

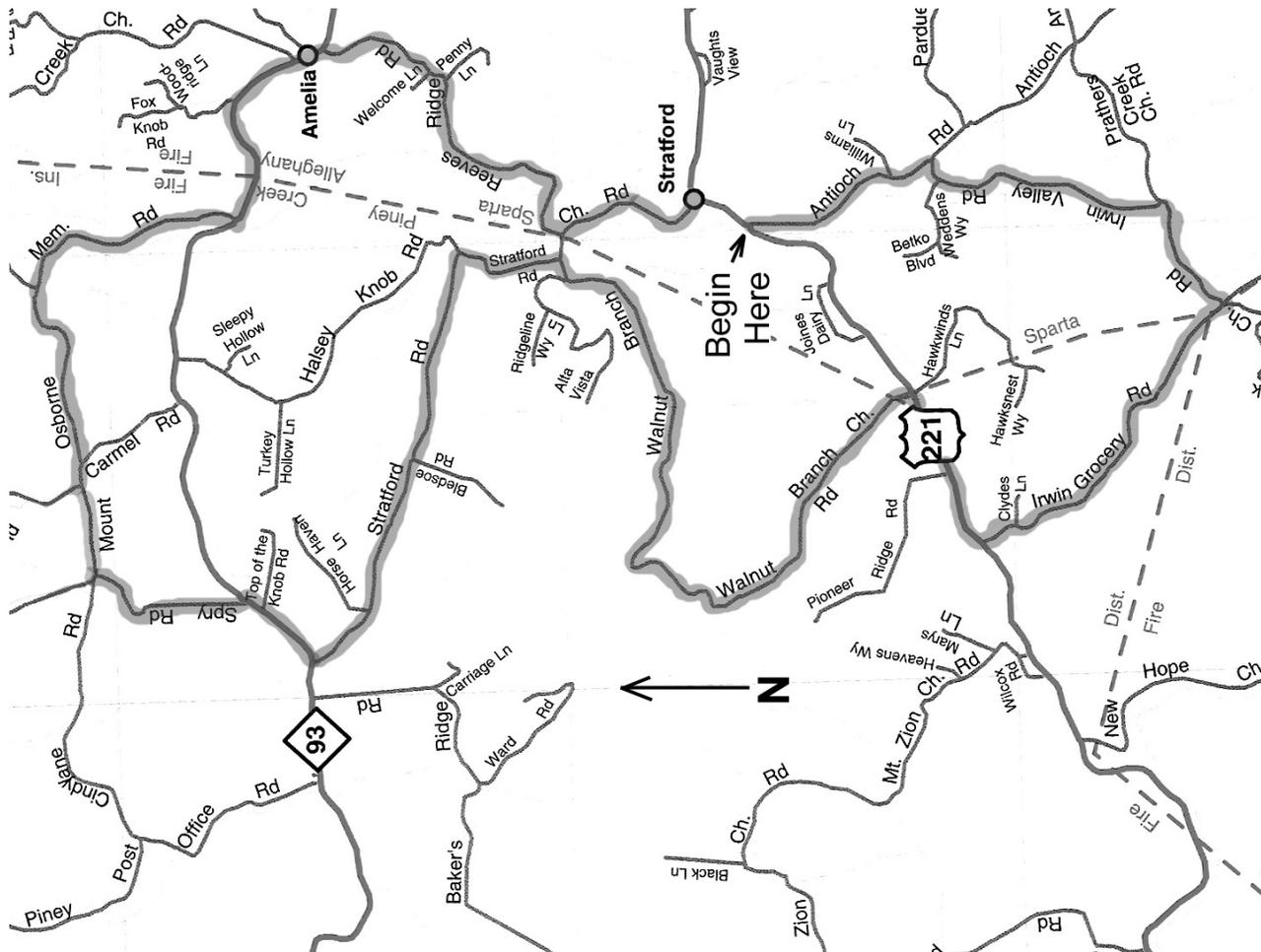
Elk Creek Valley Loop

An 18-mile driving loop through western Alleghany County, suitable for all but extremely large vehicles.

Farm Valleys
Scenic Vistas
Historic landmarks

Note to Motorcyclists & Bicyclists: All roads on this loop are paved

Alleghany County
Chamber of Commerce
58 South Main St.
P.O. Box 1237
Sparta, NC 28675
336/372-5473
800/372-5473



This is a true backroads loop. Roads are well maintained, though some are narrow and unpaved. Extremely large vehicles — motor homes and vehicles pulling trailers — are not recommended. When meeting oncoming vehicles on narrow, one-lane roads, it is courteous to pull as far to the right as practical and let the other vehicle pass. Set your trip odometer to 0.0 at the trip's beginning. The numbers before turns (bold type) and in parenthesis in text are approximate mileage and will help guide you. This 18-mile loop can be completed in a little less than an hour's driving time. Note: there are no stores or rest stops along the loop.

From the US 21/NC 18 intersection in Sparta, take US 21 north. After 3 miles, NC 21 turns right, DON'T TURN, continue straight on what is now US 221.

This area is known as Twin Oaks, owing to two large oaks that have long since been cut. In the early days of the automobile, auto clubs were formed to provide instruction for people wanting to navigate the patchwork of state and local roads to drive cross county. The Lakes to Florida Highway ran from Detroit to Jacksonville and was a major route for snowbirds who wintered in Florida. What is now US 21 was part of that route. In the 1920s, Carl Irwin built a rambling 2-story hotel on the northeast corner and constructed tourist cabins where the Jehovah's Witness Church now stands to accommodate travelers. His grandson built the corner convenience store (336-372-5470).

Continue 3.5 miles and you dip down in a valley as the road takes a long curve to the left. In the 1800s copper was mined in from these hills in what was known as Stratford. In the early 1900s, two stores were a gathering point for the community, the Richardson/Atwood store was located at this U.S. 221/Walnut Branch Church Road intersection and across the street was the Sanders Store which also housed the post office and sold general merchandise.

Continue past the Walnut Branch Church Road intersection and to the next left, Antioch Road.

0.0 Left onto Antioch Road. On your left is the Second Elk Creek Academy, so named because it replaced the first structure destroyed by fire. Built around 1900, it is set off by the octagonal belfry. Built by local carpenter Monroe Estep, it is the same plan used for the Whitehead School, now the Whitehead Community Building. The home on the left (.4) was built by local carpenter Joe T. Finney for the Cox family around 1900. The wrap around porch, curved corners, turned posts and other decorative embellishments reflects the Queen

Anne influence, so popular at that time.

.9 Right onto Irwin Valley Rd. (unpaved). The home on the right (1.2) was built in 1900 and purchased by Carl Irwin (of Twin Oaks fame) around 1920. The smaller building beside the house is one of the tourist cabins that was moved from Twin Oaks. Irwin outlived two wives and died at the age of 100.

2.1 Right on Prathers Creek Church Road. The road follows the creek in the valley of the Peach Bottom Mountains on the left.

2.7 Right on Irwin Grocery Road. The road becomes paved. Across a field to the right (3.6), what's left of the Martin Crouse house can be seen. Built around 1880, the 2-story, two-rooms wide, one-room deep plan is typical of the time with two exceptions. The decorative porch is a later addition. Rather than a central entrance opening into a hall, two front doors open into the two first-story rooms.

4.3 Right on 221. Elk Creek cuts its way along the right side of the highway to help create the wide valley.

5.0 Left onto Walnut Branch Church Road. Built around 1890 for a local minister, the large home on the corner shows some of the Queen Anne flourishes that were beginning to influence builders: shingled gables and bracing in the gables, decorative cornices and the wrap-around porch. Cherry Tree Cottage (336-372-2989), a vacation rental, is on the right (5.7). Pavement ends (5.8). The house on the left (5.9) was built in 1910 and shows more ornamentation of the Queen Anne influence. The gambrel roof barn trimmed in latticework across the road is unusual in design. The road winds through a heavily wooded area. Pavement returns (6.9). Just a few yards ahead, on the left is a small drive up to the Walnut Branch Church. Established in 1914, the simple, single-room sanctuary is finished inside in natural wood and is quite stately in its simplicity. It is well maintained, but not used for regular worship services. The road has left the woods and follows Walnut Creek. In spite of its somewhat modern appearance, the small house on the left was constructed in 1895 (8.6). Note the stained glass in the windows and decorative gables.

8.6 Left onto Stratford Road. Harmony Hill Bed and Breakfast (336-372-6868) on the right (9.2) was constructed around 1895 and reflects much of the Queen Anne embellishments so popular at that time, including the 3-sided bays, window cornices and extensive gingerbread decor. Originally built for Frank Fields, it is said that family members walked the farm and personally selected the trees to be used for the extensive oak

paneling in the downstairs.

You climb a long ridge that affords magnificent views of the fields and hills on both sides of the road.

11.0 Right onto N.C. 93

11.4 Left onto Spry Road. As the road climbs it affords dramatic views for almost 360 degrees.

12.2 Right onto Mt. Carmel Church Road. Enjoy the view as the road follows the ridge. At 16.5 is Kennedy's Store on the left at the Turkey Knob intersection. It closed in 1990s and was one of the last traditional country stores in the county, selling groceries, clothing, shoes, household goods, feed and seed. Osborne Memorial Church (18.8), established in 1943, is on the right. Osborne Cemetery is a little further down the road. You wind around and cross Elk Creek as the road descends into the valley.

The creek played a significant role in local history as it wound its way north to find the New River. During the Civil War a forge along the creek produced shell casings for the Confederate army. The creek was also the site of the first steam-driven sawmill in the late 1800s operated by brothers Zachariah and Franklin Osborne. They also operated a water-powered grist mill that served residents from North Carolina and Virginia.

13.4 Left onto N.C. 93 Joe T. Finney constructed the large 2-story house on the left in 1903 (13.9). It was quite modern in its time and featured running water, indoor bathroom, a telephone and electricity that was generated on the property. The ornate, rambling style reflects Victorian/Queen Anne influences.

Compare the previous house with the later 1 1/2 story home on the right (14.0), also constructed by Finney for his own family in 1926. The wide clipped gable front and accentuated gable returns add to the striking appearance of this bungalow design that was popular in the county 1920s and 30s. Elk Creek Primitive Baptist Church (14.2) on the left was founded in 1839. One of the oldest continually operating churches in the county, the present sanctuary was constructed in 1954.

The Amelia Post Office was located in the J.C. Fields Store across from the church. From 1888-1944 this general store sold hats, dry good and groceries.

14.3 Right on Reeves Ridge Road. Chateau Laurinda Winery (336-372-2562) is on the right (14.9). Stay right as the pavement ends. Wind through woods and fields. In a mile Elk Creek appears on the right.

16.2 Left on Walnut Branch Church Rd. Follow it to U.S. 221 to complete the loop. Turn left to return to Sparta.