

# HIKE VIRGINIA

• ***SOUTH of US 60*** •

**51 HIKES FROM THE CUMBERLAND GAP  
TO THE ATLANTIC COAST**

**LEONARD M. ADKINS**



**MENASHA RIDGE PRESS**

Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982

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## HIKE VIRGINIA SOUTH OF US 60:

### *51 Hikes from the Cumberland Gap to the Atlantic Coast*

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

*What joy awaits you,  
when the breeze hath found you out among the trees,  
and calls you forth again!*

—Wordsworth

## OTHER BOOKS BY LEONARD M. ADKINS

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*50 Hikes in West Virginia: From the Allegheny Mountains to the Ohio River*

*Hike Virginia North of US 60: 51 Hikes from the Allegheny Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay*

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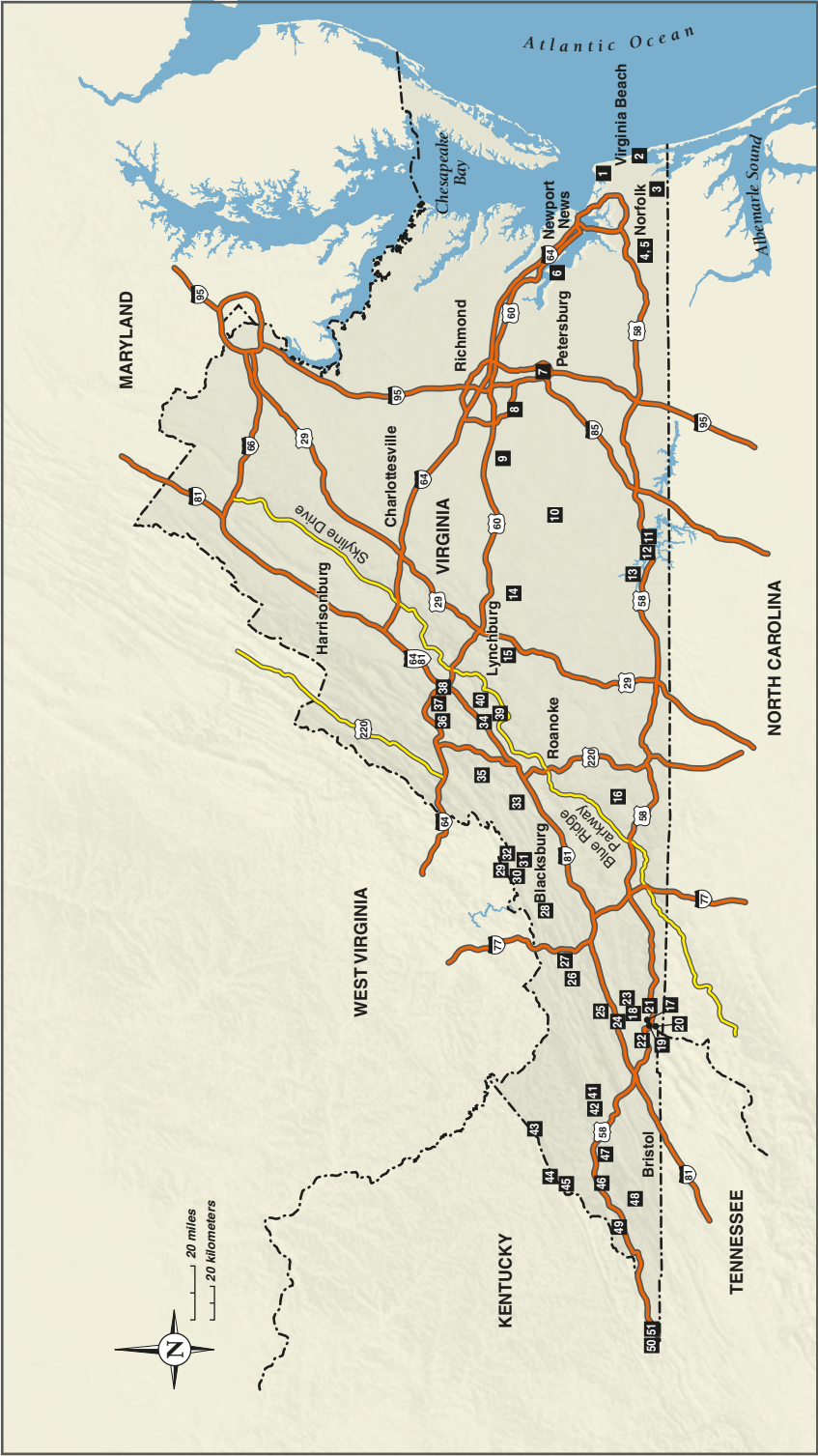
*Adventure Guide to Virginia*

*The Caribbean: A Walking and Hiking Guide*

# *Dedication*

**Dedicated to the memories** of Michael J. Pauley, Chris Deffler, Leonard Wilson Adkins, Steve Shipe, Bill Foot, and Gary Close. All good trail companions now walking the pathways of a different place.

Hike Virginia South of US 60 Overview



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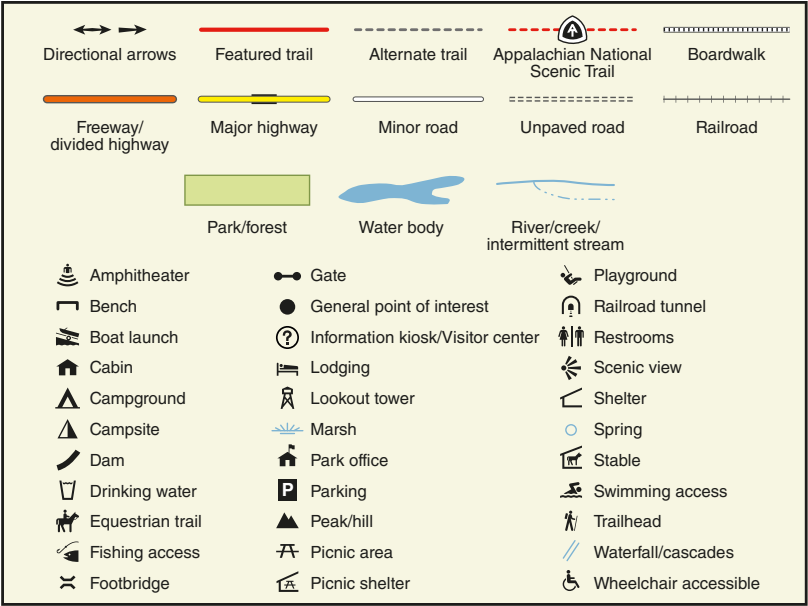
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# Introduction

**Welcome to the joys of hiking** in Virginia south of US 60, the part of the world in which I make my home! It is a beautiful place, full of cultural, topographic, floral, and faunal diversity, and it has been a grand journey reacquainting myself with familiar places and discovering new delights in order to bring you *Hike Virginia South of US 60*.

This book will take you on your own travels from Virginia's lowest point at sea level to its loftiest mountain at more than 5,000 feet in elevation and from its easternmost point—on the Atlantic coastline—to its very western tip—farther west than Columbus, Ohio. Only a person traveling by foot can truly see and appreciate all of the natural wonders to be found here.

In the eastern part of the state, you can walk for miles on undeveloped, isolated sandy beaches; stroll beside tannin-stained swamps bordered by cypress trees festooned with luxuriant folds of Spanish moss; and hike out across Tidewater lands preserved as refuges for tens of thousands of migrating birds. Upon the rolling piedmont of central Virginia are historic sites from the days of the Civil War, hikes around lakes both large and small, open meadows and deep forestlands, and a backcountry experience within the center of one of the state's larger towns.

It may take a greater amount of physical energy to negotiate the ups and downs found within the Blue Ridge region, but the rewards more than compensate. Here your gaze extends for miles upon wave after wave of Southern Appalachian ridgelines, dozens of waterfalls rush down steep slopes, hundreds of miles of the Appalachian Trail course over the mountains and into lush hardwood coves, and the opportunities for backcountry camping well isolated from the modern world are limitless.

The pathways in far southwest Virginia can be even more rugged and remote, covering terrain that is less walked upon by human feet. Rhododendron-lined mountain streams, deep gorges, and an abundance of deer, black bears, coyotes, and other wildlife are the norm rather than the exception.

Although this book contains pages of interpretive information about the human and natural history you will experience, there is certainly much more to be learned than can be presented here. 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. The "Suggested Readings and Field Guides" section on page 225 is a good place to start.

Like other guidebooks, this one will direct you to the most popular hikes within a particular region, but it will also open up marvelous new areas that are too often overlooked. With descriptions of more than 400 miles of trails, there are hikes for every degree of physical stamina and every time constraint. Mirroring the bounty of outdoor opportunities in the state is the fact that, no matter where you happen to be at any given moment (south of US 60), you will never be more than a 30-minute drive from one of the hikes.



*Whitetop Laurel Creek (Hike 20, page 97)*

As one of the Mid-Atlantic states, Virginia can have a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions. Winters can be unpredictably cold or relatively mild, while summers can become hot and humid or may be rather temperate. Spring and autumn can be the most pleasant times of the year to be outdoors, as days warm up to a comfortable temperature, nights cool down for easy sleeping, and crowds are fewer. Snow is common in the mountains, moderate in the central regions, and quite infrequent in eastern Virginia. When heat and humidity take the joy and fun out of outdoor activities in the eastern portion of the state, the mountains beckon with temperatures that can be 10 or more degrees lower.

Be willing to visit an area more than once and do not limit your outings to just one or two seasons. Outdoor adventuring here can be a year-round activity.

In putting this book together, it has been my desire that it will inspire you to visit, appreciate, and learn more about the best that the commonwealth has to offer. If you need an additional incentive to get you going, I offer one final bit of advice from the well-loved children's book *The Wind in the Willows*: "Take the adventure, heed the call, now, ere the irrevocable moment passes. 'Tis but a banging of the door behind you, a blithesome step forward, and you are out of the old life and into the new!"

## How to Use This Book

The outings in *Hike Virginia South of US 60* range from easy walks on level ground to ambitious, multiday backpacking excursions over rugged terrain. No matter your level of fitness or outdoor experience, there are trips that will best fit your abilities, time constraints, or quest for adventure. The key information at the beginning of each hike provides a quick overview of what to expect.

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

The **total distance** was determined by walking each hike with a surveyor's measuring wheel. There may be some differences if you look to other sources—trail signs, brochures from the park or agency, or other books—for additional information. Many of these merely measure distance from the trailhead and do not take into account how far you must walk to reach it. To be as accurate as possible, I measured the hike from the point where you leave your automobile to where you return to it and have included the distance of any side trails the hike description tells you to take.

A *one-way* hike ends at a different point from where you started, necessitating a car shuttle. A *round trip* is an out-and-back excursion following the same route in both directions. You will take a circular journey on a *circuit* hike, rewalking very little, if any, of the same trail or trails.

Keep in mind that the **hiking time** is the minimum amount of time it would take a person of average ability to do a trip at a leisurely pace. Some of you may go faster, some slower. When planning the hike, remember that the hiking time does not take into account rest breaks or time out for sightseeing and nature study.

The **vertical rise** provides the best indication of how strenuous a hike will be. It is the sum total of all the uphill hiking you will do, not just the difference in elevation between the lowest and highest points of a hike. This rise was determined by using information on United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps.

This book includes a detailed map for each outing that will be sufficient to use to complete the 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 appropriated 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 U.S. 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 abbreviation *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. Mileages in the “**Route Descriptions**” that correspond to these milestones are highlighted in blue.

There are, of course, a number of different routes you could drive to each hike's trailhead, but the routes described are designed to keep you on four-lane highways as much as possible and, hopefully, take the least amount of driving time.

Do not reject a hike or an area because the length, time, or vertical rise appears to be beyond your abilities. Because of my proclivity to want to experience the outdoors as much as possible, I often depict the most circuitous and longest hike possible in a particular area. Yet, many places have numerous side trails or alternate routes you could take to shorten a hike. A good example is the very first hike, First Landing State Park. I describe a trip of more than 11.0 miles, but there are so many interconnecting trails that you could take a rewarding circuit hike of only 1.0 or 2.0 miles with very little elevation change. Study maps and my descriptions and you will find that this is the case in many places.

You do not have to be in the best physical shape to enjoy a walk, but do take into account the difficulty of the terrain, the weather, and your conditioning. Allow enough time to complete your outing before dark and always let someone know where you are hiking.

Be aware that fees are charged for you to gain access to many of the hikes in this book. Since the imposition and amount of these fees seems to change constantly, they are not identified in the text of each individual hike. Just know that you will pay them at a large percentage of the state parks as well as some of the national parks or national forests.

## *Advice and Precautions*

### **WATER**

It is always wise to carry water no matter the length of your outing. On overnight trips you will 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, be sure to purchase a purifier.

*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 snakebites 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 midautumn. (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** is considered by some to be one of the most dangerous plants in the US; it 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 by Tom Watson





**Trumpet creeper** or trumpet 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.

## SUN

The consensus in the medical community is that you should apply a high-strength sun-block 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, then 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. Excluding those who 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](http://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 activity 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 non-native species.
- Do not build structures, 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 trail users.
- 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
<b>SOUTHEASTERN VIRGINIA</b>							
<b>1 First Landing State Park</b> <i>Swamps, Spanish moss, and cypress knees in VA Beach</i>	11.4	130	W	-	-	D	-
<b>2 Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Park</b> <i>Miles of Atlantic beaches untouched by development</i>	23.7	120	W	-	-	B	-
<b>3 Northwest River Park</b> <i>Cypress knees and easy walking</i>	4.5	20	W	✓	-	D	-
<b>4 Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge: Lake Drummond</b> <i>One of only two natural lakes in Virginia</i>	9	10	W	-	-	-	-
<b>5 Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge: Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail</b> <i>Easy introduction to Dismal Swamp</i>	0.9	0	-	✓	-	-	-
<b>6 Hog Island Wildlife Management Area</b> <i>Refuge for tens of thousands of geese and ducks</i>	4	7	W	✓	-	-	-
<b>SOUTH-CENTRAL VIRGINIA</b>							
<b>7 Petersburg National Battlefield</b> <i>One of the longest sieges in US military history</i>	6.7	360		-	-	-	✓
<b>8 Pocahontas State Park</b> <i>Wealth of birds, mammals, and scenery near Richmond</i>	2.5	130	W	✓	-	D	-
<b>9 Amelia Wildlife Management Area</b> <i>Few marked trails; for the experienced hiker</i>	7.75	480	W		-	B	-
<b>10 Twin Lakes State Park</b> <i>A circumambulation of two lakes</i>	5.3	350	W	✓*	-	D	-
<b>11 Kerr Reservoir: Robert Munford Trail</b> <i>Most isolated hike in Central Virginia</i>	7.2	300	W	-	-	-	-
<b>12 Occoneechee State Park</b> <i>An exploration of Occoneechee Plantation and environs</i>	2.4	190		✓	-	D	✓
<b>13 Staunton River State Park</b> <i>A walk beside three different bodies of water</i>	7.5	700	W	-	-	D	-
<b>14 Appomattox Court House National Historical Park</b> <i>Retraces the final days of the Civil War</i>	4	390		-	-	-	✓
<b>15 Blackwater Creek Natural Area</b> <i>A backcountry experience inside Lynchburg</i>	5.7	280		✓*	-	-	-
<b>16 Fairy Stone State Park</b> <i>A chance to search for fairy stones</i>	6.4	880	W, M	-	-	D	-
<b>THE BLUE RIDGE REGION</b>							
<b>17 The Appalachian Trail and the Mount Rogers NRA</b> <i>Like being on the Continental Divide in Montana and Wyoming</i>	17.1	2,400	M	-	-	B	-
<b>18 Mount Rogers</b> <i>A visit to the state's highest point</i>	19.2	3,080	M	-	-	B	-
<b>19 Buzzard Rock</b> <i>A naturally occurring mountain bald</i>	3.3	60	M	✓	-	B	-
<b>20 Virginia Creeper Trail</b> <i>Virginia's most scenic rail-trail; downhill the whole way</i>	17.4	80	M	-	✓	B	-

## KEY TO TABLE SYMBOLS

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	
THE BLUE RIDGE REGION (continued)								
21 <b>Grayson Highlands State Park</b> <i>Wild ponies, great views, and waterfalls</i>	8.3	1,820	M	—	✓	D, B	—	
22 <b>Iron Mountain</b> <i>Near Beartree Lake; a great place for the whole family</i>	14.1	2,720	M	—	—	D, B	—	
23 <b>Comers Creek Falls</b> <i>Public outcry saved it from a four-lane highway</i>	8.9	1,840	M	—	✓	D, B	—	
24 <b>Rowland Creek Falls</b> <i>Numerous 50- to 100-foot waterfalls</i>	11.8	2,100		—	✓	B	—	
25 <b>Hungry Mother State Park</b> <i>One of Virginia's first state parks; lake and mountain views</i>	6.6	1,760	W, M	—	—	D	—	
26 <b>Burke's Garden and the Appalachian Trail</b> <i>Spectacular views into "God's Thumbprint"</i>	12.6	3,320	M	—	—	B	—	
27 <b>Brushy Mountain</b> <i>A circuit that includes a former route of the Appalachian Trail</i>	4	600	M	—	—	B	—	
28 <b>Dismal Creek and Sugar Run Mountain</b> <i>Has all the elements of a great day hike</i>	9.6	1,980	M	—	✓	B	—	
29 <b>Locust Knob Loop</b> <i>Rugged hike; may not be well maintained</i>	9	2,280		—	—	B	—	
30 <b>Barney's Wall and The Cascades</b> <i>Outstanding view; The Cascades is a very popular waterfall</i>	4.9	220	M	—	✓	B	—	
31 <b>Mountain Lake</b> <i>One of Virginia's two natural lakes</i>	6.4	1,440	W, M	—	—		—	
32 <b>Wind Rock</b> <i>Easiest hike in the book, but one of the best views</i>	0.6	140	M	✓	—	B	—	
33 <b>Virginia's Triple Crown</b> <i>Considered by many to be Virginia's best three views</i>	36.2	7,760	M	—	—	B	—	
34 <b>Appalachian Trail and Little Cove Mountain Trail</b> <i>Opportunities to swim at beginning and end of hike</i>	8.2	1,900	W, M	—	—	B	—	
35 <b>Patterson and Price Mountains</b> <i>A hike on two parallel ridges</i>	15.7	4,120	M	—	—	B	—	
36 <b>Lake Robertson</b> <i>Has amenities like a commercial campground resort</i>	5.1	1,100	W, M	—	—	D	—	
37 <b>House Mountain</b> <i>Good introduction to hiking and backcountry camping</i>	6.6	1,800	M	✓*	—	B	—	
38 <b>The Maury River: Chessie Nature Trail</b> <i>Miles of level walking; easy for older kids</i>	6.7	15	W	✓*	—	—	—	
39 <b>Fallingwater Cascades</b> <i>One of the most popular hikes on the Blue Ridge Parkway</i>	1.6	400	M	✓*	✓	—	—	
40 <b>Devil's Marbleyard</b> <i>One of the largest boulder fields in the Southern Appalachians</i>	8.2	2,200		—	—	B	—	

KEY TO TABLE SYMBOLS	
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
FAR SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA							
41 <b>Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve</b> <i>Wide waterfall, spectacular view, and rare species</i>	5.1	960	W, M	✓ *	✓	—	—
42 <b>Cleveland Barrens Natural Area Preserve</b> <i>Rare dolomite barrens and a waterfall</i>	3.25	760	M	—	✓	—	—
43 <b>Breaks Interstate Park</b> <i>Largest canyon east of the Mississippi</i>	3.7	420	M	✓	—	D	—
44 <b>Red Fox Trail</b> <i>Has many historical aspects</i>	2.3	450		✓	—	B	✓
45 <b>North Fork of Pound Reservoir</b> <i>Possibly the least-visited hike in this book</i>	3.2	440	W	—	—	B	—
46 <b>Chief Benge Scout Trail</b> <i>Downhill all the way; many wading pools</i>	16.1	620	M	—	—	D, B	—
47 <b>Little Stony Creek</b> <i>Three major falls and dozens of small cascades</i>	2.9	80		✓	✓	B	—
48 <b>Natural Tunnel State Park</b> <i>850-foot-long, 175-foot-high, 100-foot-wide natural tunnel</i>	4	740	M	✓	—	D	—
49 <b>Stone Mountain</b> <i>Challenging hike on isolated terrain</i>	14.2	3,160	M	—	—	B	—
50 <b>Cumberland Mountain</b> <i>Reconstructed mountain community, views, and possibly elk!</i>	20.6	2,040	M	—	—	B	✓
51 <b>Cumberland Gap National Historical Park</b> <i>A circuit hike from the lowlands to a mountain crest</i>	10.8	2,640	M	—	—	D, B	—

You are likely to see deer along many of the trails in this book.



This map illustrates the Hampton Roads region in Virginia, highlighting the Virginia Beach International Airport (VBIA) and its surrounding infrastructure. The map includes the following details:

- Geographic Features:** The Atlantic Ocean is to the east, with Back Bay and Chesapeake Bay visible. Major waterways include the York River, James River, Elizabeth River, and the Chesapeake River.
- Major Highways:** The map shows a network of roads, including Interstate 64 (I-64), Interstate 80 (I-80), Interstate 17 (I-17), and various state routes like 13, 165, 168, 17, 32, 460, 58, 60, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 8

# Southeastern Virginia

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2. Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Park (p. 20)
3. Northwest River Park (p. 26)
4. Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge: *Lake Drummond* (p. 29)
5. Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge: *Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail* (p. 33)
6. Hog Island Wildlife Management Area (p. 36)



# First Landing State Park





# FIRST LANDING STATE PARK

- **GPS:** N36.9164178 W76.0511998
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 11.4 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 5 hours, 15 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 130 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Cape Henry*; park map
- **CONTACT:** 2500 Shore Drive  
Virginia Beach, VA 23451  
757-412-2300  
[dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/first-landing](http://dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/first-landing)

## The Hike at a Glance

- 0.0 Turn right out of the parking area
- 0.3 Turn right onto Long Creek Trail
- 2.5 Turn right onto Osprey Trail
- 4.2 Turn right onto paved 64th Street
- 5.0 Turn left onto Cape Henry/Bike Trail
- 6.5 Follow Cape Henry/Bike Trail across 64th Street
- 8.6 Bypass Kingfisher Trail
- 9.75 Turn right onto Bald Cypress Trail
- 10.5 Reach Trail Center
- 10.6 Turn right onto upper end of Cape Henry/Bike Trail
- 11.4 End hike

Spanish moss drips from the trees overhead, and a five-lined skink scampers underfoot; off in the distance a pileated woodpecker laughs as it takes wing, while nearby a painted turtle silently slips into the caramel-colored water of a swamp crowded with bald cypress. This is not the Everglades in Florida, nor is it the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia; this is First Landing State Park—nearly 3,000 acres of lush greenery tucked in among the high-rise condominiums and beachfront hotels of Virginia Beach.

This state park may be the best opportunity on all of the East Coast to explore myriad ecological zones while putting out very little effort to do so. (Look at how little elevation you will gain in a walk of more than 11.0 miles.) Thousands

of years of geological, biological, and botanical evolution, on a piece of land hemmed in by three bodies of water, have crowded much into this small area. During this hike you will walk over hickory- and pine-covered sand dunes, onto a secluded beach, into a salt marsh populated by fiddler crabs, through a lowland forest of sweet gum and red maple, and around freshwater swamps of cypress trees festooned with thick folds of Spanish moss.

The idea for a Virginia state park near the coast was originally advanced in 1929, and enough interest was sparked that the Virginia Seashore State Park Association was formed in 1931. With a gift (and a subsequent sale) of land from the Cape Henry Syndicate, Seashore State Park was dedicated on June 15, 1936, along with five other state parks. (Virginia was the first state to dedicate an entire state park system on the same day.) The Civilian Conservation Corps soon began development of the park by building trails, roadways, six cabins, maintenance work areas, and administrative offices. Many of these are still in use today.

In 1965, a portion of the park was declared a National Natural Landmark to reflect its significant position as the northernmost location where subtropical and temperate plants thrive side by side. The park's name was changed to First Landing in 1995 to commemorate the 1607 landfall of the first permanent English settlers in the New World at Cape Henry.

In addition to the trails, the park offers a beach on the Chesapeake Bay, a trail center, rental cabins, and more than 200 campsites. The varied interpretive programs include crabbing demonstrations, beach walks, sunset and night hikes, swamp strolls, and campfire presentations.

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of US 13 and US 60 (near the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel) in Virginia Beach, drive east on US 60 (Shore Drive) for 4.5 miles.

Turn right into the park entrance (VA 343) and go just an additional few hundred yards before making another right to leave your car in the picnic area parking lot.

## Route Description

Begin the hike by turning right out of the parking area, walking along the main park road for **0.3** mile, and turning right onto the orange-blazed Long Creek Trail. The beginning of this pathway winds through and along several dunes, which almost resemble miniature versions of the mountain ridges in western Virginia. Cross a dune at **0.5** mile, drop to a barricade, and reach a wider trail. This portion of the route is used as an emergency access road. Here, you'll encounter cane for the first time on the hike. Dense stands of this plant make excellent shelter for many animals, and, in earlier days, the shoots were an important livestock food.

Avoid the trail to the right at **0.6** mile and walk along a dune ridgeline with a salt marsh to your right. Sweet pepperbush and cane line both sides of the trail. Cross a small creek on a wooden bridge at **0.8** mile; you will soon come to open views to the north and south along Long Creek.

Amid a wonderful display of Spanish moss, reach a junction with the yellow-blazed Fox Run Trail, which leads left **0.3** mile to the main park road. Bear right, avoiding the trail to the extreme right that dead-ends at the creek, and ascend a dune ridgeline to continue on the Long Creek Trail.

Spanish moss is reaching its northern limits in the park. Despite its name, it is not a moss but rather a member of the pineapple family. Being an epiphyte and not a parasite as many people think, the moss has no roots; therefore it does no harm to its host tree and receives all the nutrients it needs from the air and from rainwater running down the bark of its host.

At **1.2** miles there is a grand view that overlooks salt marshes, Long Creek, beaches, and the Narrows of Broad Bay—all things still to be experienced on this hike. It was near here

that the Chesapeake Indians camped while on hunting parties.

(On April 26, 1997, the remains of 64 Chesapeake Indians were reinterred in a sacred burial site located in a sandy, wooded area near the park's trail center. Dating from 800 B.C. to A.D. 1600, the remains were unearthed in the 1970s and 1980s from the site of a former Indian village in what is now the city of Virginia Beach.)

Enjoy pleasant views of a salt marsh and Broad Bay from the top of a dune at **1.6** miles and avoid the trail to the right.

Bypass the white-blazed Kingfisher Trail, which comes in from the left at **1.8** miles, ascend a low dune, and come into a salt marsh. As the park's marshes are flooded by saltwater tides twice each day, be sure to stay on the trail or face the consequences of sinking into soft mud and muck. This spot, however, is a great place to discover great blue herons, egrets, and fiddler crabs. The crab received its name from the early settlers, who observed the male of the species waving its larger claw back and forth like a fiddler would move a bow across violin strings. Like many other notable behaviors conducted by creatures throughout the natural world, this performance is done to attract females for mating.

The gold-blazed White Hill Lake Trail comes in from the left at **2.0** miles. Make a sharp right to cross an outlet stream and continue on the Long Creek Trail. Avoid a trail that ascends a dune to the right at **2.1** miles, then bear left, skirt the edge of the marsh, and come to White Hill Lake, one of the quietest and most peaceful spots in the park and a place to possibly observe nesting ospreys. These majestic birds were once an endangered species, but they have made a remarkable comeback since the banning of the pesticide DDT. They are now a common sight, swooping out of the sky to crash onto the water and rise with a fish clutched in powerful claws.

Leave White Hill Lake at **2.3** miles and begin a long climb to the top of a dune where you will have grand views across Broad Bay. This might be a good place to learn how to identify and avoid the three-fingered leaves

and the stems of tread-softly. This plant's pretty white flower, which blooms in July and August, is tempting to touch and examine closely. However, the points of its hollow thorns may break off, injecting a toxin that will continue to cause itching for quite some time afterward.

In an area thick with tread-softly and poison ivy at 2.5 miles, the Long Creek Trail bears off to the left. You want to keep to the right, now following the green-blazed Osprey Trail as it drops steeply on steps, crosses a wooden footbridge, and arrives at a small beach with a salt marsh to your left. Cross another footbridge at 2.8 miles and come to a larger beach. This may be the time to take a well-deserved break and refresh your feet in the cool waters of Broad Bay. (Swimming, though, is prohibited.)

Passing by a salt marsh to the right at 3.1 miles, the trail gives a final view of the bay, enters the forest, and becomes wider. The southern end of the Long Creek Trail comes in from the left at 3.7 miles; stay right. Early in the morning the dense forest at this spot makes it a good birdsong listening area. Avoid pathways that cross the trail at 3.9 miles, reach 64th Street

at 4.2 miles, and turn right along the paved road, being mindful of the automobile traffic.

Continue to follow the park road and make a left turn onto the dark-green-blazed Cape Henry/Bike Trail at 5.0 miles. (The parking area, water fountain, and restrooms of the Narrows on Broad Bay—open year-round—are just a few hundred yards ahead along the roadway.)

Benches overlook the bay at 5.3 miles before you reenter the forest at 5.4 miles. Begin the traverse of a large salt marsh at 5.5 miles, where you may see numerous great blue herons trawling the shallow water in search of a meal.

Benches that overlook the marsh at 5.6 miles make for a warm place to observe nesting osprey and red-headed woodpeckers. This particular marsh was a freshwater swamp until the Ash Wednesday storm of 1962 breached its outer edge. Soon after, mosquito drainage ditches were dug, allowing more salt water into the area. Although these ditches are no longer maintained, rising sea levels continue to wash salt water over the land.

Leave the marsh at 5.7 miles, with tall grasses lining both sides of the trail. This spot, with its view of the man-made lake at 6.0 miles—the

### *Broad Bay*



result of dredging done by the City of Virginia Beach to replace beach sand that was washed away by the tremendous Ash Wednesday storm of 1962—is another good place for a rest break. While the dredging certainly changed the face of the land, it also created this lovely scene.

Continue to follow the dark-green-blazed pathway to a boardwalk over a swamp at **6.4** miles. Much of the year this swamp may be dry, but it is still a place to enjoy a good display of Spanish moss draped over black gum trees growing out of the tannin-stained water.

Cross paved 64th Street at **6.5** miles (a water fountain—turned off in winter—and chemical toilets may be available here) and continue along the Cape Henry/Bike Trail. Now walking upon the bed of an old country road—used by automobiles until the mid-1950s—you will pass luxuriant canebrakes. With a large dune on the left, the cane begins to fade around **7.2** miles; avoid the well-used but unauthorized trail to the left.

Stay on the Cape Henry/Bike Trail when gold-blazed White Hill Lake Trail comes in from the left at **7.6** miles. If you are observant, you will notice that the land is gradually changing from dry, sandy soil to areas dotted with small, boggy, wet patches.

A bench beside the trail at **8.0** miles is about as far from any trailheads as you can get on the Cape Henry/Bike Trail. Therefore, it is a nice, quiet place to sit and enjoy the cool shade provided by the oak, loblolly pine, sweet gum, beech, and red maple trees. The red bay, which makes up much of the understory, has leaves that taste similar to those of the Mediterranean bay, which are used to flavor soups, stews, and spaghetti sauces. This bush's flowers are often overlooked in the spring, but its dark-blue fruit is prominent later in the fall.

Bypass the white-blazed Kingfisher Trail as it comes in from the left at **8.6** miles and arrive at benches along the pathway at **9.1** miles. To the left is a small swamp that is a good spot to study the black gum and bald cypress trees. When in the water, the black gum trees—also commonly known as tupelo—develop a broad

base, as do the bald cypress trees. A theory to explain this habit is that it better anchors them in the moist, swampy bottoms.

Be alert when you come to a four-way intersection at **9.75** miles. You will leave the Cape Henry/Bike Trail and turn right to follow the red-blazed Bald Cypress Trail to the very edge of a large cypress pool, a spot worthy of a few minutes of study.

Begin to gradually ascend a dune ridge-line, avoiding the unauthorized pathway to the right. On both sides of the trail are swamps in the low points between parallel dunes. Avoid another unauthorized trail that ascends to the right at **10.0** miles; bear left and descend into an area thick with sweet pepperbush. One of the most widespread plants in the park, the pepperbush has fragrant flowers that blossom on spikes in midsummer.

Be alert at **10.1** miles! You want to follow the Bald Cypress Trail as it makes an abrupt hard turn to the left onto a wide, straight path. (The blue-blazed Osmanthus Trail goes off to the right.) At this junction is a good example of an osmanthus, or American olive tree. Also known as devilwood, it reaches its very northern limit in the park. A member of the olive family, its green berries appear late in the summer and turn a dark purple in the fall. Early settlers gave it the devilwood name, claiming its grain made it a devil of a tree to split.

Keep to the left again at **10.2** miles, where another section of the Osmanthus Trail comes in from the right. Avoid a trail to the left at **10.3** miles and ascend and descend a couple of dunes. On top of one of them, the exposed roots of trees show just how shallow the layer of decaying matter and soil is in the park and how precariously the vegetation exists.

Soon, turn onto a boardwalk that goes out into a cypress pool and may afford a chance to watch turtles or snakes sunning themselves. Among the species of turtles living in the park are painted, spotted, box, snapping, and mud. The last prefers shallow water but is adept at moving about on land. As the swamps begin to dry up in late summer, mud turtles may be





*Cypress knees are common along the trails.*

seen migrating to pools that still have a few inches of water remaining.

With more than 10 different species of snakes in the park, encountering one is a real possibility, but only the copperhead and the cottonmouth, or water moccasin, are venomous. While the park is within the range of the venomous canebrake rattler, none has been sighted in recent years.

Turn right at 10.4 miles (straight ahead 0.2 mile is the Cape Henry/Bike Trail), descend stairs, and cross a large cypress pool on a boardwalk. About midway in the pool is a cypress island so large that it has red maple, sweet gum, and Virginia willow growing on it. These islands are often created when cypress knees grow so closely together that decomposing material becomes caught on or between them. After many years, enough of this matter will build up to form a rich soil in which other vegetation begins to grow.

A second cypress pool is a good place to study the broad bases of the bald cypress and

tupelo trees; Spanish moss drapes itself over the vegetation.

In a dry and sandy area, reach the trail center at 10.5 miles (worth a visit, if it is open), follow the main park road straight ahead through the parking lot, and turn right onto the upper portion of the Cape Henry/Bike Trail at 10.6 miles. Make a sharp left at 10.7 miles. To the right, behind a wooden fence, is the old route that at one time was the entrance road leading from Shore Drive to the trail center. Through the vegetation to the right at 11.0 miles, located on one of the largest dunes in the park, are the rental cabins built by the CCC in the 1930s.

Cross a dirt service road at 11.2 miles; pass through loblolly pine, blueberry bushes, and greenbrier vines; and then cross the paved park road. Walk onto the old bed of a railroad that brought tourists to Virginia Beach up until World War II. The picnic area, your car, and the end of the hike are to the right through a stand of loblollies at 11.4 miles.

# Back Bay NWR and False Cape State Park





## BACK BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AND FALSE CAPE STATE PARK

- **GPS:** N36.6888247 W75.9222590
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 23.7 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 3 days
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 120 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *North Bay and Knotts Island*; refuge map; state park map
- **CONTACT:** False Cape State Park  
4001 Sandpiper Road  
Virginia Beach, VA 23456  
757-426-7128  
[dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/false-cape](http://dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/false-cape)

Located in the southeast corner of Virginia, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Park are on land unlike any other found in the commonwealth. Protecting the area from the ravages of the modern world, these two entities are situated on a 1- to 2-mile-wide barrier spit sandwiched between the Atlantic Ocean and 6-mile-wide Back Bay. More akin to the barrier islands of Virginia's Eastern Shore and those found off the coast of North Carolina than to the mainland to which it is attached, this is an area of scrubby woodlands, salt- and freshwater marshes, sand dunes, and an ocean beach devoid of the least bit of development. The coastline has remained essentially unchanged since the time the earliest settlers first set foot in the New World.

At one time you could only reach the state park by walking or biking more than 5.0 miles through the wildlife refuge or powering a boat across the waters of Back Bay. Now a tram for day visitors runs from Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Sandbridge through the refuge and into the state park. However, since full-size backpacks are not permitted on the tram, you will still have to reach the park by foot, bicycle, or boat if you wish to spend nights in the park as described below. Do not despair, though, as this is the only place in all of the Hampton

Roads area where you are permitted to do any overnight backcountry camping on public lands. Camping will also allow you more time to explore the park—and you will experience much more than the day-trippers could ever imagine.

*Note:* You do not need a permit if you are just going to do some day hiking, but over-nighters must obtain one by calling 800-933-7275 at least one day in advance.

In a farsighted move, the citizens of Virginia approved the Parks and Recreational Facilities Bond in 1992, authorizing the state to expend funds for the purpose of bringing more acreage into the public domain and upgrading facilities at existing sites. One of those upgrades was the installation of potable water facilities at False Cape State Park's visitor center and at two of the designated campgrounds. This will save you from carrying the previously suggested minimum of 1 gallon of water (which weighs 8 pounds!) for each day of your outing. Do remember, though, to carry enough with you to get you through the first 5.0 miles of the hike.

There is very little shade throughout much of this trip, so sunscreen of the highest SPF you can find is also a must, as are light clothing to protect you from the sun and a heavier layer for when the wind turns chilly. Of course, a hat and sunglasses should be a part of any walk on the beach. Mosquitoes, sand fleas, ticks, and a variety of flies (including nasty, biting deer-flies) make insect repellent an essential item to pack—sometimes even in the middle of winter.

The tent pegs you use in the mountains just won't do here. Strong winds coming off the ocean will lift the short ones out of the soft sand in no time. Your pegs should be at least 15 inches long, and don't expect to find any branches or downed wood around the campsites to use. Beach tent pegs can be purchased at a number of stores in Virginia Beach.



**DIRECTIONS** Take I-64 to Exit 286 in Virginia Beach and drive southeast on VA 407 (Indian River Road) for 13.0 miles. Turn left onto VA 672 (New Bridge Road), continue an additional 1.2 miles, turn right onto VA 629, and drive 3.0 more miles to make one more right, this one onto Sandpiper Road. Another 3.7 miles of driving brings you to Little Island City Park, where you will pay the overnight parking fee (during the warmer months) and leave your car.

## Route Description

### First Day

- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (one way): 6.1 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 2 hours, 30 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 10 feet

The foot journey begins by walking southward along the main paved roadway and coming to the refuge entrance station at 0.4 mile, where you will need to pay another fee. You are only permitted to be in the refuge during daylight hours (pets prohibited). Also be aware that some routes through the refuge (including the one described below) are closed from time to time depending on wildlife use. At other times, you may be required to walk the beach. However, there will always be a way to reach the state park by foot, so just follow posted directions.

The 9,250-acre Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1938 to provide habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl, especially greater snow geese. It is estimated that more than 10,000 of these geese visit the refuge during the annual peak in December and January. However, with its varied habitats, the refuge attracts a large number of bird species—more than 300 have been observed within its boundaries. Be on the lookout for loons, grebes, bitterns, swans, ducks, raptors, doves, woodpeckers, warblers, finches, wrens, and more.

As you walk along the road, notice that, protected from wind and salt spray, the vegetation

behind the primary dune is larger and healthier looking than that found on the beach.

Stay to the right when you come to the T intersection at 1.6 miles, bypass the dirt road to the left for the moment, and, to understand your surroundings better, look over the displays in the refuge's visitor center.

When you're ready to resume walking, return to the main dirt road and follow it southward through the refuge; stay to the left at 1.8 miles and 2.1 miles. The cross dikes to your right at 3.1 miles and 3.3 miles are closed to public travel. These water impoundments have been artificially created and are alternately drained and flooded to provide the optimum habitat for various species of visiting waterfowl.

Introduced from Europe into the northeastern US, the distinctive mute swan was not seen in the refuge until the 1960s. It was hard to misidentify, with its all-white plumage and orange bill with a black knob at the base. It holds its neck in a characteristic S-curve, as opposed to native swans, who hold their necks straight. Contact authorities if you happen to see one, as it seems to have once again disappeared from the refuge.

Enter False Cape State Park at 4.7 miles, and make use of the observation tower at 4.75 miles to look northward over the land you have walked across today; turn south to see what you will traverse tomorrow.

The state park contact station, where you may obtain water, is at 5.4 miles. If it is early in the day and you are feeling energetic, consider taking an optional journey along the 2.4-mile circuit Barbour Hill Interpretive Nature Trail. Numbered posts keyed to a pamphlet you may obtain at the contact station will help acquaint you with the natural world you are walking through.

### The Hike at a Glance: First Day

- 0.4 Wildlife refuge entrance station
- 1.6 Wildlife refuge visitor center
- 4.7 Enter False Cape State Park
- 5.4 State park contact station
- 6.1 Barbour Hill campground

Go left from the contact station on the route marked as leading toward the Barbour Hill beach campground and arrive at your home for the night at 6.1 miles. After setting up camp (the only amenities are a water spigot, picnic table, and chemical toilet), resting, and having dinner, consider walking the 3.0-mile round-trip journey to the Barbour Hill Boat Dock to watch the sun set over Back Bay.

## Second Day

- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 12.0 miles
- **HIKING TIME**: 5 hours, 15 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE**: 100 feet

Carpe diem! Hopefully, you walked over to Back Bay to watch the sun drop below the western horizon last night, so wake up early enough today to watch it rise over the ocean, having wended its way around Earth while you slept. Besides, you have much to do today and many miles of exploration to embrace.

After getting your camp in order, preparing a day pack with food and water, and hanging your food on the provided “raccoon racks,” walk back toward the contact station. At 0.6 mile turn left onto the Sand Ridge Trail, a dirt road that is signed as heading toward the Wash Woods Environmental Education Center. The shade you are walking through is courtesy of one of the most dominant trees in the park, the loblolly pine.

Adapting well to poorly drained, heavy soils, the loblolly grows straight and tall, with scales that become larger and smoother as the tree ages. One field guide claims its common name means mud puddle, a reference to one of its preferred environments. The loblolly has also been called the rosemary pine, an acknowledgment of the fragrant resin found within its needles.

South Inlet, the moist, swampy area you walk by at 0.8 mile, was formed during a hurricane in 1749; most of the downed trees you notice around the trail were toppled by the high winds of Hurricane Bonnie in 1998. Soon after you pass through the inlet, the live oak trees, whose acorns are a favorite food of the park’s feral hogs, become some of the more dominant

## The Hike at a Glance: Second Day

- 0.6 Contact station
- 1.2 Bypass South Inlet Trail
- 2.7 Stay straight at four-way intersection
- 3.9 Stay straight at four-way intersection
- 4.0 Stay straight at four-way intersection
- 4.5 Stay straight at four-way intersection
- 6.8 Pass through gate; turn to walk northward on the beach
- 7.5 Wreck of the *Clythia* is visible
- 9.0 Bypass Wash Woods Interpretive Trail
- 9.1 Bypass Wash Woods Trail
- 10.2 Pass False Cape Landing campground
- 12.0 Return to Barbour Hill campground

trees in the forest. You may notice that the earth under and around the trees looks like it has been churned over by a rototiller, but it’s the work of the feral hogs. They are most active at dusk and dawn, and as they root around for food, they destroy the eggs and shelters of ground-nesting birds; they have become a serious threat to the area’s native plants, as well. If you encounter them, give them a wide berth, as you should do with any wild animal.

Bypass the South Inlet Trail (which also leads to the remains of an old whiskey still) to the right at 1.2 miles. A mowed path of just a few feet to the right at 1.6 miles has a duck blind at its end overlooking the Spratts Cove area of Back Bay. Continuing southward on the Sand Ridge Trail, stay straight when you come to a four-way intersection at 2.7 miles. (False Cape Landing beach campground is 0.4 mile to the left, and False Cape Landing bay campground is about 0.3 mile to the right, but neither of them has water available.)

Bypass the Maple Leaf Trail to the left at 2.8 miles. (Along its route is a concrete trough, known as The Dip, where cattle were once plunged into a solution to cleanse them of the ticks that are so abundant in this area.)

Stay straight again when you come to another four-way intersection at 3.9 miles. (The Wash Woods Trail goes left about 0.7 mile to the ocean. The route to the right heads to the

Wash Woods Environmental Education Center.) Once more you need to continue straight at the intersection at **4.0** miles, and less than **300** feet later, the route is lesser-used and you will soon be walking on softer sand.

Continue straight, bypassing the Cemetery Trail at the four-way intersection at **4.5** miles.

The assemblage of rusting tin cans and old jars to the right at **5.9** miles is an indication that this narrow strip of land was once inhabited. Interestingly, since this is one of only a few such sites bearing witness to that habitation, this garbage pile has taken on sort of an aberrant historical and archaeological significance.

Keep to the left when the Dudley Island Loop Trail (leading **0.4** mile to Inlet Creek) and the Monument Trail (leading **0.4** mile to the Virginia–North Carolina border) come in from the right at **6.0** miles. Pass through the gate along the Virginia–North Carolina border at **6.8** miles and begin the return hike to your campsite by turning northward along the beach and the ocean's edge. No vehicles (except those of park personnel and a few commercial fishermen and North Carolina residents) are permitted on the sands; since you are miles from any public road access point, you may well be the only person on the beach. It seems

*The quiet beach goes on for miles.*



ironic that the land farthest to the east—an area that the earliest settlers would have most likely encountered first—is the place where you can be the most isolated in all of eastern America.

You may notice an old, weather-beaten black shape sticking out of the water during low tide at 7.5 miles into the hike. This is the bow of the 290-foot *Clythia*, which wrecked here during a storm in 1894 while transporting a load of marble for John D. Rockefeller.

The Wash Woods Interpretive Trail is to your left at 9.0 miles, while the Wash Woods Trail meets the beach at 9.1 miles. The primary dune along this stretch of beach is not natural but was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers in the 1930s in an effort to protect the land behind it.

The largest portion of your foot travel for the day is over, so you might want to relax and take a swim in the ocean. Just remember: There are no lifeguards here to rescue you if you get into trouble.

Pass the False Cape Landing beach campground at 10.2 miles and return to your tent in the Barbour Hill beach campground at 12.0 miles.

## Third Day

■ **TOTAL DISTANCE** (one way): 5.6 miles

■ **HIKING TIME**: 2 hours, 45 minutes

■ **VERTICAL RISE**: 10 feet

By walking back to the state park contact station and following the main route through the wildlife refuge, the final day of this outing could be a repeat (in reverse) of the first day. However, for variety, and especially if it is low tide, when the hard-packed sand will make for easy walking, head to the beach and follow it northward.

If you wish to take a dip in the ocean, be sure to do it soon after you begin, as you will enter the wildlife refuge at 0.6 mile, where swimming and sunbathing are prohibited.

Although there are few landmarks along the beach to mark your progress, there are still an amazing number of things to observe to occupy the hiking time. Maybe it is time to take

## The Hike at a Glance: Third Day

0.6 Enter wildlife refuge

3.6 Bypass Dune Trail

3.7 Turn left onto Seaside Trail

4.0 Turn right onto road

5.6 Return to car

a short break from dedicated hiking and just saunter a bit, engaging in the favorite activity of beachcombers everywhere—hunting for shells. With its fanlike appearance and two small wings at the bottom, the shells of the scallop are some of the easiest to identify. (Think of the logo for Shell gasoline.) These creatures are bivalves, but unlike the oyster, whose entire body can be consumed, humans only eat the strong central muscle of the scallop. This is the muscle that snaps the two valves quickly shut, forcing a jet of water out of the scallop, enabling it to “swim.”

If you are here at night from early spring to midautumn, you might witness a female sea turtle come ashore to lay eggs. Using both front and rear flippers, she digs a hole in the sand and lays from 50 to more than 150 white eggs the size of Ping-Pong balls. Covering them with sand, the mother turtle returns to the sea, leaving the babies to fend for themselves when they hatch in 50–70 days. Please do not disturb the turtles, nests, or eggs; sadly, of the six sea turtle species found along US coasts, all are designated either threatened or endangered.

You could turn inland via the Dune Trail at 3.6 miles, but to extend the oceanside walk as long as possible, continue along the beach. In winter you could possibly see humpback or fin whales drifting by just beyond the whitewater of the surf.

The beach north of the Seaside Trail at 3.7 miles is closed to the public, so turn inland on the boardwalk pathway and arrive at the refuge’s main paved road at 4.0 miles.

Turn right to retrace your steps from the first day and return to your car at 5.6 miles.

# Northwest River Park



- **GPS:** N36.5850205 W76.1518406
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 4.5 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 2 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 20 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Moyock*; park trail map
- **CONTACT:** 1733 Indian Creek Road  
Chesapeake, VA 23322  
757-421-7151  
cityofchesapeake.net

### The Hike at a Glance

- 0.0** Follow Molly Mitchell Trail
- 1.5** Turn left onto gravel road; then left onto Otter Point Trail
- 1.6** Observation platform
- 2.2** Restrooms
- 2.4** Begin following Indian Creek Trail
- 4.4** Cross gravel road
- 4.5** Return to car

Even though Northwest River Park has a playground; picnic shelters; a miniature golf course; canoes, kayaks, and paddleboats for rent; and a campground with hot showers, laundry, and a camp store (all of which are bunched together close to the park entrance), it is more like a nature preserve than a regional park. Except for the few miles of hiking trails and a network of old canals, most of its 763 acres have been left in an unspoiled state.

Finding a home within this natural area are 18 species of snakes; close to 300 types of plants; and several species of mammals, including minks, squirrels, nutria, otters, and white-tailed deer. At least 160 species of birds have been observed in the park at one time or another.

In addition, the park is a low-cost, quiet place to camp and explore the natural world that's only about a 30-minute drive from the resort amenities of Virginia Beach.

**DIRECTIONS** From I-64 take Exit 290 in Chesapeake and drive south on VA 168 (Battlefield Boulevard) for 12.2 miles (be sure to avoid Business VA 168 when the roadway splits in two so that you can escape traffic and numerous stoplights). Turn left onto Indian Creek Road, drive 3.5 more miles, and turn right into the park. Bear left almost immediately into the day-use area, continue for another 0.2 mile, and leave your car in parking lot 4.

## Route Description

Begin by following the Molly Mitchell Trail into the woods and walking through switchgrass, with its tall-growing stems and long, thin blades. The pathway to the left at **0.15** mile leads to the playground area. Stay to the right here and once again, when you come to another intersection at **0.2** mile. Swing by the first of many swampy areas at **0.5** mile and cross footbridges at **0.6** mile, **0.8** mile, and **1.1** miles.

Often overlooked by hikers are the half-inch white or purple flowers of the low-growing pennywort, which blooms next to the trail in this area in early to midspring. Gaining much of its nourishment from decaying humus, this perennial's rounded leaves reminded people of the coins they carried in their pockets, giving rise to its common name.

You will cross two more footbridges, at **1.2** miles and **1.3** miles, where broad-based cypress trees and cypress knees grow out of the swampy lowland area. The maniacal laugh of pileated woodpeckers adds to the feeling of eeriness and isolation here. Turn left onto the gravel service road at **1.5** miles, pass a swampy area bordered by dwarf trillium where turtles bask on floating logs, and make a left onto the Otter Point Trail.

Bear left at the intersection at **1.6** miles to stand upon an observation platform jutting



into still and shallow Smith Creek, a quintessential southeastern Virginia body of water. Cypress trees and knees grow out of the dark-colored water, turtles make small ripples as they swim from log to log, and dragonflies dart about in search of tiny insects such as mosquitoes and midges.

People often confuse dragonflies—also called devil’s darning needles—and damselflies. Probably the easiest time to tell them apart is when they are resting. The dragonfly extends its wings outward as if still in flight, while the damselfly folds its wings over its back.

Return to the main pathway, bear left, and continue along your way.

Turn left onto the gravel service road at **2.2** miles and follow it through a picnic area. Pass restrooms to come to the benches overlooking a wide expanse of the Northwest River, the perfect spot for a rest break. Bald cypress trees line the shore—it’s a good place to observe that they shed their needles in winter, since it can be difficult to pick out individual trees in deep woods.

Take as much time as your schedule allows to enjoy this tranquil scene to which your feet have delivered you. Turkey and black vultures may soar overhead, egrets and herons might wade in close to the shore, and a nutria or

muskrat might swim by—you’ll know it by the V-shaped ripple pattern it will leave in its wake.

Larger than a muskrat, the nutria is sometimes mistaken for a beaver. It was introduced from South America in the mid-1900s for its fur, has no natural predators here, and its numbers continue to rise, causing increasing amounts of damage to wetlands. Burrowing into the soil, the nutria feed upon the roots of plants, causing the plants to die before they’re able to reproduce.

Retrace your steps and turn left onto the Indian Creek Trail at **2.4** miles. Although you may see another trail to your left at **2.6** miles, you want to remain on the Indian Creek Trail. Step over footbridges at **2.7** miles, **2.9** miles, and **3.3** miles. In the fall, you are likely to see squirrels busily harvesting the hundreds of acorns dropped here by towering oak trees.

Just like the pennywort found earlier in this hike, the wild ginger that grows along the trail in this area is easy to overlook. Its color closely approximates that of the soil around it, and, as it rises no more than a couple of inches from the ground, it may also be hidden by its own foliage or fallen leaves.

There are a number of reasons why the flower has evolved into its particular color, shape, and size. Blooming in the early spring, the blossoms are some of the first to be located by small flies and gnats as they emerge from the ground in search of sustenance. Being carrion eaters, these insects are attracted by the flower’s purplish brown, rotting-flesh color. Once inside the jug-shaped flower, they can feast on the abundant pollen—protected from the chilly winds of springtime.

You cross equestrian trails at **3.9** miles and **4.1** miles, and you will need to turn right onto a service road at **4.2** miles—only to bear left into the woods less than **100** feet later. Walk over the bridge across the lake’s outlet stream, ascend and descend wooden steps, and cross a gravel road at **4.4** miles. Barely **300** feet later, turn right onto the paved park road and return to your car at **4.5** miles.

### *Cypress trees and knees in the Northwest River*



# 4 GREAT DISMAL SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: LAKE DRUMMOND

- **GPS:** N36.6445564 W76.5471999
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (round trip): 9.0 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 4 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 10 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Suffolk, Lake Drummond*, and *Lake Drummond, NW*; refuge map
- **CONTACT:** Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge  
3100 Desert Road  
Suffolk, VA 23434  
757-986-2353  
[fws.gov/refuge/Great\\_Dismal\\_Swamp](http://fws.gov/refuge/Great_Dismal_Swamp)

## The Hike at a Glance

- 0.2 Bypass end of Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail
- 1.1 Bypass Lynn Ditch roadway
- 4.0 Bend to the right
- 4.4 Turn right at T intersection
- 4.5 Lake Drummond; retrace steps
- 9.0 End of hike

Unjustly called “dismal,” the Great Dismal Swamp is a wondrous place of rich natural charm, with cypress knees rising out of tannin-darkened waters and a forest of pine, cedar, black gum (tupelo), sweet gum, and oak growing upon and around the soft peat bogs. In the center of the refuge is one of only two natural lakes in all of Virginia, 3,100-acre Lake Drummond. (See Hike 31 on page 139 for the other one.)

George Washington first visited this place in 1763 and was so taken by it—proclaiming it a “glorious paradise”—that he helped form the Dismal Swamp Land Company, which purchased 40,000 acres. More entrepreneurial than naturalist in its philosophy, the company proceeded to drain and log portions of the swamp. Logging operations were so successful they continued until 1976; the exploitation was so extensive that the entire swamp has

been logged at least once, greatly changing its ecology. In addition, continued agricultural, commercial, and residential development have destroyed much of the original swamp, so much so that what remains is less than half of its original size.

Creation of the wildlife refuge began in 1973, when a lumber company donated 49,100 acres to The Nature Conservancy, which in turn transferred the land to the US Department of the Interior. The Dismal Swamp Act of 1974 officially established the refuge, which now encompasses almost 113,000 acres of forested wetlands.

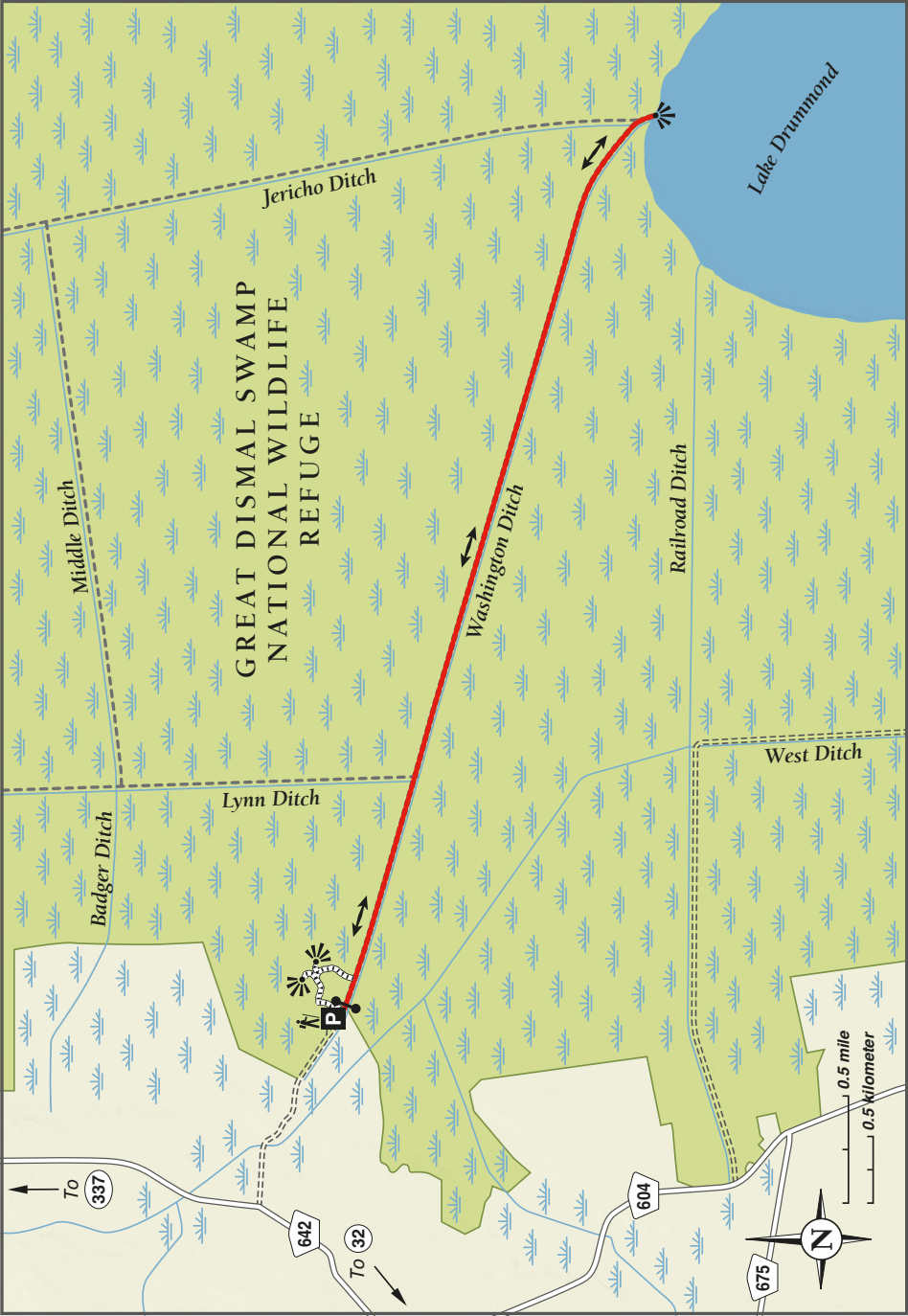
With more than 50 miles of old logging roads now open to hikers and bikers, you could spend days exploring the area. The hike described below follows the arrow-straight route of the Washington Ditch to the heart of the swamp, Lake Drummond. This is not only the best-maintained and most popular pathway, but it is also the most convenient and easiest route to experience just about everything the swamp has to offer.

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of I-664 Exit 13 and US 58/13/460 in Chesapeake, take US 58/13/460 west for 6.9 miles (making sure to take Business US 58/460 when the highway splits). Turn left onto VA 337 (East Washington Street), continue for an additional 2.4 miles, turn left onto VA 642 (White Marsh Road), and drive 5.3 more miles, bypassing the Jericho Lane entrance. Turn left onto the Washington Ditch entrance road and leave your car in the parking area 1.0 mile later.

To reach the refuge headquarters, where additional information and a sketch map brochure may be obtained, continue southward on White Marsh Road for approximately 1.0 mile from the Washington Ditch entrance road. Bear left onto VA 604/Desert Road and arrive at the



# Great Dismal Swamp NWR: Lake Drummond



headquarters in less than 2.0 miles. The 0.25-mile Pine Trail encircles the center, and, if you or members of your family do not wish to hike to the lake, Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive—located just south of the headquarters—allows visitors to access the area by car via a 6.0-mile gravel road.

## Route Description

Begin the hike to Lake Drummond directly from the parking lot and walk around the gate. Just after passing an entrance to the Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail (see Hike 5) at 0.2 mile, look to the right across the ditch for your first view of a swampy area punctuated by cypress knees. There is still some disagreement as to the purpose of these knees, which are a part of the cypress tree's root system. The most commonly accepted theory is that the trees send them up in order to draw oxygen out of the air and back to the roots. Notice that some knees appear to be growing not in the water but on dry land close to the trail. The swamp has evidently extended to these points at times because the tree will not send up the knees unless its roots are under water.

As you walk along you will notice that jewelweed lines the ditch in prodigious amounts for more than half of this hike. Pokeweed joins the vegetative undergrowth about 0.5 mile into the journey. If you grew up in the country, or even close to an abandoned lot in the city, you are probably familiar with this tall plant with its 12-inch-long leaves and thick purple stem. It is a good bet that you were attracted to its dark violet berries, which begin to appear in mid-summer. You might also have found out that the juice from these berries makes a great ink with which to stain your hands and clothes—sometimes indelibly. Luckily, you must not have eaten any, as they are poisonous.

The Lynn Ditch and its roadway come in from the left at 1.1 miles. To the right, in the Washington Ditch, is a water control structure. Because the system of canals, dikes, and

locks has significantly changed and dried the environment of the swamp, refuge management has installed these apparatuses and put pipes underneath the dike roads in an effort to restore the natural flow of the water.

One of the results of the unnatural drainage of the swamp has been the gradual encroachment of the red maple trees onto the tupelo, bald cypress, and Atlantic white cedar forests. At one time the most predominant forest types in the swamp, they now compose less than 20% of the total refuge cover.

Although they grow in isolated patches along the beginning of the trail, harebells join the floral display in large numbers about 2.6 miles after you leave your car. At one time, these beautiful blue flowers were referred to as witch's thimbles because of the Scottish belief that witches could transmogrify themselves into hares.

There are no hares living within the confines of the Great Dismal Swamp, but you are very likely to see a marsh or an eastern cottontail rabbit while here. The swamp, in fact, harbors a wide variety of mammals, including shrews, bats, chipmunks, squirrels, beavers,

### *Lake Drummond*





### *Along Washington Ditch*

deer, foxes, raccoons, minks, river otters, and bobcats. With an estimated 200–300 individuals, the refuge is also home to the easternmost population of black bears in Virginia. Every once in a while one of them will make headlines by wandering off the refuge and into nearby farm fields and backyards.

Negotiate the curve at 4.0 miles, the only bend to the right on the entire trip. Turn right when you come to the T intersection at 4.4 miles and arrive at Lake Drummond and an observation deck at 4.5 miles. There is disagreement as to how the lake was formed. Some say it was the result of a meteorite slamming into the earth, though most experts feel that it was most likely formed by a fire that burned a depression into the peat during a severe drought. Although it is only between 4 and 6 feet deep, the lake can be an angler's dream, for within its waters are pickerel, catfish, perch, sunfish, bluegill, bass, crappie, and more.

This is by far one of the most isolated places you will ever find in eastern Virginia, so spend as much time as possible here, observing the natural world going about its business unfettered. If it were not for the naval aircraft that seem to be on constant training flights, you could easily imagine that you are no longer part of the 21st century.

As they have done for hundreds of years, snow geese and tundra swans visit here in

winter, double-crested cormorants and ospreys take up residence in spring and summer, and bald eagles have become a common sight during fall and winter.

A number of wood ducks, both male and female, do not migrate and may be seen on Lake Drummond throughout the year. The male wood duck, one of the most colorful birds found here, has a red-and-white bill; red eyes; and luminescent green, purple, and blue feathers along its head. Because visitors must be out of the refuge no later than 30 minutes after sunset, you are eventually going to have to leave this peaceful place. Retrace your steps, noticing things you may have missed on the way in, such as the gnawings of beavers on trees next to the ditch, or the diminutive Asiatic dayflower. A member of the spiderwort family, the plant was imported from Asia and has escaped into the wild; now its range stretches from Alabama to Massachusetts in the East and as far as Kansas and Wisconsin to the west. Its small flower (less than an inch wide) consists of two rich blue, rounded petals that last but a day.

The hike comes to an end when you return to your car at 9.0 miles. Since you now know that this is one of the most under visited areas in Virginia by people looking for solitude, natural beauty, and outdoor adventure, you may find yourself returning here time and again.

# 5 GREAT DISMAL SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: DISMAL TOWN BOARDWALK TRAIL

- **GPS:** N36.6445564 W76.5471999
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 0.9 mile
- **HIKING TIME:** 30 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 0 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Suffolk*
- **CONTACT:** Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge  
3100 Desert Road  
Suffolk, VA 23434  
757-986-2353  
[fws.gov/refuge/Great\\_Dismal\\_Swamp](http://fws.gov/refuge/Great_Dismal_Swamp)

## The Hike at a Glance

- 0.25** Turn left to observation point; return to main trail
- 0.45** Turn left to observation point; return to main trail
- 0.7** Turn right onto Washington Ditch Road
- 0.9** Return to car

For those unable or unwilling to make the 9.0-mile round-trip hike to Lake Drummond (see Hike 4) to enjoy the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, the 0.9-mile Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail is a viable and rewarding alternative. Although you will not become acquainted with the lake's environs, you will still be exposed to much of the beauty and human history of the swamp.

The National Wildlife Refuge System began in 1903, when one of America's most foresighted presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, pronounced Florida's Pelican Island the country's first such refuge. Administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the system has grown to include more than 565 sites throughout the United States that are managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and its habitat.

Mastodons roamed the Great Dismal Swamp millennia ago, with human occupation beginning some time around A.D. 700. Few

Native Americans remained in the area by 1665, when North Carolina governor William Drummond stumbled upon the lake that now bears his name. William Byrd III was commissioned to lead a party into the swamp in 1728 to survey the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina.

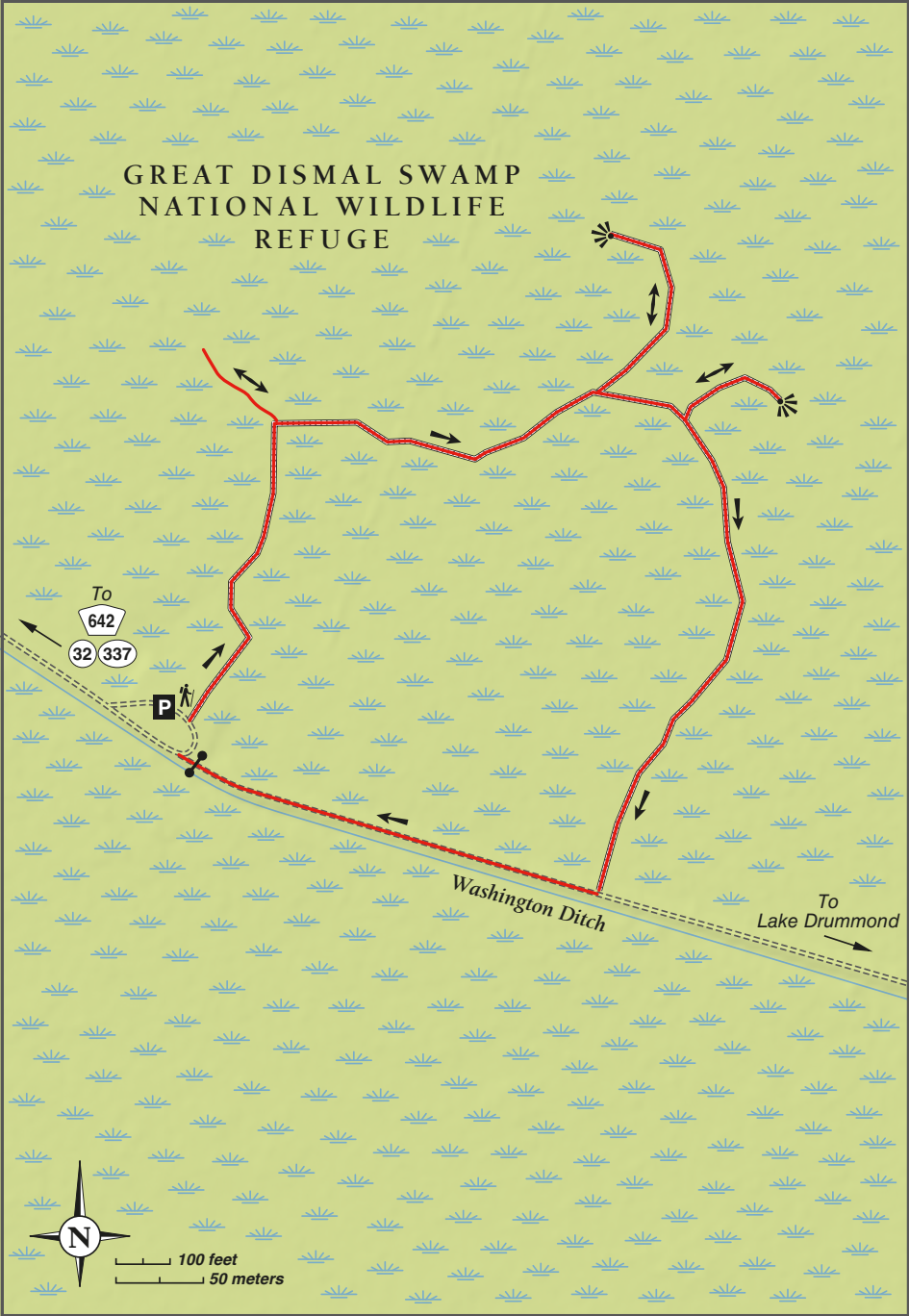
It was George Washington and his Dismal Swamp Land Company that had the biggest impact on the swamp. A decade before the Revolutionary War, Washington was involved in building a massive system of roadways and canals that drained much of the land and made it accessible for nearly two centuries of large-scale logging.

Although the entire swamp has been logged over at least once, and it is now less than half of its original size, with greatly decreased biodiversity, it retains much of its primitive feel. Many of the animal and plant species that originally inhabited the swamp are still there, as well. At least 35 mammals and close to 60 reptiles and amphibians roam the refuge, 70 tree and shrub species have been identified, and several score of wildflowers add color to the forest from early spring to late fall. One of the rarest and most localized of American ferns, the log fern, is more common in the refuge than anywhere else.

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of I-664 Exit 13 and US 58/13/460 in Chesapeake, take US 58/13/460 west for 6.9 miles (making sure to take Business US 58/460 when the highway splits). Turn left onto VA 337 (East Washington Street), continue for an additional 2.4 miles, turn left onto VA 642 (White Marsh Road) and drive 5.3 more miles, bypassing the Jericho Lake entrance. Turn left onto the Washington Ditch entrance road and leave your car in the parking area 1.0 mile later.

To reach the refuge headquarters, where additional information and a sketch

# Great Dismal Swamp NWR: Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail





map brochure may be obtained, continue southward on White Marsh Road for approximately 1.0 mile from the Washington Ditch entrance road. Bear left onto VA 604/Desert Road and arrive at the headquarters in less 2.0 miles.

## Route Description

Begin the hike by walking onto the boardwalk directly from the parking lot. This area was the site of Dismal Town, from which Washington oversaw the construction, primarily by slaves, of the cart road and the drainage ditch.

Although logging removed a large percentage of the bald cypress and Atlantic white cedar trees, permitting red maples to become the predominant cover throughout most of the refuge, you will be walking mostly through maple-gum and cypress-gum forests while on this hike.

Bear left at **0.25** mile, coming to benches in a quiet part of the refuge at **0.3** mile. The only sounds you are likely to hear will be the scampering of squirrels, the snorting of a deer, or the songs of an abundance of birds.

More than 25 species of warblers have been observed in the refuge, and two of them are more common here than in any other coastal location. Named after a 19th-century naturalist, the Swainson's warbler, with a drab olive color on the top of its body and a dull-white breast underneath, can be hard to find amid the lush foliage of the refuge. With its bright-yellow face, Wayne's warbler, a subspecies of the black-throated green warbler, is a bit more colorful and easier to spot.

Return to the main portion of the boardwalk at **0.4** mile and bear left, only to turn left again onto another side route at **0.45** mile. This portion of the hike will deliver you to a small pool with broad-based cypress trees and knees rising out of the dark water. Since you are more than halfway through the outing, why not take a break? Notice a five-lined skink scamper across the boardwalk's handrail; listen to the *jug-o-rum* call of a bullfrog or the banjolike *c'tung* of a green

frog; watch a spotted turtle or eastern cottonmouth slip silently into the water.

Although rarely seen, the refuge is home to three species of venomous snakes. The semiaquatic eastern cottonmouth, or water moccasin, can grow to be 6 feet long. They are olive brown with darker crossbands on their sides and backs. This pattern can fade as they age, and many adults become solid black. More commonly seen is the copperhead, with its light-tan body decorated with darker hourglass markings. Now rarely found within the confines of the refuge (and, indeed, throughout most of what should be its home range) is the canebrake rattler. There has been much controversy among biologists as to how to classify this snake. Some say it is merely a timber rattlesnake that is found in the lowlands, while others insist it is a species unto itself.

Return to the main boardwalk at **0.5** mile and bear left, passing more cypress knees and listening to the Woody Woodpecker-like cries of pileated woodpeckers. They make their homes in tree trunks, usually excavating a hole several inches inward and up to 12 inches downward. Unlike many birds, they leave their nests unlined, save for a few wood chips. After she lays four or five white eggs, the female shares the brooding responsibilities with her mate.

Butterflies flit from the blossoms of jewelweed to those of the Asiatic dayflower where you turn right at **0.7** mile onto the Washington Ditch Road. Nearly 50 kinds of butterflies have been identified in the refuge; the several species of swallowtails are among the easiest to recognize. As their name suggests, most have short tails at the bottoms of their wings.

Pass through the gate and return to your car at **0.9** mile, having come to truly appreciate Henry David Thoreau's sagacious message in his book *Walking*: "When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable and, to the citizen, the most dismal swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place, a sanctum sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow, of Nature."



# Hog Island Wildlife Management Area



- **GPS:** N37.1852242 W76.6913286
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 4.0 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 1 hour, 45 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 7 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Hog Island*; wildlife management area map
- **CONTACT:** 7938 Hog Island Road  
Surry, VA 23883  
757-357-5224  
[dwr.virginia.gov/wma/hog-island](http://dwr.virginia.gov/wma/hog-island)

## The Hike at a Glance

- 0.5 Turn left onto narrow strip of land
- 0.7 Turn right
  - 1.1 Turn left
  - 1.3 Turn right
- 1.5 Cross Homewood Creek
- 3.3 Turn left onto main roadway
- 3.6 Observation platform
- 4.0 End of outing

With more than 40 of them spread throughout the state, wildlife management areas (WMA) are probably the Old Dominion's most overlooked parcels of public backcountry lands. Except during hunting season (usually late October to early January), when it might be best to avoid them, many of the areas can possibly go for days on end without anyone visiting their inner reaches.

While state parks were primarily established to provide outdoor recreation, and state forests founded for silviculture, wildlife management areas were created with an emphasis on protecting and harvesting game animals. Habitat for waterfowl, white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, fish, rabbits, squirrels, and others is often artificially created and maintained.

Within the last few decades, many people have come to also view these areas as places for conservation of nongame species and recreation

sites for the public. In many ways, WMAs can't be beat if you are looking for a primitive experience in an uncrowded place. Amenities such as picnic areas, restrooms, and the like are usually nonexistent, and trails are sometimes nothing more than informal, unmarked pathways created by the footsteps of occasional hunters.

Acquired by the state in the 1950s, the 3,908-acre Hog Island Wildlife Management Area contains three separate parcels. The Carlisle Tract and the Stewart Tract are small plots; the bulk of the acreage is located in the Hog Island Tract at the end of a peninsula jutting into the James River. The Hog Island Tract earned its name from the practice of 17th-century English settlers permitting their swine to forage freely upon the land. It is a flat, open area of pine forest mixed with tidal marshes and constructed water impoundments.

While a large percentage of the state's wildlife management areas have a tendency to concentrate on increasing the numbers of land animals, the emphasis here is on producing native plant foods for wintering waterfowl. The authorities must know what they are doing; there have been years when there were more than 15,000 ducks and more than 10,000 Canada geese in the refuge all at the same time.

Following a network of service roads around the impoundments, this nearly level hike passes through the Hog Island Tract's varied ecological zones. With very little shade available, hikes during the summer can be exceedingly hot. In addition, be prepared for throngs of biting insects. Perhaps the best times to visit are in the early spring or fall, when temperatures are more moderate and bugs fewer in number. Remember that Hog Island is a wildlife management area with hunting permitted, and it may be closed to the general public during hunting seasons and other occasions. It's best to call ahead to see what regulation is currently in place.

**DIRECTIONS** From the intersection of VA 10 and VA 617 in the small settlement of Bacon's Castle in Surry County, take VA 10 east for 0.8 mile and turn left onto VA 650. Follow that route for 5.7 more miles, where you will pass the information center (open to the public) for the Surry Nuclear Powerplant. Continue for an additional 0.6 mile to pass through the WMA entrance gate. Leave your car at the parking area on the right in an additional 1.0 mile.

## Route Description

Begin your journey by passing through the gate and walking a grassy road, which is soon bordered on both sides by water impoundments. Perfectly at home in this moist environment, dragonflies dart across the road from one impoundment to another.

Most adult dragonflies capture their insect prey on the wing. In their immature stage as nymphs, they lie in wait in the water, some species sitting on aquatic vegetation, others buried at the bottom of the pond with only their eyes sticking out of the muck. When an insect or even a small fish or tadpole happens by, the nymph snatches the prey with its long labium. This odd, liplike structure is folded under its head when not in use.

Come to an intersection at **0.5** mile. Because the land behind the gate in front of you is closed on a seasonal basis to protect eagle nesting sites, turn left onto a narrow strip of land between two impoundments. Bear right onto an even narrower strip of land at **0.7** mile, go left at **1.1** miles, and then right at **1.3** miles.

The distinctive reddish orange blossoms of the trumpet vine (also known as cow itch because it can cause contact dermatitis) that grows along the edges of the road usually begin to bloom in July. Aerial roots growing out from the stem enable the plant to hold on as it creeps and climbs over other vegetation; it sometimes becomes so aggressive and well established that it can be a nuisance plant.

You will dip slightly at **1.5** miles to cross Homewood Creek at a water-control structure. This loss and rise of less than 10 feet is about the only change in elevation you will experience on the entire outing.

If you are here during winter, look at the impounded waters of Homewood Creek to your left and you are likely to see at least a few, if not many, Canada geese. Born during the summer in the Arctic regions of North America, they spend the winter in the lower 48 states. The impoundments in the wildlife management area are controlled wetlands. They are drained in spring and various grains, such as millet, are sown or permitted to grow throughout the summer. The land is reflooded when the plants mature, and their seeds provide a source of food for the geese and other waterfowl.

Bend to the left at **2.2** miles and walk along the south bank of the James River, the Old Dominion's longest waterway. Rising as a narrow stream in the mountains along the Virginia–West Virginia border, the river has grown to be nearly 3 miles wide as it flows around the Hog Island peninsula.

Sweet gum trees provide a slight bit of shade just before you break out into the open again at **2.6** miles. A small, sandy beach at **2.9** miles might tempt you to rest for a few moments, remove your shoes, and wade into the cool water. (Be alert—the bottom drops off quickly.)

Pass by residences, maintenance buildings, and the WMA's headquarters before bending to the left onto the area's main roadway at **3.3** miles.

Make use of an observation platform at **3.6** miles to overlook the low-lying land of Hog Point to the north and the shimmering water of the James River to the west. Designated fishing sites along this portion of the hike allow anglers to fish for striped bass, channel and blue catfish, croaker, white perch, and carp. The outing comes to an end when you return to your car at **4.0** miles.

Other Virginia wildlife management areas worthy of your hiking time include:

**Havens WMA**, which encompasses most of Fort Lewis Mountain west of Roanoke. A

pathway ascends from VA 622 (Bradshaw Road) to the crest of the mountain, where a dirt road provides access to grandstand views of the Roanoke Valley and more than a dozen miles of ridgetop walking.

About 7.0 miles of the Appalachian Trail pass through the **G. R. Thompson WMA**, connecting with a system of more than 20.0 miles of pathways within the 4,160 acres. Be sure to take a walk here in the spring when—literally—millions of trillium are in bloom. Easiest access is from VA 688 south of Paris.

Three of the trails in 6,400-acre **Hidden Valley WMA** in far southwest Virginia actually have names. The Brumley Creek, Brumley Rim, and Long Arm Trails connect to make a circuit hike of close to 10.0 miles. Highlights include creekside walking and several vistas of Clinch Mountain. You can reach the area's

main entrance by following US 19/Alternate 58 west from Abingdon for 11.0 miles to make a right onto VA 690.

Those who live in central Virginia, where vast acreages of public land are sadly quite scarce for backcountry tramping, should check out **C. F. Phelps WMA**. A network of about 15.0 miles of gated roads and unmarked trails twist through 4,500 acres, leading to some positively isolated camping spots. The area is accessible by driving US 17 northwest of Fredericksburg to VA 651 at Goldvein. Continue through Summerduck to the WMA.

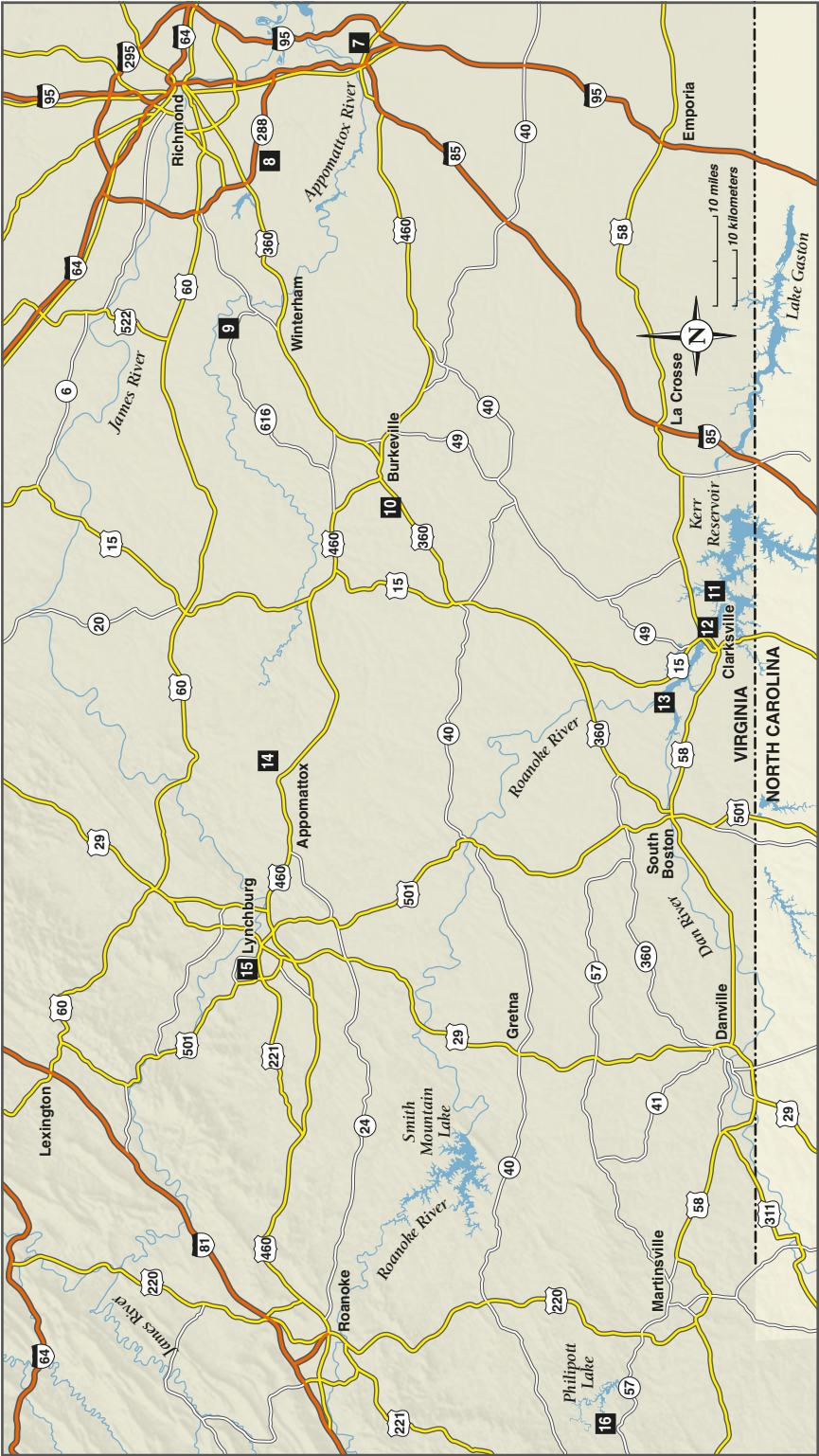
Less than an hour's drive from downtown Richmond are the approximately 8.0 miles of trails and roadbeds in the 2,200-acre **Amelia WMA** (see Hike 9). Except for land adjacent to Saunders Pond and Amelia Lake, you are permitted to camp anywhere.

*One of the impoundments, with the James River in the background*





South-Central Virginia

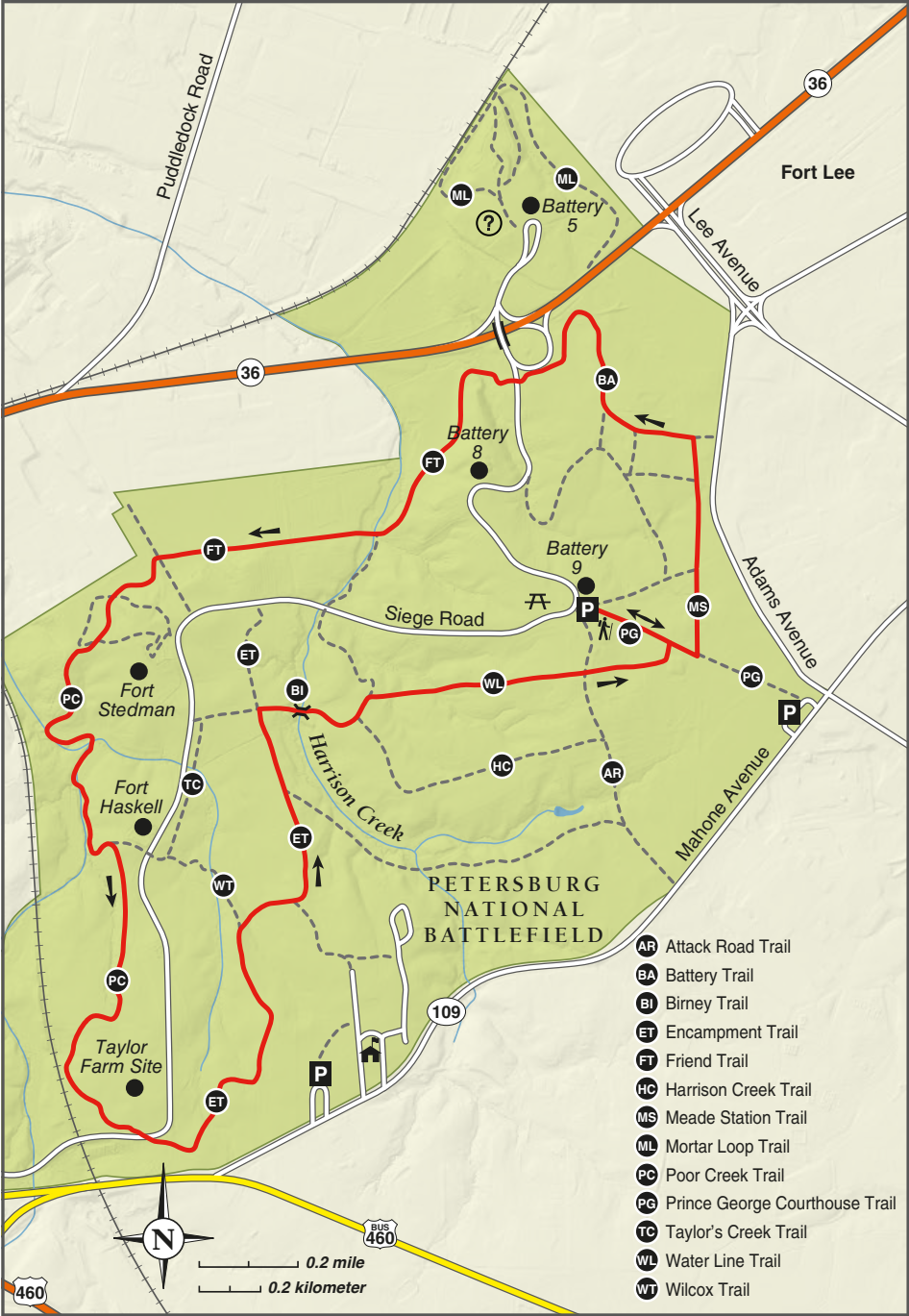


# South-Central Virginia

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8. Pocahontas State Park (p. 46)
9. Amelia Wildlife Management Area (p. 50)
10. Twin Lakes State Park (p. 54)
11. Kerr Reservoir: *Robert Munford Trail* (p. 58)
12. Occoneechee State Park (p. 62)
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14. Appomattox Court House National Historical Park (p. 70)
15. Blackwater Creek Natural Area (p. 74)
16. Fairy Stone State Park (p. 78)



# Petersburg National Battlefield



- **GPS:** N37.2297737 W77.3459332
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 6.7 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 3 hours
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 360 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Prince George*; battlefield trail map
- **CONTACT:** 1539 Hickory Hill Road  
Petersburg, VA 23804  
804-732-3531  
[nps.gov/pete](https://www.nps.gov/pete)

## The Hike at a Glance

- 0.25** Turn left onto Meade Station Trail
- 0.6** Begin following Battery 7 Trail
- 1.3** Cross Siege Road and follow Friend Trail
- 2.3** Turn left at T intersection; then stay left at Y intersection on Poor Creek Trail
- 5.0** Turn left onto Encampment Trail
- 5.5** Turn right onto Birney Trail
- 5.7** Turn left onto yellow-blazed trail for a few feet, then right onto red-blazed trail
- 6.45** Turn left onto Prince George Courthouse Trail
- 6.7** Return to car

In the hope of finally bringing an end to the Civil War, Union troops under the command of General Ulysses S. Grant crossed the Rapidan River in May 1864 to engage Confederate general Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Recognizing the severity of the situation, Lee told one of his officers, "We must destroy this Army of Grant's before he gets to the James River. If he gets there it will become a siege and then it will be a mere question of time."

Although battles at Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania (see *Hike Virginia North of US 60*, available from Menasha Ridge Press in 2023) brought no decisive victory for either side, Grant continued his movement toward the Confederacy's capitol in Richmond.

At Cold Harbor (see *Hike Virginia North of US 60*), a mere 9.0 miles from the capitol, Grant met such fierce resistance and sustained so many casualties in early June 1864, that he abandoned his idea of capturing the city by direct assault. Reasoning that if he could procure the "capture of [Lee's] army, Richmond would necessarily follow," he moved his troops to the south side of the James River in an attempt to seize Petersburg, a major rail center and resupply line for the Confederate forces.

Cutting two of the railroad lines and gaining control of several roadways, but unable to take the city by direct combat, the Union forces began a siege of the city. Minor skirmishes occurred throughout the summer and fall, with Grant's troops capturing other rail lines and diminishing the supplies for the Army of Northern Virginia.

Recognizing the weakening state of his forces, Lee took the offensive in March 1865, attacking Grant in an attempt to gain supplies with the capture of one of the Union's newly established U.S. Military Railroads. Although the move was somewhat successful, the tide of the battle turned in favor of Grant several days later. The 10-month struggle for the city, the longest siege in American warfare, came to an end with Lee's retreat and evacuation of Petersburg on April 2. His surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House, less than 100 miles to the west, was just a week away.

Established in 1926 as a national military park, the 2,700-acre site was declared a national battlefield in 1962. Unlike many of the Civil War's other federally designated national battlefields, which have been preserved predominantly as open fields and meadows, the land at Petersburg has been permitted to grow into maturing forests. Therefore, most of this hike will be through deep woods with varying amounts of undergrowth. This allows you not only to visit the various sites pertaining to the battles and the siege, but also to enjoy plants

and animals that would not be found living in a more open landscape.

**DIRECTIONS** Coming from Richmond, take I-95 to Exit 52 in Petersburg. Drive east on Wythe Street for approximately 0.6 mile. Merge onto VA 36 (Washington Street), which you will follow for another 1.4 miles to make a right and come to the battlefield visitor center.

In order to add more background information to your hike, take a few moments to look over the exhibits and multimedia programs in the visitor center. In addition to obtaining a brochure that describes a driving tour through the battlefield, you may also pick up a trail map here.

From the visitor center, drive Siege Road into the main part of the national battlefield and, in 1.0 mile, leave your car in Parking Area 3. In addition to the usual ethical practices you should follow while on any hike, the park service requests that you not remove any relics you may find and preserve the breastworks by refraining from walking or climbing on them.

## Route Description

Initiate the outing by making use of the wide Prince George Courthouse Trail (it's the middle of the three routes emanating from the parking area). Bypass the trail coming in from the right at 0.2 mile, but turn left onto the Meade Station Trail at 0.25 mile.

Continue straight when you come to a four-way intersection at 0.4 mile. Many of the woods roads you follow during this hike, like the one you are on now, were major thoroughfares dating from decades before the Civil War and were used extensively by both sides during the siege.

Another pathway goes off to the left at 0.6 mile; stay right on the yellow-blazed route, soon following the Battery 7 Trail. Grassy routes come in from the left at 0.8 mile and 0.9 mile; stay right at both intersections. The road traffic on VA 36 is visible through the vegetation to the

right at 1.1 miles. At 1.2 miles and 1.25 miles, use footbridges to cross ditches that were created when earthworks were built as a training exercise during World War I.

Cross paved Siege Road at 1.3 miles and, now following Friend Trail, descend to pass earthworks covered by large trees. Black Union troops captured Confederate Battery 8 in this area, renaming it Fort Friend and using it as a supporting artillery position during the siege. The forest here is a bit older than what you have been walking through, with some large poplar and oak trees covered by thick, hairy poison ivy vines.

The Harrison Creek Trail is to the left at 1.9 miles, but you want to stay to the right and cross the creek. Confederate forces fell back to the creek and dug in for two days during the commencement of the battle in June 1864. The main advance of Lee's last offensive was stopped along the stream in March 1865.

Cross a paved service road at 2.1 miles, and then turn left at a T intersection at 2.3 miles. (Please note: The next mile or so of this hike is closed on a seasonal basis to protect nesting birds. If you find this to be the case when you're here, simply do not take the next right in a couple of hundred feet; instead, continue left to intersect Siege Road, turn right on it and walk to the Fort Haskell site, where a short trail will bring you back to this hike description close to the 3.1-mile point.) The next intersection, a Y, is in less than 200 feet. Here you want to keep to the right fork, on Poor Creek Trail.

Turn right onto the paved pathway at 2.5 miles and rise to the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery Monument. Follow the paved route to Colquitt's Salient, near the site of Lee's last offensive on March 25, 1865. About nine months before that date, Confederate forces had repulsed a charge from the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery, and that unit sustained the greatest casualties in a single action during the Civil War.

Continue the hike by following the yellow-blazed dirt road (Poor Creek Trail), and you will soon pass Gracie's Salient. Enter the woods and follow Poor Creek upstream. Ironwood (also called American hophornbeam)



### *Near Colquitt's Salient*

enjoys the moist bottomland and thrives here. Its numbers are limited only because it is a low-growing tree that must make do with the decreased amount of sunlight that is able to penetrate the forest canopy.

Cross side streams on footbridges about **3.0** miles into the journey, then swing away from the creek for a short distance at **3.1** miles and walk by the remnants of the Fort Haskell earthworks. During Lee's final offensive, in March 1865, many federal troops were driven back into the fort; they became so tightly packed, that only those in the very front were able to fire weapons.

Rise on switchbacks at **3.3** miles and come to an intersection where you need to stay on the yellow-blazed Poor Creek Trail and avoid red-blazed Haskell Creek Trail. With railroad tracks visible to the right at **4.0** miles, come into an open area near the site of the Taylor farm, whose buildings were all destroyed at the start of the siege.

Cross paved Siege Road, reenter the woods on the yellow-blazed Encampment Trail, and cross a dirt service road at **4.3** miles. The ground is littered with pine cones, gumballs, hickory nuts, and acorns as you pass a number of low earthworks around **4.7** miles.

Avoid the unblazed route to the right at **5.0** miles and stay left on the yellow-blazed

Encampment Trail, lined by pine trees. The Encampment Trail continues straight ahead as a red-blazed route when you come to a four-way intersection at **5.5** miles, but you need to turn right onto the yellow-blazed Birney Trail. Cross a creek on a footbridge where there are massive earthworks at **5.6** miles.

There is a major intersection at **5.7** miles where yellow-blazed pathways run both right and left. Go left for just a few feet before turning right onto a red-blazed route for the first time during this hike. This is Water Line Trail, a lesser-used pathway; those who do make use of it often see white-tailed deer and squirrels.

All of us know that squirrels cache nuts for the winter, with many species burying their winter food supply in scattered locations throughout the forest. Although they cannot remember the specific sites, their acute sense of smell enables them to locate enough of the nuts. Studies have proven that they can even find what they are looking for through more than a foot of snow.

There is another four-way intersection at **6.2** miles. A red-blazed route comes in from the left, while yellow-blazed courses go right and straight ahead. Continue straight.

Having made your way back to the Prince George Courthouse Trail at **6.45** miles, turn left and return to your car at **6.7** miles.



# Pocahontas State Park





- **GPS:** N37.3866722 W77.5818959
- **TOTAL DISTANCE** (circuit): 2.5 miles
- **HIKING TIME:** 1 hour, 10 minutes
- **VERTICAL RISE:** 130 feet
- **MAPS:** USGS *Chesterfield*; park map
- **CONTACT:** 10301 State Park Road  
Chesterfield, VA 23838  
804-796-4255  
[dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/pocahontas](http://dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/pocahontas)

### The Hike at a Glance

- 0.15** Turn right onto Beaver Lake Trail
- 0.6** Second observation platform
- 2.2** Third observation platform
- 2.5** Return to parking area

Being so close to the large populations of Richmond, Petersburg, and other nearby settlements, Pocahontas State Park has come to be viewed by its neighbors as more akin to a municipal park than the typical state park. The commonwealth has catered to this perception by offering conference facilities, a swimming pool, a concession stand, Virginia's first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) museum, a heritage center, an ecology camp, and an activity center. A large modern amphitheater has been constructed on a hillside and is extensively used for a variety of summer musical performances. (Most shows require a ticket, which may be purchased at the park office for a small fee.)

All of this is in addition to the usual state park amenities such as picnic areas and shelters; a playground; boat rentals and a launch area; and a campground complete with hot showers, hookups, a dump station, yurts, and camping cabins. Within a piedmont topography of gently rolling terrain, the Beaver Lake Trail winds its way through the forest and beside a scenic body of water.

More than 120 species of birds have been spotted on or near the trails, and more than 40 kinds of mammals make their home here as well. Underscoring the significance of preserving open spaces near growing population centers, the park is within the range of three scarcely seen creatures—bald eagles, eastern tiger salamanders, and loggerhead shrikes.

*Note:* You will encounter many trail intersections, but this hike will always stay on the Beaver Lake Trail.

**DIRECTIONS** Take I-95 to Exit 62, about midway between Richmond and Petersburg, and follow VA 288 west approximately 7.0 miles. Turn left onto VA 10 (Iron Bridge Road) and travel 1.4 miles, then turn right onto VA 655 (Beach Road). Bear right into the park on VA 780 in another 4.2 miles. Continue along the main park road (pick up the Beaver Lake Trail guide at the office), bypass the ecology camp and campground, and turn left 1.8 miles later. Leave your car in the lot next to the CCC Museum.

## Route Description

Begin the hike by walking behind the museum and onto the paved pathway marked as leading to the Spillway and Beaver Lake Trails. Turn right onto the Beaver Lake Trail at 0.15 mile and, soon, make use of the observation platform to look out upon the thousands of water lilies crowding the surface. The lake is undergoing eutrophication and gradually becoming a freshwater marsh. Silt is building up because the water is moving slowly as a result of the construction of the dam. The nutrient-rich silt promotes plant growth, such as water lilies, which die and then decay on the lake floor, providing more nutrients for more plant growth.



The park has chosen not to dredge the lake and, instead, let nature take its course.

A boardwalk delivers you across a wet area at 0.5 mile, where ironwood and beech trees inhabit the moist soil. Sadly, the beeches are marred by the inevitable graffiti and love messages that thoughtless people just seem unable to refrain from carving into the bark.

Make use of another observation platform at 0.6 mile, where you may see an osprey wending toward the trees with a fish grasped in its talons. The male osprey brings food back to the female to feed to their young. Each fledgling requires 2 pounds of fish per day in order to develop into a healthy adult.

The largest frog inhabiting the United States, the cannibalistic bullfrog may attain a length of up to 8 inches, and its low, deep call of *jug-o-rum*, which carries for more than 0.25 mile, can often be heard around the lake. With powerful hind legs, it can jump 8–9 feet in one leap.

Swing away from the lake at 0.8 mile, soon walking next to a smaller pond that is also silting in.

A 350-foot boardwalk (slippery when wet!) at 0.9 mile allows you to observe the arrow-head-shaped leaves of freshwater marsh plants without getting your feet wet. Among the trees that grow here are sycamore, pawpaw, and ironwood. Spring beauty and jack-in-the-pulpit burst forth from the soil in early spring. The bumpy, small brown balls you find on the ground in the fall are the fruits of the sycamore tree. Made up of numerous tiny nuts covered in tufts of hair, the ball comes apart as the temperatures cool in the winter months. In addition, you will probably see balls bristling with spikes. These are from the sweet gum trees also growing in this wet area. Swing to the left at 1.1 miles and follow Third Branch upstream in what is the quietest part of the hike. The Old Mill Bike and Third Branch Trails are to the right at 1.2 miles. You,

### *Beaver Lake*





*Boardwalks take hikers over wet areas.*

however, want to turn left, cross the creek, and pass the site of a mill that operated here decades ago. Rise gradually as you walk beside more graffiti-defiled beech trees. Soon after walking above a small pond, where squirrels are often seen, you will use a footbridge at 1.8 miles to cross a gully created by erosion.

Return to the shore of Beaver Lake, where the body of water's namesakes, at one time, lived and built a number of lodges. Constructed primarily of sticks, mud, and leaves, the inside of a lodge, which is above the water's surface, is lined with soft grasses and shredded bark. A small hole in the top lets fresh air in. Today, instead of beavers you are more likely to observe some ducks paddling around or see an egret trawling the water for a meal.

Step across another footbridge at 2.1 miles and rise over a couple of low ridges through a forest of poplar, oak, and holly with an understory of Virginia creeper and blueberry bushes. An observation deck overlooks the dam

spillway at 2.2 miles. Cross the concrete bridge below the dam spillway and come to an intersection. The bicycle trail goes right, but you want to bear left toward and beyond the spillway. Upon reaching the blacktopped Spillway Trail, turn right and follow it uphill to the CCC Museum and your car at 2.5 miles.

Pocahontas State Park was established in 1946 but was administratively combined with the surrounding state forest in 1989, making it the largest park within the state system. Mountain bikers will be interested to know that the 7,600 acres are no longer managed primarily for extractive purposes but for recreational opportunities. More than 50 miles of interconnecting old logging roads are now designated as bicycle trails (also open to hikers and equestrians). Some of the routes are wide and level, while others are narrower, less used, and somewhat challenging. The trailheads and some intersections are signed; additional biking and hiking information is available from the park office.

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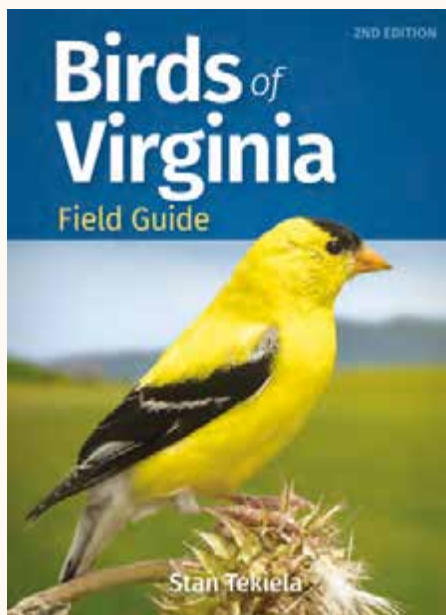
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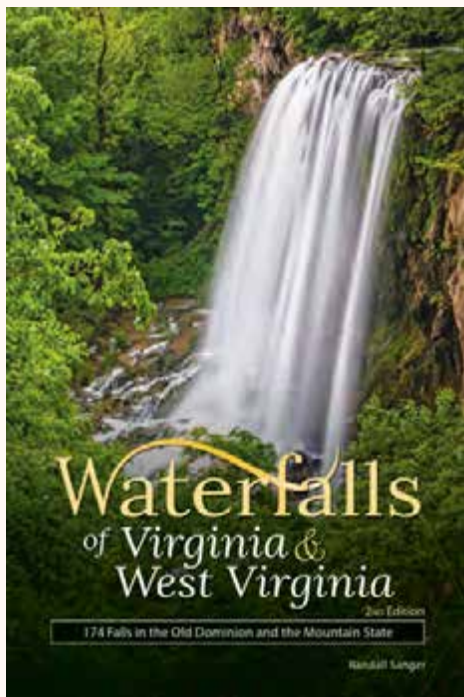
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## About the Author



**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 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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