

Day Hikes and Overnight/Multi-Day Treks Recommended By NCAC High Adventure Committee Members

Introduction: The tables below present a list of some of the favorite hikes submitted by members of the NCAC High Adventure Committee. Please feel free to use this list as a resource to identify day hikes and overnight backpacking treks, all of which will be good for preparing for Philmont.

A few helpful points when using this list:

- It is non-exhaustive. We are fortunate to have endless hiking possibilities in this region and this list is just a sample of what is available.
- These hikes have been 'trail-tested' by members of the HAC
- Conditions, regulations, and even trail routes and accessibility change. This list was constructed in the fall of 2018, **and updated in the fall of 2020**. Do some research before hitting the trail to be sure the information below is still accurate.
- Most of the hikes have a difficulty rating. These are admittedly qualitative and your experience will depend on the conditions at the time and your level of conditioning.
- You will see that the hikes below are not Appalachian Trail treks, though some may cross the trail or be on it for limited mileage. This was intentional for two reasons. First, there is voluminous information available about the myriad of AT options. Second, during spring and summer this region of the AT has a lot of through-hikers and we do not want to contribute to clogging up shelter space that they need. Day hikes on the AT are not problematic, so long as you follow local regulations.
- There are specific regulations that apply to hiking and camping in Shenandoah National Park (SNP), Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. These regulations cover things such as the maximum allowable size for a hiking party, where you are allowed to camp overnight, whether permits are allowed, etc. Be aware of the regulations before you hit the trail, and follow them! The fines can be costly, and more importantly, as Scouts and Scouters we want to uphold the highest outdoors ethics.
- The tables are divided between day hikes and overnight/multi-day treks. There is some overlap between the two. At the end of the document is a table with miscellaneous resources that may be useful.
- Feel free to submit your favorite hikes/treks based on your experience to highadventure@ncacbsa.org. This can be a 'living document' that grows as we try out new trails and combinations of trails.

Day Hikes – Maryland, Virginia and DC

Maryland Day Hikes (listed from south to north)			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Cabin John Trail	9 miles	PATC D	MacArthur Blvd to Goya Dr. Easy good beginning hike for crews – flat
C&O Canal at Carderock/Billy Goat Great Falls (Maryland Side)	7-10 miles	NPS on-line Great Falls Map	A good early training hike. Mostly flat but the Billy Goat Trail Challenges. Park at Carderock off Clara Barton Parkway. Hike NW on C&O Canal and get on Billy Goat B trail. Rejoin Canal and approximately .6 miles further get on Billy Goat A Trail. At end of Billy Goat A either hike back on C&O Canal or cross stop gate, ascend Overlook Trail to Gold Mine Trail to Angler's Spur, which takes you back to footbridge to cross back over canal at Old Angler's Inn. Hike remaining distance back to Carderock Parking. Hike can be made shorter or longer depending on what you add or cut off. Billy Goat A may be closed following heavy rains so prepare to adjust. Can also make a side trip to Olmstead Island to view the falls.
Sugarloaf Mountain – Maryland	9.3 miles Variable	Sugarloaf Mountain Map	Good moderate hike. Sugarloaf Mountain, like Massanutten Mountain further west, is a solitary mountain in the middle of farmland between the Piedmont Plateau and the Blue Ridge Mountains. The park is privately owned by the Stronghold Corporation but open to the public. Note- roads to upper parking areas may close in winter depending on weather conditions. Hike is still possible but will add an extra mile and elevation gain.
Catoctin Mountain Loop (Catoctin Mountain Park)	7-10 miles	PATC 5,6	Note: We use this as an advisor hike, so a good strenuous test. Moderate hike with many nice vistas. A good crew day hike with nice lunch spots. Can add to the miles by ascending toward Cat Rock and Bob's Hill, and taking the Old Misery Trail on the way back down. Be aware, if you take the Misery Trail in order to get back to your start point the final half mile is along a road.

Virginia Day Hikes in Shenandoah National Park (listed from south to north)			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
White Oak Canyon/Cedar Run	9.7 miles	PATC 10	Very strenuous. Start at base of White Oak Canyon, ascend trail and descend Cedar Run Trail. More than 3000 total elevation gain/loss. Beautiful terrain, many waterfalls, swimming holes
Old Rag Mountain	9.0 miles	PATC 10	An iconic SNP hike. Strenuous and challenging hike with >2400 feet total elevation change. If you have never climbed "Old Raggedy Top", now's the time. This hike provides views in all directions, including a noble panorama of the mountains of the Shenandoah National Park. Be forewarned – it is very busy on weekends and in the spring and fall and there may literally be long lines. Best to do on a weekday, or get a very early start.
Robertson Mountain	11.3 miles	PATC 10	Very strenuous. Follows a trout stream to an original mountaineer's cabin and summits one of the least-climbed peaks in SNP. 2884 total elevation gain/loss. Climb Robertson mountain from the east for an even greater challenge
Thorofare Mountain	9.5 miles	PATC 10	This trail offers a waterfall, old farm roads that once connected the families in this area, two great swimming holes, and a restored mountaineer's cabin. Total elevation change – 2559 feet. A good strenuous hike.
Hazel Mountain	10.25 miles	PATC 10	This hike takes you into one of the most remote areas of the Shenandoah National Park and is recommended for crews who have good map and compass skills. It offers a waterfall, a swimming hole and a cave. Total elevation change – 2365 feet. The Hazel Country region is also a good backcountry area for overnight trips
Jeremy's Run	10 miles	PATC 9	Moderately strenuous. Jeremy's Run is one of the most scenic streams in the Northern District of the Shenandoah National Park. The trail is beautifully forested and the run itself is a continual series of cascades and pools.
Thornton Hollow	10.6 miles	PATC 9	This moderately strenuous hike gives the backpacker a taste of the Appalachian Trail. It descends over Piney Ridge and climbs back up along the beautiful North Fork of the Thornton River.
Piney Ridge/Piney Branch	9.4 miles	PATC 9	Walk along a ridge where homes and farmlands once stood and see a spectacular view of a three tier waterfall. Offers two waterfalls and a deep swimming hole. Total elevation change – 1650 feet

Virginia Day Hikes in Shenandoah National Park (listed from south to north)			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Overall Run Loop	9.5 miles	PATC 9	Very strenuous hike – total elevation change – 2490 feet. This hike follows trails that were farm roads in pre-park days and gives access to the Overall Run Falls. At 93 feet, it is the highest waterfall in the Shenandoah National Park. Also an area for overnight treks (see multi-day section)
Sugarloaf Trail	9.3 miles	PATC 9	Moderate, with 1875 total elevation change. This trail uses both the Appalachian Trail and horse and foot trails that were farm roads in the pre-park days. It also offers two excellent viewing areas from the tops of Sugarloaf and Hogback Mountains.
Little Devil's Staircase	10.2 miles	PATC 9	Little Devil's Stairs Trail winds around and between the rocks in a canyon, crossing and recrossing Keyser Run many times. Be sure to stop and visit a graveyard dating back to the early 1800s. Total elevation change – 2490 feet
Big Devil's Staircase	10.5 miles	PATC 9	Moderate Elevation change: 1300 feet Length: 10.5 miles Driving Distance (one way): 12.2 miles PATC Map: 9 This hike slabs around the eastern and southern slopes of Mount Marshall and provides a side trek to the east rim of Big Devil's Stairs offering spectacular views of Big Devil's Stairs canyon and the mountains beyond.

George Washington National Forest			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Massanutten Mountain	9.1 miles	PATC G	Elevation change – 2237 feet. From the top of the ridge, there will be opportunities for superb views both east towards the mountains of the Shenandoah National Park and west into the Shenandoah Valley.
Signal Knob	10.6 miles	PATC G	Moderate hike with 2770 feet total elevation change. Signal Knob was used by Confederate forces during Civil War to monitor movements of Federal troops. Excellent views of the Shenandoah Valley.

HAC 'Endorsed' Day Hikes and Overnight/Multi-Day Training Treks

Northern Virginia Hikes			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Bull Run Occoquan Trail (BROT)	20 miles (variable)	NoVA Parks Map	Moderate hike with elevation changes and stream crossings; trail is well blazed with some signage. NoVA Parks map lacks detail; recommend All Trails or other map source. Recommend starting at Rt. 28 parking lot for point-to-point ~18-mile hike south to Occoquan Regional Park. (Rt. 28 starting point avoids "boots off" crossing of Cub Run in Bull Run Regional Park.)
Fairfax Cross County Trail (CCT)	40 miles (variable)	FFX County website	Easy hike with multiple entrances and exits for a custom length point-to-point hike. Recommend the 15.5 mile section from Georgetown Pike parking area to Oak Marr Recenter for its natural surface and scenery. Ten section maps available via website, but highly recommend the Trail Buddy app on your smartphone for sections where signage is missing or ambiguous.
Mount Vernon Trail	18 miles (variable)	NPS online	Easy hike with asphalt surface, and bathrooms and water available at Fort Hunt Park and Belle Haven Marina. Stay on right side of trail to avoid omnipresent cyclists. Recommend hiking south from Mount Vernon Mansion parking lot, and finishing in Old Town for lunch and/or ice cream (10 miles).
Potomac Heritage Trail (Turkey Run Park to Theodore Roosevelt Island)	10 miles (variable)	NPS online	Moderately strenuous. On southwest bank of Potomac River accessed from parking lots on GW Parkway. If you have enough adults, split crew into two groups and swap keys when you meet halfway. Length and difficulty can be adjusted by start and finish points - easiest ending at Theodore Roosevelt Island parking and toughest ending at Turkey Run for 10 mile hikes; hike can be shortened by starting/ending at Fort Marcy. Some options involve some rock scrambles. Depending on the section, when the Potomac River runs high some sections may be blocked.
Sky Meadow State Park	6.0 miles	Park Trail Guide	Sky Meadow Equestrian trail (opposite side of the highway from the main park). A six mile figure-8 loop with about 1,000 feet of altitude change. Great first shakeout if you have 2 crews as they can go opposite ways around the "8" and crossover a few times
Great Falls National Park (Virginia Side)	15 miles (variable)	NPS online Great Falls Map	Multiple trails on natural surface of varying lengths, including loop hikes. Has steep trails at south end that can be accessed from parking lot at Difficult Run on Georgetown Pike.

DC Day Hikes			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Rock Creek Park	10 miles (variable)	NPS online	Rock Creek Park offers multiple opportunities for loop hikes with moderate elevation changes. Individual trails are blazed by color, with some signage at major intersections. For a 10-mile loop hike, begin at Pierce Mill, cross Rock Creek and head north via Valley Trail, and return south via Western Ridge Trail. Multiple books (see Misc Resources below) describe this and other hikes in the park in detail.

Overnight/Multi-Day Treks – Maryland, West Virginia and Virginia

Maryland Overnight/Multi-Day			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Catoctin Trail (Day hike to multi-day hikes)	29 miles	PATC 5,6	Excellent 3 day hike. Do entire trail or choose sections. Intermediate to strenuous. Hamburg Road to Zion Rd or Hamburg Rd to RT 77, Cat Rock Trail. Camp in The Manor Area Cunningham St Park camp grounds 1 - 8.
Green Ridge State Forest			A good test of a crew's ability to do a dry camp(s) and follow a non-existent map. Green Ridge State Forest in Maryland off I-68 has a maze of dirt roads between the Interstate and the C&O Canal. We wandered in with a dog eared map that the Visitor Center gave us, camped that night, and got down to the Canal and turned north thru the Paw-Paw to meet the Troop on the other side. Option 2 is to turn south to the Little Orleans Campground. Distance and hill climbing was not what we were after, but the ability to camp in lousy conditions and find their way with no marked trails. As we were there the summer of the 2002 fires, most trails were closed or confused where bulldozers went through
Savage River State Forest			Great backpacking options in the state forest – but it is a long drive for many groups in the NCAC region. Also a state forest so hunting is permitted at certain times of year. Check out: http://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/savageguide.aspx

West Virginia Overnight/Multi-Day			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Monongahela National Forest			Beautiful area great for multi-day backpacking trips. A lengthy drive but worth it for a multi-day trip. Six backcountry wilderness areas are within the forest. Too many good hikes to list, but consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dolly Sods region - Spruce Knob hikes (Spruce Knob elevation – 4863 feet) - North Fork Mountain Trail

Virginia Overnight/Multi-Day - George Washington National Forest			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Wild Oak National Recreation Trail (3 day/2 night)			A strenuous three day trek in VA. Last water is at noon on day 2 so need to start with 7 liters after lunch on day 2 to have 3-4 left top of Hankey Mountain for dinner and day 3. This is a stout test only recommended for very well-prepared crews
Ramsey's Draft (2 day/1 night)	21-22 miles		Do it clockwise or counterclockwise on the outer loops of the hikes as described on mid-Atlantic Hikes; not going up the Draft. This is a strenuous 21-22 mile loop. Harder going counterclockwise; 11.3 miles on day 1. Great campsite, but can be very crowded. Need to be on trail no later than 0900 to make camp at reasonable time. It will take longer than you think.
Signal Knob (Elizabeth Furnace) (2 day/1 night)	10.6 (variable)	PATC G	Starting from the Elizabeth Furnace Group camping area it is about 6 miles up to Signal Knob (used for long distance signaling during the Civil War). There are a few small camping areas at the top of the ridgeline, about a mile short of Signal Knob, and no water so good dry campsite training. There are several trail options to allow you to increase distance, and a different trail down to allow for variety.
Big Schloss Loop (3 day/2 night)		PATC F	Start at Wardensville; night 1 at Sandstone Spring. Night 2 at campsite near Sugar Knob PATC Cabin.
Little Schloss Loop (2 day/1 night)		PATC F	Starting at Stony Creek trailhead

HAC 'Endorsed' Day Hikes and Overnight/Multi-Day Training Treks

Virginia Overnight/Multi-Day - Shenandoah National Park (SNP)			
Hike	Distance	Map	Details
Rocky Top and Big Run Loop (2 day/1 night) SNP South District	13.3		Strenuous hike with total elevation change of >3000 feet. Crosses Big Run several times and in early spring water levels can be high. Also ridge hiking so need to be prepared to carry sufficient water.
Austin Mountain/Trayfoot Mountain – (3 day/2 night) SNP South District			Park at Jones Run Lot. This is a strenuous trek with 2 climbs on day 2, but trout fishing opportunities both evenings. Either of these loops can be done as a 1 night
White Oak Canyon/Cedar Run Loop (2 day/1 night) SNP Central District			A 'classic' SNP hike. Can be very challenging. Also offers many options to modify or add other trails to make it longer. Lots of waterfalls and Cedar Run has swimming holes. Note: Must follow all National Park rules (backcountry permit required, no fires, limit to crew size, etc.) Can also be done in a single day as an aggressive day hike, but better as a two day for the enjoyment.
Overall Run/Heiskell Hollow Combined Loop (variable – 2-3 days/1-2 nights) SNP North District	Variable	PATC 9	Can construct a 2-3 day trek by combining these two loops – very beautiful section of SNP.

Miscellaneous Resources

Hike/Location/Resource	Details
On-line Resources	<p>A good web search will find many options, as will asking others for their favorite sites. A few good ones:</p> <p>https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/vigorous-hikers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tuesday Vigorous Hikers: A wealth of information on hikes in the 15 to 20-mile range with 3000 to 5000 elevation change <p>https://sites.google.com/site/tuesdayvigoroushikers/hike-leaders/past-hikes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tuesday Vigorous Hikers database of past hikes with descriptions <p>http://www.midatlantichikes.com/</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extensive descriptions with maps for hikes in MD/VA/WV/PA <p>https://www.hikingupward.com/</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extensive descriptions with maps for hikes in MD/VA/WV/NC
Some Useful Books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shenandoah National Park. Must-Do Hikes for Everyone. Johnny Molloy. Wilderness Press. 2012 - AMC's Best Backpacking in the Mid-Atlantic. A Guide to 30 of the Best Multiday Trips from New York and Virginia. Michael Martin. Appalachian Mountain Club Books. 2014 - The Mid-Atlantic Hiker's Guide: Central Maryland. Michael Juskelis. Scott Adams Enterprises - The Mid-Atlantic Hiker's Guide: West Virginia. Michael Juskelis. Scott Adams Enterprises - 50 Hikes in Northern Virginia. Leonard M. Adkins (Explorer's Guides). The Countryman press - 60 Hikes Within 60 Miles – Washington D.C. Paul Elliott (American Hiking Society). Menasha Ridge Press