

A trail across N.C.

From Clingman's Dome to Jockey's Ridge



LAUREN CARROLL/JOURNAL

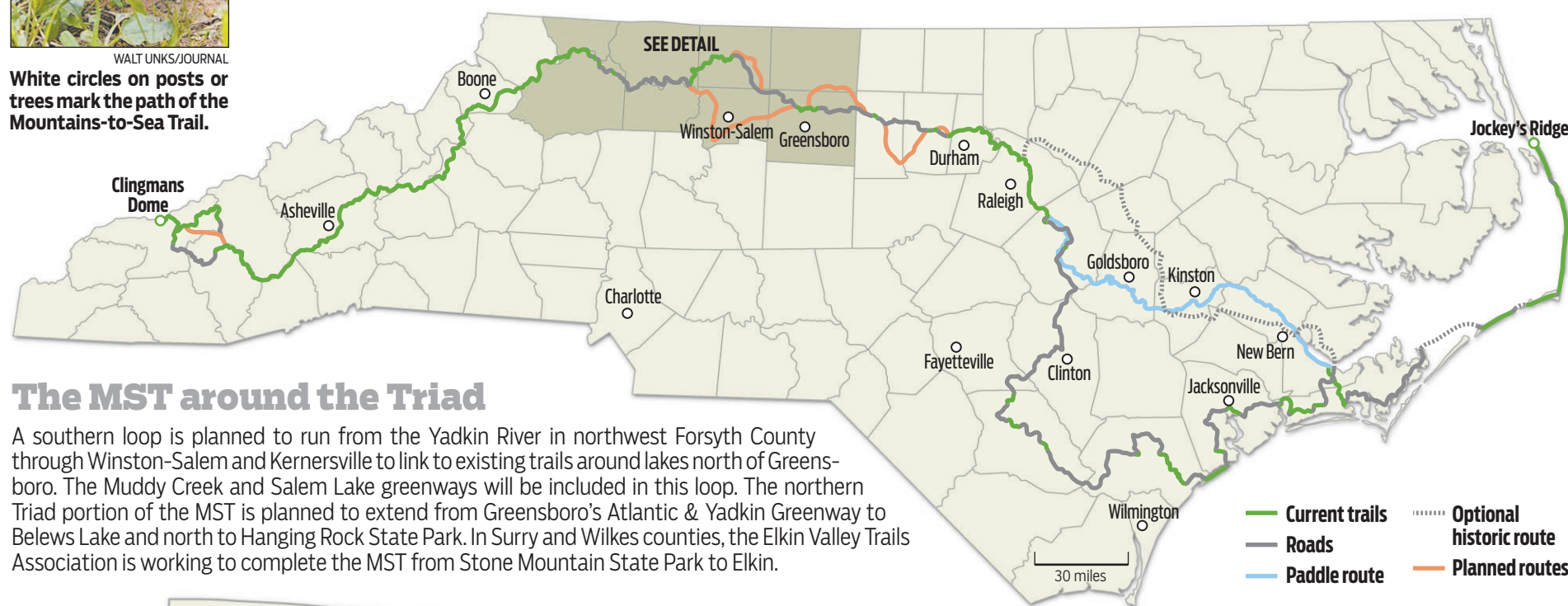
The Mountains-to-Sea Trail connects Pilot Mountain State Park (foreground) with Hanging Rock State Park (background).

The idea for a statewide trail — today's Mountains-to-Sea Trail — was first proposed in 1977 as a way to showcase and connect the state's natural features. Most early segments of the trail were constructed in the mountains because of the availability of public land. More than 600 miles of trail on the planned 1,000-mile route have been completed. Where there are not yet trails, roads are used, or you can take the Neuse River "paddle route." The MST became part of the state park system in 2000.



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White circles on posts or trees mark the path of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.



The MST around the Triad

A southern loop is planned to run from the Yadkin River in northwest Forsyth County through Winston-Salem and Kernersville to link to existing trails around lakes north of Greensboro. The Muddy Creek and Salem Lake greenways will be included in this loop. The northern Triad portion of the MST is planned to extend from Greensboro's Atlantic & Yadkin Greenway to Belews Lake and north to Hanging Rock State Park. In Surry and Wilkes counties, the Elkin Valley Trails Association is working to complete the MST from Stone Mountain State Park to Elkin.



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ABOVE: A swing bridge crosses a small creek on the Sauratown Trail portion of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

RIGHT: MST hikers will pass Hidden Falls in Hanging Rock State Park.

FAR RIGHT: The route of the MST goes through Stone Mountain State Park.



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About the MST

WHO'S BUILDING THE TRAIL? Existing trails have been constructed by the state, local governments, nonprofits, volunteers and private landowners. The state has bought some tracts of land, but there is no overall budget for the project or a target completion date. A Master Plan was produced this year, which details planned routes and priorities.

HIGHEST ELEVATION: 6,684 feet on Mount Mitchell

LOWEST ELEVATION: Sea level at Cape Hatteras National Seashore

FIRST SEGMENT: The first section, 75.8 miles of trail along the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, was designated in 1982.

Online
Go to ncmountainstosea.org to see a detailed Master Plan for the MST.

In the next few months, ncparks.gov will add interactive GIS mapping of the trail, including planned routes.

LATEST SEGMENT: The 1.8-mile Riverwalk along the Eno River in Hillsborough is the most recent designated section.

FIRST THRU-HIKE: 1997

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE COMPLETED THE MST: In June, Lorie Hansen, a 63-year-old first-time long-distance hiker, became the 50th documented person to walk, paddle or bike the entire trail.

NUMBER OF STEPS TO COMPLETE THE MST: About 2.1 million

TIME TO COMPLETE THE MST: This will vary by hiker, but a good estimate is two to three months. The fastest completion was by Diane Van Deren, an endurance runner, in 22 days, 5 hours and 3 minutes.

NUMBER OF STATE PARKS IT CONNECTS: Seven

SAURATOWN TRAIL: The MST follows the Sauratown Trail between Pilot Mountain and Hanging Rock state parks. A portion of this trail has been permanently closed, but a 2.6-mile road detour is available; the curvy road is not suitable for equestrian traffic. The Sauratown Trails Association is working to establish a new trail route.