

Seven Hikes for Beginners

(All driving instructions start from Front Royal.)

What to bring on a day hike: water, snacks or lunch, sun screen, a hat, bug spray, rain gear or a collapsible umbrella, a camera, a small flashlight (just in case), hand sanitizer, some toilet paper (bury all human waste and toilet paper, please), a map or these instructions, some band aids for blisters.

Take only pictures, leave only footprints. Keep the dog on a leash (bears - they won't bother you, but they don't appreciate your dog).

And have fun!

And while you're at it, enjoy six local **Quests**, family-friendly, fun, and educational!

Download these community-developed treasure hunts from

<http://discoverfrontroyal.com/page.cfm/cat/123/>. Sponsored by the Warren-

Front Royal Appalachian Trail Community program, there's even one in the

Shenandoah River State Park - it passes right by the Visitor Center!

Hike 1: Limberlost ADA Trail, Shenandoah National Park, Central District

1 mile, shorter options

\$10, December thru February; \$15 March thru November (good for 6 days); \$30 annual park pass

46 miles from Front Royal, 1 hr, 15 mins

Follow US340-South to US211-East in Luray. Follow about 9 miles to park entrance on left.

Take Skyline Drive south to MM43, Limberlost entrance on left. Map at kiosk. Large, roughly circular route.

Hike 2: Dickey Ridge Aviation Station, Shenandoah National Park, North District

2 miles

\$10, December thru February; \$15 March thru November (good for 6 days); \$30 annual park pass

5 miles from Front Royal, 10 minutes

Enter park left off US340-South, just south of Front Royal. Follow to Dickey Ridge Visitor Center on right. Park in picnic ground at far end, near dumpsters. Trailhead to your right. Cross Skyline Drive and proceed up fire road. Take first foot trail to your right, which is the Dickey Ridge Trail. Climb about 1 mile to overlook. Just past overlook, take unmarked trail to your left.

Reach summit and Federal Aviation Station in one-tenth mile. Follow the fire road back down to your starting point.

Hike 3: Whitehouse Loop, Sky Meadows State Park

4 miles, shorter options

\$4 fee per car, exact change suggested, ranger not always present

20 miles from Front Royal, 40 minutes

Follow I-66-East to Exit 18: SR688/Markham. At the end of the ramp, turn left onto SR688-North. Take SR688-North to end. Turn left onto US17-West. Follow about 1.8 miles to Sky Meadows on left. Park in main parking lot.

Trailhead at map kiosk. Follow Gap Run Trail to North Ridge Trail and turn right. Follow North Ridge Trail to Appalachian Trail and turn left. Nice walk along the ridge with many views. Bear right at Ambassador Whitehouse Trail. Follow to junction with North Ridge Trail/Piedmont Overlook Trail and turn left, uphill. After a short distance, you will reach beautiful overlook with bench. You will see your starting point from here. Just follow the Piedmont Overlook Trail downhill.

Map at <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/sky-meadows.shtml>.

Hike 4: Cullers & River Trail Loop, Shenandoah River Raymond R. 'Andy' Guest, Jr. State Park

4 miles, shorter options

11 miles from Front Royal, 20 minutes

Follow US340-South past the park entrance to Indian Hollow Road/SR613-West. Turn right and follow about .9 mile to Downriver Canoe Company on right. Park in pull-out to right and begin trail at kiosk. Rather inaccurate map at <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/shenandoah-river.shtml>. But don't worry, you can't get lost. You're following Culler's Trail and the River Trail on the map. Make a big loop by combining the two, up to the bend in the river. Sunny flat walk along the Shenandoah River. May be muddy.

***Hike 5: Stony Man/Passamaquoddy Loop, Shenandoah National Park, Central District**

4 miles

\$10, December thru February; \$15 March thru November (good for 6 days); \$30 annual park pass

45 miles from Front Royal, 1 hr 15 mins

* Uses Appalachian Trail.

Follow US340-South to US211-East in Luray. Follow about 9 miles to park entrance on left. Take Skyline Drive south to just past MM 41. Turn right into Skyland Lodge entrance and make immediate right into trailhead parking lot. Begin trail at kiosk. Have lunch at Skyland on your way back!

Follow Appalachian Trail a short distance to the turn-off for the Stony Man overlook, a half-mile loop out to viewpoint. When you return to the Appalachian Trail, continue 1 mile north (left) over several rocky overlooks to the Passamaquoddy Trail and turn left. Follow Passamaquoddy Trail along base of cliffs back to Skyland Road, just past power line right of way. Turn left up the hill. Path becomes paved and exits at Skyland Dining Hall. Eat! To return to your car, just follow the road back to the trailhead parking lot (left out of the Skyland parking lot).

***Hike 6: Appalachian Trail/Pinnacles Picnic Area to Panorama, Central District**

5 miles, one-way, use two cars

\$10, December thru February; \$15 March thru November (good for 6 days); \$30 annual park pass

40 miles from Front Royal, 1 hr, 15 mins to situate both cars and get started

To Car 1 Parking: Follow US340-South to US211-East in Luray. Follow about 9 miles to unmarked park entrance on right, just after Appalachian Trail crossing and before Skyline Drive overpass. Park one car in this lot, the Panorama lower lot. No admission fee.

To Car 2 Parking: Exit Panorama lot right onto US211-East. Follow to park entrance on left. Take Skyline Drive south to just past MM 36. Follow straight ahead into Pinnacles Picnic Area on right. Park in first lot.

Begin at Appalachian Trail mileage sign, following white blazes to the right (north, towards Maine). About midway, there's a nice shelter (Byrd's Nest – with a composting outhouse) where you can snack or eat your lunch. Don't forget to sign the trail log you'll find there, and read all the chatter from Appalachian Trail thru-hikers. At mile 3, there's a short spur trail to the right leading up to Mary's Rock, a spectacular viewpoint. From there, continue down the Appalachian Trail to your other car at Panorama. Congratulations, only 2,180 miles more to finish the Appalachian Trail.

***Hike 7: Hogback Figure 8, Shenandoah National Park, North District**

8 miles, shorter option of 4 miles

\$10, December thru February; \$15 March thru November (good for 6 days); \$30 annual park pass

18 miles from Front Royal, $\frac{1}{2}$ hour

Enter park left off US340-South, just south of Front Royal. Follow to Keyser Run Rd parking lot on left just after MM19. Trail begins at kiosk. Follow Keyser Run fire road downhill one

* Uses Appalachian Trail.

mile to “Fourway” crossing. Turn right onto Pole Bridge Link Trail. Follow Pole Bridge 1 mile to Piney Branch Trail and turn right. (You will pass the turn-off for Sugarloaf Trail. See below.) Follow to Appalachian Trail and turn right (north). Follow the Appalachian Trail about 3.5 miles (great views) to turn-off for Keyser Run Parking Lot, to the right.

NOTE: If you want a shorter, 4-ish-mile hike, turn right onto the Sugarloaf Trail off of Pole Bridge Link Trail. This will link you up with the Appalachian Trail. Turn right (north) on the Appalachian Trail and walk about 2.5 miles to the Keyser Road Parking Lot turn-off (right).

Notes

To find Shenandoah National Park info, see <http://www.nps.gov/shen/index.htm>. Shenandoah National Park has a fall foliage color watch page, updated regularly in season. And Dickey Ridge Visitor Center, closest to Front Royal, will start hosting family Ranger programs in 2012.

Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) is a great source for maps and trail guides: www.patc.net. Purchase maps online or at local outfitters and Shenandoah Park visitor centers.

Another great website: <http://www.swimmingholes.org/va.html>