

*Campus News:*

Alternative Routes

The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the most famous and recognizable stretches of asphalt in the United States. But due to its elevation and location, sections of it unfortunately remain closed to motor vehicle travel during the winter months. Granted, the views during the summer and fall are spectacular from the Parkway, but few people experience the pure beauty of the overlooks during the blanketing snows that occur often.

But, if hiking a few extra miles sounds good, then the Parkway can still be enjoyed while it is closed. Two main ways to reach the Parkway are via N.C. 276 and N.C. 215. These winding roads lead to sections of the Parkway near Brevard and are generally safe and always open to the public. The intersection of these roads with the Parkway coincides with the gates used to close off the road to vehicles. At both crossroads there are parking areas and overlooks.

N.C. 215 meets the Parkway just south of Devil's Courthouse. Beyond the Parkway, 215 continues down the mountain and on the right about two miles past the intersection is a small camping area and a trail. This is the Art Loeb Trail. This trail leads up to Black Balsam in the Shining Rock Wilderness. By taking this trail, the Parkway is no longer necessary for access.

Once at Shining Rock Wilderness, one can begin hiking towards Shining Rock and Cold Mountain. But, if you continue on the Parkway itself, you will soon reach one of the favorites on the Parkway, the Graveyard Fields.

These are wonderful hikes and offer great outdoor experiences to anyone willing to put forth a little extra effort. Consider possibly skiing on the snow-covered Parkway when a good storm hits or just hike it for the pleasure of the views. But just because it has been closed to vehicles, does not mean it still cannot be enjoyed by the public.