

Falls Lake Dam and Visitor Assistance Center

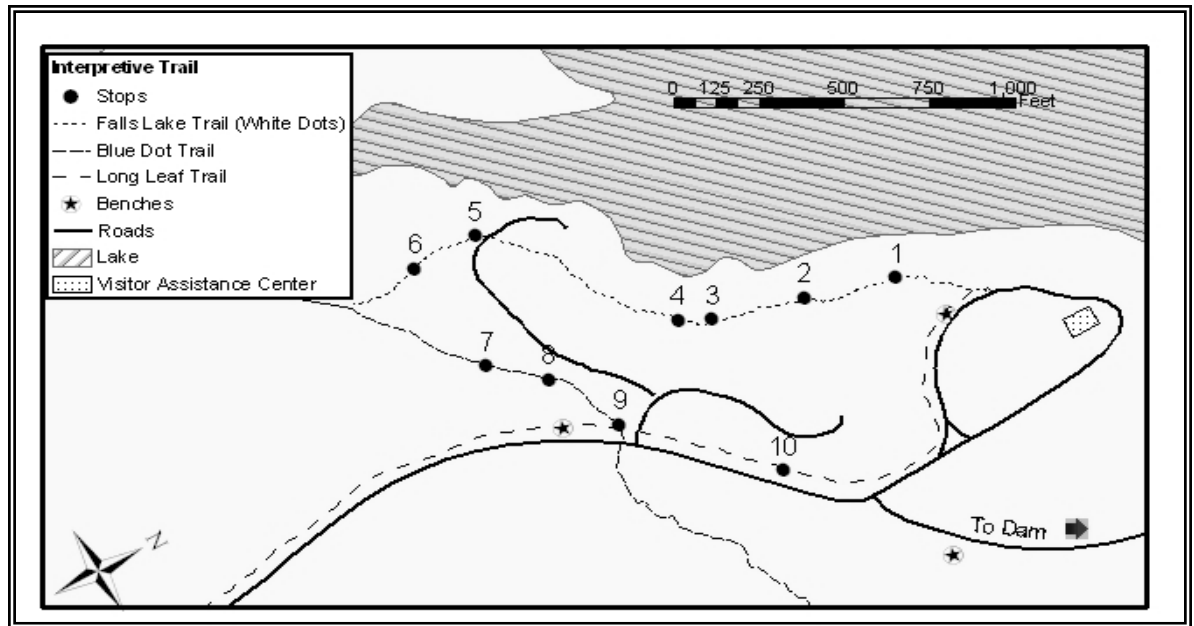
Self-Guided Nature Trail



Join us for a short walk in the woods.

Learn some fascinating natural and historical facts about Falls Lake!

Trail is ~ 3/4 of a mile,
a 45 minute walk.



Begin at the Big Bridge behind the Visitor Center...

Follow the White Dots on the Trees...

Stop 1—Hollyday at the Beech...With its prickly, shiny green leaves and red berries in winter, the holly tree is a forest favorite. George Washington loved the tree so much that he planted 13 of them around his Virginia home. Those 200 year old trees are still alive today!

The American Beech tree has smooth gray bark and keeps its dried leaves over the winter. It was on a beech tree that Daniel Boone carved “D. Boone Cilled a Bar On Tree In Year 1760” (Don’t be like Daniel Boone. Carving any tree’s bark can let disease in and possibly kill the tree!)

Stop 2—Well, What Have We Here? People used to live and work on lands that are now part of Falls Lake. Those landowners had to be relocated and all of their homes and property were torn down. This is a well site from an old homestead that’s been filled with rocks and dirt for safety. See the ferns growing in the damp soil?

Stop 3—Rock and Roll...This old road and the rocks you’ve seen along the trail are from a quarry that was here. Stones were hand cut from the earth and hauled away by a system of pulleys and cables. Do you see the stone and cable ahead and off to the right of the trail?



Stop 4—Rock On...more rocks from the quarry site and natural stones still in the earth. It may be a great place for a picnic or to explore, but be careful on the rocks so you don't slip. You may see some of our native insects, spiders, or snakes too! Just leave them be—they were here first!

Stop 5—Going Batty... This is a bat box, a safe place for bats to rest or hibernate. Historically, bats would nest underneath bark on a tree. However, in recent years habitat loss from urbanization and other factors have greatly reduced the abundance of useful trees, and therefore reduced the availability of nesting spots.



Why does it matter? Many reasons, but a single bat can eat thousand of insects in one night. Their favorite snake? Mosquitoes!

Stop 6— Wildfire?? The land on your right has been managed using prescribed burns to reduce the smaller plants and trees that grow close the forest floor. Why? Compare the forest on either side of the trail, one has been burned, one has not. Different animals prefer each side. Wild turkey like the open forest floor where they can scratch for insects to eat. Deer prefer a shrubby forest floor to hide and rest in.

Turn LEFT at the post and follow the Blue Dots on the trees...

Stop 7—If a tree falls in the woods... A tree can be beneficial to the forest even after it dies and falls over. This oak was pushed over by a hurricane in the 1990's and it now provides small animals and insects a home on the forest floor. See the large 'taproot' in the middle? That was the tree's main way to get water and nutrients from the soil when it was young. Once the tree grew up enough to develop other roots, this taproot dies off.



Stop 8—Why here? Look around you. Do you see three different habitats? The forest you came out of is thick and hasn't been burned in years—it would be very hard to walk through without the trail.

The forest you're in now is a mix of pine trees (loblolly) and hardwood (oaks, hickories). See the sandy/rocky soil? This type of soil and regular prescribed burns have kept the smaller trees and brush sparse. If you look ahead, you'll see a very brushy area we're headed for.

Stop 9— You're standing in a longleaf pine forest. They're the trees with loooong needles around you. Longleaf pines are native to NC, but you may have never seen one before. Most were cut by early Americans to be used for tar and pitch to make ships watertight. This and changes in habitat have caused them to die off.



Here at Falls Lake we are trying to restore some longleaf pine forests. Our forester and park rangers planted the longleaf pines you see here after Hurricane Fran toppled over down many trees .

Turn LEFT onto the Paved Trail...

Stop 10—This plant has holes in it! This is a wax myrtle, named for its waxy berries that ripen in late summer. If boiled, the wax from the berries can be used to make candles. See the holes on the tree? That's from a kind of woodpecker called a yellow-bellied sapsucker. This bird uses its long, pointed bill to drill holes around the tree to find sap.

Thanks for walking with us! If you follow the paved trail it will bring you back to the big bridge and Visitor Center where you began.

