



NCAC HAC High Adventure Sourcebook

Volume 2: Treks, Hikes, and
Overnights

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Introduction

The National Capital Area Council (NCAC) High Adventure Committee (HAC) is dedicated to promoting high-adventure programs in all NCAC districts by providing information and assistance to NCAC youth and adults on High Adventure program opportunities, and conducting planning, logistics and training for expeditions to National and regional High Adventure bases with contingent crews from our Council.

This Sourcebook volume is comprised of many treks and hikes in the Mid-Atlantic region, great for preparing for the many High Adventure opportunities across the United States and around the world.

Mid-Atlantic Trails

(Updated 2-3/2021)

Location: Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, DC

Website: <https://www.patc.net/> or as noted

Many trails and parks are now open but pay close attention to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about "keeping it local" and from state and local health agencies whose responsibilities govern the area you intend to visit before you head out. Remain at least 6-feet from other visitors and bring a mask to protect yourself and others. Stagger your start times to keep groups distant and limit group size to ten or less.

Services may be limited and facilities closed where you are headed resulting in a lack of water and restrooms so take necessary steps like bringing food, water, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and trash bags with you. Check area websites for specifics of their CoVID-19 operations plans.



As Troops venture out, follow some basic Leave No Trace Principles and always keep in mind the leading stewardship role scouts have in preserving and protecting our outdoor resources for all. Our parks have taken quite a hit from ill-informed visitors during the pandemic so bring a trash bag or two to collect trash carelessly discarded along the trail.

Let the Outdoor Ethic serve as your guidepost when venturing outdoors. Your Outdoor Ethics Guide is there to help your troop plan and conduct activities that emphasize and apply the Outdoor Code, the seven Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles, and tenets of TREAD Lightly! Your guide will work with your Scouts improve to ethical decision-making with respect to minimizing environmental impacts as they venture outdoors. Use your guide to lead your troop in developing a culture of responsible outdoor choices that reduce the impacts of Scouting activities (reference the Outdoor Ethics Guide Handbook (publication 510-047) which provides ideas on how to effectively carry out this role).

So where to start? The Council High Adventure Committee maintains a list of some day and overnight treks to consider. Below are a few highlights.

Virginia

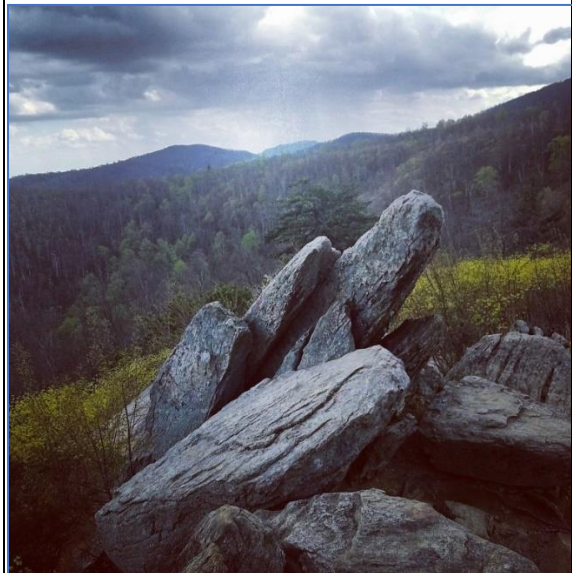
Name: White Oak Canyon / Cedar Run
Distance: 9.7 miles
Map Reference: PATC 10
Description: This one is a very strenuous hike with more than 3,000 total feet of elevation gain / loss. The trek starts at the base of White Oak Canyon where you start the ascent. The descent is on the Cedar Run Trail. The terrain is beautiful terrain with numerous waterfalls and even a swimming hole or two.



Name: Robertson Mountain
Distance: 11.3 Miles
Map Reference: PATC 10
Description: Another strenuous one. The trail follows a trout stream to an original mountaineer's cabin and summits one of the least-climbed peaks in the Shenandoah National Park. There is 2,884 feet of total elevation gain / loss. Consider climbing Robertson Mountain from the east for an even greater challenge.



Name: Hazel Mountain
Distance: 10.25 Miles
Map Reference: PATC 10
Description: This hike takes you into one of the most remote areas of the Shenandoah National Park and it is recommended for crews who have good map and compass skills. It offers a waterfall, a swimming hole and a cave. Total elevation change is 2,365 feet.

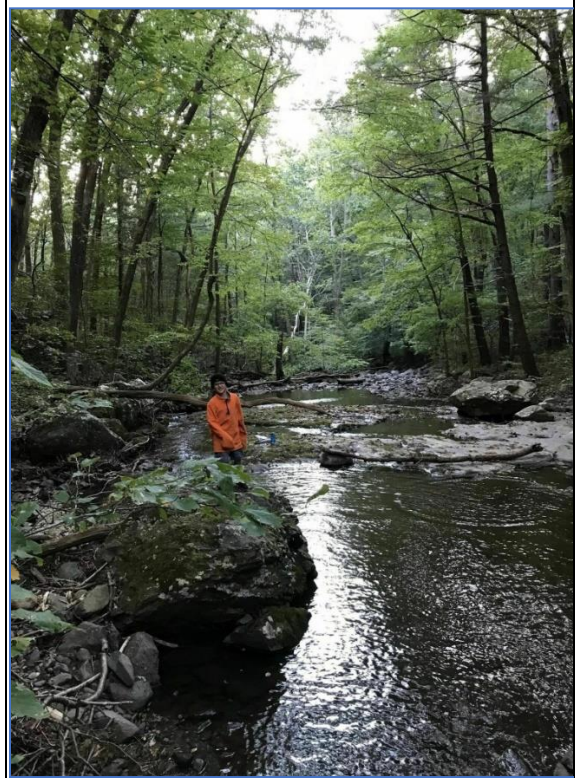


Name: Jeremy's Run

Distance: 10 Miles

Map Reference: PATC 9

Description: 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.

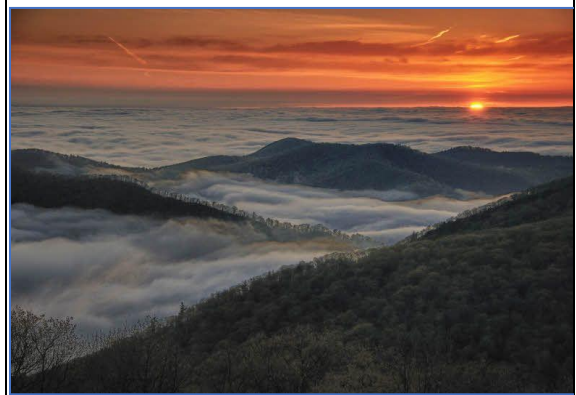


Name: Thorofare Mountain

Distance: 9.5 Miles

Map Reference: PATC 10

Description: 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.

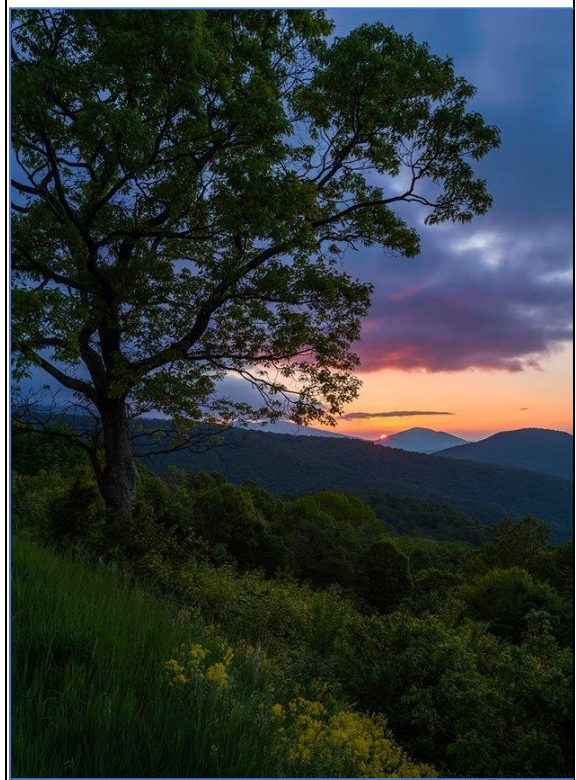


Name: Thornton Hollow

Distance: 10.6 Miles

Map Reference: PATC 9

Description: This moderately strenuous hike gives the backpacker a good taste of the Appalachian Trail. It descends over Piney Ridge and climbs back up along the beautiful North Fork of the Thornton River.

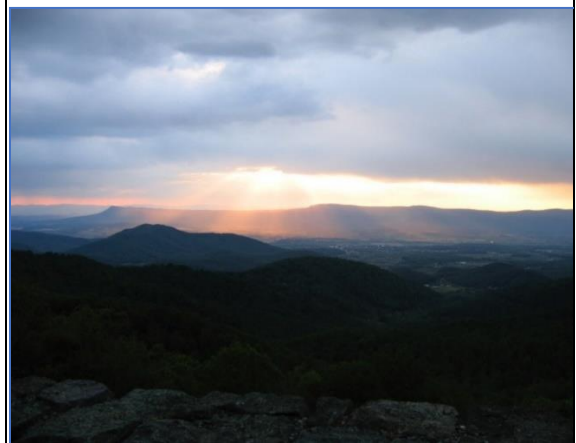


Name: Massanutten Mountain

Distance: 9.1

Map Reference: PATC G

Description: 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.

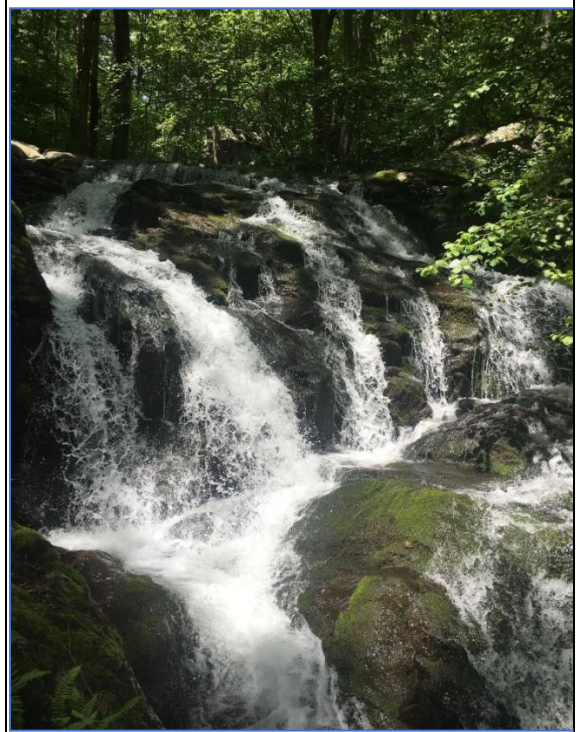


Name: Piney Ridge/Piney Branch

Distance: 9.4 Miles

Map Reference: PATC 9

Description: 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 is 1,650 feet.



Name: Sugarloaf Trail

Distance: 9.3 miles

Map Reference: PATC 9

Description: This another moderately difficult trek with 1,875 feet of 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.

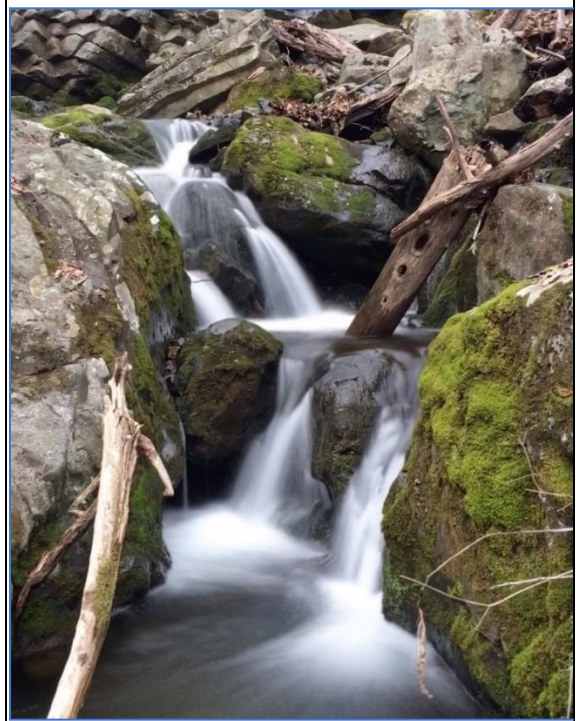


Name: Little Devil's Staircase

Distance: 10.2

Map Reference: PATC 9

Description: Little Devil's Stairs Trail winds around and between the rocks in a canyon, crossing and re-crossing Keyser Run many times. Be sure to stop and visit a graveyard dating back to the early 1800's. Total elevation change is 2,490 feet.

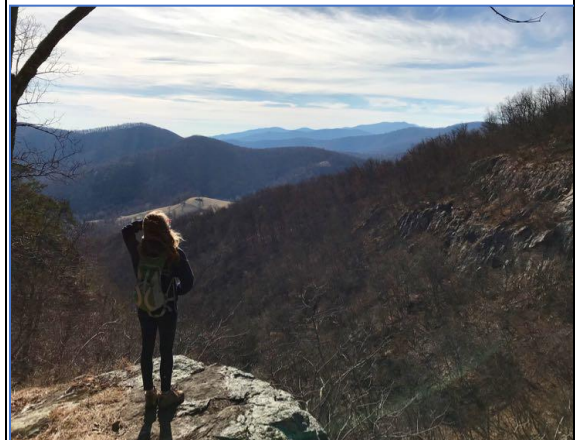


Name: Big Devil's Staircase

Distance: 10.5

Map Reference: PATC 9

Description: A moderately challenging hike with 1,300 feet of elevation change. This hike takes you around the eastern and southern slopes of Mount Marshall. There is a side hike to the east rim of Big Devil's Stairs which offering spectacular views of Big Devil's Stairs canyon and the mountains beyond.

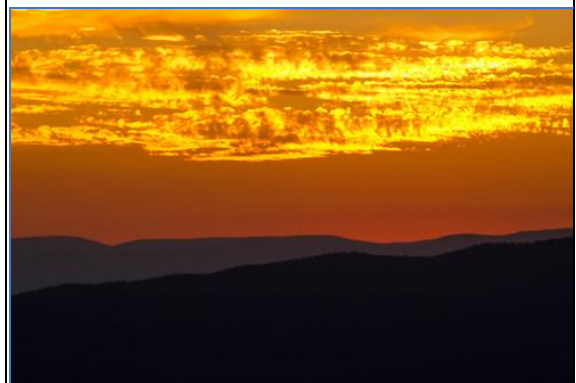


Name: Signal Knob

Distance: 10.6

Map Reference: PATC G

Description: This is a moderately difficult hike with 2,770 feet of total elevation change. Signal Knob was used by Confederate forces during Civil War to monitor movements of Federal troops. It offers excellent views of the surrounding Shenandoah Valley. Sunrise can be a particularly stellar experience.



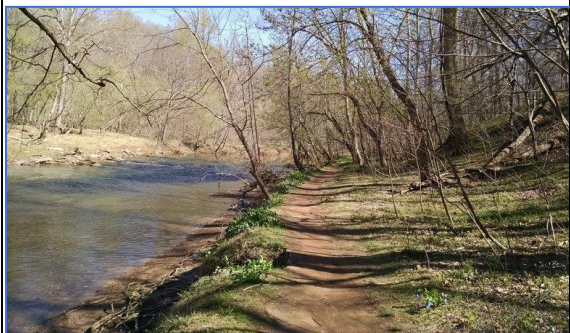
Name: Old Rag Mountain
Distance: 9.0 miles
Map Reference: PATC 10
Description: This is an iconic Shenandoah National Park hike. This hike is strenuous and challenging with slightly more than 2,400 feet of total elevation change. It is worth it, though, for the views. From the summit you can see in all directions, including a noble panorama of the mountains of the Shenandoah National Park. There are several ways to hike "Old Raggedy Top" including the "Circuit," via Berry Hollow, or Nicholson Hollow. Parking in National Park Service lots is free but there is a park entry fee and permitting process to follow. Pets are not allowed and large back packs discouraged as are hiking / trekking poles. Be forewarned, though, it is very busy on weekends in Spring and Fall and there may be long lines; best to tackle this one on a weekday or plan to hit the trail at dawn's first light.



Name: Overall Run Loop
Distance: 9.5 miles
Map Reference: PATC 9
Description: A very strenuous hike with a total elevation change of 2,490 feet. This hike follows trails that were once farm roads in pre-park era. The hike offers commanding views of the Shenandoah Valley and Massanutten Mountain to the west. But the highlight of this trek is the view of Overall Run Falls. At 93 feet, these falls are the highest drop of any waterfall in the Shenandoah National Park. There are a few rock ledges just below the falls to sit on as you enjoy the scene while you snack on lunch.



Name: Bull Run Occoquan Trail (BROT)
Distance: 20 miles, depending on route
Map Reference: Northern Virginia Parks (view on-line)
Description: This is a moderately difficult hike with some elevation changes and stream crossings. The trail traverses more than 5,000 acres of scenic woodlands. This area played a vital role at different times in our history -- from the Revolutionary to the Civil War -- and sites along the trail include various battle points and land features, as well as the more curious, like a grouping of earthen mounds that once comprised a make-shift Civil War fort. If planning on "going the distance," the High Adventure Committee recommends starting at the Rt. 28 parking lot and



heading south to Occoquan Regional Park (starting at Rt. 28 avoids “boots off” crossing of Cub Run in Bull Run Regional Park). This is a shared use trail so do not be surprised should you encounter riders on horseback. The trail is well blazed and there is some signage to guide you.

<https://www.novaparks.com/parks/bull-run-occoquan-trail>

Name: Gerry Connolly Cross County Trail (Fairfax Cross County Trail)

Distance: 40 miles, depending on route

Map Reference: Fairfax County Park Authority

Description: Easy hike with multiple entrances and exits for a custom length point-to-point hike. The Gerry Connolly Cross County Trail has been divided into ten sections (plus an additional section for the Laurel Hill Greenway) for purposes of mapping. The individual section maps show neighborhood connections, parking, and amenities such as restrooms and water fountains. Check out the Trail Buddy App on the Fairfax County Government website to further guide your journey of discovery. The High Adventure Committee recommends the 15.5 mile section from the Georgetown Pike parking area to Oak Marr Recreational Center for its natural surface and scenery.

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/trails/cross-county-trail>



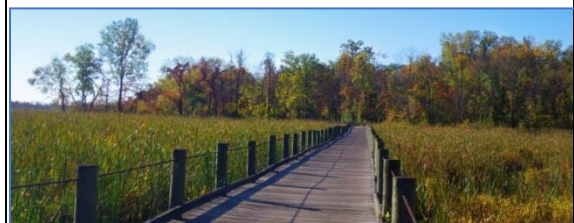
Name: Mount Vernon Trail

Distance: 18 miles

Map Reference: National Park Service

Description: An easy hike with asphalt surfaces, and bathrooms and water available at Fort Hunt Park and Belle Haven Marina. Stay on right side of trail to avoid the omnipresent cyclists. The High Adventure Committee recommends hiking south from Mount Vernon Mansion parking lot, finishing in Old Town for lunch and ice cream (approx. 10 miles).

<https://www.nps.gov/gwmp/planyourvisit/mtvernontrail.htm>



Name: Potomac Heritage Trail (Turkey Run Park to Theodore Roosevelt Island)
Distance: 10 Miles
Map Reference: National Park Service
Description: A moderately strenuous hike on the southwest bank of Potomac River. Length and difficulty can be adjusted based on the selected start and end points. The easiest route ends at the Theodore Roosevelt Island parking lot. The more challenging route ends at Turkey Run Park. A hike can be shortened, though, by starting / ending at Fort Marcy. Some options involve a rock scramble or two. Note that when the Potomac River runs high, some sections may be blocked. The trail can be accessed from parking lots on George Washington Parkway. If you have enough adults, the High Adventure committee recommends splitting your crew into two groups and have the drivers swap keys when they meet at the halfway point.

<https://www.nps.gov/pohe>



Name: Great Falls National Park (Virginia Side)
Distance: 15 miles
Map Reference: National Park Service
Description: At Great Falls, the Potomac River builds up speed and force as it falls over a series of steep, jagged rocks and flows through the narrow Mather Gorge. There are multiple trails on natural surface of varying lengths, including loop hikes, here. Steeper trails are at the south end. They can be accessed from parking lot at Difficult Run on Georgetown Pike

<https://www.nps.gov/grfa>



Name: Sky Meadow State Park
Distance: 6.0 miles
Map Reference: Park Trail Guide
Description: This 1,860-acre park is on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It offers scenic views, woodlands and the rolling pastures of a historic farm that capture the colonial through modern life of the Crooked Run Valley. The park has 10.5 miles of bridle trails, 22 miles of hiking trails, 9 miles of bike trails and Appalachian Trail access. Nature and history programs are offered year-round.



<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/sky-meadows>

Name: Bear Church Rock

Distance: 9.4 miles

Map Reference: National Park Service

Description: Hike to Bear Church Rock from Bootens Gap (on Skyline Drive). The trail traverses the ridge of Jones Mountain leading to the gorgeous views at Bear Church Rock. This is one of those hidden gems in Shenandoah National Park and it is a great alternative to the route that begins down in the valley at Graves Mill. While this route doesn't include the scenic Staunton River or the Jones Mountain Cabin, it crosses some of the deepest, least traveled parts of Shenandoah National Park. And, in the end, reaches the same great viewpoint at Bear Church Rock. While this route is about a mile longer than the Graves Mill route, it has fewer feet of elevation change and is a bit more moderate. This route to Bear Church Rock is also a bit less popular than the route from Graves Mill so you'll likely encounter far fewer hikers along the way making it a bit more suited to a crew

Bootens Gap parking lot is at Mile Marker 55.1 on Skyline Drive, 10.4 miles north of the Swift Run Gap Entrance. From the parking lot, head turn left going northbound on the Appalachian Trail (AT). In .4 miles you will come to a trail junction. Turn right on Laurel Prong Trail. The Laurel Prong Trail declines a bit and bottoms out at the junction with the Cat Knob Trail at 1.1 miles. At 1.4 miles you will reach another trail junction. Proceed straight, joining the short Cat Knob Trail. Taking the Cat Knob Trail you'll begin a moderate incline where. Follow that trail uphill, past gray boulders, where you will reach your final junction at 2.1 miles, intersecting Jones Mountain Trail. Veer right onto Jones Mountain Trail. At mile 4.6, the trail zigzags very steeply down the point of the ridge among the brush and laurel.

In about a mile, look for a side trail to the left that will lead you onto the granite slab of Bear Church Rock. Plan on stopping there for lunch and enjoying the views of the Blue Ridge (Fork Mountain, Cat Knob, and the Staunton River Valley), but be mindful and considerate of others who may have come for the peace, solitude, and views.

Retrace your steps out, making for a 9.4 mile out and back hike. The total elevation gain is 800 ft. The entire



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| route is at or above 3,000 ft the entire hike, so the views are expansive in the fall, winter, and spring. | |
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Maryland

Name: Cabin John Trail

Distance: 9 miles

Map Reference: PATC D

Description: MacArthur Blvd. to Goya Dr. Easy good beginning hike. This is a popular one so anticipate moderate to heavy pedestrian traffic.



Name: Sugarloaf Mountain – Maryland

Distance: 9.3 Miles

Map Reference: Sugar Loaf Mountain Map

Description: 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 it is open to the public. Roads to upper parking areas may close in winter, depending on weather conditions, but the hike is still possible. Just plan for the extra mile and elevation gain.

<http://www.sugarloafmd.com/>



Name: Catoctin Mountain Loop (Catoctin Mountain Park)

Distance: 7-10 Miles

Map Reference: PATC 5, 6

Description: This is a moderate difficulty hike. Lots of nice vistas and places to sit and enjoy lunch spots. You can add a few miles by ascending toward Cat Rock and Bob's Hill, and taking the Old Misery Trail on the way back down. Note, though, if you take the Misery Trail in order to get back to your start point, the final half mile is along the road.

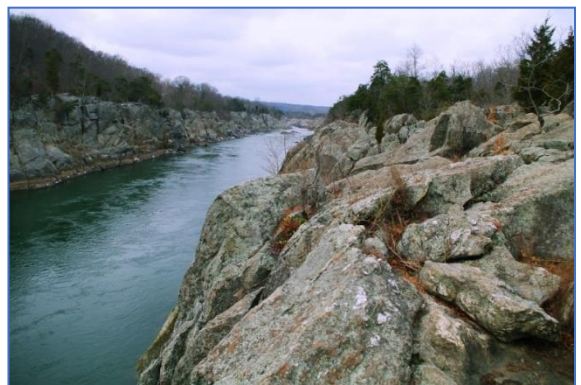


Name: Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal at Carderock / Billy Goat Great Falls (Maryland side)

Distance: 7-10 miles

Map Reference: National Park Service

Description: An easy and fun hike. Recommend you get an early start as this one fills up and gets crowded fast. There are more than half a dozen trails and paths surrounding the Billy Goat Trail, including the towpath, River Trail, Gold Mine Loop and Spurs, and the Ford and Mine Trails. The trails are mostly flat but that is not to say that there aren't some challenges. When planning your trip, note that Trail A is currently a one-way trail (recommended), going downstream. One-way travel prevents hiker "jam-ups" at the traverse and other narrow areas of the trail, protects natural habitats, and reduces the number of encounters with other visitors. The Exit Trail at the half way point is a two-way trail so hikers can choose to complete the bottom half of the trail or continue to the top to complete the full circuit. Make time for a side trip to Olmstead Island to view the falls but know that wading and standing on rocks at the water's edge is extremely dangerous; one false step can have dire consequences. Fines of \$200 or more may also be levied if caught swimming in the Potomac River anywhere along the trail.



<https://www.nps.gov/choh>

Pennsylvania

West Virginia

Washington D.C.

Name: Rock Creek Park

Distance: 10.0, depending on route

Map Reference: National Park Service

Description: 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, the High Adventure Committee recommends beginning at Pierce Mill, cross Rock Creek, and head north via Valley Trail, and return south via Western Ridge Trail.

<https://www.nps.gov/rocr>



Recommendations

Ready to head out? The National Park Service has ten common sense rules for when getting out.

Get a Map and Know Trail Markers. Be sure that you know your hiking route before you get out on the trail, and bring a trail map of the area where you'll be hiking. A compass and a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver can also help to keep you on track. With any navigation aid, know how to use it before you venture out. Have a backup plan for when the technology fails you (it will, eventually, and at the worst possible moment). Shenandoah's trails are well-marked, but it's important to know what to look for. Trail markers are cement posts found at trailheads and trail intersections. The metal bands on them will show you what trail you are on, what other trails converge at that intersection, and the mileages to other points of interest. You will also see trail blazes painted on trees and rocks along the trail. The color of the paint indicates the type of trail that you are on (Blue: hiking trail; White: Appalachian Trail; Yellow: hiking trail that is also open to horses)

Bring Plenty of Water. The average person drinks one quart of water per hour while hiking on a hot day so it's important to plan ahead and bring plenty of water for everyone in your group, including pets!

Don't Skip the Snacks. Bring plenty of snacks. Salty snacks can help you to replace lost electrolytes. Plan on carrying out all your trash, even those banana peels, orange peels, and apple cores. Leave nothing but your footprints behind.

Communicate. Cell service is unreliable in Shenandoah National Park, so be sure to let your Committee Chair, Charter Partner Representative, and parents know where you plan to hike and when to expect your return. When you do return, give everyone a call to say you are back.

Pack a First Aid Kit. Slips, trips, and falls are a fact of life on the trail and can happen at any time, and having a basic first aid kit can help. Observing a few guidelines can minimize the likelihood that you'll need to use it. Sounds silly to say, but watch your step and be prepared to turn around in dangerous settings such as a wet and slippery conditions, high-water crossings, or ice on the trail. Never walk around the top of a waterfall as wet rocks can be surprisingly slippery and many people have been injured, some fatally, trying to do so. Be sure to always stay on park-maintained trails.

Check the Weather. Always check the weather forecast and be prepared for changing conditions. Remember, temperatures on the mountain can be 10 to 20 degrees cooler than in the valley.

Wear Appropriate Clothing. Wear proper, sturdy footwear when hiking on any unpaved trail. Layer your clothing and bring a rain jacket so that you're ready for any weather.

Carry a Flashlight. Even if you plan on finishing your hike before dark, having a flashlight with fresh batteries is a good idea. Cell phones don't make reliable flashlights.

Don't Forget a Whistle. A whistle is a great way to alert someone to your location, if necessary. Check to see if your hiking backpack has one built into the chest strap.

Plan for Emergencies. Play the "What If?" game with your leaders and crew, and know what to do if an emergency arises. Talk it through often and with the seriousness it deserves to the point at which responses are purposeful and automatic.

Acknowledgements

This sourcebook would not be possible without the dedicated work of NCAC High Adventure Committee member and Old Dominion District representative Mike Nostrand. Mike's "High Adventure Corner" articles for their district newsletter provided the vast source for this collection. Thank you, Mike!

We also gratefully acknowledge the efforts of the National, Council, federal, state, local, and camp websites and webmasters that share the information about their awesome camps, programs, and trails. Thank you!