
If you’re looking for a guidebook about backpacking in North Carolina that is friendly to beginners, Joe Miller’s *Backpacking North Carolina* is a great resource. Not only is Miller an experienced hiker and backpacker, he is also the author of *100 Classic Hikes in North Carolina* and he maintains an outdoor recreation blog titled GetGoingNC.com. *Backpacking North Carolina* includes a wealth of general information about backpacking and trails, such as planning a trip, essentials to pack, and what organizations maintain the area (which can mean a great deal in regards to the maintenance and care of the trails). This guidebook is well organized and easy to comprehend, containing maps, black and white photos of wilderness areas, a resource list of additional information on hiking and backpacking, and an index.

The guidebook is arranged into two main sections: a short section of preliminary advice and then a longer section on the trips themselves. The first section includes an introduction, advice on how to use the book, a backpack checklist, best trips by category, and additional resources. The trip section of the book is arranged by geographic location and then broken down further into more specific regions, then by trail or park name.

The introduction to the book is a must-read because in it Miller provides useful information about backpacking in North Carolina, weather, planning ahead, hunting, backpacking gear, and the history of backpacking. The purpose of this section is to introduce the beginner to backpacking and also to provide essential reminders for experienced backpackers. As Miller states, “Forget what you may have heard about backpacking, about carrying 40 pounds on your back for 20 miles a day, about developing blisters on top of blisters, about getting caught in a downpour and staying wet for days on end, and about bad camp coffee first thing in the morning. Backpacking isn’t about enduring, it’s about enjoying.” The best trips by category section has an excellent list that breaks trips into categories such as beginner, family, fishing, waterfalls, winter, and—important for some adventurers—escaping other people. This helps readers narrow their focus to particular types of backpacking adventures. In addition, the author gives his advice on subjects such as hiking at night, filtering water, going solo, and surviving the fourteen-hour night.

The bulk of the guidebook is a section titled “The Trips.” It is arranged by geographic area and it includes Blue Ridge Escarpment/North; Blue Ridge Escarpment/South; Great Smoky Mountains; Appalachian Trail; Southern Mountains; Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness; Piedmont; and Coast. Within each geographic area Miller supplies essential information about trails, campsites, and wilderness areas. Miller offers useful commentary about the difficulty rating for each hike, sights and trail markers, and the best time of year to visit the area. Each section includes a map and a one-page summary that has all the vital information needed for that specific backpacking trip, giving the reader a quick reference for all the information they need for a successful trip.

Whether you are a novice or an experienced backpacker, Miller’s book is an essential resource.
Miller has written the book with both native North Carolinians and visitors in mind. I would recommend this book for any public library, or any library that has a collection of North Carolina related books. The guidebook serves not only as a practical guide to backpacking, but also as an inspiration to explore the natural areas of North Carolina.

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