

Shenandoah National Park

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide



Trip Name: Graves Mill and Laurel Prong

Description: Variety of forest habitats; Rapidan Camp historic site

Entry: Graves Mill Boundary (Central District; East side; Route 662)

Exit: Graves Mill Boundary (Central District; East side; Route 662)

Map(s): PATC #10 Central District

Level: Strenuous Beginner

Total Length: 14.5 miles

Day One

Campsite: Graves Mill Trail - backcountry

0.6 to 2.1 miles

Hike into Shenandoah National Park on Graves Mill Trail 0.5 mile.

Turn right, remaining on Graves Mill Trail. Cross stream, and hike as far as desired.

Find a place to camp. Watch out for poison ivy.

Day Two

Campsite: Laurel Prong Trail - backcountry

5.5 to 7.5 miles

Finish hiking Graves Mill Trail (total 2.2 miles from parking area).

Turn left onto Rapidan Fire Road and hike 3.4 miles.

Turn left onto Rapidan Camp Road, hiking 0.8 mile to Rapidan Camp.

Find Laurel Prong Trail leaving from the southwestern edge of the camp.

Hike at least 0.5 mile and look for a place to camp in the next 0.5 mile.

(Camping within 0.5 mile of Rapidan Camp is not permitted. To be sure you have hiked far enough, do not look for a place to camp until you have reached the junction with Fork Mountain Trail.)

Day Three

8.7 to 9.7 miles

Hike on Laurel Prong to Fork Mountain Trail (0 to 0.5 mile depending on campsite).

Hike up Fork Mountain Trail 1.4 miles to "the Sag."

Turn right on Fork Mountain Road and hike 0.8 mile.

Turn right onto Staunton River Trail, hiking about 4.8 miles to the parking area.

Notes

You will be following the Rapidan River upstream from where it leaves Shenandoah National Park for the last time. Fish, swimming holes, and level areas to camp abound. Rapidan Camp is the historic retreat built by President Hoover; the buildings and exhibits may be open for a self-guided tour. The circuit back will take you through lush mountain laurel thickets, fast-moving mountain streams, and an old mill site.

The Staunton and Rapidan rivers were dramatically affected by a deluge in 1995. The flooding destroyed many of the trails in the area, and while the trails have been repaired, mileages have not been re-calculated and are estimates only!

Options

Experienced backcountry campers getting an early start may make this a one-night trip by hiking 7.6 to 8.1 miles the first day and camping on Laurel Prong the first night. The next day will then be day two, rather than day three.

