

HIKE VIRGINIA

• *NORTH OF US 60* •

**51 HIKES FROM THE ALLEGHENY
MOUNTAINS TO THE CHESAPEAKE BAY**

LEONARD M. ADKINS



MENASHA RIDGE PRESS

Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982

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For information about trail and other closures, check the "Contact" listings in the hike profiles.

AN INVITATION TO THE READER Over time trails can be rerouted and signs and landmarks altered. If you find that changes have occurred on the routes described in this book, please let us know so that corrections may be made in future editions. The author and publisher also welcome other comments and suggestions. Email: habitualhiker@verizon.net.

*Every part of this soil is sacred.
Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove
Has been hallowed by some sad or happy event
In days long vanished.*

—Chief Seattle

*I think I know now the secret of making the best person.
It is to live in the open air and sleep with the earth.*

—Walt Whitman

OTHER BOOKS BY LEONARD M. ADKINS

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Maryland: An Explorer's Guide

West Virginia: An Explorer's Guide

Adventure Guide to Virginia

The Caribbean: A Walking and Hiking Guide

Dedication

In memory of **Leonard Wilson Adkins**, who understandingly said to me,
“I know you need to go hiking, son, so go.”

This map illustrates the state of Virginia and its proximity to Maryland, North Carolina, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The map is oriented with North at the top. Major cities and locations are marked with numbers 1 through 51. Key geographical features include the Atlantic Ocean to the east, Chesapeake Bay to the northeast, and the Albemarle Sound to the east. Major highways are shown as orange lines, and state boundaries are indicated by dashed lines. A compass rose and a scale bar (0 to 20 miles and 0 to 20 kilometers) are located in the bottom left corner.

Numbered locations (1-51) are distributed across the state, with a concentration in the northern and central regions. Major cities labeled include Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Newport News, Chesapeake, Charlotteville, Lynchburg, Roanoke, Blacksburg, Bristol, and Harrisonburg. The map also shows the Blue Ridge Parkway and Skyline Drive.

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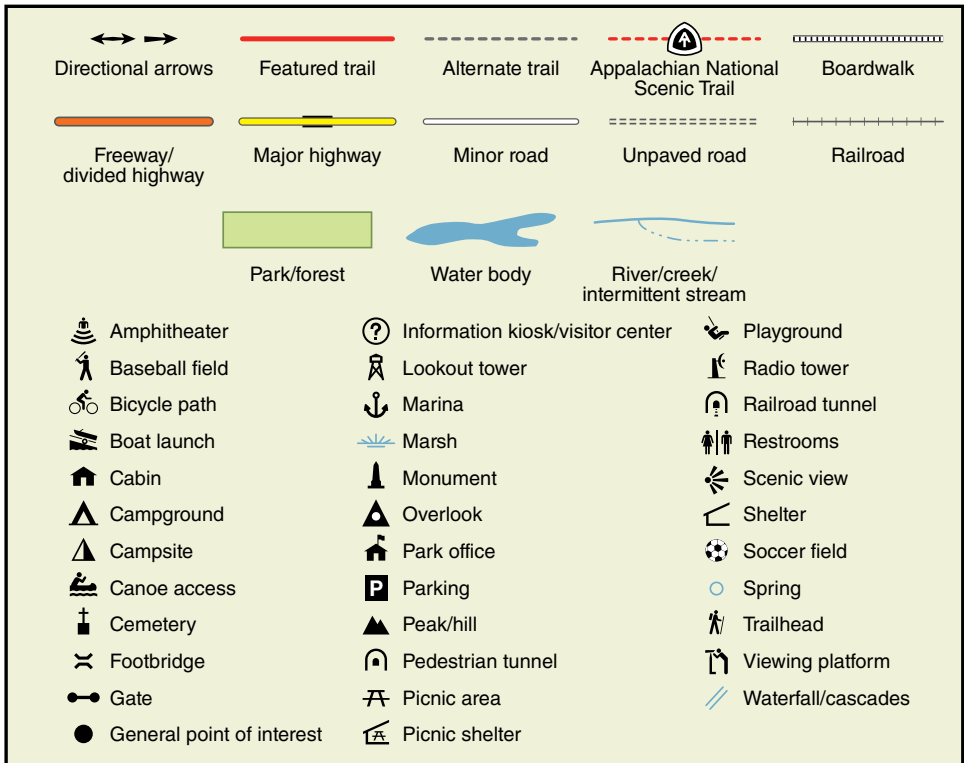
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A thunderous round of applause to the builders and maintainers of all trails!

Introduction

Only a person traveling by foot can truly appreciate the natural beauty to be found in Virginia. The two flower scars evident on a tiny red partridgeberry or the rich aroma and cool temperatures of an evergreen forest will be overlooked by those passing through in an automobile. Virginia's most impressive waterfalls are accessible only to someone who is willing to put forth a bit of effort to reach them, and the majestic serenity of a golden sunset shining on distant mountains is made all the more inspiring when you know you have reached the viewpoint under your own power. Only by walking on a quiet beach will you be permitted to study etchings in the sand that mark the movements of a ghost crab or have the time to watch the swooping silhouette of an osprey outlined by a silvery glow reflecting off salt water.

The topography of the northern portion of Virginia, stretching from the craggy summits of the Allegheny Mountains to the soft shores of the Chesapeake Bay, provides some of the widest variety of hiking terrain and sights to be found in any of the Middle Atlantic states. In the eastern part of the commonwealth—the coastal plain where land meets salt water—you will often find yourself hiking up and down minor changes in elevation and walking past herons and egrets as they fish in small swamps, brackish ponds, and slow-moving streams. The Piedmont in central Virginia is characterized by gently rolling land that will lead you into grassy meadows for open views almost as often as you will be treading in mixed hardwood forests. Influenced by narrow mountains and their spreading spur ridges, trails in the Blue Ridge and Massanutten Mountains either follow the rises and falls of fluctuating mountain crests or descend past quickly flowing streams and waterfalls into small valleys and coves. The mountains of western Virginia are the least populated, and it is here that you will find the most rugged yet isolated and quiet hiking and have the best chance of viewing the state's abundant wildlife.

This book was originally envisioned as a guide to 51 hikes throughout the entire state. It soon became apparent, however, that by trying to incorporate so much area, I would actually be limiting myself, and you, by having to reject and ignore far too many places deserving of your hiking time and attention. By concentrating on only about half the state, it is possible to include many of the most enjoyable and rewarding hikes in the northern part of Virginia. With descriptions of more than 360 miles of pathways, this book offers hikes for every degree of physical stamina and time constraint. Best of all, no matter where you happen to be at any given moment (north of US 60), you are never going to be more than a 30- to 45-minute drive away from one of the hikes.

Like most guidebooks, this one will tell you where the hikes are and how to follow the pathways, and it will point out the plants, animals, and birds you may see along the way. It differs from many guides, however, in that it also contains interpretive information; by using it you will not be hiking "blind." Not only will you be informed where to turn left, right, and so forth, but you will also receive background information on the



Dogwood in full bloom

plants, animals, and natural and human history or issues facing a certain area. You will come to understand why the pink lady's slipper grows in such an exotic shape, what animal likes what types of foods, and how to tell what an animal has recently eaten. You'll learn to look for signs that show whether a bear or a turkey inhabits an area. You will also be able to determine why human history has left its mark on the land and what caused certain events to occur. There is, of course, much more to be learned than can be presented in this book. To help you gain an even greater awareness, enjoyment, and understanding of your surroundings, I urge you to read (and possibly carry) some additional books and field guides. (See "Suggested Readings and Field Guides" on page 228.)

Birds singing early in the morning, flowers opening wide to soak in the noontime sun, and owls hooting in the evening make it worthwhile to walk the same trail at different times of the day. Also, a trail walked in late spring is certainly going to be a different experience when you return to hike it in the fall. Therefore, be willing to visit an area more than once, and don't limit your outdoor activities to just one or two seasons; hiking in Virginia can be a year-round activity. Of course, you must be prepared for sudden changes in the weather, but even on the highest mountains in Virginia there are numerous days when winter temperatures reach into the 50s and 60s.

To paraphrase Will Rogers, I've never met a trail I didn't like. My wish is that this guidebook conveys to you the sense of excitement, joy, wonder, peace, and contentment

that can only be found in the freedom of traveling the natural world by foot. Virginia awaits—go do some exploring!

How to Use This Book

This book includes a wide variety of hikes—ranging from pleasant strolls on nearly level ground to challenging, several-day backpacking trips over rugged terrain—so that everyone, regardless of their hiking experience or level of physical stamina, can choose an excursion that best fits their schedule, lifestyle, or expectations. The headings at the beginning of each hike were designed to give you—at a quick glance—an overview of what to expect.

GPS lists the coordinates for each hike's trailhead in decimal degrees.

I arrived at the **total distance** for each hike by walking with a surveyor's measuring wheel. If you compare some of my distances to those of other guidebooks or information from the forest service, state parks, or other sources, you may notice some discrepancies. Most often these sources give distances from a beginning trailhead, not taking into account how far you must walk to reach that trailhead. In order to give you as true a picture as possible of how far you are actually going to walk, I measured the hike from the point you leave your automobile to where you are able to return to it.

A *one-way* hike is just that—you walk in one direction, ending the hike at a different point from where you started. A one-way hike necessitates a car shuttle. On a *round-trip*, you go to your destination and then return by way of the same route. On a *circuit* hike, which represents the vast majority of the hikes presented in this book, you will take a circular route to return to your starting point, rewalking little, if any, of the same trail or trails.

Hiking time is the minimum amount of time that it would take a person of average ability to do a trip at a leisurely pace. Some of you may go faster, a few of you slower. Begin with some of the shorter hikes and compare your time with those stated. This way you can approximate how long it should take you to do the more extended excursions. Do keep in mind that the stated time does not account for any rest breaks, meals, resupplying for water, or sightseeing and nature study, and that in hiking, it is not how fast you go, but how much you enjoy the trip. Robert Louis Stevenson may have said it best: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive."

Vertical rise is probably the best way to determine how strenuous a hike will be. It represents the sum total of all the uphill hiking you will do and is not, as most other guides provide, just the difference in elevation between the lowest and highest point of a hike. This rise was determined using information from United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps.

This book includes a detailed map for each outing and will be sufficient to use to complete each hike. However, in the **maps** category, additional maps are identified that are available for each hike if you wish to obtain more detailed information. These include the appropriate USGS 7.5-minute series topographic maps (of which several may be needed for just one outing), the National Geographic Trails Illustrated map (if available for the particular hike), and the hand-out maps (most often free of charge) that are available at the appropriate contact stations, visitor centers, or agency offices.

Some maps mark the trails in the national forest with the official forest service inventory numbers, so to help you orient yourself, I have included these numbers in brackets

(e.g., {FS 621}) in the hike descriptions. I have also used the initials FSR to refer to forest service roads (which are usually unpaved). Be aware that trails in the national forest may not be as well maintained or marked as those in the national, state, or regional parks.

“The Hike at a Glance” section describes the milestones in each route.

Please do not dismiss a hike or an area as being beyond your capabilities because you are intimidated by its length, time, or vertical rise. Because I enjoy walking so much, I have often described one of the longest and most meandering hikes to be taken in a particular area. Yet many places have numerous side trails or alternate routes you could take in order to shorten a hike. A good example is the Tuscarora Overlook hike in Douthat State Park. I describe a trip of more than 9 miles with a vertical rise of more than 2,000 feet, but there are so many interconnecting trails in the park that you could take a very rewarding circuit hike of about 3 miles, with only a minimal change in elevation. Study maps and my descriptions and you will find that this is the case in many places.

Advice and Precautions

WATER

It is always wise to carry water no matter the length of your outing. A good rule is to hydrate before your hike, carry (and drink) 16 ounces of water for every mile you plan to hike, and hydrate again after your hike. On overnight trips you may have to depend on a stream or spring, but the rise in the number of people visiting the natural areas of Virginia has brought about an increase of giardia, a water-borne parasite. Water can also become tainted by viruses, bacteria, and man-made pollutants.

Boiling could make stream or spring water potable, but a portable purifier is more convenient and, possibly, more effective. Be aware that a filter only removes bacteria, while a purifier is also capable of eliminating viruses. Since they cost about the same, the wiser move would be to purchase a purifier (even though it will probably weigh a little more).

Please note: For your convenience, water sources are identified in a number of the hike descriptions, but this is not an endorsement of their purity. Water from all sources should be treated before drinking!

SNAKES

Only four snakes in Virginia are venomous. The **copperhead** and **timber rattlesnake** are found throughout most of the region, while the **cottonmouth** (sometimes called water moccasin) inhabits eastern Virginia and a small part of central Virginia. The very eastern part of the state is within the range of the **canebrake rattlesnake** (considered by many to be the same species as the timber rattler), but sightings have been almost nonexistent within the last few decades. It would be wise to learn how to identify all four of these pit vipers.

Do remember that the outdoors is a snake's natural habitat and that it has as much right, if not more, to be there as you do. Please refrain from killing any snake; just walk around it, giving it a wide berth, and continue on your way.

Important: All snake bites may contain bacteria, so seek medical attention as soon as possible for any bite.

BLACK BEARS

Virginia is home to thousands of black bears. Although it is exceedingly rare for a black bear to attack a human, you must remember that they are wild animals and do not like to be approached at close range. Do not try to feed a bear. Not only does this endanger you, it also endangers the bear. Once a bear becomes used to close human contact, it may begin wandering into campsites or housing developments looking for handouts. This often results in the bear having to be destroyed by the authorities.

INSECTS

Warm weather brings **no-see-ums, gnats, fleas, sand fleas, deerflies, mosquitoes, ticks,** and more. Although the mountains have their fair share, the lowlands, marshes, and beaches of central and eastern Virginia can be nearly swarming with them at times. Bring lots of repellent on any hike from late spring to mid-autumn. (And remember that one of the pleasures of hiking during the colder months is the absence of insects.)

Recent years have seen a rise in the reported cases of Lyme disease, a bacterial infection transmitted by the bite of the deer tick. Check yourself for ticks after each outing, remembering that the thing you are looking for could be as small as the period at the end of this sentence.

PLANTS

Poison ivy is found just about everywhere in Virginia. Learn how to identify it, as it can grow in a number of forms. The most common is a woody shrub of up to 2 feet high that grows in large patches, often lining or overtaking pathways. Just as likely, it will grow as a hairy, root-covered vine that clings to the trunk of a tree, climbing far up into the branches. All parts of the plant contain the poison urushiol and can give you an itchy rash; this is true even in winter, when it appears to be dead.

Not as prevalent, but certainly present, **poison oak** is most often found in sandy soil habitats. As its name suggests, its leaflets resemble the leaves of an oak tree, but they are fuzzy. **Poison sumac** occurs most notably in the eastern part of Virginia. Unlike the low-standing poison ivy, poison sumac can grow to be 25 feet tall and has compound leaves with an odd number of leaflets. The upper side of the leaflets is shiny green, while the underside is lighter and has small hairs.

Poison ivy

photo: Tom Watson



Trumpet creeper or vine is most often found in the lowlands. Also known as cow itch, it can cause contact dermatitis.

Stinging nettle will grow in large carpets and encroach upon pathways that are not well maintained. Brushing up against the plant may cause your skin to itch for the rest of the day.

Hogweed is an invasive plant that was first found in the United States in the early 1900s. It is a member of the carrot family, looks somewhat like Queen Anne's lace, and can grow to more than 14 feet tall. Touching it can cause skin blisters so severe as to create permanent scars and blindness if it gets in the eye. Definitely learn how to identify this one.

SUN

The consensus in the medical community is that you should apply a high-strength sunblock whenever you will be outdoors for extended periods of time—any time of year.

HUNTING

Due to the abundance of wildlife, hunting is extremely popular in Virginia, even in the more populated counties. Hunting seasons usually run from early fall into January, and again for part of the spring. Dates vary from year to year and place to place, so check with local authorities. During hunting season, it may be best to hike in a group; do not venture forth without wearing some kind of blaze-orange clothing. If you are hunting (or fishing), be sure to obtain the proper licenses and check into local regulations.

UNATTENDED VEHICLES

There is always the possibility of theft and vandalism to cars left unattended at trailheads, so it is wise to leave your valuables at home. If you must bring valuables with you, take them with you when you go hiking, or stash them out of sight and lock the car.

A way to avoid a car shuttle on a one-way hike, as well as the problems associated with leaving an automobile overnight, is to have someone drop you off at the trailhead and pick you up when you have finished.

PROPER CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

As with any outdoor pursuit, you need to be ready for abrupt fluctuations in the weather. Warm and sunny summer days may become cold and rainy within minutes. Also, do not be surprised if a pleasant spring or fall day changes to one with sleet or snow.

Because people are caught off guard on days such as this, when the temperature dips into the low 60s and 50s, **hypothermia**—one of the leading causes of hiker and camper deaths—may strike. Be prepared by carrying raingear and an insulating layer of clothing, such as a wool sweater or synthetic jacket, in your day pack. Layering is a more effective means of keeping warm than wearing one thick garment, so carry several items of clothing.

In addition to the above, your pack should include a first aid kit, flashlight, knife, compass, toilet paper, and waterproof matches. Be prepared for possible cool nights even in the summer.

It is not necessary to subject your feet to the tortures of heavy-duty boots to enjoy hiking in Virginia. Unless you have ankle or foot problems, comfortable tennis, walking, or running shoes will probably suffice for most of the hikes—especially the shorter ones in the eastern half of the state. Lightweight hiking boots or shoes should be sufficient for journeys into the mountains and on overnight trips.

Applying moleskin or a similar product (available at most pharmacies and outdoors outfitters) immediately at the first sign of a “hot spot” will help prevent blisters from developing.

These are just the basics you should know about foot travel in areas removed from the mainstream. Obviously it is not the intent of this guidebook to be a hiking or backpacking primer, so I suggest you solicit advice from backpacking acquaintances, trail club members, and outdoors outfitters. I am a firm believer in supporting your neighborhood outdoors outfitter instead of mail-order companies. Not only will the local folks help fit and adjust your equipment and be there if you have any questions, but some shops rent hiking and camping equipment, enabling you to try something before you decide to buy it.

HIKING AND CAMPING ETIQUETTE

Endorsed by almost every organization connected with the outdoors, the **Leave No Trace Seven Principles** have been developed to protect a fragile natural world from increased usage. (Leave No Trace Seven Principles © by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics: lnt.org.)

Plan Ahead and Prepare

- Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you'll visit.
- Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies.
- Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use.
- Visit in small groups. Split larger parties into groups of 4–6.
- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns, or flagging.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses, and snow.
- Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.

In popular areas:

- Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.
- Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.
- Keep campsites small. Focus activities in areas where vegetation is absent.

In pristine areas:

- Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.

Dispose of Waste Properly

- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food, and litter.
- Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6–8 inches deep at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished.
- Pack out toilet paper and other hygiene products.
- To wash yourself or your dishes, carry water 200 feet away from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Scatter strained dishwater.

Leave What You Find

- Preserve the past: examine, but do not touch, cultural or historic structures and artifacts.
- Leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you find them.
- Avoid introducing or transporting nonnative species.
- Do not build structures or furniture or dig trenches.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

- Campfires can cause lasting impacts to the backcountry. Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a candle lantern for light.
- Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires.
- Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.
- Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.

Respect Wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach wildlife.
- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
- Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely.
- Control pets at all times, or leave them at home.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young, or winter.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
- Be courteous. Yield to other users on the trail.
- Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock.
- Take breaks and camp away from trails and other visitors.
- Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.

For further information, *The Green Guide to Low-Impact Hiking and Camping* by Laura and Guy Waterman is an excellent resource, providing details on not only the “how” of making little or no impact on the environment but also the “why.”

HIKES AT A GLANCE

REGION/HIKE	DISTANCE (in Miles)	VERTICAL RISE	VIEWS	GOOD FOR KIDS	WATERFALLS	CAMPING	HISTORY
CHESAPEAKE BAY AND EASTERN VIRGINIA							
1 Grandview Nature Preserve <i>Chesapeake Bay shoreline</i>	5.0	0	W	✓	—	—	—
2 Newport News Park <i>Easy terrain; Civil War site</i>	5.6	130	W	—	—	D	✓
3 Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve <i>Optional mile-long beach walk</i>	2.1	10	W	✓	—	—	—
4 Hickory Hollow Natural Area Preserve <i>Swamp exploration; wildflowers</i>	3.0	130	—	✓	—	—	—
5 Belle Isle State Park <i>Hike beside Rappahanock River</i>	5.0	30	W	✓ *	—	D	—
6 The Northern Neck <i>Horsehead Cliffs fossil; Washington's birthplace</i>	4.0	370	W	✓ *	—	D	✓
CENTRAL VIRGINIA							
7 Cold Harbor <i>Civil War trenches</i>	1.0	100	—	✓	—	—	✓
8 Willis River Trail <i>Most rugged hike in the Piedmont; for the experienced hiker</i>	15.3	700	—	—	—	—	—
9 Lake Anna State Park <i>In the rolling woodlands of the Piedmont</i>	12.9	660	W	—	—	D	—
10 Spotsylvania <i>Site of major Civil War battle</i>	5.3	240	—	—	—	—	✓
11 Prince William Forest Park <i>Streams and isolation close to D.C.</i>	13.5	400	—	—	—	D, B	✓
12 Mason Neck State Park <i>Turtles, eagles, muskrats, and ducks</i>	2.7	50	W	✓	—	—	—
13 Bull Run–Occoquan River <i>Hike along streams most of the way</i>	11.0	3,180	W	—	—	—	—
14 Manassas National Battlefield Park <i>Site of two major Civil War battles</i>	5.5	390	—	—	—	—	✓
15 Sky Meadows State Park <i>Best view of the Piedmont</i>	5.4	1,460	M	✓ *	—	B	—
16 Split Rock <i>Views of Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers</i>	5.2	950	W, M	—	—	—	✓
BLUE RIDGE AND MASSANUTTEN MOUNTAINS							
17 Little Sluice Mountain and Cedar Creek <i>Mountains along Virginia–West Virginia border</i>	12.7	2,080	M	—	—	B	—
18 Big Schloss <i>Excellent views and interesting rock outcrops</i>	4.4	710	M	—	—	B	—
19 Signal Knob <i>Has become popular with mountain bikers</i>	10.4	2,220	M	—	—	B	—
20 Woodstock Observation Tower <i>Very easy walk with great views</i>	0.3	50	M	✓	—	—	—
21 Duncan Knob <i>Off-trail scramble to view</i>	8.5	2,240	M	—	—	B	—
22 Marys Rock <i>Views extend almost 360 degrees</i>	3.6	1,240	M	✓	—	—	—
23 Stony Man <i>Shenandoah Valley view</i>	3.5	760	M	✓ *	—	—	—

KEY TO TABLE ABBREVIATIONS

W = water views

D = developed camping available

* = for kids with stamina

M = mountain views

B = backcountry camping available

HIKES AT A GLANCE *(continued)*

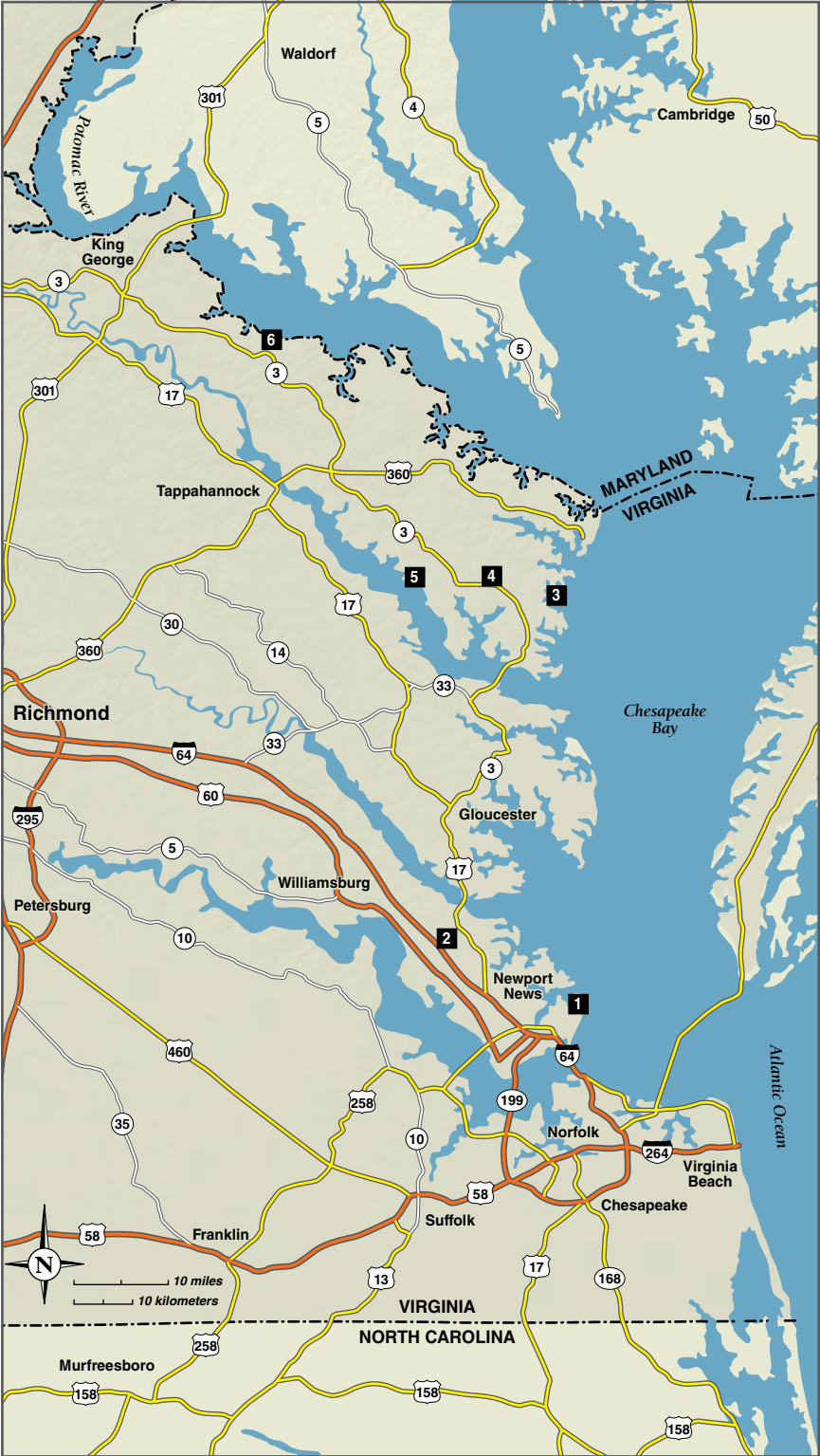
REGION/HIKE		DISTANCE (in Miles)	VERTICAL RISE	VIEWS	GOOD FOR KIDS	WATERFALLS	CAMPING	HISTORY
BLUE RIDGE AND MASSANUTTEN MOUNTAINS <i>(continued)</i>								
24	Old Rag <i>Arduous with rock scrambles, but extremely popular</i>	9.2	2,380	M	—	—	—	—
25	Cedar Run and Whiteoak Canyon <i>Almost continuous waterfalls</i>	8.0 or 9.3	2,560	—	—	✓	B	—
26	Hawksbill <i>High point of Shenandoah National Park</i>	2.8	740	M	✓	—	B	—
27	Rapidan Camp <i>President Hoover's mountain retreat; small streams</i>	7.4	1,480	—	—	—	B	✓
28	Rocky Mountain, Brown Mountain, and Rockytop <i>Two-day hike into isolated valley</i>	20.0	4,000	W, M	—	—	B	—
29	Riprap Hollow <i>Waterfall and swimming hole</i>	9.6	2,260	M	—	✓	B	—
30	Blue Ridge Tunnel <i>Dark, dripping tunnel almost a mile long</i>	2.3 or 4.6	300 or 480	—	✓	—	—	✓
31	Whetstone Ridge <i>Less used than many other trails; rugged ridgeline walk</i>	11.8	4,500	M	—	—	B	—
32	White Rock Falls and Slacks Overlook Trail <i>Along the Blue Ridge Parkway</i>	5.0	1,050	W	—	✓	B	—
33	Sherando Lake <i>Nice break from noisy campground</i>	1.6	280	M	✓	—	D	—
34	Saint Mary's Wilderness <i>Two-day hike with remote campsites</i>	17.5	2,400	—	—	✓	B	—
35	Crabtree Falls <i>Strenuous, but 1.5 miles of waterfalls</i>	5.8	1,520	W, M	✓*	✓	B	—
36	Appalachian and Mau-Har Trails <i>Has everything that makes hiking worthwhile</i>	26.1	7,000	M	—	✓	B	—
37	Mount Pleasant <i>A protected National Scenic Area</i>	5.5	1,400	M	—	—	B	—
38	Cole Mountain <i>High mountain meadow</i>	5.8	1,320	M	—	—	B	—
WESTERN VIRGINIA								
39	North River Gorge <i>Nine river fords</i>	4.5	40	—	—	—	B	—
40	Todd Lake Recreation Area and Trimble Mountain <i>Circuit hike of Trimble Mountain</i>	3.8	1,120	M	—	—	D, B	—
41	Wild Oak National Recreation Trail <i>Three days with ups and downs, but also long ridges</i>	27.2	7,550	M	—	—	B	—
42	Ramseys Draft <i>Popular wilderness; fords and possible overgrown trails</i>	8.5	1,080	M	—	—	B	—
43	Shenandoah Mountain <i>Easiest long hike in Virginia mountains; snowshoeing</i>	10.6	1,400	M	—	—	B	—
44	Elliott Knob and Falls Hollow <i>Great sunrise and sunset spot</i>	9.0	2,060	M	—	✓	B	—
45	Laurel Fork <i>Most isolated hike; fords and possible overgrown trail</i>	14.0	2,300	—	—	✓	B	—
46	Hidden Valley <i>Trout fishing on side streams</i>	4.3	100	W	—	—	D, B	—
47	Lake Moomaw <i>Lakeshore camping</i>	6.6	1,700	W	—	—	B	—
48	Rich Hole Wilderness <i>Accessible; lightly traveled; signs of black bears</i>	5.8	980	M	—	—	B	—
49	Douthat State Park: Beards Mountain <i>Explore a mountaintop environment</i>	7.1	1,360	M	—	—	D	—
50	Douthat State Park: Tuscarora Overlook <i>Two waterfalls and a grand overlook</i>	9.6	2,180	M	—	✓	D	—
51	Dry Run <i>Secluded stream with campsites</i>	9.7	1,640	—	—	—	B	—



The Jackson River swinging bridge

KEY TO TABLE ABBREVIATIONS		
W = water views	D = developed camping available	※ = for kids with stamina
M = mountain views	B = backcountry camping available	

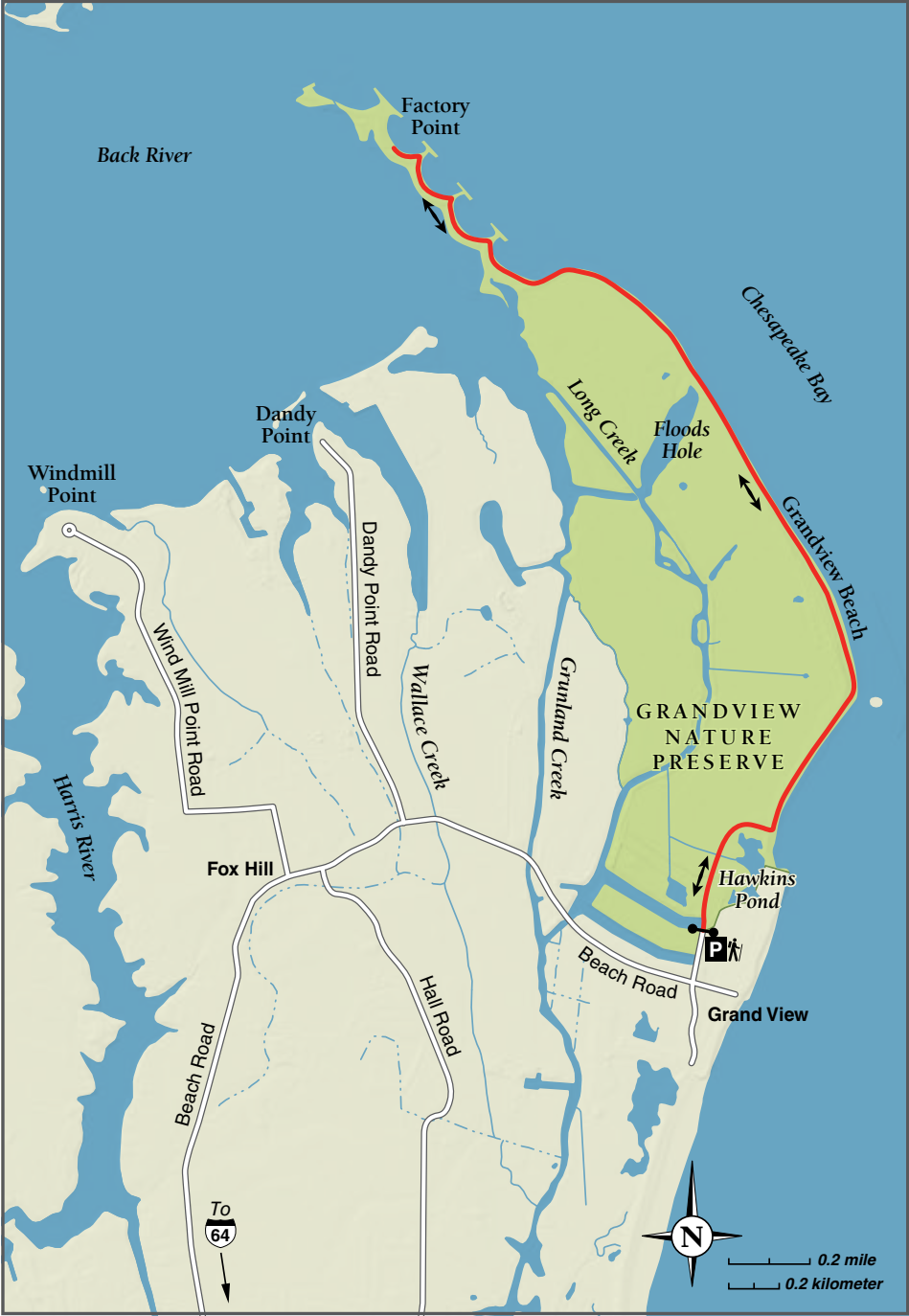
Chesapeake Bay and Eastern Virginia



Chesapeake Bay and Eastern Virginia

1. Grandview Nature Preserve (p. 14)
2. Newport News Park (p. 18)
3. Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve (p. 23)
4. Hickory Hollow Natural Area Preserve (p. 27)
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6. The Northern Neck (p. 35)

Grandview Nature Preserve





GRANDVIEW NATURE PRESERVE

- **GPS:** N37.0791832 W76.2775342
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (round-trip): 5.0 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 2.5 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** None
- **MAP:** USGS *Hampton*
- **CONTACT:** Hampton Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Services
22 Lincoln St.
Hampton, VA 23669; 757-727-8311
hampton.gov/1187/Parks-Recreation

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.4 Turn left onto the beach
- 0.7 Round a corner of the beach
- 1.7 Large dunes; shortly thereafter walk onto a narrow spit of land
- 2.5 Sign denoting area behind it closed in the warmer months; retrace steps
- 5.0 Return to automobile

The Chesapeake Bay, America's largest bay, is the catch basin for a far-reaching drainage system that covers 64,000 square miles. Snowmelt that begins its downstream journey near Cooperstown, New York, meets and mingles in the bay with rainwater that fell on the higher elevations of the Allegheny Mountains on the central West Virginia–Virginia border. The bay is considered an estuary, a body of water where tidal movements bring salt water upstream, where it comes into contact with the fresh water being carried toward the ocean by river currents.

There are many other estuaries throughout the world, such as Puget Sound in Washington, Cook Inlet in Alaska, and the fjords of Norway, but none of them are nearly as productive as the Chesapeake Bay. Millions of pounds of seafood are harvested from the bay each year, including large percentages of America's

supply of blue crabs and oysters. A number of conditions combine to make the bay this productive. Probably the two most important factors are the large amounts of fresh water coming into the bay and the vast acreage of marshlands surrounding the bay, which provides an abundance of detritus and other nutrients. These wetlands are home to numerous shorebirds and are also major stopping-over and resting areas on the Great Atlantic Flyway for migratory waterfowl, including a wide array of ducks, swans, and Canada geese.

Although the Chesapeake Bay has about 4,000 miles of shoreline—more than the entire US Pacific coast (excluding Alaska)—a large percentage of it is privately owned, heavily developed, or both. It is our good fortune that the city of Hampton has set aside a few miles of that shoreline as the Grandview Nature Preserve, where you and I can walk on a secluded beach, far removed from hordes of sunbathing vacationers, carnival-atmosphere boardwalks, high-rise condominiums, or busy shipping yards. Here, in a place of relative quiet, we can study the bay's waters, shoreline, and marshes at our leisure, or just sit peacefully on the sand.

Be aware that the preserve has no restroom facilities or potable water. Note, too, especially if you're hiking in the cooler months, that the winds around the bay can teach your body the meaning of a windchill factor. There is no shade in the preserve, so be ready for the glare of the sun hitting from above and reflecting off the water beside you and the sand underneath your feet. Regulations prohibit visitors from being in the preserve after sunset.

DIRECTIONS To reach the preserve, take I-64 Exit 263 in Hampton onto US 250N/VA 134S/Mercury Boulevard and drive 3.2 miles to make a left onto Fox Hill Road. Continue straight onto Silver Isle Boulevard in an additional 2.9 miles,

but just 0.1 mile later turn left onto Beach Road and follow it for 2.7 miles to make a left onto State Park Road. Park your automobile at the end of the street, being sure to obey the posted regulations.

Route Description

Walk through the gate, and immediately to the right you may see several turtles basking in the sun on and around Hawkins Pond. At dawn or dusk, you might see a raccoon searching for a meal at the pond, and despite all the houses and other developments in the area, deer have been spotted roaming about on the preserve. Arrive at the beach in 0.4 mile and turn to your left (to the right is private property in a few yards), enjoying, as the name of this place suggests, a grand view of the Chesapeake Bay. Huge cargo ships often go slowly by, for the Norfolk–Hampton area is one of the busiest ports in the world. Off in the distance you may be able to make out the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, built in 1965 at a cost of \$200 million. The bridge-tunnel spans the mouth of the bay—a distance of 18 miles—joining southeast Virginia with the Delmarva Peninsula. A trip across the bridge-tunnel to the peninsula is worthwhile; Jay Abercrombie thoroughly covers some good hikes in this area, which most people tend to overlook, in his book *Weekend Walks on the Delmarva Peninsula*.

Continue walking and doing a bit of beach-combing. You will find the shells of the jackknife clam, known locally as a razor clam because of its resemblance to the old-fashioned shaving razor. You might happen to see a few live ones wash up on the beach, but they are such fast burrowers that they will quickly disappear, making them next to impossible to dig up. The clams use a strong foot to anchor themselves in the sand as they send up siphons to feed on plankton and detritus floating about in the water.

Various body parts of the blue crab may be spread over the sand. In addition to being a favorite food of the shorebirds, blue crabs are one of the most important seafood species of

the bay. Commercial watermen catch millions of pounds annually, with the same amount also estimated to be caught by weekend crabbers. The crabs bury themselves in the mud and become dormant in the winter, emerging as soon as the water temperature rises a few degrees. You will find large numbers of female crabs here in late summer, as they move into this area from the north so that their young will be released into the more saline water found near the mouth of the bay. The interesting lives of blue crabs are described in superbly entertaining and nontechnical detail in William Warner's *Beautiful Swimmers: Watermen, Crabs, and the Chesapeake Bay* ("beautiful swimmers" is the English translation of the blue crab's Latin name, *Callinectes sapidus*).

The dune on your left was formed when sand, blown about by winds off the bay, became trapped in bits of beach debris. As the winds continued to blow more sand onto and over the dune, wind- and salt-resistant vegetation established itself and helped stabilize the dune.

Rounding a corner of the beach at 0.7 mile, look for brown pelicans resting on rocks in the water. Pelicans were once on the decline around the bay, but they have made a remarkable comeback since the banning of the pesticide DDT. It is now common to be able to watch one use its 90-inch wingspan to build up speed for a spectacular dive into the water. The cartoons you watched in your childhood may have convinced you that a pelican uses its pouch to carry fish, but in reality the pouch is primarily employed as a device to scoop the fish out of the water.

Looking back onto the beach, you'll see that the sand is dotted by small holes with scratch marks in front of them. These are the homes of small ghost crabs. If you wait and watch long enough, one of them will make a mad dash for the water because they have to wet their gills on a periodic basis. Sadly for them, this is when they often become a meal for a circling gull or tern. In addition to the crab holes, that string of tan capsules you find on the beach is a collection of whelk eggs. Many times the capsules

do not hatch and, if you break them open, you'll find tiny whelk shells inside, identical to those of adults.

Rounding another curve in the beach, you will notice the dune has become large enough to develop sand "cliffs," but by the time you have walked 1.7 miles, the dune will have disappeared and you can look out across the inland marsh where herons and egrets wade in search of food. At about this spot, the waves become larger and louder because the land no longer slopes gently into the water but rather drops steeply into the bay. Shortly thereafter, you will arrive on a narrow spit of land, which has some interesting history.

This spit existed until the late 1990s when a violent storm that blew in from the northeast

breached the land, creating a small channel and separating the tip of the spit from the mainland. It remained this way until bulkheads were constructed around 2010, which allowed sand to build up and rejoin everything together again. The spit has now become a popular place for boaters to have picnics. At 2.5 miles, you should come to a sign that will inform you that the land behind it is closed to visitors during the warmer months of the year. This is to protect migratory birds—primarily oystercatchers, black skimmers, and least terns—during their nesting season.

Turn around and stroll back to your car, delighting in the sunshine, the salty breeze, the antics of passing seagulls, and the discovery of other sights, sounds, and small treasures you may have missed on the way out.

While in this area you should consider driving over to the City of Hampton's Sandy Bottom Nature Park (accessible from I-61 Exit 261A). A stroll along the several miles of pathways there will take you through lake edge, marsh, streamside, and forest habitats.



The preserve may be lightly visited on a late fall day.

Newport News Park



- **GPS:** N37.1826327 W76.5365394
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 5.6 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 3.0 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 130 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS Yorktown; Newport News Park map
- **CONTACT:** Newport News Park
13560 Jefferson Ave.
Newport News, VA 23603-1104
757-888-3333
nnva.gov/894/Parks-Squares-Plazas

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.0 Cross bridge over Lee Hall Reservoir; at far end turn left onto Twin Forts Loop
- 0.4 Go right at four-way intersection; 100 feet later stay right to continue on Twin Forts Loop
- 0.8 Left onto White Oak Nature Trail
 - 1.1 Left onto Sycamore Creek Trail
 - 1.5 Right onto Bikeway
 - 1.7 Left onto unmarked wide roadway
- 2.6 Road comes in from left, but continue a few feet to make a right onto Bikeway
- 3.6 Bear left onto ungraveled roadbed
- 3.7 Turn right onto Wynn's Mill Loop; soon come to Swamp Fire Trail and turn left to cross footbridge
- 4.5 Another section of Wynn's Mill Loop comes in from left; keep right, cross Swamp Bridge and keep right at its far end
 - 5.1 Observation deck
 - 5.6 End of hike

multiple miles of walking routes through dense forests, well removed from automobiles and the resulting din of traffic noise—all the more amazing when you realize the park sits within the confines of one of Virginia's most heavily populated areas.

In order to meet the diverse recreational needs of so many people, the park provides bicycle and boat rentals, an archery range, a 36-hole golf course and driving range, picnic shelters, an arboretum, an interpretive center, an excellent seasonal schedule of naturalist-conducted programs, playgrounds, concessions, and a campground with close to 200 sites. Yet, all of these facilities are concentrated on just a few hundred acres, and approximately 40 miles of pathways and fire roads can lead visitors away from intensely used areas around Lee Hall Reservoir and through dark stands of loblolly pine, by overgrown reminders of wars past, and into lushly green and quiet swamplands. The official state transportation map of Virginia may show this as metropolitan property, but you are in for a most decidedly un-urban walk. Park personnel and volunteers have inventoried in excess of 70 spring flowers; more than 100 summer and fall blossoms; at least 60 tree types; various shrubs, vines, and other plants; and so much wildlife that it takes an eight-page pamphlet just to list all of the native species. Take a look at the total vertical rise you're going to experience while on this hike of more than 5 miles and you will know you're in for an easy stroll over gentle terrain.

DIRECTIONS Take I-64 Exit 250B in Newport News onto VA 105 East, drive for less than 0.2 mile, and make a left onto VA 143. In 0.5 mile, turn right into the park and continue about 1 mile to the Discovery Center, where you can obtain maps and other information about the park, which is open year-round.

Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and Central Park in New York may be more famous than the Newport News Park, but these and other municipal parks often contain amusement rides, zoos, bandstands, and other highly developed areas spread out and connected by networks of paved roadways. With approximately 8,000 mostly wooded acres, Newport News Park is one of the country's largest city-owned parks to provide hikers with

Route Description

You can leave your car either at the center or in the parking area across the road from it. Begin by crossing the bridge over Lee Hall Reservoir, which is open for the fishing of catfish, largemouth bass, northern pike, crappie, chain pickerel, bluegill, and white and yellow perch. At the far end of the bridge, bear left to follow the left branch of the Twin Forts Loop, where you'll see the first of many mounds and trenches that made up the Confederate lines of defense during the Civil War's Battle of Dam Number One. The dam, now covered by the waters of the reservoir, is still visible from the footbridge you just crossed.

At the beginning of 1862, the Union strategy of the peninsula campaign was for Major General George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac to swiftly defeat the Confederate forces on the peninsula and move on to capture Richmond before it could be fortified. At this time the war was still in its early stages and the Union felt the fall of Richmond would depress Southern resolve and bring about a speedy conclusion to the rebellion. Preparing for the impending attack, the Confederates constructed, with the supplementary labor of slaves from nearby plantations, a series of fortifications (known as breastworks because soldiers could fire from the trenches but still be protected to the breast by the high mounds) stretching across the peninsula. Following a failed attempt to make it past the Warwick River on April 5, the Army of the Potomac was again repulsed on April 16 by soldiers entrenched behind the breastworks close to Dam Number One.

Some of the old breastworks found at other sites in Virginia have deteriorated to the point of being barely distinguishable, but the ones you'll see throughout your hike in the park are remarkably well preserved, many coming close to retaining their original shape and size. Please refrain from walking on any of them.

After the two skirmishes, McClellan halted frontal assaults in favor of large artillery bombardments. After suffering several weeks under

the Union barrage, the Confederates retreated—not quite in defeat, as they had gained a month's worth of valuable time for Richmond to fortify and reinforce.

At 0.3 mile, the trail swings away from the reservoir to cross a creek beside the high mounds of the breastworks. When you come to the four-way intersection at 0.4 mile, the path-way straight ahead goes to the campground while the Longmeadow Trail to the left heads back to the reservoir. You need to continue right for 100 feet before making another right and continuing on the Twin Forts Loop, walking on the other side of the breastworks you've been observing.

At 0.8 mile, the route will have returned you to the bridge, where you'll make a left onto the White Oak Nature Trail. People who have been to Florida or the Caribbean may be reminded of mangroves when looking at the vegetation in the shallow waters of the reservoir. On the dry land, the mixed forest of oak, hickory, and loblolly pine has an intermediate story of holly, pawpaw, and dogwood, with very little undergrowth. Make a left onto the Sycamore Creek Trail at 1.1 miles, reaching the well-maintained Bikeway at 1.5 miles. To the left, it is about 0.7 mile to the campground; turn right into a younger forest of smaller trees. Be alert at 1.7 miles, where the Bikeway curves to the right; you want to take the unmarked but wide roadway to the left, where the undergrowth suddenly expands into hundreds of blueberry bushes, which are abundant throughout the park. A road comes in from the left at 2.6 miles, but you want to keep to the right for a few more feet to make a right onto the Bikeway and enter a small portion of the Colonial National Historical Park.

The historical park commemorates the battle of Yorktown and the surrender of Lord Cornwallis to General George Washington. (The park is connected by way of the 20-plus-mile Colonial Parkway—passing through Colonial Williamsburg—to the site of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in the New World.) Honeysuckle and poison ivy vines



Lee Hall Reservoir is open for fishing.

are draped over the trees where a road to the left leads approximately 500 feet to Washington's Yorktown headquarters. Continuing right on the Bikeway, you'll return to the confines of Newport News Park; bear left onto an ungraveled roadbed when the Bikeway makes a 90-degree turn at 3.6 miles.

Turn right onto Wynn's Mill Loop (which has habitat for the cottonmouth snake, so be alert) at 3.7 miles, making sure, 100 feet beyond that, to turn right again. The maze of a multitude of breastworks going off in different directions must have required hundreds of hours of backbreaking labor to construct. Coming to the Swamp Fire Trail, turn left, soon crossing a small footbridge. Five-lined skinks are often seen skittering across the bridge in search of insects. The young skinks have five well-defined lines along their backs and bright-blue tails, but the characteristics fade and become less obvious with age. As defense mechanisms,

the skink has a detachable tail as well as a bite powerful enough to draw blood.

Another section of the Wynn's Mill Loop comes in from the left at 4.5 miles; you want to keep right, heading onto the Swamp Bridge and into a radically different environment of lush summer greenery. Mixed in with the swamp's dense tangle of vegetation is arrow arum, differentiated from other arrowhead-shaped plants by its distinctive long green sheath, or spathe, surrounding tiny flowers that grow on a fleshy spike known as a spadix by botanists. Spotted turtles, aptly named for the yellow dots on their head, neck, and shell, are sometimes seen basking in warm sunshine on logs floating in the swamp. Although they may not appear so as they leisurely slide into the water when disturbed, spotted turtles are amazingly intelligent creatures and have shown an ability to correctly negotiate elaborate mazes.

At the far end of the bridge, make a right, coming to an observation platform at 5.1 miles.

Looking to your right, you'll see where the lake meets the swamp, and it is in this zone of transition that Canada geese, tundra swans, and a variety of ducks make their winter homes. Continue along the trail, cross a footbridge that parallels the paved road, and stay along the reservoir shoreline to the end of the hike at 5.6 miles.

If you haven't had your fill of easy hiking on nearly flat tidewater terrain, there are still miles of pathways and fire roads you can use to explore the thousands of acres in a less frequently visited part of the park across VA 105. Personnel at the Discovery Center can supply you with the information you'll need.



Dozens of turtles live in the reservoir.



HUGHLETT POINT NATURAL AREA PRESERVE

- **GPS:** N37.7418722 W76.3174065
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 2.1 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 45 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 10 feet
- **MAP:** USGS *Fleets Bay*
- **CONTACT:** Division of Natural Heritage
600 E. Main St., 24th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219
804-786-7951
dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-area-preserves/hughlett

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.15 Right onto woods road
- 0.4 Left onto side trail to observation deck; retrace steps to woods road and turn left
- 0.9 Observation deck; left turn onto beach a few feet later
- 1.8 Make left onto trail into woods; turn left onto woods road and a few feet later make right onto trail back to parking area
- 2.1 Return to your automobile

Like Belle Isle State Park (see Hike 5), the Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve is a gift Virginians gave themselves by voting for the 1992 Parks and Recreational Facilities Bond. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also provided funds to help purchase the 204-acre tract in order to protect the rare northeastern beach tiger beetle and the occurrences of Chesapeake Bay salt marshes, beaches, and dunes.

Enclosed on three sides by the waters of Ingram Cove, Dividing Creek, and the Chesapeake Bay, and rising no more than 10 feet above sea level, the preserve in many places is more marsh than it is dry land. Plants that find a favorable home here include needle rush, salt meadow hay, switchgrass, common reed, cordgrass, and marsh elder. The inland marshes are bordered by wax myrtle, whose berries begin forming in August and develop a

white, waxy dust that was used in former times to make bayberry candles. But it is not just the berries that have a pleasant scent; rubbing just about any part of the plant will produce the familiar fragrance. Areas just slightly lower in elevation produce the right conditions for cattails to survive.

DIRECTIONS From VA 3 in Kilmar-nock, in the main part of town, turn northeast onto VA 200 and follow it 4.3 miles to a right turn onto VA 606. In another 2.1 miles, make a right onto VA 605. The parking area for the preserve is on the left in an additional 2.0 miles. No visitor's or parking fee is charged, but be aware that it is a day-use area only. Pets must be on a leash at all times.

Route Description

Enter the preserve by taking the boardwalk into a forest dominated by loblolly pine trees, where you might see a gray fox splashing through shallow, tannin-stained water in pursuit of an early morning meal. The mounds of what appear to be dirt covered by rich vegetation are actually the decaying piles of wood debris left over from the last time this area was logged, several decades ago. Look closely and you may find that tracks made by heavy logging equipment are slowly disappearing into the soft soil.

Intersect a woods road at 0.15 mile and turn right; the Chesapeake Bay is visible through the vegetation to the left. To appreciate as much of what the preserve has to offer as possible, turn left onto a side trail at 0.4 mile to follow it out to an observation deck overlooking a large marsh and the bay. Note that the deck you are standing upon is built with recycled plastic; maybe one of your old soda bottles contributed

Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve



to this “lumber” and helped save a tree from being destroyed.

From the vantage point of the deck, the Chesapeake Bay and its accompanying shoreline look much as they did at the time of Captain John Smith’s explorations in the early 1600s. Reminders of the modern world may be a large ship passing by on the horizon, or the smoke from the menhaden processing plant in Reedville to the north. Menhaden, herring that can grow up to 14 inches in length and distinguished by silver sides marked with large dark spots below a bluish upper portion, are caught in large quantities in the bay. Most often turned into fertilizer, the fish may also be included in pet foods or nutritional supplements.

Return to the main trail and turn left, soon passing a possible wet-weather small pond on the right at 0.7 mile. The route swings to the left at 0.9 mile, coming to another observation

deck. The cattail-lined marsh here has been known to be a good place to watch ospreys and bald eagles on the wing. In addition to providing nourishment and home-building material for muskrats, cattails help stabilize soil along the edge of the marsh.

You will arrive at the beach, the home of the northeastern beach tiger beetle, less than 300 feet later. The beetle begins its life by crawling out of the egg its parent laid in the sand. Spending the first two years of its life in the larval stage, it grows to 5/8 inch in length and has noticeable humps on its back, as well as large jaws like the adult. It survives by waiting at the mouth of a 4- to 10-inch burrow for prey to come along and be snatched by the powerful jaws. With russet-green heads and black markings on white backs, the adults are only two-thirds of an inch long. They can often be seen during the warmer months, hopping across the sand

In a natural process, Chesapeake Bay is gradually eroding the shoreline.



in search of food. At one time these beetles inhabited much of the shoreline around the Chesapeake Bay, but waterfront development, increased human foot traffic on their sandy home, and the effects of pollutants have caused their numbers to decrease dramatically. There are only a few places left in Virginia and Maryland where they are known to exist.

It's time to take a break, so dip your feet into the water (although swimming is prohibited), and sit back to enjoy the sun and the sand. One of the most enjoyable activities in the Chesapeake Bay is to go crabbing by becoming what the locals call a "chicken necker." This is done by attaching a chicken neck (or any other bony piece of meat) to a string and casting it a few feet out into the water. Gradually pull the string in when you feel a tug on it. With luck, a crab will be hanging tenaciously onto the bait, and you can slip a net under it before you lift it out of the water. Be careful of the claws when you turn the net over to gently shake the crab out! No license is required for recreational crabbing in Virginia, but I suggest you follow the example of a Maryland law and throw back all crabs less than 5 inches from shell point to shell point.

You have the option of extending the hike by a little more than 1 mile (round-trip) by turning right and walking southward to Hughlett Point and a bit beyond—all of which is public land. To continue with this hike description, turn left and follow the beach northward—maybe. This is a landscape that is constantly in flux. When I first came here, it was possible to do this outing as a circuit hike. Then a major storm blew in and breached the sand, creating a wide outlet from the inland pond, meaning visitors had to retrace their steps back to the parking area. Soon after the turn of the 21st century, a major hurricane changed the beachfront again and reclosed the outlet. However, the last time I was here that situation had changed once more. There was a new outlet, but it was not so wide that it could not be waded across. (You may, however, not want to do this if the tide is going out, as the current is quite swift. In

addition, signs periodically posted discourage crossing due to deep mud or other hazards.)

If you are able to continue with the circuit hike, enjoy the quiet of your surroundings, comb the beach for hidden treasures, or keep a lookout for some of the area's wildlife. At one time of year or another, deer, river otter, herons, scoters, egrets, rails, loons, American black ducks, and tundra swans have all been seen along this shoreline.

Be watching for the unmarked trail to the left at 1.8 miles that will bring you back to the woods road, where you will turn left, walk a few yards, and then turn right to rewalk the original portion of the trail on which you started the journey, returning to your car at 2.1 miles.

Take in the beauty at Hughlett Point.





HICKORY HOLLOW NATURAL AREA PRESERVE

- **GPS:** N37.7721713 W76.4440805
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 3.0 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 1.5 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 130 feet
- **MAP:** USGS *Lancaster*
- **CONTACT:** Division of Natural Heritage
600 E. Main St., 24th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219
804-786-7951
dwr.virginia.gov/vbwt/sites/hickory-hollow-nature-trail

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.2 Right onto green-blazed Torn Teeples Trail
- 0.7 Right onto white-blazed trail; 300 feet later make a right onto Ann Messick Trail
- 1.0 Cabin Swamp; retrace steps to main trail
- 1.2 Right onto main trail; 200 feet later onto red-blazed Overlook Trail
- 2.0 Right onto main trail
- 2.2 Keep left to stay on main trail; bypass side trails
- 2.9 Make right onto road trail
- 3.0 Return to parking area

The existence of a marked trail system in the Hickory Hollow area of Lancaster County is proof that the efforts of one person can enhance the lives of many people. Although a number of state, civic, and environmental organizations contributed donations and volunteer efforts, county forester Henry Bashore is generally acknowledged as the person who made an idea into a reality. Not only did he help coordinate the groups' efforts and persuade the county bureaucracy to open Hickory Hollow to the public, he also spent his own time and funds developing, building, and maintaining the trail system. This is surely a lesson to those of us who feel one person alone cannot make a difference.

From 1780, the first year of recorded ownership, to 1877, the approximately 200 acres of

Hickory Hollow changed hands several times and were used for a variety of purposes, notably for timber or farming. In 1877, Lancaster County purchased the property and maintained a poor farm on it until 1905. The process of reforestation has allowed the timber to be harvested numerous times, the last in 1962.

Much of this hike is on old logging roads, making the walk moderately easy. Wildflowers are plentiful. Among them are trout lily, crane-fly orchids, violets, pygmy pipe, and horsetail. Flying squirrels begin their acrobatics in the early evening, and ovenbirds, with their familiar *teacher, teacher, teacher* call, are more often heard than seen.

DIRECTIONS To reach the trailhead, follow VA 3 for 0.9 mile eastward from the Lancaster County Courthouse. Make a left onto VA 604, turning into the parking area on the left in 0.3 mile.

Route Description

Begin by taking the trail beside the bulletin board to an old road into the woods. The large holes in the ground next to the road are known as borrow pits. Soil, rock, and clay were "borrowed" from these spots to aid in building a level roadbed. Walk past the aqua-and-white-blazed trail to the left in less than 0.1 mile; you will return this way. Pink lady's slippers usually begin lining the roadside sometime in April. Although their numbers may appear to be more than adequate here in Hickory Hollow, this plant is becoming rarer every year in Virginia. Watch your step and please don't dig one up to replant at home. Besides, like other orchids, the lady's slipper will grow only when certain fungi are present in soil around its roots. If soil and weather conditions aren't conducive to the fungus, the lady's slipper will not survive. Remember the axiom to follow

Hickory Hollow Natural Area Preserve



while on any hike: “Take only pictures; leave only footprints.”

Pass another aqua-blazed trail to the left at 0.2 mile, and turn right onto the green-blazed Tom Teeples Trail, an old woods road that quickly fades to a trail, just 15 feet later. Swing to the right onto another woods road at 0.4 mile, but be alert just 600 feet later, as the road ends and your route swings to the left. Pass a picnic table and bench at 0.6 mile, and be sure to turn left onto a woods road less than 300 feet later. Arrive at the main, white-blazed trail at 0.7 mile, turn right, and, in less than 300 feet, turn right onto the yellow-blazed Ann Messick Trail, which makes a sharp right turn at 0.8 mile and descends.

The beginning of a 200-foot-long boardwalk marks your arrival in Cabin Swamp at 1.0 mile. Enjoy this quiet place, which is so intensely green and lush during the warm months that it may make other parts of the forest seem sparse and dull in comparison. Skunk cabbage, jack-in-the-pulpit, spring beauty, wild ginger, marsh marigold, and false hellebore grow among

dozens of other wildflowers. Freshwater clams have been seen next to the pennywort in the small streams, and the call of great horned owls often echoes through the woods.

Retrace your steps back to the main white-blazed trail at 1.2 miles, turn right, and, in less than 200 feet, bear right onto the red-blazed Overlook Trail that gradually descends through a forest with many loblolly pine and beech trees. The trail makes a sharp left at 1.5 miles, but, for the moment, keep right for 250 feet to arrive at an overlook of another portion of Cabin Swamp. Return to the intersection, turn right, and, making use of an old fire break, follow the trail as it descends into, and ascends out of, a narrow stream valley that has a wonderful sense of isolation.

Turn right onto the main white-blazed trail at 2.0 miles, coming to an intersection with the brown-blazed Great Mill Swamp Trail at 2.1 miles. The latter route descends for 0.3 mile to the edge of the swamp and is a nice side trip if you wish to take it, but this hike description continues by keeping left on the main,

Observing Cabin Swamp



white-blazed trail. A purple-blazed trail comes in from the left 300 feet later; keep right and make an abrupt descent, coming to another intersection at 2.2 miles. The unmarked trail to the right ascends to Lancaster High School. You want to turn left and ascend, but in less than 100 feet, pay attention—your journey does not follow the blue-blazed Ridge Trail to the left, but rather bears right to continue on the white-blazed route.

Because you are now on a trail instead of an old road, the hike takes on a more rustic feeling, as you walk through an open beech forest next to a creek (bypassing another trail to the right that also leads to the school). Passing in and out of laurel tunnels, the trail goes by heartleaf, running cedar, and partridgeberry that make up the ground cover. Come to an intersection at 2.6 miles. The main road/trail on which you started this hike is a couple hundred feet to the left via the aqua-blazed trail; however, in order to enjoy the walk for a few

minutes longer, keep right. The loblolly pines have dropped so many needles onto the under-story that it looks to be festooned by thousands of thin brown icicles. Come to the road/trail at 2.9 miles, and make a right to return to the parking area in less than 500 feet.

You should be aware that in the late 1990s, many residents of Lancaster County (rallied by local citizens Henry Bashore and Ann B. Messick) fought short-sighted government officials who were trying to develop an industrial park on Hickory Hollow lands. The residents' nearly tireless efforts were fruitful. Grants and donations, including \$150,000 from the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, were raised to purchase and protect the land. Hickory Hollow is now administered by the Northern Neck Audubon Society with assistance from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program. If you have enjoyed your hike here, be sure to let the county officials know.

This boardwalk leads into lush, tranquil Cabin Swamp.



- **GPS:** N37.7734926 W76.5924604
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (round-trip):
5.0 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 2.75 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** Less than 30 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Lively*; *Belle Isle State Park* map
- **CONTACT:** Belle Isle State Park
1632 Belle Isle Road
Lancaster, VA 22503
804-462-5030
dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/belle-isle

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.2 Left to observation blind; then return to main route and turn left
- 0.5 Turn left onto Watch House Trail
- 0.8 Bypass Neck Fields Trail coming in from the right; few feet later make left onto mowed pathway
- 1.1 Turn left onto Watch House Trail
- 1.4 left onto Neck Fields Trail
- 1.7 Left off of Neck Fields Trail
- 2.5 Left onto Neck Fields Trail
- 3.2 Brewer's Point; turn around and head back on Neck Fields Trail
- 4.4 Left onto Watch House Trail
- 4.6 Bypass Mud Creek Trail; turn right onto Porpoise Creek Trail
- 5.0 End of hike

The Tidewater area of Virginia has always had fewer places in which the public could walk or hike when compared to other parts of the commonwealth. So, it was a sad day in 1999 when two of its best trails located on private forest lands were closed—one was located beside the Corrotoman River in Lancaster County and the other one was near West Point in New Kent County. Thanks to hard work by local volunteers, those pathways have now been reopened, though they are now shorter in length and travel through areas diminished in acreage.

Earlier in the same decade, Virginians were foresighted enough to see that occurrences similar to this—coupled with the rapid spread of the modern world—threatened their ability to recreate in the natural world. Approving the Parks and Recreational Facilities Bond in 1992, the citizens authorized the commonwealth to expend state funds for the purpose of bringing more acreage into the public domain (and upgrading facilities at existing sites).

Bounded by water on three sides, 890-acre Belle Isle State Park was the first parcel of land to be purchased with the bond money. Archaeological evidence has shown that this small tract along the northern side of the Rappahannock River has been inhabited for approximately 1,000 years. The temporary camps of Native Americans who seasonally visited the area became the settlements of Algonquin-speaking peoples who moved inland from the coast. In turn, they were replaced by the Moraughtacunds, part of the Powhatan tribe, who were living in the region when colonists arrived.

The newcomers from the Old World soon turned the riverside acreage into a large and thriving plantation. Soon after the Civil War, the land was sold off into several parcels, and by the late 1900s was threatened with the possibility of becoming a waterfront community until the state purchased it in 1993.

The state park offers picnic areas; a campground and a backcountry canoe-in campsite; overnight accommodations in a Georgian-style mansion and guest house; an accessible boardwalk and fishing pier; bicycle, kayak, and canoe rentals; a motorboat launch; and a cartop launch. Rockfish, croaker, spot, and flounder are found in the waters around the park. The interpretive programs include canoe trips onto the river and into the creeks and marshes. Led by park personnel and volunteer naturalists, the guided paddle journeys focus on the ecology and fragility of the area. Making use

Belle Isle State Park



of innovative conservation practices to reduce pollution runoff into the Chesapeake Bay, some of the land is still open fields.

Following old farm roads, a network of trails provides the opportunity to walk by these fields and out to vistas overlooking the Rappahannock River and Mulberry Creek. Most of the pathways are also open to bicyclists and equestrians. Pets must be on a leash at all times.

DIRECTIONS Drive northward from Kilmarnock on VA 3 for 10.0 miles to Lively. Turn westward and follow VA 201 for 3.3 miles, then turn right onto VA 354. An additional 3.2 miles brings you to a left turn onto VA 683. The contact station is 0.7 mile down this road, the camp store is 0.8 mile farther, and the playground area where you leave your car is an additional 0.5 mile.

Route Description

Walk from the parking lot to the fence overlooking the broad Rappahannock River, more than 3 miles wide at this point. This is a great place to be in early morning as the sun spreads its glow across the water. After enjoying the view, walk next to the woods to begin following the Porpoise Creek Trail, an old road.

Turn left onto a small pathway into the woods at 0.2 mile and come to an enclosed blind overlooking a small backwater area of the river. Staying inside this small hut built by volunteers of a local conservation organization, and being quiet as long as possible, increases your chances of observing great blue herons, ducks, geese, and other waterfowl. Small ripples moving across the water in a zigzag fashion could indicate a snake gliding to the opposite shore. You may also see the head of a muskrat bobbing up and down as it swims to its tunnel home in the bank. Boosted by partially webbed hind feet, these amphibious members of the rodent family are able to swim forward or backward and have been known to stay submerged for more than 10 minutes at a time.

Return to the main trail and turn left, walking between woods and field. Pass through a windrow at 0.5 mile and come to a T-intersection beside another field. Turn left onto the Watch House Trail. The Mud Creek Trail comes in from the right a few feet later; keep left on the Watch House Trail—the only bit of dryness separating two wetlands—with a view of the Rappahannock River to the left.

The Neck Fields Trail comes in from the right at 0.8 mile; keep left. Just 100 feet later, turn left onto a mowed pathway, the Watch House Loop. Your perspective onto the Rappahannock River changes as you continue along.

Intersect and turn left onto the Watch House Trail at 1.1 miles, passing through a stand of towering loblolly pine trees and coming to the edge of the river. More than 100 years ago, an oyster watch house stood close to 100 feet offshore to ensure that thieves did not sneak in to harvest the fruits of the oyster beds. A later watch house was built on the point of land you are now standing upon. As did those throughout the Chesapeake Bay, the oysters here began to dwindle in numbers in the 1970s due to nonpoint pollution and disease.

Return inland along Watch House Trail to bear left onto the Neck Fields Trail, a wide country lane bordered by loblolly trees, at 1.4 miles. For a bit of a change from walking the old farm roads, turn left onto a mowed pathway, the Neck Fields Loop, at 1.7 miles. Tracks in the soft soil attest to an abundance of deer in the park, while the pond visible through the trees may harbor ducks, geese, egrets, and herons. While you may see some great blue herons in Virginia all year long, others fly as far north as Ontario for the summer and migrate to Virginia's Northern Neck—or points farther south—for the winter. At 2.3 miles, come to an intersection of woods roads and bear to the right. Songbirds may serenade you in the early morning, while vultures, crows, and hawks wing their way across the open sky.

Intersect the Neck Fields Trail at 2.5 miles and turn left. As you pass by the Brewer's Trail (whose mowed pathway is an additional walking option), private homes along Mulberry Creek are

barely visible through the vegetation to the right at 2.8 miles. Be sure to stay on the main route to come to its end at the canoe-in campsite on Brewer's Point at 3.2 miles. You certainly deserve a break, so bring the snacks out of the day pack and enjoy the sights and sounds. A small fishing boat may pass by, causing small waves to lightly splash upon the shore, while an osprey may drop to the water, rising a few moments later with a fish grasped in its talons. Bald eagles have been seen winging past this point.

When you are ready to return, follow Neck Fields Trail back to Watch House Trail at 4.4 miles. Turn left and bypass Mud Creek Trail on the left at 4.6 miles. (If you wish to extend the hike, you could follow Mud Creek Trail to another point overlooking the Mulberry River, a round-trip of a little more than 0.5 mile.)

Making a right turn onto the Porpoise Creek Trail less than 200 feet later will return you to the playground area at 5.0 miles.

For a whimsical diversion before heading home after the hike, drive back to Lively and turn right onto VA 3. In Lancaster Court House make a right onto VA 604 and drive for several miles. The Merry Point Ferry, one of the few remaining river ferries in Virginia, will shuttle you across the West Branch of the Corrotoman River. Although this is a utilitarian boat, the ride across the river can be a scenic and enjoyable one as you watch waterfowl and other birds fly above the river. To return to VA 3 after the ferry ride, take VA 604 to Ottoman, where you will make a right onto VA 354. Watch for a right turn onto VA 201 to bring you to back to Lively.

View from Brewer's Point



- **GPS:** N38.1696993 W76.8634969
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 4.0 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 2.0 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 370 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Stratford Hall and Colonial Beach South*; *Westmoreland State Park* map
- **CONTACT:** Westmoreland State Park
145 Cliff Road
Montross, VA 22520
804-493-8821
dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/westmoreland

The Hike at a Glance

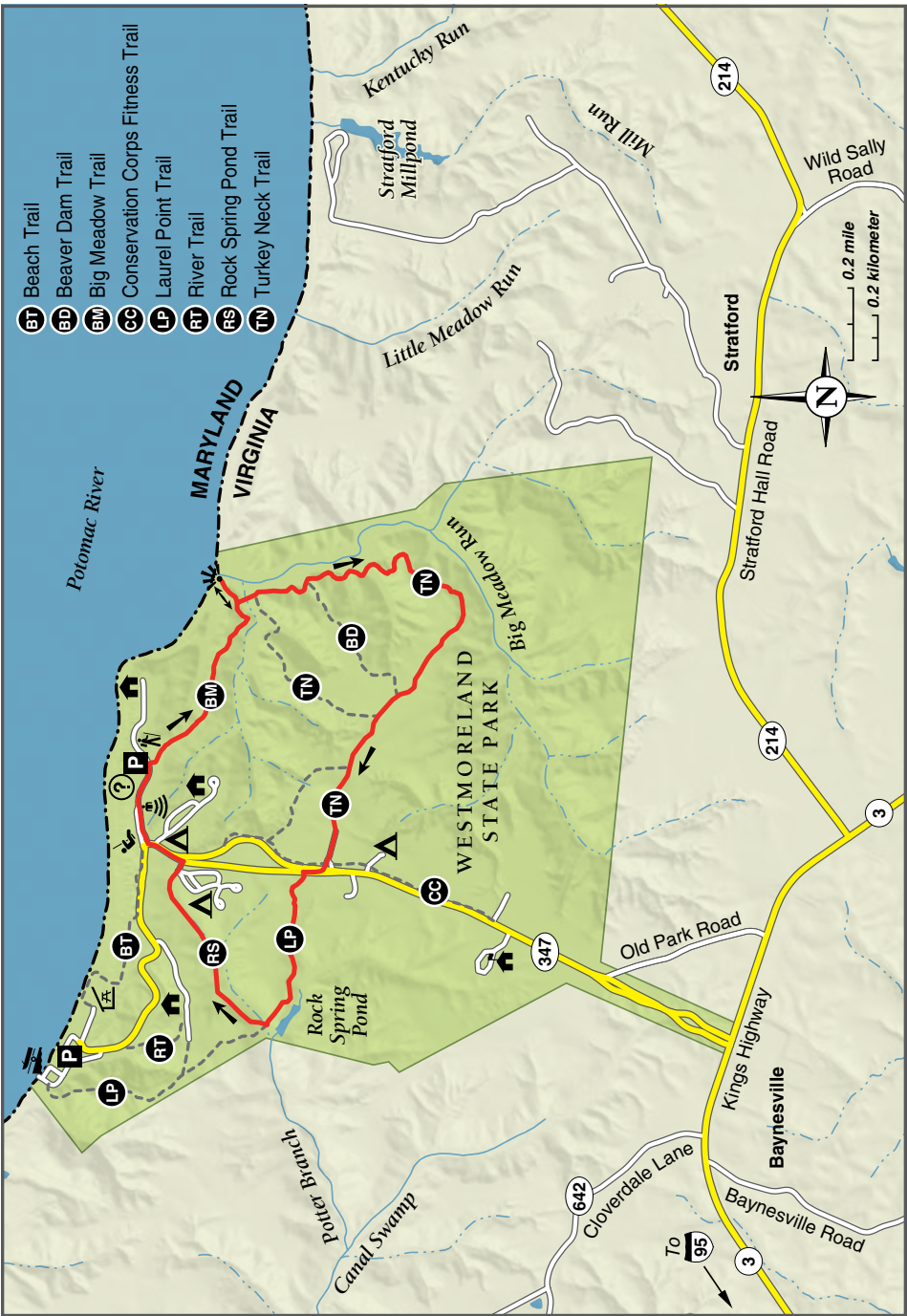
- 0.7 Take trail left to beach; then retrace steps to Big Meadow Trail and turn left
- 1.0 Turkey Neck Trail comes in from right, stay left
- 1.2 Beaver Dam Trail comes in from right, stay left
- 2.1 Other end of Beaver Dam Trail comes in from right, stay left. Soon another branch of Turkey Neck Trail comes in from right, stay left
- 2.4 Another branch of Turkey Neck Trail comes in from right; stay left, go through campground, cross park road, turn right, and, in a few feet, turn left onto Laurel Point Trail
- 3.2 Right onto Rock Spring Pond Trail
- 3.8 Left onto park road, follow it to right turn onto road leading to visitor center
- 4.1 Return to your automobile

Driving east on VA 3 from I-95 Exit 130 at Fredericksburg will bring you onto the Northern Neck, a wide peninsula between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. The land took on its present form some 5,000-6,000 years ago after glaciers from the last Ice Age melted, raising sea levels enough to form the Chesapeake Bay and cover the Susquehanna River floodplain. The area can be a lesson in the history of America's earlier days, and three sites—one federal, one state, and one private—have trails coursing through them that let you study that time period from a pedestrian's point of view. Fees of some kind are collected at each location.

DIRECTIONS About 36 miles east of I-95 at Fredericksburg is the George Washington's Birthplace National Monument located off of VA 3. After passing through Oak Grove on VA 3, look for a sign directing you to make a left turn onto VA 204 to reach the grounds of the monument in approximately 2 miles. Washington was born here on February 22, 1732. The property, once known as Pope's Creek Plantation and now called Wakefield, was Washington's home for the first three years of his life. Walking the small network of trails past numerous sites will help you gain insight into the life of America's first president and the era in which he lived. The Memorial House, built in the 1930s, is typical of 18th-century plantation homes of the area. Also built in the 1930s, the Kitchen House stands on the site of the original kitchen. Nearby, the park service manages some of the more than 500 acres of the monument as a demonstration and working farm, using the agricultural technology of the 1700s. Other portions of the trail network have interpretive signs that discuss the natural, as well as human, history of the land. Pets are required to be on a leash.

From Washington's birthplace continue driving east on VA 3 for 5.0 miles to bypass the entrance to Westmoreland State Park for the moment. Just 0.6 mile beyond it is a left turn onto VA 214, which leads to Stratford Hall. Like Wakefield, Stratford Hall was once part of an enormous tract patented by Nathaniel Pope in the 1650s. In 1716, Colonel Thomas Lee purchased about 4,000 acres and built what became home to several generations of one of Virginia's premier families. Among the most famous of the famous to live here were Richard

The Northern Neck



Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee, both signers of the Declaration of Independence, and the Confederate States' military leader during the Civil War, Robert E. Lee. Privately owned, the 1,500-plus acres are operated as a plantation much as it would have been during Robert E. Lee's lifetime. Livestock graze in open meadows, and fields are cultivated by traditional methods. By taking a 2- to 3-mile circuit hike on a system of interconnecting pathways, you can tour the H-shaped Great House, pass through reforested acres of hardwoods, watch the reconstructed mill grind grains, overlook the broad Potomac River, and visit the spring that supplied water (and a means of refrigeration) for the plantation.

After the visit to Stratford Hall, return to VA 3, turn right, and go 0.7 mile to make a right turn into Westmoreland State Park. Follow the main park road for 1.7 miles to turn right onto the road leading a few hundred feet to the visitor center and the parking area.

Route Description

The Commonwealth of Virginia purchased approximately 1,300 acres (at \$11.50 an acre) in 1933 to develop Westmoreland State Park, which was once a part of Stratford Hall. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built most of the still-existing structures and roadways. Westmoreland, one of Virginia's original six state parks, now has rental cabins, several campgrounds, a camp store and conference center overlooking the river, a picnic area and shelters, an Olympic-size swimming pool, and boat rentals available at a dock on the river. Like all of Virginia's state parks, Westmoreland offers interpretive programs throughout the heavy tourist season.

Ever since the park opened in 1936, one of its great attractions has been the fossils found on the river beaches. Visitors have discovered the skeletal remains of crocodiles, stingrays,

porpoises, turtles, whales, sharks, and other marine life that lived in the Miocene Sea some 15 million years ago. Be sure to ask about the tides at the visitor center; the river overtakes the beach below Horsehead Cliffs at high tide.

The trails of Westmoreland will bring you into a woods that has not been timbered since the beginning of the 20th century, making the forest a wonderland of exceptionally large-trunked trees towering over sparse undergrowth. Opossums, raccoons, weasels, mink, river otters, beavers, foxes, squirrels and various other rodents, wild turkeys, deer, turtles, snakes, and frogs have all been seen by hikers at one time or another. Yellow Swamp and Big Meadow are good introductions to coastal-plain marshes.

Enjoy the view along the Potomac River from the visitor center. Across the 6-mile-wide river is southern Maryland. There is also the possibility of sighting an osprey or bald eagle on the wing.

After looking at the visitor center's displays, start the hike on the Big Meadow Trail. Enter the woods on an 1890s logging road, where dogwoods and pawpaws are part of the understory. In late fall the pawpaw trees, among the last to lose their leaves, add various tones of yellow to an otherwise brown and gray forest.

At 0.7 mile, make a left onto the short trail leading you onto the beach, a great place to learn more about the makeup of the Northern Neck. Only about 30 miles from the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River at this point is brackish. Because of the salinity, creatures you normally associate with bays or oceans are able to survive here. Blue and horseshoe crabs are often found on the sand. Note that horseshoe crabs are not really crabs but are more closely related to spiders and ticks. Despite its fearsome appearance, the horseshoe is harmless, mostly using its long, pointed tail to turn itself back over when flipped up onto the beach. Amid deer tracks in the sand you'll probably see lumps of clay that have broken off from the cliffs. The clay was a perfect pottery material for early Native Americans.

Return to, and turn left onto, the main trail and boardwalk, walking through the reed grass and rosehips of Yellow Swamp. If you didn't see them on the river, there is a good chance you will see a few buffleheads plying the stream in the swamp. A small duck, the male bufflehead is easy to identify—it has a nearly all-white body, a black back, and an almost perfectly round black head topped by a large patch of white. Buffleheads are also referred to as butterballs by duck hunters.

Passing arrowroot, a favorite food of muskrats, come to an intersection at 1.0 mile. The blue-blazed Turkey Neck Trail goes right; your route takes the trail's left branch, hugging the edge of Big Meadow, where park personnel often report seeing browsing deer and turkeys. At 1.2 miles you will rise to another intersection. Yellow-blazed Beaver Dam Trail is a shortcut and will rejoin your route at the 2.1-mile mark. Do not take that route. Keep left and continue following the blue-blazed trail, overlooking beaver dams and, maybe, lodges in the swampy meadow. As you walk along, look at the tops of the trunks of fallen trees; you may see that they are often used by woodland creatures as a table for feasting on nuts and pinecones. At around 1.6 miles you will pass some massive trees that have obviously been around for a long time. Stop for a few moments to pay your respects to these great-grandparents of the forest. Their branches are bigger around than most of the trunks of nearby trees. Ascend to swing away from Big Meadow and begin walking on an old road.

The other end of the Beaver Dam Trail comes in from the right at 2.1 miles; you want to

stay left. Soon the other branch of Turkey Neck Trail comes in from the right; again, you want to stay left. At 2.4 miles the Turkey Neck Trail swings right—you could follow it back about a mile to the visitor center and your car. However, keep left on the old road to walk through campground C. Water and restrooms are available in the campground during the season.

Step across the paved Civilian Conservation Corps Trail and both lanes of the park road and turn right. In a few feet, turn left onto orange-blazed Laurel Point Trail, which descends into a holly- and laurel-crowded draw. At 3.1 miles, Rock Spring Pond shimmers emerald as it reflects the evergreen leaves of a laurel thicket. The pond was built in the 1930s by the CCC and now contains a variety of bass and other fish. Continue around the pond to 3.2 miles, where Laurel Point Trail bears left as a pathway to arrive at the boat dock in less than a mile. You, however, will keep right onto the woodlands roadway to follow green-blazed Rock Spring Pond Trail. If you are camped in the park, this wide, level road through the broad valley would make a great moonlight walk before retiring for the evening.

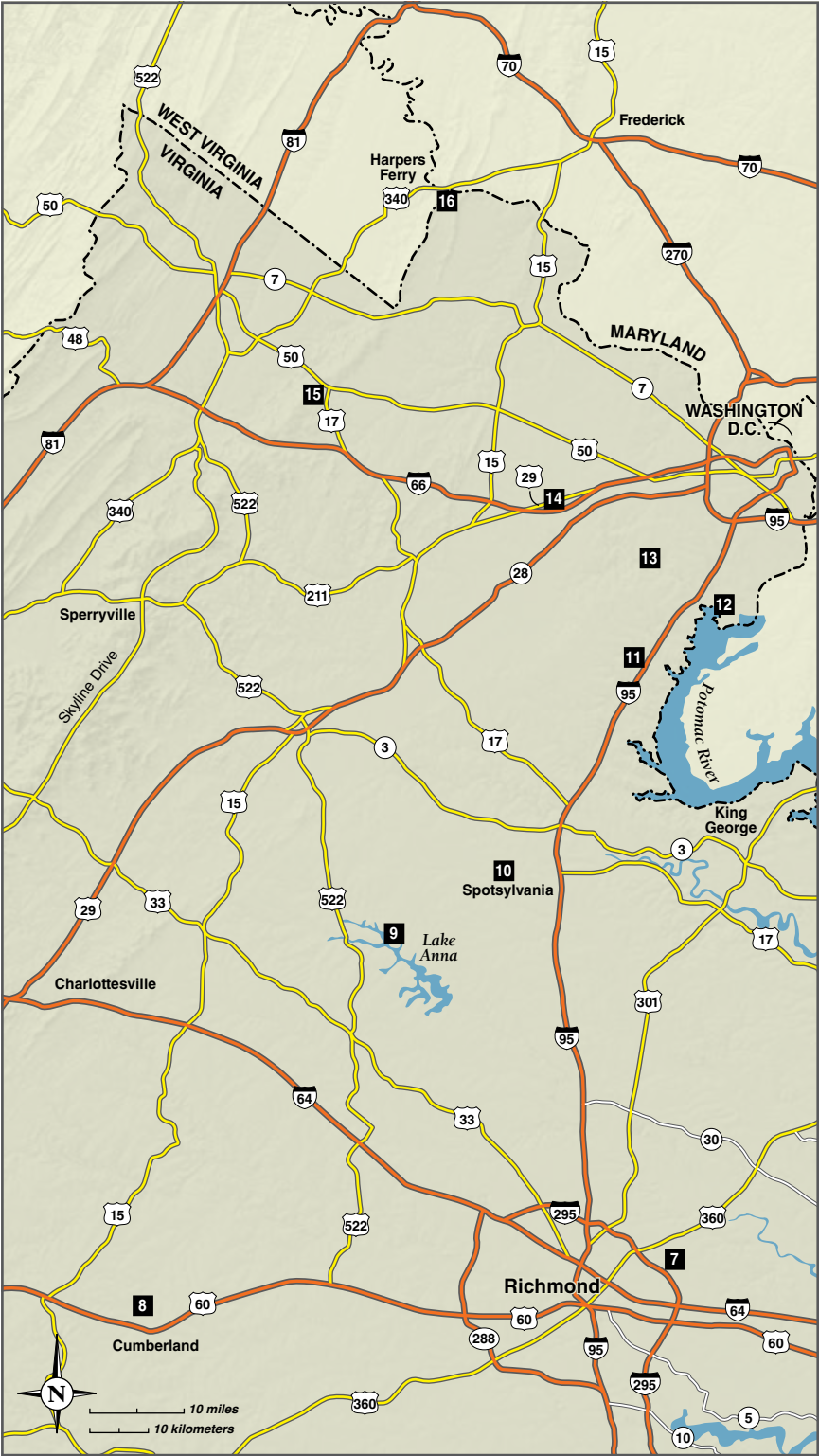
Arrive at the park road in 3.8 miles, cross the pavement, and turn left, soon coming to the conference center. Make a right and return to the visitor center at 4.1 miles.

There are two other short trails in the park. The 0.2-mile River Trail connects cabins 1–18 to the beach area; and the half-mile Beach Trail, which has scenic views of the river, descends from near the conference center to the swimming pool and beach.



The trail hugs the edge of Big Meadow.

Central Virginia



Central Virginia

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- 8. Willis River Trail (p. 46)
- 9. Lake Anna State Park (p. 51)
- 10. Spotsylvania (p. 56)
- 11. Prince William Forest Park (p. 60)
- 12. Mason Neck State Park (p. 65)
- 13. Bull Run–Occoquan River (p. 69)
- 14. Manassas National Battlefield Park (p. 74)
- 15. Sky Meadows State Park (p. 78)
- 16. Split Rock (p. 83)

Cold Harbor





- **GPS:** N37.5856309 W77.2871352
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 1.0 mile
- **HIKING TIME:** 30 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE:** Less than 100 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Seven Pines*; National Park Service *Cold Harbor* map
- **CONTACT:**
Richmond National Battlefield Park
3215 E. Broad St.
Richmond, VA 23223
804-226-1981; nps.gov/rich

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.2 Swing away from VA 156
- 0.5 Bypass trail to right (that is an additional 2-mile-long loop option)
- 0.7 Cross paved park road (where the optional 2-mile loop rejoins this hike)
- 1.0 Return to visitor center

After May 21, 1864, and the somewhat stale-mated battle of Spotsylvania (see Hike 10), Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant continued to move in a southward direction in his Overland Campaign to capture the Confederate capital, Richmond. In addition to several other skirmishes along the way, Grant's forces and General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia clashed again near the crossroads of Old Cold Harbor. Union soldiers captured the crossroads on May 31, but fortifications, mostly in the form of extensive dirt breastworks built by the Southern army, turned the next three days of battle into a standoff.

The Union troops were never able to penetrate the fortifications, while the Confederate army just held its ground, unable to drive the invaders back. From June 4 through 12, the days were filled with minor attacks and occasional sniper fire. Unable to break through

the Southern lines, Grant finally withdrew and turned his attention onto Petersburg. This successful defense of Richmond is considered Lee's last field victory of the war. Historians say the battle at Cold Harbor influenced the strategies of future wars by proving that well-selected defenses, supported by strong artillery power, are quite invulnerable to direct attack. It certainly turned the rest of the Civil War into a conflict where entrenchments and sieges took precedence over battles of direct assault.

From early 1862 to the city's surrender on April 3, 1865, Union forces engaged in numerous battles in attempts to capture Richmond. Many sites commemorating various conflicts and activities are scattered throughout the city and surrounding area and make up the National Park Service's Richmond National Battlefield Park.

DIRECTIONS In order to obtain a clear mental picture of Civil War events around Richmond, you should stop in at the visitor center at 500 Tredegar Street at the terminus of Fifth Street in Richmond, study the exhibits, and watch the audio-visual presentations. To reach Cold Harbor from the visitor center, follow Seventh Street to Broad Street to I-95 and take the interstate north to I-64. Take I-64 east to I-295 and follow that highway north to the VA 156 (North Airport Drive) exit. Continue on VA 156N for 5 miles, through several twists and turns, to the Cold Harbor park entrance, on the right. (The park service provides a pamphlet describing a circuitous driving tour of the sites of the Richmond National Battlefield Park. Following this tour will also eventually lead you to Cold Harbor.)

Route Description

In order to add even more background information to your hike, take a few moments to look in on the Cold Harbor Visitor Center. In addition to the usual ethical practices you should follow while on any hike, the park service requests that you refrain from removing any relics you may happen to find, park your automobile only in designated areas, and preserve the breastworks by not walking or climbing on them.

Start your hike by walking to the plaque behind the visitor center and continuing on the pathway along the edge of the meadow next to VA 156. You will be crossing the center of the Confederate main line of defense. On June 3, 1864, the Union army launched a massive attack but was soon pinned down by Confederate firepower, and in less than 30 minutes thousands of Union soldiers were killed or wounded. Remember that most of the land you will be walking upon throughout this hike was open farmland at the time of the Civil War;

there were few trees or shrubs to hide behind or to use as shields against the showers of bullets filling the air.

Large oak and loblolly pine trees tower above, while sassafras and holly make up the understory as you swing away from the road at 0.2 mile. Holly is very shade tolerant and is often found flourishing, as it is here, under the canopy of an older and taller forest. Unlike many other trees, hollies are either male or female—thus, they must be in proximity to each other for the female to bear fruit. The berries, which turn bright red in the fall, are a favorite winter food for birds and deer. Wild turkeys are sometimes seen feeding high up in the trees as well as on berries that have fallen to the ground.

At 0.3 mile, cross a footbridge constructed to protect the breastworks. The fortifications here were made by Union soldiers, who, unable to advance or retreat, used bayonets, cups, canteen halves, and whatever other implements would work to dig the trenches in an attempt to escape the unrelenting Confederate artillery

Site of the main Confederate line of defense



and musket fire. This area later became the main battle line for the Union forces.

The rifle pits you pass at 0.4 mile were dug so that guards could watch for enemy movement but be protected—more or less—from musket fire. Sweet pepper bush is now growing near the site, helping to heal the ground's wounds and obscure this little bit of history. In late July, the plant's wildly fragrant white flowers grow in spikes. Stop to smell one and discover how the “sweet” got into the name. The “pepper” portion was given to the plant, possibly, because the dried seedpods resemble small peppercorns. These remain on the plant through much of the year, making it a distinctive plant that is easy to identify.

If you wish to extend this hike by about 2 miles, you could follow the trail that takes off to the right at 0.5 mile to pass by more rifle pits and sites of the battle. However, this description continues on the main route to the left, crossing tiny Bloody Run and the paved park road at 0.7 mile, where those who have followed the longer route will rejoin the main trail. Ascend slightly and pass by a bit of Virginia creeper running along the ground and up some of the tree trunks.

You'll pass some of the best-preserved and deepest breastworks and trenches at 0.8 mile. If these trenches and mounds of dirt are still this obvious, just think how deep and tall they must have been more than a century and a half ago! Imagine what it was like to be a soldier engaged in this desperate attempt to stay alive. Although historians have not found any proof that it happened, a persistent tale maintains that men of the Union army wrote their names on bits of paper and attached them to their own clothing in the hope that their bodies could be identified after the battle. It's unfortunate that through the course of history, the human race seems to have expended more energy for hostile actions than for peaceful pursuits.

Swing to the left when you emerge into an open field. Due to the excellent forest-field

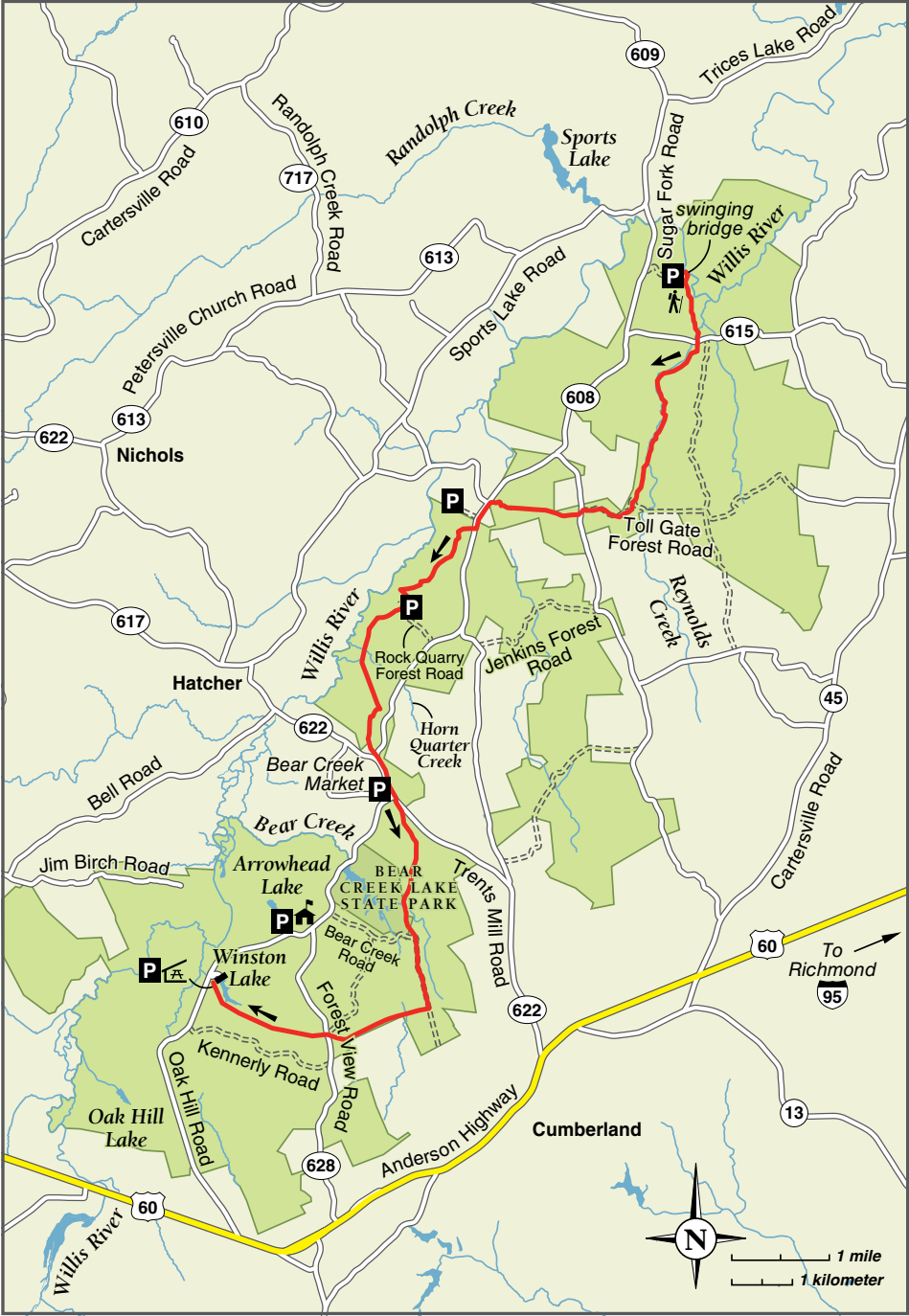


This fence marks the national battlefield park's boundary.

mixture, foxes have adapted well to living in the rural Richmond area. Very likely the scat that you see on the trail is evidence that one of them has walked the same path you have. Take a stick and break open the scat to find out what the fox has been eating—perhaps there's fur and bones of a mouse, feathers from a bird, wild cherry and grape seeds, or remains of various insects.

The hike comes to an end as you return to the visitor center at 1.0 mile. (See Hike 14 for information on additional Civil War sites in Virginia.)

Willis River Trail





WILLIS RIVER TRAIL

- **GPS:** N37.619646 W78.213735
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (one-way): 15.3 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 9.75 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 700 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Gold Hill* and *Whiteville*;
VA Department of Forestry *Cumberland State Forest/Willis River Trail* map
- **CONTACT:** Cumberland State Forest
751 Oak Hill Road
Cumberland, VA 23040; 804-492-4121
dof.virginia.gov/education-and-recreation/state-forests/virginia-state-forests/cumberland-state-forest

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.7 Cross Reynolds Creek on VA 615 bridge
- 1.8 Ford Reynolds Creek
- 2.9 Right onto Toll Gate Forest Road
- 4.8 Left onto VA 624
- 7.9 Ford Horn Quarter Creek
- 9.6 Bear Creek Market
- 10.3 Pass by Forest Trail 24
- 12.6 Ford Big Bear Creek
- 15.3 End of hike

After you have traversed several of the Tidewater's and Piedmont's easier and tamer hikes, you may be ready for a change of pace—a walk on the wilder side. The Willis River Trail is a cooperative venture of the Department of Forestry and volunteers from the area and courses its way for more than 15 miles through many of the lesser-visited regions of the Cumberland State Forest. While volunteers—who provide most of the labor for construction and maintenance of the route—do an admirable job, quick-growing summer vegetation and fallen trees rapidly overtake even the best-maintained sections. In addition, there are no bridges to get you across streams or aids to help you climb some of their high banks. There may be no discernible treadway on the ground in some places

or the trail may be rerouted for short sections, so always follow the white blazes to make sure you on the correct route. Also be aware there are a few places where there may be short designated high-water routes; use these in times of wet weather. In addition, the forest has been logged in several places along the trail in recent years, sometimes making it even more difficult to discern the pathway.

You probably should not attempt this hike until you feel comfortable about being in such situations, but once you've gained that confidence, the Willis River Trail is a recommended adventure. Nowhere else in the Piedmont can you feel like you are one of the few explorers to pass through such a concealed countryside yet have the safety of trail blazes showing the way. Bring tackle to try your luck fishing the river for bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass, and pickerel.

Consider breaking this trip into two day hikes, as you'll sometimes need extra time to find your way. A number of options exist, but since the parking lot of the Bear Creek Market (see below) is a good place to leave one of your automobiles (after asking permission), splitting the trail into 9.6-mile (6.5-hour) and 5.7-mile (3.0-hour) segments is the most convenient. The store is also well stocked to provide you with ample lunch and munchies supplies. Water sources should not be considered potable, so carry plenty. With an abundance of ticks, flies, chiggers, and mosquitoes during the warmer months, plus ensnaring growths of briars, poison ivy, and other prickly vegetation, long pants and shirts should be your hiking garb here any time of the year. You will cross a well-developed multiuse trail, but it will be obvious that you want to continue to follow the lesser-used Willis River Trail. The only camping option is the developed campground in 326-acre Bear Creek Lake State Park a little more than 10 miles into the journey. In addition to its campground, the

park has picnic facilities, a swimming area, concessions, fishing, and about 4 miles of trails.

DIRECTIONS To reach the hike, turn off US 60 onto VA 629, which soon becomes dirt. If coming from the west you will make this turn about 12 miles from the US 15–US 60 intersection in Sprouses Corner; coming from the east it will be about 1 mile from the VA 45–US 60 intersection west of Cumberland.

Three miles from US 60, a sign identifies Winston Lake, the Willis River Trail's southern trailhead. You can leave a car in the small parking area. Continuing the drive, come to a four-way intersection with the Cumberland State Forest headquarters to the left (obtain free maps of the trail here) and VA 628 coming in from the right. Continue straight on now-paved VA 629, passing the entrance to Bear Creek Lake State Park, 2.0 miles from Winston Lake. From the state park, it's 0.8 mile to a T-intersection and the Bear Creek Market, where you will turn left onto paved VA 622. Turn right onto dirt VA 623, 0.4 mile from the market, making a left onto paved VA 624 in 1.7 additional miles. From this intersection it is 2.2 miles to where you bear left onto paved VA 608, which almost immediately becomes dirt. When VA 615 comes in from the right, keep to the left for 0.4 mile to make the last right turn onto dirt Warner Forest Road. Park the car in another 0.5 mile in the small dead-end turnaround.

Route Description

Do not cross the swinging bridge over the Willis River; instead, look for double white blazes on the southern side of the parking area, which direct you into the woods along a pathway lined by Virginia creeper, mayapple, pawpaw, false Solomoni's seal, running cedar, partridgeberry, and a host of entangling vegetation. The

partridgeberry is an important ground cover; its roots are shallow but intertwining, forming a compact mat that helps stabilize the soil and keep it from washing away in times of high water. Look for deer tracks and other animal prints as you pass through the damp area just before emerging onto VA 615 at 0.7 mile.

Make a left to cross Reynolds Creek on the roadway's bridge, and in less than 300 feet look for double blazes that tell you to make a right onto a probably overgrown pathway beside a swampy area. At 0.9 mile, the trail bears right into the woods and then makes a left along a low ridge before it crosses and ascends out of a gully to the right. From here, it's important to keep a close watch on the blazes as the trail turns left to follow a water run uphill, crosses the run, climbs steeply to cross a ridge and descend, crosses an old trail at a right angle, and continues southward to return to Reynolds Creek at 1.8 miles. Go upstream a few feet and rock-hop the creek at its shallowest point. You may need to search for blazes before moving away from the stream. When you come back to Reynolds Creek at 2.1 miles, the trail can be hard to follow, but just stay between the creek on your left and the ditch (which looks almost like it could be an old railroad grade) on your right. Be very alert at 2.3 miles, where ironwood is spread throughout the forest, as the trail swings right to ascend and descend the hillside around a bend in the stream. Deep-red fire pinks dotting the woods in spring and summer, the rippling of little shoals, and reflections of large green cedars may be enticements to linger.

The trail crosses a very old road at 2.5 miles and swings to the right, ascending away from the creek to follow a grassy woods road below cedars and loblolly pine trees. At 2.9 miles, make a right onto the dirt Toll Gate Forest Road before going straight across dirt VA 624 and reentering the woods. That patch of wonderfully lush and green vegetation you walk through at 3.7 miles is poison ivy, so tread carefully as you gradually descend next to the small streambank punctuated by animal dens. Sycamores prosper in the wet bottomland you will be walking on once you

begin to parallel Bonbrook Creek. The fording of the creek at 4.3 miles may be a little easier if you go upstream a bit. Be careful here if it has been raining hard; Bonbrook Creek has been known to have 10-foot-high flash floods.

At 4.8 miles, make a left onto paved VA 624, following it for 400 feet before turning right onto a gated forest road. Be alert because your route will take a left off this roadway in a short distance, descending along a small creek. Make a left to walk upstream next to the Willis River at 5.4 miles. Although the river is slightly murky, its cool, shallow waters would be nice to wade on those hot August days in the Piedmont. At 5.8 miles, make an abrupt turn to the left away from the river, soon entering the 27-acre Rock Quarry Natural Area. The Department of Forestry has reserved several of these natural areas in a number of the commonwealth's state forests. No recreational developments or logging are permitted in them, as these natural areas are intended to be used as laboratories to study the ecology of the areas they preserve.

After crossing a small stream at 6.2 miles, you will follow a defined footpath to a left turn onto a grassy woods road that will, in turn, bring you to a right onto Rock Quarry Forest Road (dirt VA 623 is 0.4 mile to the left). When the road ends in a forest of tall maple and poplar trees, enter the woods to the left, returning to walk along the river, though it is barely visible through the summer vegetation. It is hard for a camera to capture the colorful mixture of ground cover here—the green of running cedar and hundreds of ferns, the crimson red of fire pinks, and the vivid white and yellow of bloodroot. A bit later, rise from the waterway for a short distance before dropping to skirt a flat bottomland. The vegetation is so lush and quick growing that, even if it receives maintenance on a regular basis, the trail is likely to be quite overgrown and tricky to follow as it returns to the river through twists of honeysuckle vines. At 7.5 miles, once again you must be very alert when, for no apparent reason, the trail makes an abrupt left turn away from the river; be sure

to keep a sharp eye out for the blazes (and try not to step on the jack-in-the-pulpits).

Horn Quarter Creek, at 7.8 miles, is quite different from the river. Its clear water and flat rocky bottom, combined with the quiet beauty of the surrounding forest, make this possibly the prettiest spot of the entire hike. Watch for giant snapping turtles when you cross the creek at 7.9 miles (and be careful crossing any stream around here). They can grow up to 18 inches in length and weigh more than 40 pounds. The one I nearly stepped on as I was fording the creek was well over a foot in size, and it was almost perfectly camouflaged with long fronds of river moss flowing from its back. The turtle's powerful jaw muscles (which it is not reluctant to use) and a belligerent disposition are what give it its name.

After making a left onto an old road, watch closely for blazes as the route continues south to VA 623, turns right, follows an old logging road, turns left, and then makes a junction with a creek.

You will soon come onto paved VA 622 (Trents Mill Road), which you should follow past dirt VA 623, the Bear Creek Market, and VA

Fire pink



629 at 9.6 miles. Three hundred feet beyond the intersection, leave VA 622 (across the road from a utility box turnaround) by making a right into a grove of planted loblolly pines, soon following an old woods road, and continuing straight past several road junctions. When the woods road ends at 10.1 miles, take the pathway across a small water run. If you have walked the Willis River Trail from its beginning and have had a hard time following its route, you will be happy to know that it will make use of fairly well-defined pathways from here to the end of the hike.

The grassy road (Forest Trail 24) you cross at 10.3 miles goes right about 0.3 mile to the main road in Bear Creek Lake State Park. The forest is populated by birch, beech, and sycamore trees, some of them especially large along the scenic and winding stream you'll cross at 10.9 miles. Enjoy the walk next to clear-flowing Little Bear Creek, with its small ripples, 2-foot-high cascades, and sandy and rocky bottom. Cross over to the other side of the creek at 11.5 miles, continuing upstream amid a garden of mayapple on the ground and pawpaw leaves at eye level.

Pass by a flowing spring, rarer in the Piedmont than in the mountains, under giant grapevines hanging from the trees before crossing dirt Bear Creek Forest Road. After fording Big

Bear Creek at 12.6 miles, bear left onto the grassy woods road, with wild rose blooming under the tall pines. After 150 feet, make a left turn, come to a power-line right-of-way, and cross paved VA 628 to enter a woods of dogwood and sweet gum.

Descend to cross a stream at 14.4 miles and pass by a walled-in spring (often dry) on your right just before crossing a larger creek; going upstream a bit may help you find a place to rock-hop across the water. You are now in the backwater area of Winston Lake, and there may be signs of beaver when the trail brings you close to the lake before veering away to ford another tributary. Again, go upstream to find the best place to cross. The ferns and running cedar are a plush carpet from where you look out to the lake and its dam. Descending, you'll make a right onto a hand-laid stone pathway, crossing the footbridge to arrive at the Winston Lake picnic shelter and the end of the hike at 15.3 miles.

After successfully facing the rigors and possible confusions of the Willis River Trail, you may reach the same conclusion I have: Sometimes it is more interesting and gratifying to hike a route that requires you to use a bit of your own navigational skills rather than one that coddles you with groomed treadways and manicured foliage.

Mayapple



- **GPS:** N38.1166108 W77.8188920
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 12.9 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 6.75 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 660 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Lake Anna West*; *Lake Anna State Park* map
- **CONTACT:** Lake Anna State Park
6800 Lawyers Road
Spotsylvania, VA 22551
540-854-5503
dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/lake-anna

The Hike at a Glance

- 0.7 Stay on Mill Pond Trail at intersection
- 0.9 Cove on Pigeon Run; retrace steps to intersection and turn right onto Pigeon Run Trail
- 2.1 Bear right on Gold Hill Trail
- 2.7 Swing right onto loop portion of Gold Hill Trail
- 3.6 Left at Y intersection
- 4.0 Left onto utility line right-of-way
- 5.5 Right onto Pigeon Run Trail
- 5.9 Left onto Sawtooth Trail
- 6.8 Left onto park road
- 7.0 Return to car; take spur of Sawtooth Trail to continue hike
- 7.1 Left onto Sawtooth Trail
- 8.0 Left onto Glenora Trail
- 8.6 Bypass Big Woods Trail and arrive at Glenora Plantation site; retrace steps and turn right onto Big Woods Trail
- 10.0 Bypass Cedar Run Trail for the moment and turn right to arrive at Taylor homesite; retrace steps
- 11.5 Turn right onto Cedar Run Trail
- 12.3 Right onto Turkey Run Trail
- 12.9 Return to car

Nearly every bit of land on Earth has gone through countless changes in its topography, geology, natural history, and uses by the human race. A walk through Lake Anna State Park can provide physical evidence of how past

events have shaped the present-day makeup of Virginia's central Piedmont.

Long before humans set foot on this continent, a fault formed in the crust of the earth near what is now Lake Anna State Park. Molten lava poured through this north-south fracture and, as the general lay of the land sloped toward the Atlantic Ocean, the liquid rock spread eastward. Unimpeded, the leading edge of the flow fanned out widely, eventually cooling into a large area rich in iron ore, while behind it the flow was compressed into a narrow band now called the Gold-Pyrite Belt of Virginia.

The Mannahoacks, an eastern tribe of the far-flung Sioux Nation, lived in the area at the time settlers from the Old World began to arrive. Being hunters, food gatherers, and small-plot farmers, the native tribe had little use for the mineral riches below their domain, and the land remained more or less unchanged throughout their occupancy. Within 100 years of the newcomers' arrival, though, the Mannahoacks had been forced off their ancestral territories, and use of the land began to shift.

Virginia's colonists needed a steady supply of nails, farm implements, and other tools to establish their farms and settlements, and the early 1700s saw the rise of numerous iron furnaces making use of the rich ore deposits in what is now Spotsylvania County. Iron mines pockmarked the countryside, and logging roads crisscrossed the landscape to enable harvesting of what was known as the Big Woods. The lumber was made into charcoal to fire the furnaces, one of which was on Douglas Run, just east of the present-day parklands. By the end of the 18th century, however, most of these furnaces had closed, replaced by other furnaces on the more easily navigable James, Potomac, and Rappahannock Rivers.

Agriculture became the region's primary means of livelihood, yet many farmers found

Lake Anna State Park



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About the Author



Leonard M. Adkins has logged more than 20,000 miles hiking the world's backcountry. Each hiking season finds him on some new adventure. He has hiked the entire Appalachian Trail five times; traversed the Continental Divide Trail from Canada to Mexico; followed the full Pacific Northwest Trail through Montana, Idaho, and Washington; and walked several hundred miles upon Canada's Great Divide Trail. He has also trekked the full length of the Pyrenees High Route from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean and has explored Iceland's interior. With his wife, Laurie, he has hiked West Virginia's Allegheny Trail, the Ozark Highlands Trail in Arkansas, and the Mid-Atlantic's Tuscarora

Trail. Together, they tramped New Zealand's Milford Track and a number of the country's other Great Walks. And, of course, he has hiked every one of the trails in this book—along with many other pathways to determine which ones were the best to include. In addition, he walked each of these routes with a surveyor's measuring wheel to ensure the accuracy of the mileage and the description.

Leonard is the author of more than 20 books and over 200 articles on the outdoors, nature, and travel and is the walking columnist for *Blue Ridge Country* magazine. His writing has received numerous awards, including the National Outdoor Book Award and SATW Foundation's Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Award. He has also been a Ridge Runner and a Natural Heritage Monitor for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, helping to observe and protect rare and endangered plants, and has been on the boards of directors of two Appalachian Trail maintenance clubs. He and his wife currently live in North Chesterfield, Virginia.

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