

LINVILLE, N.C. — The first week of June is a remarkably colorful time at Grandfather Mountain.

The Appalachian Mountains are in the spotlight when it comes to the rhododendron, because this particular bloom tends to flourish at higher elevations and cooler temperatures. Few plants signify summer in the mountains quite like the vivid pink Catawba rhododendron.

“Rhododendron season is just starting, which means summer is almost here,” said Lauren Farrell, interpretation and education programs coordinator for the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, the nonprofit organization that oversees and operates the Linville nature park. “The rhododendron’s colors are most extraordinary in the mountains, so the guests who visit during this time are sure in for a treat.”

To showcase the beauty and significance of this native plant, Grandfather Mountain naturalists will host the Remarkable Rhododendron Ramble from June 1-8.

This series of short, guided strolls, each held at 1 p.m. daily June 1-7, allows visitors to observe the blooms and learn from naturalists about their history, characteristics and roles they play in the mountain’s ecological communities. The programs are free with regular park admission.

The Rhododendron Ramble will culminate on Saturday, June 8, with a full day of activities and multiple hikes. From 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., there will be interpretive tables, a special kids’ craft activity station, a photo booth and naturalists’ talks. All of these events will be taking place periodically throughout the day, so guests will have the chance to participate in all of the activities no matter their arrival time.

On the Rhodo

“Four species of rhododendron grow wild on Grandfather Mountain, and three of them could be in bloom for this year’s Rhododendron Ramble,” Amy Renfranz, director of education for the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, said.

Flame azaleas (*R. calendulaceum*) range from yellow to orange, peach or red in color and can be seen at the mountain’s main entrance gate and at Split Rock in late May through July.

Catawba rhododendron (*R. catawbiense*) is in bloom from early to mid-June, depending on elevation. Probably the best-known of the rhododendron, their deep purple blooms will frame most of the trails in natural splendor.

Rosebay rhododendron (*R. maximum*), with its very light pink flowers, is the last to bloom in late June and may be in its early stages during the Rhododendron Ramble.

Many rhododendrons are already blooming at lower elevations in the High Country, but the wide range of elevation available on Grandfather Mountain — a nearly 1,000-foot change from base to peak — provides viewers with a longer window of opportunity to see the rhododendron in bloom.

And now, Grandfather Mountain is operating under its extended summer hours from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily. (with ticket sales ending at 6 p.m.).

The nonprofit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation strives to inspire conservation of the

natural world by helping guests explore, understand and value the wonders of Grandfather Mountain. For more information, call 800-468-7325, or visit www.grandfather.com to plan a trip.

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