

Great North Mountain Cluster

Crawford Mountain Archer Knob Walker Mountain

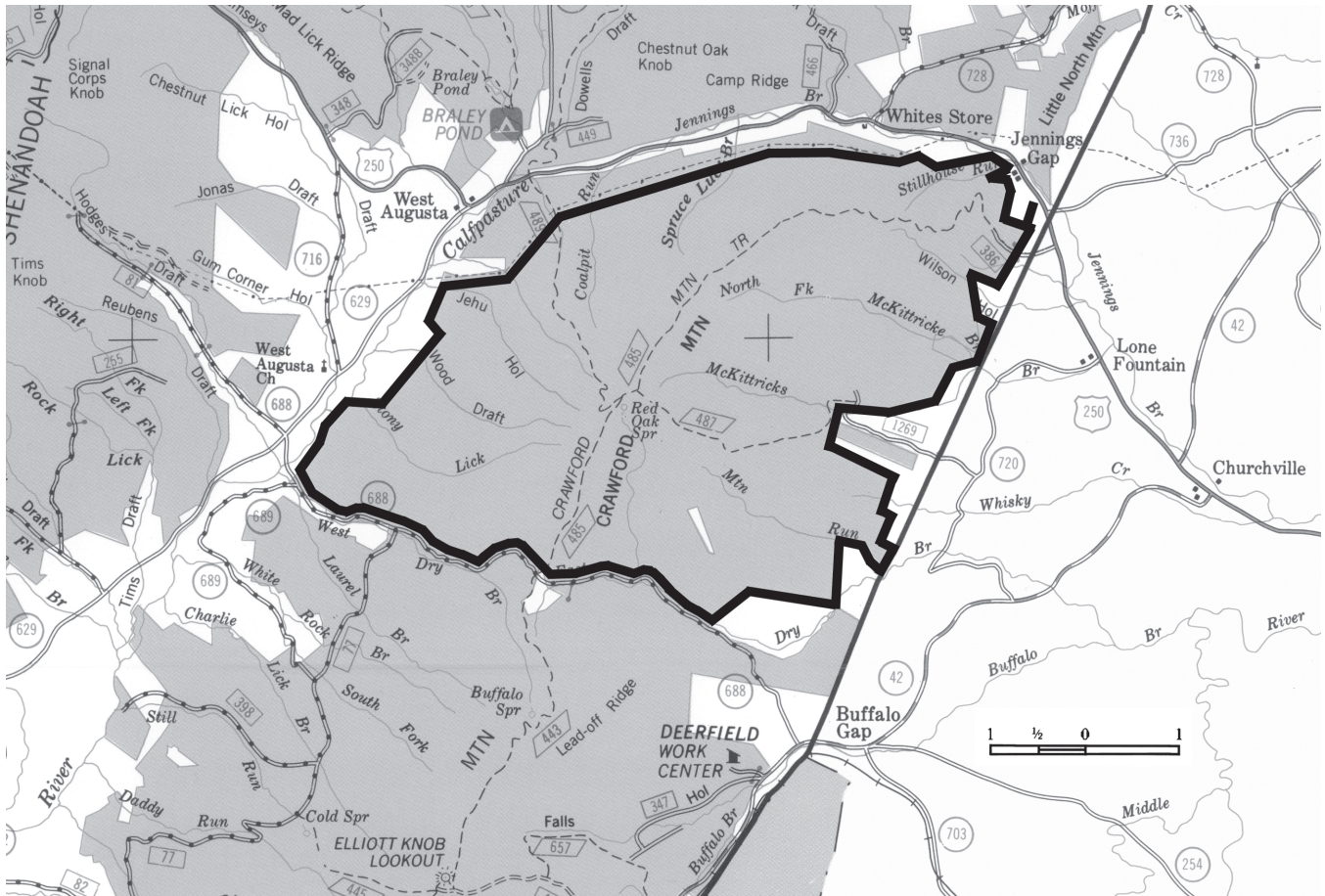
Separated from its sister to the west by the Calpasture River and its Deerfield Valley, the long ridge known as Great North Mountain in Virginia's Augusta County constitutes the southeastern "leg" of greater Shenandoah Mountain. Here are found five Mountain Treasures totaling around 52,000 acres.

Ridges and slopes found here serve as divisions for the Shenandoah and James River watersheds. One of the highest prominences in the Forest, the 4463 feet high Elliott Knob, is situated in the middle of this complex of Treasures.

Elliott Knob Sideling Hill

The popular Great North Mountain Trail traverses the length of Archer Knob, Elliott Knob, and Crawford Mountain. Numerous Special Biological Areas supporting rare species, such as the Virginia Least Trillium, are scattered about the ridges, crags, creeks, and coves. Crawford Mountain is renowned Black Bear habitat.

Unfortunately, ATV trespass and poaching are an ongoing problem within these areas and in their vicinity. Logging regularly occurs, particularly at their lower, richer elevations.



Crawford Mountain

The Crawford Mountain Roadless Area occupies both sides of Crawford Mountain, which is oriented from northeast to southwest. The elevation ranges from approximately 1650 feet to 3728 feet at the summit of Crawford Mountain.

Numerous small hollows and streams create rugged side slopes with deep narrow drainages. One unique characteristic of Crawford Mountain is Red Oak Spring, which has its origin near the summit of the mountain. Due to its high elevation, the stream has created many small rock ledges and waterfalls as it descends the mountain.

Public utilization of Crawford Mountain consists of dispersed recreational activities including hunting,

hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, and equestrian trail riding. This use occurs on a trail system that includes the Crawford Mountain Trail, Chimney Hollow Trail, and Crawford Knob Trail. In all, there are approximately 14.5 miles of trail.

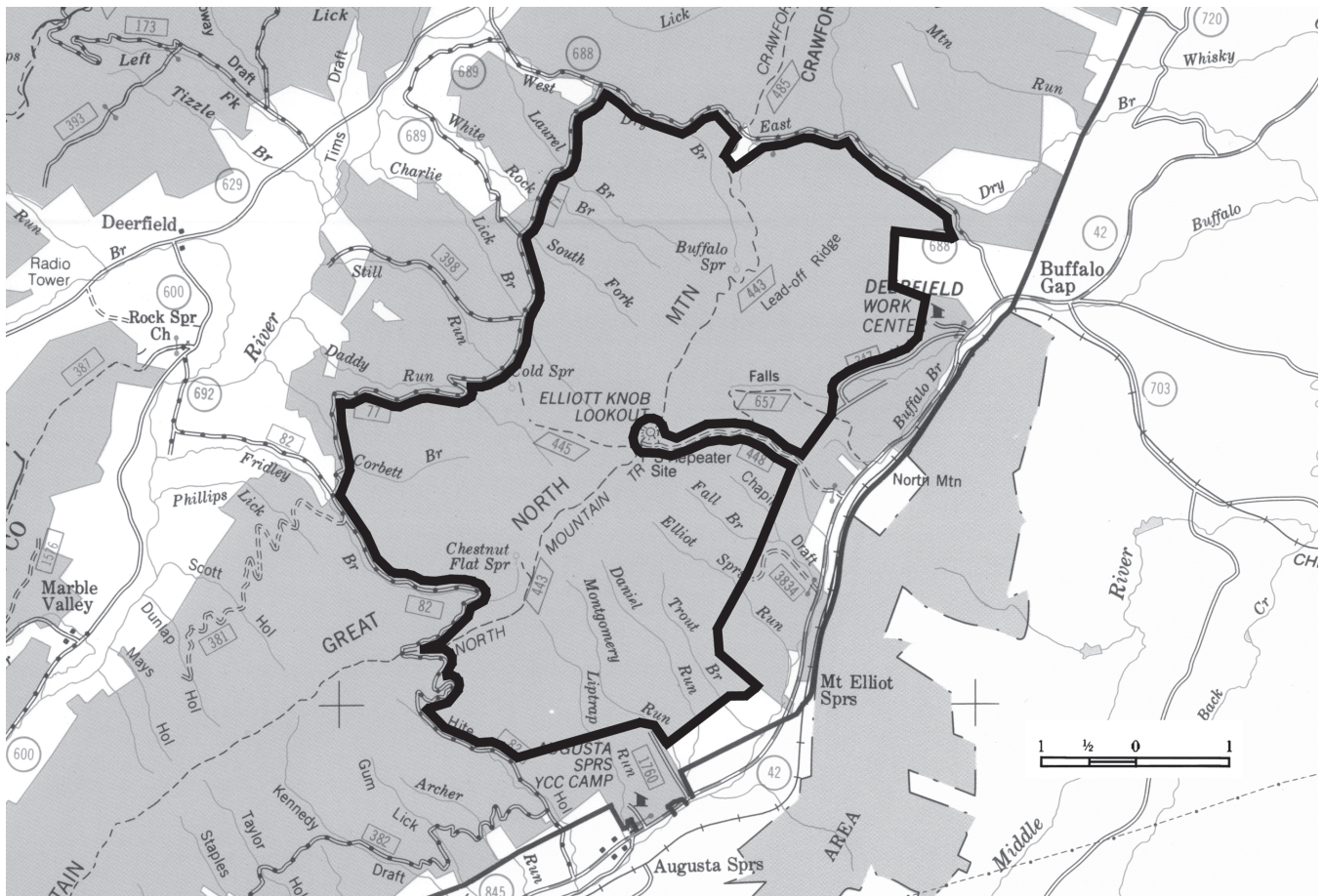
During the Civil War, this area played a brief role in the events leading up to the Battle of McDowell in 1862. Jedediah Hotchkiss rode out on Crawford Mountain to spy on Union forces camped along Jennings Branch.

Crawford Mountain may contain 4276 acres of possible old growth.

Approximate Size: 15,000 acres

Location: Augusta County, Virginia in the North River District

Topos: West Augusta, Stokesville, Churchville, Elliott Knob



Elliott Knob

Elliott Knob is the summit of Great North Mountain, the southeastern leg of Shenandoah Mountain. With an elevation of 4463 feet this behemoth rises high above the surrounding countryside. Lead-off Ridge and Hogback are other high features along the crest of Great North Mountain. Slopes near the ridge line are very steep. In some areas the grade exceeds 80 percent.

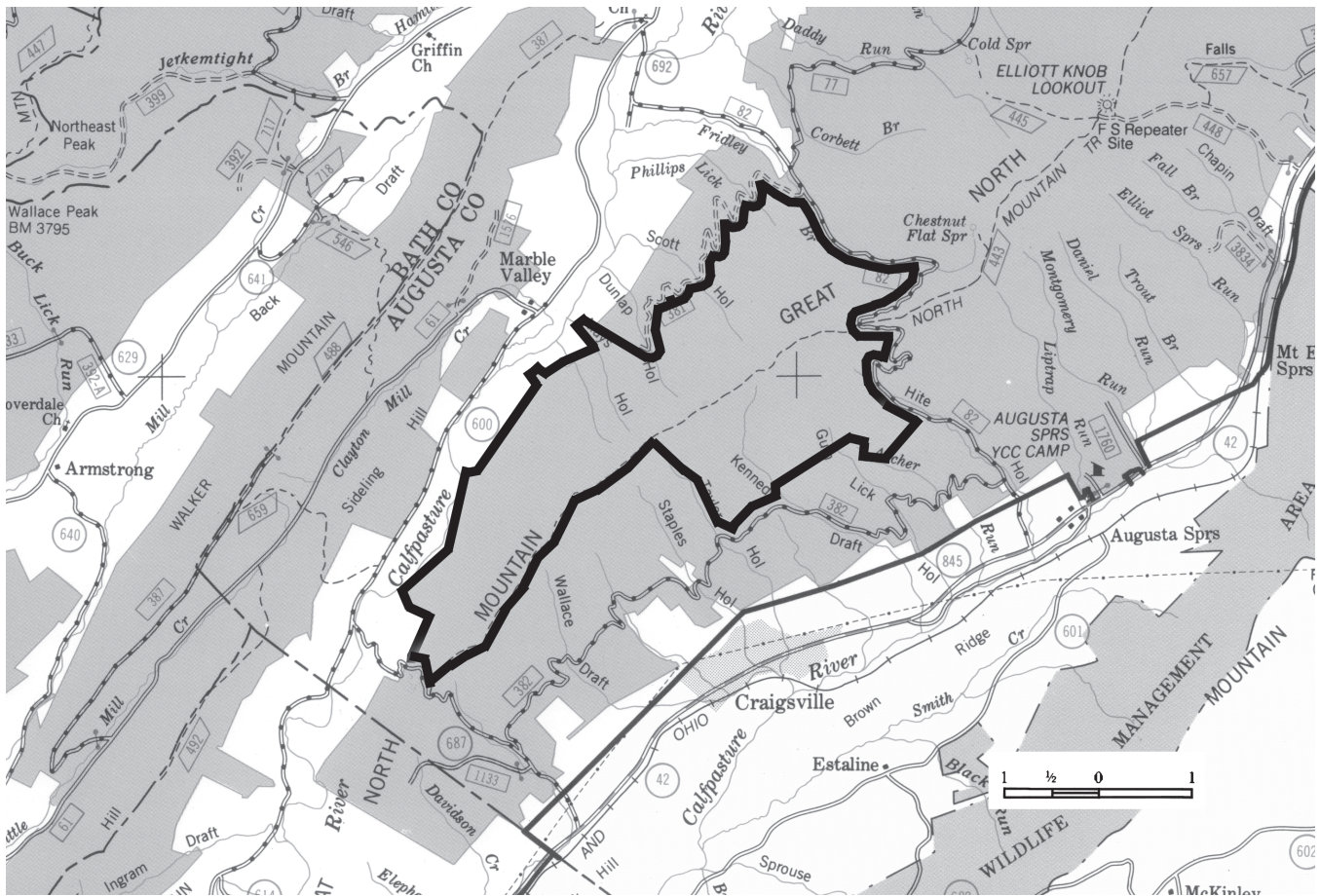
Buffalo Spring and Chestnut Flat Spring are two clear, cool springs that originate high up the ridge. Cold Spring bubbles out of the ground on the western flank of the mountain. These springs, and others like them, feed streams such as Montgomery Run, Fridley

Branch, and West Dry Branch.

The Virginia Division of Natural Heritage has identified several threatened and endangered plants along the ridgeline of Elliott Knob. Another attractive quality of the area is its Black Bear habitat. The dense understory vegetation and species composition makes it a desirable place for Black Bear.

Elliott Knob has a forest plan-designated 962 acre Special Biological Area. This area may contain 4407 acres of possible old growth.

Approximate Size: 16,657 acres
Location: Augusta County, Virginia in the North River District
Topos: Elliott Knob, Augusta Springs



Archer Knob

Archer Knob is the southern portion of Great North Mountain, just south of the Elliott Knob Roadless Area. Not as lofty as its neighbor to the north, elevations here range from 2000 to almost 3300 feet. Steep slopes dissected with numerous drainages characterize the eastern and western flanks.

The area includes Kennedy and Wallace Drafts; Phillips Lick; Archer Run; and Gum Lick, Taylor, Staples, Mays, Dunlap, and Scott Hollows. The Scott Hollow Barrens conservation site lies along the crest of the mountain in the northern part of the area. Several tracts of old growth can be found on the upper slopes of the northern part of the area.

Seven miles of the Great North Mountain Trail pass through the heart of Archer. This trail continues on and through the Elliott Knob and Crawford Mountain Treasures to the north, for a total length of about twenty miles.

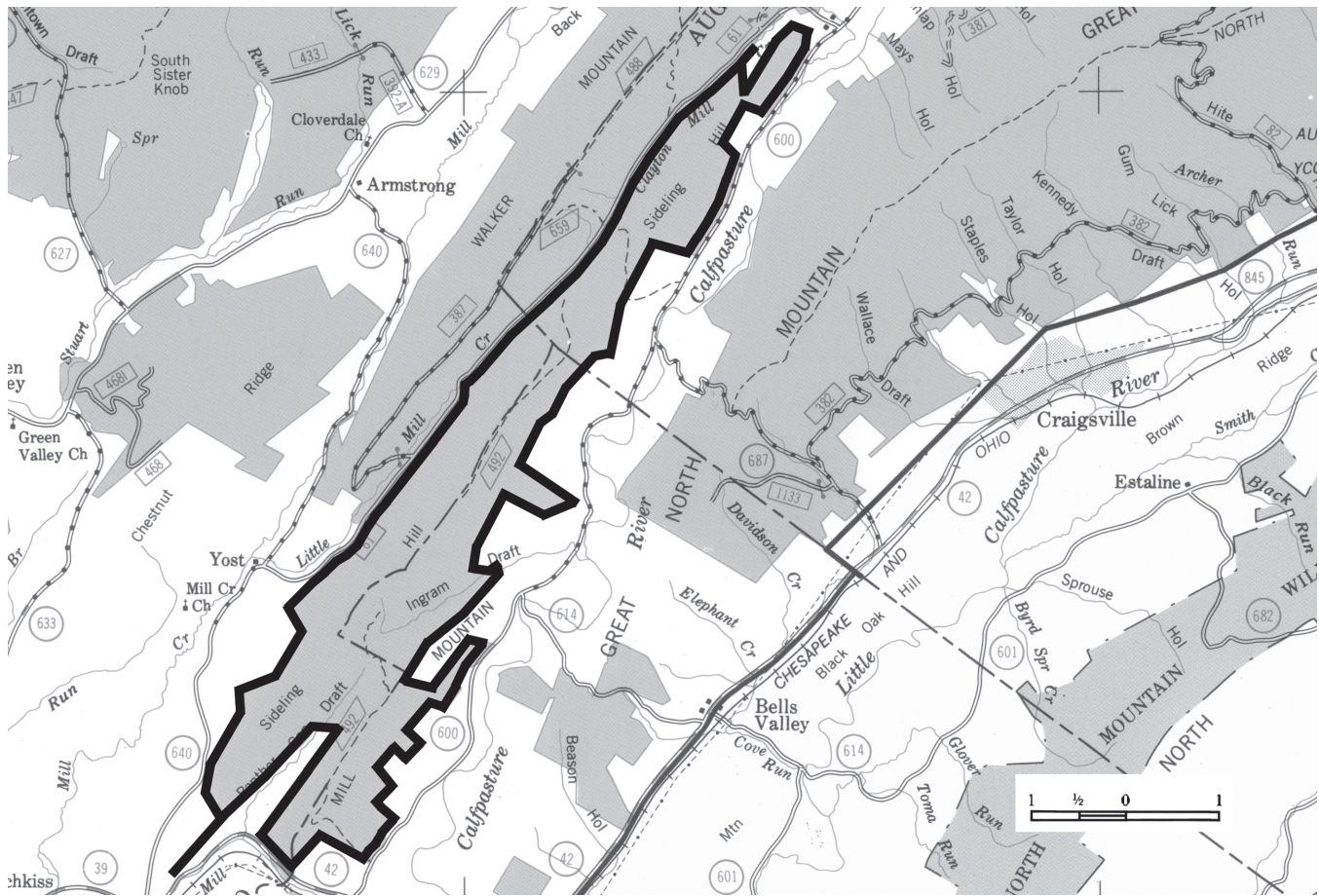
The Forest Service has identified a large area of “semi-primitive” lands here. Nonetheless, much of it is considered suitable for timber harvesting and road construction. The area is also threatened by the construction of ATV motorways.

Archer Knob may contain 1835 acres of potential old growth.

Approximate Size: 7220 acres

Location: Augusta County, Virginia in the North River District

Topos: Craigsville, Deerfield, Elliott Knob, Augusta Springs



Sideling Hill

The eastern sister of Walker Mountain, Sideling Hill is a seven mile long ridge that helps bridge the Shenandoah Mountain and Great North Mountain complexes. The southern end forms the dramatic backdrop for US 39 as it wends its way through Panther Gap. This Treasure includes the parallel ridge of Mill Mountain on its southeast flank, as well as the headwaters of Panther Gap Draft, Ingram Draft, and Clayton Mill Creek.

Striking cliffs figure prominently in the center portion of the area. The Mill Mountain Trail travels

eight miles up Mill Mountain to Ingram Draft before crossing over to run along the crest of Sideling Hill to FDR 61. Midway along this trail, large rock outcroppings offer visitors stunning views of Great and Little North Mountains, the Marble Valley of the Calfpasture River, the hamlet of Goshen, and the Maury River Gap through the mountains to the southeast. The Sam Judd Ramsey Trail traverses the northern part of Sideling Hill.

Sideling Hill may contain 853 acres of possible old growth.

Approximate Size: 7155 acres

Location: Augusta, Bath, and Rockbridge Counties, Virginia in the North River District

Topos: Craigsville, Green Valley



Walker Mountain

The long forested ridge of Walker Mountain serves as a connector between Shenandoah Mountain and Great North Mountain to the east. Here can be found cliffs and crags, coves and creeks, Black Bears, and Timber Rattlers.

FDR 61, paralleling Clayton Mill Creek for much of the way, provides access along the southern boundary of the area. The western slope of Walker Mountain is steep and rugged. Due to the rough nature of this ridge, small pockets of old growth thrive.

Six miles of Trail #488 follow the main ridge crest. The Back Draft Trail crosses the center of the area for three miles, connecting FDRs 61 and 384. The Sam Judd Ramsey Trail in the southern portion connects FDR 387 to FDR 61 and Sideling Hill, the adjacent Mountain Treasure.

Walker Mountain may contain 459 acres of possible old growth.

Approximate Size: 5596 acres

Location: Augusta and Bath Counties, Virginia in the North River District

Topos: Deerfield, Craigsville, Green Valley, Williamsville



Fly fishing in Dry River

Photo by Steve Wise

I've been a fly fisher for more than thirty years. For me it is not just a sport but an opportunity for spiritual renewal, meditation and contemplation. Even when fishing with a friend, at its best, fly-fishing is a solitary activity seeking out native trout on an isolated stream in a wilderness area. The pursuit of the trout is the objective, but it is most fully experienced when enveloped by the quietude and pristine environment of the natural world.

Jim Cushman--Resides in New Market, Virginia
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