

Shenandoah National Park

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide



Trip Name: AT: Swift Run Gap to Wildcat Ridge

Description: Mountaintop trek along the AT with excellent views

Entry: 66 MP - Swift Run Gap (south)

Exit: 92 MP - Wildcat Ridge Parking

Map(s): PATC #11 South District

Level: Beginner or Strenuous Beginner

Total Length: 33 miles

Day One

Campsite: AT (3A) Swift Run - Simmons Gap * - backcountry

3.5 miles

Park before or after the entrance station.

Hike up the hill and find the Appalachian Trail (AT) on your right (to the south).

Hike south 3.4 miles on the AT.

Turn right toward Hightop Hut, hiking 0.1 mile; camp at the hut or designated campsites.

Day Two

Campsite: AT (3B) Simmons Gap - Loft Mt. * - backcountry

8.4 miles

Return to the AT, 0.1 mile.

Turn right onto the AT, hiking south 8.2 miles.

Turn left to Pinefield Hut, hiking 0.1 mile; camp at the hut or designated campsites.

Day Three

Campsite: South District developed areas - campground or cabin

7 miles

Return to the AT, 0.1 mile.

Turn right, hiking south on the AT for 6.4 miles.

Turn right toward Loft Mountain Campground, 0.1 mile to campground, up to 0.5 mile to register for the beautiful tent sites available throughout Loft Mountain Campground.

Day Four

Campsite: AT (3D) Doyles River - Blackrock Gap* - backcountry

7.1 to 7.5 miles

Take one of the spur trails to the AT (0.1 to 0.5 mile from campsite).

Turn right onto the AT, hiking south about 6.8 miles.

Turn left to Blackrock Hut, hiking 0.2 mile; camp at the hut or designated campsites.

Day Five

6.6 miles (If Skyline Drive is closed, hike down Trayfoot Mountain Trail, Furnace Mountain Trail, and Madison Run Fire Road.)

Return to the AT, 0.2 mile.

Turn left onto the AT, hiking south 6.3 miles.

Turn left onto Wildcat Ridge, hiking 0.1 mile to the parking area.

Notes

Plan your trip in late July to October if using the campground, August to April if using the cabin. Do not plan your trip from mid-May through mid-July! While the AT is always busy, this is when the north-bound thru-hikers come through Shenandoah and there will not be any camping available at the huts.

Loft Mountain Campground generally opens sometime in May and closes the end of October. Since the sites are first-come, first-served, the campground often fills to capacity on weekends. Plan to arrive by 4:00 p.m. on a Friday or Saturday (earlier on a holiday weekend).

Options

Doyles River Cabin is available for rent from the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (www.patc.net).

You must make reservations in advance. Change your route as follows:

Day three (8.4 miles): AT south for 8 miles, turn left to cabin, 0.3 mile (Doyles River Trail).

Day four (6.0 miles): Turn left onto AT, AT south for 5.2 miles.

To make this a winter trip when Skyline Drive is closed, you'll need to use the cabin (the campground will be closed) then exit at Madison Run Fire Road Boundary (State Route 663). On your last day leave the hut, hike north a short distance on the AT, then take Trayfoot Mountain Trail, Furnace Mountain Trail, and Madison Run Road to reach the boundary. Be sure you have a good map along if you might take this route.