Dark Sky Observing Sites
Overview
Our Vanishing Stars

OUR VANISHING STARS
Increasing light pollution from 1950 to 2025

Artificial night sky brightness at zenith, at sea level, for standard clean atmosphere as fraction of the average natural night sky brightness

- <11%
- 11%-33%
- 33%-100%
- 1-3
- 3-9
- 9-27
- 27-81
- 81-243

Late 1950s
Mid-1970s
1997
2025
Doughton Park

11.5 Miles to US Hwy 21
X Bluffs Lodge

US 21/BRPwy to I-77 25.8 Miles
Doughton Park

- Hwy 421 to I-77 North to Hwy 21 North (off I-77 after Yadkin River at Elkin) to BRPkwy South to MP 241.1 Turn left into the Bluffs Lodge access road, then straight ahead to Lodge or 1st right to the Picnic area
- Can be windy, cold, Most used site
- 2 Bathrooms open while picnic area is unlocked
- Picnic are is closed by gate November- early April
- Campground nearby (in season)
- Occasionally unavailable in winter when snow gates are closed
Doughton Park
Sheet's Gap Overlook MP 252
Sheet's Gap Overlook MP 252

- Hwy 421 West to N.Wilkesboro Hwy 18 West to BRPkwy then South 4.7 miles to MP 252.8
- Can Be cold, No facilities, Always open
- Good Winter site
The Lump Tom Dooley OL MP 264.4
The Lump Tom Dooley OL MP 264.4

- Hwy 421 West to other side of N. Wilkesboro, right on Hwy 16 to BRPkwy, 3.2 Miles to The Lump/Tom Dooley overlook
- Can be Cold/Windy, No facilities
- Glendale Springs Restaurant is nearby (very good)
- Great views, Great meteor site
- To go to the top of The Lump itself, requires a short steep hike
The Lump
US Hwy 52 N to Mt. Airy, West on Hwy 89 Then N on BR Pkwy 3.1 miles to access road
Sheltered site, available only when the Blue Ridge Music Center is not open
Set up in front of gate on access road from Parkway
Good site for everything, but especially photography on windy nights
No facilities
Stone Mountain SP Campground

3.3 Miles to Campground road

4.4 Miles to US Hwy 21

16 miles to I-77
Stone Mountain SP Campground

- US Hwy 421 W, I-77 N, Left on Hwy 21 (at Elkin) 16 miles to left on Traphill Rd 4.4 miles to right on John P. Frank Parkway 3.3 miles to right into campground, There are signs from Hwy 21
- Gate closes at dark
- Can be very damp, bring dew shields/heaters
- Heated bathrooms/showers
- Someone has to bring a cover for septic tank lid
- Good Trout Fishing (easy access) and Hiking
Stone Mountain SP Campground
Mt Rogers/Whitetop Mt from Doughton Park
Groundhog Mt-Pilot Mt Overlooks
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- Hwy 52 N to BRPkwy at Fancy Gap then North 10.8 miles to MP 188.8
- Pilot Mountain OL is just before Groundhog Mountain
- Restrooms at Groundhog Mt, Not open November-early April
- Pilot Mt OL can be OK site for meteors
Rocky Knob NP MP 169.2
Rocky Knob NP MP 169.2

- Hwy 52 N to BRPkwy at Fancy Gap, then North on BRPkwy 30.6 Miles to MP 169.2
- Long Trip
- Campground/Restrooms nearby (In season)
- The Saddle can be very windy, Parking lot at MP 169.2 is better
Whitetop Mt Mt Rogers/Grayson Highlands SP

23.1 Miles to NC Hwy 194, US Hwy 221
In West Jefferson, via Hwy 58, Helton Creek Rd, NC Hwy 194 from VA Hwy 68/US Hwy 58 intersection

1.6 Miles to US Hwy 58

X Parking Lot Whitetop Mt
Whitetop Mt Mt Rogers/Grayson Highlands SP

- Hwy 421 west to US Hwy 221 N (just past BRPkwy) to left on Hwy 194. to Sturgills, NC, then left on Helton Creek Rd, then Left on US Hwy 58, then right on Whitetop Rd, then 1.7 miles to left on Mud Creek Rd (gravel) to level gravel parking lot just short of summit
- One of the best, highest, and darkest sites on the east coast
- Sky to the North is blocked by the mountain
Whitetop Mt Mt Rogers/Grayson Highlands SP

- Can be very, very cold and windy
- Over 5400' elevation
- South side of mountain is cleared
- 1200'-2000' higher than surrounding mountains
- No facilities, very long trip (lots of backroads)
- Stunning views
- Access road can be rough in places but is quite passable (a long climb, though)
Whitetop Mt Mt Rogers/Grayson Highlands SP

- Mt Rogers/Grayson Highlands SP is nearby
- Camping and facilities
- Favorite site for Raleigh Club for camping
- Mt Rogers is the highest mountain in Virginia (Whitetop is slightly lower)
- Appalachian Trail trailhead at Whitetop Rd is also a usable site (parking lot at trailhead surrounded by a large meadow on both sides of road)
Cold Weather Tips
10 degree 25-30 mph wind night
Cold Weather Tips

- Keep your core warm (hips to shoulders)
- Dress in multiple layers
- Get good thermal underwear
- Good loose fitting shoes/boots, don't crowd toes
- Hat and gloves (glove liners/light gloves OK if core remains warm)
- Food and warm drinks help (excess carbs can make you sleepy)
- Insulated ground layer for meteor observations (meteor observations can be one of the coldest situations you might encounter)
- I like some synthetic thermals, but not polypropylene (except glove liners), Silk is