, wildlife, nature, and a crowd of people waiting in line to go into the park. I guess everyone had the same idea as us to go hiking on a beautiful Saturday. Besides the crowd, though, the views were breathtaking from just what we had seen on the drive up.



As soon as me, my boyfriend, and his family got into the park, we went to go grab something to eat because we were all starving to death. There was a cute little café that had burgers, chicken tenders, sandwiches and much more. We ate outside at the picnic area and just talked about how excited we were about being there and looking forward to the day. Our first stop was to look at the animals they had there. They had cougars, otters, deer, eagles, and my personal favorite were the bears. There were about five bears out there, and when we saw them it was feeding time. The workers put the bears inside while a few other workers went out and hid food for them. I was surprised at the places they were putting the food, such as underneath a bush on the far back of the enclosure, and I thought the bears would never find it. It was neat to watch them go on a hunt for the food and sniff it out of the weirdest places.



Next, we wandered on over to the swinging bridge— a huge suspension bridge they have at the park. By this time in the day, the temperature had gone up fifteen degrees from the morning so it was very hot. I was hoping for a cool fall day but it felt more like a day in the middle of July. The bridge was intimidating at

first because it is 228-foot bridge, and one mile above sea level. Everyone in my group was a little nervous about it but we decided to go across it anyways. As we started to the bridge, I realized that I should have worn tennis shoes instead of flip flops because we were climbing over rocks and my shoes kept coming off. After stumbling around the rocks for a while, we finally made it up to the bridge. When you are looking at the bridge from the bottom, it is hard to tell just how high up it is. Standing there in front of the bridge gave an incredible view, but was super terrifying.

The bridge could only hold so much weight so only a few people could be on it at a time. When it was finally our turn, we stepped on it one by one and slowly started to walk across it. With every step, the bridge would swing a little more which was really scary standing right in the middle of it. Finally, we made it to the other side and the view was breathtaking. I feel like we could see for miles on top of that mountain. We sat there for a few minutes and took a little break and soaked up the views.



On the way back down, we started to prepare ourselves for a couple mile hike. I really did not know what to expect but I was ready for the adventure. None of us really knew where the hike started, so we just kind of went in on the side of a trail and started walking. I will admit, I am not in the best shape, so about thirty minutes in I was ready to give up. We had to jump over huge logs and climb up onto rocks and it was exhausting. When we finally stopped for a break, I considered turning back to the car but everyone encouraged me to keep going and to not give up—I am glad I did. The first little bit of the trail was by far the hardest part of the whole hike. Once we got about a mile in, I was feeling good and ready to get to the top of the peak, called Macrae Peak.



The last part of the trail was mostly climbing ladders and scaling the side of the mountain. Looking back, parts of the hike were dangerous and I am surprised I came out of there alive. There were also a few spots where we could not climb up on the rocks, so we had to grab a rope and pull ourselves up to get over them. I was surprised at how many people were out on the trail ranging from a 10-year-old who was full of energy and looked like he could go all night, to a 70-year-old who was slow but still in good shape obviously. On one of our breaks, we were talking to a grandson and grandfather and they said that they had hiked that specific trail over twenty times. We also met a married couple that travels around the country hiking different trails and said that they loved the adventure.

As we neared the top of the peak, I got a second wind and was leading my group up the mountain. It was getting later in the day which made for a nice cool hike the rest of the way up. After climbing the last and final ladder, we finally made it to the top of the peak. When I got up on top, I could see why so many people loved hiking. The hike itself was not very fun at the beginning, but once I realized how beautiful the view was going to be, I sucked it up and



moved on. You could see for miles over the whole park and it was amazing. I think I counted about eight people that were up there just hanging out and taking a break from the hike and soaking in the rewarding view. Unfortunately, we started our hike a little late, so we could not stay at the top for too long because we needed to get back before the sun set and we got stuck out in the dark.

The way back was probably a little more challenging only because we had to go down the ladders instead of up. Besides that, it was basically all downhill the whole way. When we were about fifteen minutes away from the car, I realized that we were the only ones left on the trail which was kind of spooky cause it had gotten pretty dark. As we approached the car, I could not have been more excited because I was so tired and hot from the day and just wanted to fall over and go to sleep.

The car ride back was mostly silent except for when we talked about our favorite part of the day and how beautiful the view was. We talked about going back sometime but have not gotten around to it yet, unfortunately. Overall, I think that I did good on my first hike and would

definitely go back. Every part of our day was something that I can still vividly look back on and think about how grateful I am to have gone. I tell people all the time about it and tell them that if they ever get the chance to go it will be unforgettable. Even when people tell me they are not outdoorsy, I tell them to go anyways because you cannot beat that beautiful view.

