

# Backcountry Camping Trip Guide

Five Nights

National Park Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior  
Shenandoah National Park  
Emergency: 1-800-732-0911



## Central District Highlights

Standard - Circuit

**Level:** Experienced or Advanced

**Total Length:** 55 miles

**Trip Description:** Peaks, valleys, rivers, waterfalls, park history -- see it all!

**Entry:** 34 MP - Meadow Spring Area

**Exit:** 34 MP - Meadow Spring Area

**Map(s):** PATC #10 Central District

### Day One

Campsite: Nicholson Hollow Trail - backcountry

9 to 10 miles

Hike down Hazel Mountain Trail 1.6 miles.

Turn left onto White Rocks Trail (2.4 miles); be sure to take the side trail to cave/falls.

Turn right onto Hazel River Trail and hike 1.6 miles.

Turn left back onto Hazel Mountain Trail, hiking 1.2 miles.

Take right at "Y" onto Hot Mountain-Short Mountain Trail and hike 2.1 miles.

Turn left onto Nicholson Hollow Trail and look for a pre-existing campsite.

### Day Two

Campsite: Nicholson Hollow Trail - backcountry

9 to 12 miles

Leave camp (leave your permit on the tent, be sure to properly store your food, and take your valuables with you).

Hike downriver on Nicholson Hollow Trail to road (1.8 miles from Hot-Short).

Turn right (you will be outside of the park in order to access Old Rag).

When you re-enter the park, turn left hiking up the Ridge Trail 2.7 miles.

Past the summit hike down the Saddle Trail, 1.9 miles.

Turn right onto Weakley Hollow Fire Road (gravel) and hike about 3 miles.

(Weakley Hollow will bring you in a circuit back out of the park.)

Turn left to return to your camp on Nicholson Hollow Trail.

Camp, or move your camp upriver to a new site on Nicholson Hollow Trail .

### Day Three

Campsite: Whiteoak Canyon Fire Road - backcountry

8 to 10 miles

Hike up Nicholson Hollow Trail (2.4 miles from Hot-Short).

Turn left onto Indian Run Trail , hiking 1.7 miles.

Turn right onto Corbin Mountain Trail and hike 0.6 mile.

Turn right onto Old Rag Fire Road and hike 0.8 mile.

Turn left onto Skyland-Big Meadows Horse Trail (SBMH), hiking 1.2 miles.

Turn left to hike down Whiteoak Canyon Trail 3 miles.

Turn right onto Cedar Run Trail and look for a place to camp well before the time you reach the Link Trail (0.4 mile).

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### Day Four

Campsite: Rose River Fire Road - backcountry

10 to 12 miles

Continue hiking up Cedar Run Trail , 2.7 miles past the Link Trail.

Turn left onto SBMH and hike 4.3 miles.

Turn left onto Rose River Loop Trail, hiking 1.8 miles.

Turn left onto Rose River Fire Road and eventually camp.

(Note: The Rose River and Haywood Mountain wilderness area is beautiful and seldom explored once you drop below Rose River Loop. The "road," pretty much impassable and seldom used, continues for 4 more miles before it reaches the park boundary. Experienced off-trail hikers will especially enjoy exploring this area.)

### Day Five

Campsite: AT (2C) Hawksbill Gap - Lewis Spr \* - backcountry

4+ miles

You have several routing options to access the Appalachian Trail (AT):

This area is criss-crossed with trails so take your pick, Lewis Falls Trail is a worthy inclusion.

Your minimum distance to the AT from below Rose River Loop Trail will be 1.5 miles..

Once on the AT hike north to Nakedtop Ridge 2.2 miles.

Note: Camping in the Hawksbill area – Hawksbill Mountain Summit is closed to camping, but there are great options nearby. There is a nice level place with pre-existing campsites on Nakedtop Ridge.

Access Nakedtop at the junction of the Appalachian Trail (AT) and Salamander Trail by hiking off-trail northwest along the ridge. Another nearby option is the Spittler Hill area on Skyland-Big Meadows Horse Trail. The easiest water access is Rock Spring, but if you can find the short side trail to Hawksbill Gap Spring, you might get lucky, since the spring is usually running. At Rock Spring Hut there are designated campsites around the hut for your tent, or you may stay in the hut if there is room. The Rock Spring area is only for hikers staying at least 3 nights in the park, and is primarily for the use of long-distance AT hikers. There will probably be quite a few AT thru-hikers mid-May through mid-July.

### Day Six

13.3 miles

Turn onto Salamander Trail and hike 0.9 mile to the summit.

From summit (highest peak in Shenandoah NP), hike down Lower Hawksbill Trail, 0.9 mile.

Rejoin the AT and continue hiking north, 10.3 miles to Meadow Spring Trail .

Be sure to take the side trail loop to Stony Man Summit! (This adds 0.5 mile.)

Turn right onto Meadow Spring Trail, hiking 0.7 mile to return to car.

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### Notes

Both the Hughes River, which runs through Nicholson Hollow, as well as Hazel River can run very high in the spring or after heavy rains (knee to waist high). Each trail crosses the river several times, so be prepared. The plus side is the excellent swimming holes that exist even in drought.

There is good camping along Nicholson Hollow in the miles below Corbin Cabin, as the valley widens. If you are ready to camp when you are near the cabin, remember that you must camp at least 100 yards away from the cabin. (Try the north side of the stream if you want to camp in this area.)

Hiking the Ridge Trail to Old Rag involves a strenuous rock scramble, including jumping over a crevasse and pulling yourself up ledges. Every year hikers are injured in this area so use caution, especially if the rocks are wet. If there is ice, avoid this route unless you have crampons, and be prepared to turn around. In addition, the summit is an ecologically sensitive area where overnight camping is prohibited above 2,800 feet elevation. So for various reasons, the Ridge Trail is best enjoyed as a day hike. The summit of Old Rag can also be accessed from the Saddle Trail -- still strenuous, but a hike rather than a scramble.