

Arcadia Up and Over Mountain Bike Ride

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Directions:

- Take exit 168 off I-81 and turn right onto Rt. 614 (Arcadia Road) for 3.2 miles
- Turn left onto North Creek (FR 59). Proceed along North Creek just over 2 miles. You'll note North Creek campground (water available).
- There are several parking options, the best perhaps being a pull off just past the campground on the right.

Description:

- **The Up segment:** N37° 32.497, W79° 34.9 - Start riding in the same direction as you arrived (eastward) for 2 miles. This gentle climb turns from rough asphalt to gravel, netting your first 475' vertical. At the end, you'll note a trail to the right, and a trail to the left with a bridge. Kiosks describe this as the Apple Orchard Falls trail (left). The Cornelius Creek trail to the right will provide your return trip. Take the Apple Orchard trail, continuing to rise, over beautiful, sometimes gnarly blue limestone singletrack. The creek contributes to a lovely atmosphere in concert with the Hemlocks and Rhododendron. Just about a country mile up this slow grinder, a bridge leftwards across the stream appears, leading up a short trail to a dirt road dead end with a kiosk. This is the bottom of Parker's Gap, and yes, you'll be going to the top of that particular gap. The Parker's Gap segment rises just over 1000' feet in 2.2 miles. A little ornery at spots, this one terminates in another gravel forest road, FR 812. Take a right on FR 812, traveling 3.3 miles to Thunder Ridge itself, the Blue Ridge Parkway at the Sunset Fields overlook, a cool 3130' higher than the North Creek Campground.
- **The Over segment:** Across the parkway from Sunset Fields overlook is a gated fireroad. Take that until it opens up into the Sunset Field itself. You'll note structure remnants of the Air Force base that once was a fixture on Apple Orchard Mountain. Your exit is at the far right corner of the sometimes thickly grown field, which is due south. It's a wide trail, steep at the outset, but rideable. As it crests, please note a hard right, even though the trail you're on continues. Take the right, or you'll find yourself in a fizzled field with nowhere obvious to go. You'll know you turned correctly as the trail shows definite use, and becomes a fun and fairly gnarly 800' drop down to Overstreet Falls. Now, back up to the ridge. The trail dumps you out at the falls on a dirt road. Go right, upwards, for a 1.2 mile grade that spends a bit of time in the double digit percentages. It's over, thankfully, with a downhill drift to the parkway, then right back to the Sunset Fields overlook. The Back Down segment: From Sunset Fields overlook, take the falls trail, being courteous of day hikers along the way. This one is classic Blue Ridge singletrack of the finest kind: rocks, switchbacks, drops. Not real long, but sweet. It opens up to an open woods road. Take a left on the road, which becomes grassy and fun, rolling about a mile to the Cornelius Creek upper trailhead. You'll know your almost there because you'll be grunting up a nasty little steep granny pitch, uncommon to that section previously, which had been mostly downhill or slightly upward rolling. At the top, you'll note perhaps left and right options. You'll take the right trail, which is open and grassy until the first switchback left shortly thereafter reveals Cornelius Creek's true nature: rocks, loose rocks, and rocks. Steep and nifty at first, you'll heat the brakes until reaching a bottom of sorts. Follow the main trail down the ancient canyon alongside the creek, eventually crossing it several times. The whole run is a bit over 2 miles, but what a 2 miles it is! Upon surviving all that, you're reward is a gravel road downward drift for 2 miles back to the start. Up-N-Over well done. 21 miles, over 4500' of climbing, hazards galore, and both sides of Thunder Ridge slain!

- MAP ON REVERSE -

