

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide

Three Nights

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



Nicholson and Hazel Wilderness

Standard - circuit

Level: Experienced

Total Length: 27 to 18.3 miles

Trip Description: Waterfalls, park history, cascading streams, swimming holes

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

8-10 miles (add 1.4 roundtrip to go to Mary's Rock Viewpoint)*

Cross Skyline Drive and hike up Meadow Spring Trail 0.7 mile.

Turn left on the Appalachian Trail (AT) and hike south 4.6 miles to Nicholson Hollow trail.

Turn left onto Nicholson Hollow trail and hike 2-4 mile.

Begin looking for a campsite after Corbin Cabin.

(Nicholson Hollow to Hot-Short is 4.1 miles)

*Optional side trip to Mary's Rock, hike N on AT after Meadow Spring, then backtrack.

Day Two

Campsite: Catlett Mtn Trail - backcountry

2.6 to 4.6 miles (or add 5.3 for longer trip option)

Hike Nicholson Hollow to Hot Mountain-Short Mountain (0 to 3 miles).

Hike entire length of Hot-Short, 2.1 miles.

Then either:

Longer hike – turn right onto Pine Hill Gap, hiking 2.1 miles.

Turn left onto gravel road and hike about 0.3 mile.

Turn left onto Broad Hollow and hike up entire trail, 2.4 miles.

Turn left onto Hazel Mountain and hike 0.5 mile.

Turn right onto Catlett Mountain and camp (see note).

Or:

Shorter hike – turn left onto Hazel Mountain and hike 0.5 mile.

Turn left onto Catlett Mountain and look for a place to camp (see note).

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Day Three

Campsite: White Rocks Trail - backcountry

Several options, 4-7 miles long, all camping on White Rocks
6.3 mile option

Continue hiking on Catlett Mountain (total 1.2 miles).

Turn right onto Catlett Spur, hiking 1.1 miles.

Turn right onto Hazel Mountain and hike 0.7 mile.

Turn left onto Hazel River and hike 1.6 miles.

Turn left onto White Rocks and hike about 1.7 miles to Cave/Falls trail.

Look for a place to camp on White Rocks Trail, within about ½ mile of the Cave/Falls junction.

Be sure to take the side trail down to Cave/Falls for water and the scenery

6 mile option– return to Hazel Mountain Trail

Hike down Sams Ridge, hike up Hazel River, and turn right onto White Rocks.

4 mile option – return to Hazel Mountain Trail

Turn right and hike down Hazel River, hike up White Rocks.

Four Nights

2.3 miles

Finish hiking White Rocks, about another 0.7 mile.

Turn right onto Hazel Mountain and hike 1.6 miles to vehicle.

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.

Most of the camping along Nicholson Hollow is in the area well 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). Above the cabin, camping is limited.

Catlett Mountain has a great pine grove well off the trail where you may camp near the intersection with Hazel Mountain. Hike down Catlett Mountain a few hundred yards from the intersection, then turn left leaving the trail. In a hundred yards or so you will enter a pine grove with nice soft beds for the night. (Always check for dead trees and other safety hazards before pitching your tent. It is a short distance from here to water; just return to Catlett Mountain trail and hike down a little farther to the stream. If the pine grove is occupied, there are flat places to camp off of Hazel Mountain Trail in this general area.

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Options

Reversing and Flexibility – This trip is also excellent the other way around. You can have your short day at the beginning by reversing everything. The entire trip is quite flexible, with the exception of the long day on the AT (there is very limited camping on that section of the AT). Here are two examples:

Printed order

Day one: hike 7 - 8 miles and camp on Nicholson Hollow.

Day two: hike 5 (or 10) miles and camp on Catlett Mountain.

Day three: hike 6.3 miles and camp on White Rocks.

Day four: hike out 2.3 miles.

Reverse order

Day one: hike 2.3 miles and camp on White Rocks.

Day two: hike 4 miles and camp on Catlett Mountain.

Day three: hike 5 miles and camp on Nicholson Hollow.

Day four: hike out, 7 miles.

The only required information for your permit is the trail where you will camp each night. This area lends itself to flexible route planning to get to your destination. You can adapt your hike as you go along. Just be sure to have a map!