

Asheville Area Running/Hiking Guide

This guide will hopefully give you an idea of the amazing amount of running spots in the area, and perhaps inspire you to make some plans for some routes when you come to visit. Asheville is a beautiful place with a near infinite amount of trails. All of the pictures below are taken by me or other residents. Please get in touch with me if you have any questions. Enjoy!

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Some Useful Apps:

[Trail Run Project](#)

[All Trails](#)

This Guide is organized primarily by distance from MAHEC. Below is a quick explanation of terms:

Technical: this is a term to describe how difficult the footing of the trail is. For example, a trail with tons of roots, rocks, branches, and places to twist your ankle would be very technical.

Climb: In this case does not mean literal rock climbing but rather long uphill.

A Guide to Surface Types:

Road: self explanatory, it is a road or sidewalk

Forest Road: This is a dirt or gravel road, usually pretty smooth and wide

Single Track: This is more of a classic “trail”, only wide enough for one person, more technical (more roots and stuff to trip on), arguably more fun and adventurous



Road: random road in Kennilworth



Forest Road: Bent Creek



Single Tack: Mountains-to-Sea Trail

Close By (within ~20 mins of MAHEC)

Biltmore Forest

Distance from MAHEC: 0 mins (you can run from clinic)

Miles of Trails/Roads: Max ~10 mile loop

Surface Type: Road

Parking: MAHEC Clinic

Difficulty: Moderate — footing is perfect, but still pretty hilly

Description: Biltmore Forest is the neighborhood behind MAHEC. It was previously a part of the Biltmore property, but was sold to a bunch of wealthy people and they made their own town out of it! It is a beautiful, safe neighborhood with little traffic, lots of tree coverage, and a bunch of huge beautiful houses to gawk at. You can go down the trail out the back of MAHEC, past the Double Tree, and then start up Vanderbilt Road. Wander around for a while and then come back down Vanderbilt road. This is a great “I finished clinic kind of late and just want to get a quick endorphin bump before dinner” kind of run.



Biltmore Estate Trails

Distance from MAHEC: ~10 minutes

Miles of Trails/Roads: 10-15

Surface Type: Forest road, single track, and asphalt

Parking: [Antler Hill Village](#)

Difficulty: Easy

Map: [Biltmore Trail Map](#)

Description: The Biltmore Estate is famous for The Biltmore House, the largest privately owned home in the US. The estate also has a bunch of nice trails! The most popular place to run/walk is the Farm Trail, which winds along the French Broad River. Antler Hill Village is also a cute little place with restaurants, shops, an ice cream place, and a winery with free wine tastings!

Note: It costs \$\$ to get onto the Biltmore property. When you choose MAHEC and move here, I would highly recommend the annual pass, so you can get in as often as you like all year, and get a discount for visitors. If visiting, passholders can get you in to run on the trails after 5pm (but you can't go to the house as a guest)

Mountains-to-Sea Trail

Distance from MAHEC: closest access 8 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: One several hundred mile long single track trail

Surface Type: Single Track

Parking: Mostly pull-offs along the Blue Ridge Parkway; [Closest Access is off 74](#); [Next closest access is off Hendersonville Rd](#)

Difficulty: Moderate — hills are pretty rolling in the Asheville area, but the footing can be very technical/rocky/rooty

Description: The MST is a long single track trail that runs, predictably, from the mountains to the sea. It is like North Carolina's state version of the Appalachian trail. In our area, it more or less parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway, so you can drive along the BRP and there are access points all over, with the sign posts above marking where the trail is. Some sections are more technical/rooty/difficult than others, especially as you go up from the valley of Asheville. The access points above are relatively flat.

Note: the BRP closes sections when there is bad weather or pandemics. [This website](#) has the updated closures.



Mountains-to-Sea Trail

Carrier Park/French Broad River Greenway

Distance from MAHEC: 11 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: ~8 mile out-and-back

Surface Type: Asphalt greenway

Parking: I would recommend [Hominny Creek Park](#), which starts at one end, and then you can go out about 4 miles and then turn around and come back

Difficulty: Easy — smooth & flat

Description: This is definitely the flattest, easiest run in Asheville. It is an asphalt Greenway that runs along the French Broad River. It goes through some parks and also by the Velodrome, which was previously a NASCAR track and now is used by cyclists. There are also [multiple extensions to this in progress right now](#), so this path will be much longer and you will be able to end your run at New Belgium. Not bad.

Bent Creek Experimental Forest/NC Arboretum

Distance from MAHEC: ~15-20 min drive

Miles of Trails: 40? 50? A lot.

Surface Types: Forest roads and single track

Parking: [Hard Times parking lot](#); [Rice Pinnacle parking lot](#); [Bent Creek River Park](#) (aka "Sandy Bottoms")

Note: DO NOT park in the NC Arboretum. It costs \$14 and the above parking lots are free and give you access to the same trails.

Difficulty: Moderate — forest roads have great footing, but most trails (aside from bent Creek Gap Rd) have some long climbs.

Description: Bent Creek is amazing. A true magical wonderland that is very close to home. A place to escape to during your weekend afternoon off when you're on Medicine. There are a ton of trails, about half forest roads and half single track. It can be a bit of a maze if you're trying to make loops, so the best approach when visiting may be to just go out and then turn back and come back the way you came to avoid getting lost. Most trails are fairly mountainous and have long gradual climbs, with the exception of Bent Creek Gap Rd which goes right along bent creek and is fairly flat.

Some Suggested Runs

- [Bent Creek Road](#): The flattest route. The link has you start close to Bent Creek River Park, but it is probably easier to start at Hard Times parking lot. Go from there, and about 0.25 miles in, you will reach a "T." Go left, and you will be on the trail. You can go about 2 miles out and 2 miles back for a 4 mile run.
- [Hard Times](#): This is a more challenging climb, from hard times parking lot as well. Go from Hard Times parking lot, and take a right at the "T." You will then almost immediately reach another intersection; take a left and go over the bridge across the creek. You are now on Hard Times! You can go out and back, or if directionally inclined you can make a loop connecting this to Bent Creek Rd (above)
- There are many other possible routes, and even a book made about all the different routes (which I have), and I even made some laminated cards from the book with route instructions for different loops for my wife who is adventurous but navigationally challenged. Please text/call me for these!



Bent Creek Experimental Forest/NC Arboretum

Beaver Lake

Distance from MAHEC: 18 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: 2 mile loop

Surface Type: Gravel path

Parking: [Beaver Lake parking lot](#)

Difficulty: Easy

Description: This is a really pretty loop around a mountain lake in North Asheville. Enough said.

Note: You need a permit to take your dog or you could get fined! Permits available [here](#).

20-40 mins from MAHEC

Warren Wilson Trails

Distance from MAHEC: 20 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: ~8-10

Surface Type: Single track

Parking: [Owen Park](#)

Difficulty: Moderate — not many hills, but some roots and rocky sections

Description: Warren Wilson is a small, very cool college just east of Asheville. There is a small trail system around the college, with the highlight being the trail that runs along the Swannanoa River. You can park at Owen Park, and there will be a small loop around a lake. On the easternmost part of the loop, a trail branches off and runs along the river. Eventually, you will reach a little network of trails. [Here](#) is a very confusing trail map that I can't make heads or tails of.



Montreat Trails

Distance from MAHEC: 28-35 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: ~20-30

Surface Type: Mostly single track with some wider, poorly kept forest roads

Parking: [Main Trailhead](#); [Greybeard Trailhead](#)

Map: [Montreat Trail map](#)

Difficulty: Moderate to hard — most trails are fairly technical with rocks and such, and also most trails are steep. Some might say this is a hiking place, not a running place.

Description: Montreat is another small college outside Asheville, in Black Mountain, NC. These trails are much more extensive than Warren Wilson, and you can even run all the way up to the top of Mount Mitchell (~4,000 foot elevation change, Mount Mitchell is the highest mountain in the east)! Most of these trails are fairly technical and steep with amazing views and lookouts. Greybeard is a legendary trail within these trails with a different parking area. It is very rocky and there are a few water crossings, very beautiful. Check out downtown Black Mountain while you're in the area, maybe even grab a post-run/hike brunch at Black Mountain Biscuit Co. or Louise's.



Kitsuma

Distance from MAHEC: 20 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: ~9.4 miles total out and back

Surface Type: Single track

Parking: [Kitsuma Trailhead](#)

Difficulty: Hard — it is a long descent and climb

Description: Kitsuma is a long and sometimes steep drop down the mountain with beautiful views along the way, and a challenging run back up! This is a personal favorite stop on the way back home from our ED or rural rotations in McDowell. Be sure to take the offshoot to the Young's Ridge look-out. Also this is a popular mountain biking spot so watch out for them bombing down the trail.

Catawba Falls

Distance from MAHEC: 30 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: 2.4 miles total out and back

Surface Type: Wide forest road

Parking: [Catawba Falls Trailhead](#)

Difficulty: Easy — slight climb to the waterfall but it is very gradual and footing is great.

Description: This is better as a hike than a run — it is fairly short, very smooth and relatively easy with a big reward at the top. You can hang out, swim around in the pool on the bottom, and then walk back. *Caution:* likely to have a ton of traffic on weekends.

Mills River Trails

Distance from MAHEC: ~30-35 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: 30-50

Surface Type: Mix of forest roads and single track

Parking: [Trace Ridge Trailhead](#)

Map: [Mills River Trail Map](#)

Difficulty: Moderate to hard — most trails are pretty steep long climbs, single tracks can have some difficult footing as well. Fletcher Creek Rd is more on the moderate side, easy footing but still some climbing.

Description: Mills River is southwest of Asheville and due south of Bent Creek (they are divided by the Blue Ridge Parkway). You can actually run into Mills River from Bent Creek if you're one of those ultrarunning folks. There are some nice flatter trails at the base near Mills River itself. Most of the trails, though, climb up from the river. Trace Ridge is a popular, very steep, straight up challenging trail that you can access from the trailhead. For a more mellow run (though still a climb), you can run on Fletcher Creek Rd (aka Never Ending Rd aka Rd 5097). It is a nice forest road that goes on for quite a while, you'll need to go out and back. You can also make a loop connecting Trace Ridge to Spencer Gap to Fletcher Road.



Lake Summit Loop

Distance from MAHEC: ~35-40 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: 9 mile loop

Surface Type: Dirt road

Parking: [Tuxedo Park](#)

Difficulty: Easy — flat, smooth, nice

Description: This is a beautiful and fairly flat (except for one real hill), very low traffic dirt loop around Lake Summit. Peaceful and serene.



>40 mins from MAHEC

Pisgah National Forest

Distance from MAHEC: ~40 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: hundreds

Surface Type: Mostly single track

Parking: [Art Loeb Trailhead](#); [Looking Glass Rock Trailhead](#); ... and many more

Difficulty: Moderate to hard — a lot of these trails are more for hiking than running, though what is trail running if not fast hiking?

Description: Pisgah is a huge forest full of trails. Possibly the most famous trail is the 31 mile Art Loeb trail, but there are a ton of trails, waterfalls, and views to be had. The beginning of the Art Loeb trail does not have quite as grand views as later miles, but still beautiful. Looking Glass is another great hike or run with a very rewarding view at the top. I would recommend making a day of this, go into downtown Brevard, which has some fun shops and restaurants.



Appalachian Trail

Distance from MAHEC: ~40 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: Hundreds

Surface Type: Single track

Parking: [Sam's Gap](#)

Map: [Appalachian Trail Interactive Map](#)

Difficulty: Hard — this is a pretty steep tough climb

Description: The Appalachian Trail is a famous trail extending from GA to Maine, 2,193 miles, all within the Appalachian mountains. Our closest access point is Sam's Gap, and you can take this up to Big Bald (pictured above) about 6 miles one way ~12 miles round trip).

DuPont State Forest

Distance from MAHEC: 50-60 mins

Miles of Trails/Roads: 40?

Surface Type: Very well groomed forest roads, some less groomed forest roads, some single track

Parking: [Triple Falls Parking](#)

Difficulty: easy to moderate — the falls loop is easy, if you branch out it can become moderate.

Description: Dupont is a beautiful area with a lot of waterfalls. You can park at Triple Falls and see 3 different waterfalls in a 3 mile run. [Here is a link](#) to a nice description of that loop.



Other Asheville Running Stuff

Running Groups

- There is a trail running group that meets at Hard Times Parking Lot on Tuesday evenings at 6. They are a great way to meet some trail running friends and get introduced to Bent Creek without getting lost.
- There is another running club called [Asheville Running Collective](#) which meets on Thursdays at 6:15pm at The Wedge (brewery). There are a variety of pace groups and such. Very nice people.
- Resident Exercise Club: We have a running group that runs after didactics on Wednesday evenings! Attendance is mandatory for all residents (not really).

Tracks

- As far as I know, the only track that is open to the public is [UNC Asheville's Track](#), which is a rubberized track. I hear that it is about to be resurfaced which would be great!

Running Stores

- FootRx: co-owned by a pedorthist (makes custom orthotics in office) and a trail running enthusiast (whose wife was a MAHEC resident!)
- Jus' Running: the original Asheville specialty running store. Owner Norm is a staple of the community. They also have a running group called Norm's Maggots which meets for track workouts

PT

- The Runner's Mechanic: Miriam Salloum, does running specific PT and gait analysis. You can also learn from her on some elective rotation time!
- AntiFragile PT: Wes is also a Sports PT who works with a lot of local runners. Interesting guy with a lot of cool thoughts. You can also rotate with him.