

Shenandoah National Park

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide



Trip Name: Old Rag from Berry Hollow

Description: Basecamp at the popular Old Rag Mountain, best planned for a weekday

Entry: Berry Hollow Boundary (Central District; East side; Route 600 - Syria)

Exit: Berry Hollow Boundary (Central District; East side; Route 600 - Syria)

Map(s): PATC #10 Central District

Level: Experienced

Total Length: 8.8 miles

Day One

Campsite: Berry Hollow Road - backcountry

Park at Berry Hollow Boundary.

Hike up Berry Hollow Fire Road at least ¼ mile.

Find a place to camp off Berry Hollow Fire Road or Saddle Trail.

Berry Hollow – Some camping is possible on your right shortly before the junction with Saddle (about 0.8 mile from Berry Hollow Parking).

Saddle – Hike up to the first water bar (ditch) across the trail and turn left into the woods. There are several good campsites here (about 0.9 from BH parking).

Either hike the circuit, returning to camp that evening; or camp, then hike the next day.

Day Two

Hike the Old Rag circuit (or if you set up early on day one, you can hike the first day).

Route:

Go to the junction of Berry Hollow Fire Road, Saddle Trail, Old Rag Fire Road and Weakley Hollow Fire Road.

Turn right/down onto Weakley Hollow Fire Road, hiking 2.5 miles.

Turn right onto Ridge Trail and hike 2.7 miles to the summit.

Continue, now on Saddle Trail, hiking 1.9 miles to Berry Hollow.

Turn left on Berry Hollow Fire Road to return to your vehicle.

Return to camp, pack up, and hike back Berry Hollow to your vehicle; or stay another night.

Notes

Alternatives –

There is limited camping off Weakley Hollow Fire Road. Hike up the road across Brokenback Run, then turn left into the woods, following the side stream. (On PATC map #10, this will show as the first feeder stream after the boundary. It is about ¼ mile from the Weakley Hollow boundary.) The further you hike up, the wider the level areas become. Be very cautious in picking your campsite to be sure it is at least 10 yards from the stream and that it is not under any dead trees.

For those with the energy, an excellent camping alternative is Nicholson Hollow. This beautiful wilderness valley with a sizeable river, and many swimming holes can be accessed from near Old Rag Parking in Weakley Hollow (plan to hike at least 1 mile to find a campsite). Your day hike around the Old Rag Circuit will be at least 10 miles by hiking from Nicholson Hollow, but if you have the stamina, your reward will be solitude and beautiful places to camp.

Important -

Any camping trips to the Old Rag area should be planned for a weeknight, not a weekend.

Geology of Old Rag Mountain, a Hiker's Guide:

This 30-page booklet about Old Rag will make an excellent, lightweight companion for your hike. There is helpful planning and hiking information, plus you'll learn about geology, flora and fauna and cultural sites in the Old Rag area. You can purchase this booklet, as well as topographic maps, at a visitor's center or online at www.snpbooks.org.

Backcountry Camping near Old Rag Mountain

The beautiful and unique Old Rag Mountain is an excellent, challenging day hike. However it is more than a strenuous hike – there are considerable stretches of hand-over-hand rock scramble on the Ridge Trail, thereby making fully loaded packs inadvisable. Most hiking guides and information have hikers leave from Weakley Hollow. Old Rag Parking in Weakley Hollow is the best place for circuit hikers who do not plan to stay overnight. However, overnight stays are best done from Berry Hollow Parking. You can hike in and set up your camp (including properly hanging your food and scented items) before climbing Old Rag. Allow yourself plenty of daylight and be sure to follow backcountry regulations in picking your campsite.

Old Rag receives extraordinarily high use on weekends. Not only does this make for unpleasantly crowded hiking and camping, it damages the natural resource as increasingly large areas are impacted. Areas within 1/4 mile of the boundary, above 2,800 feet, within 100 yards of the shelters, and near the trail, water, or other groups, are all closed to camping. Please plan your overnight stay on a Monday – Thursday night in order to take advantage of the relatively few safe, legal sites. For weekend trips, there are many other beautiful and less crowded options in Shenandoah National Park!

Driving directions:

Use a map or online directions to find Sperryville or Madison (both in Virginia).

From Sperryville, follow Route 211 to Route 522 south for .8 mile. Turn right on Route 231, follow 10.2 miles to Etlan, turn right on Route 643. Follow for 4.5 miles and turn right onto Route 600. Proceed nearly 6 miles, past the Whiteoak Canyon parking area to the Berry Hollow parking area. If Berry Hollow is full, drop off your packs if desired, then return to Whiteoak Canyon Parking, and hike up the road from there.

From Madison, Route 29, follow 231 north for 5.6 miles to Route 670 at Banco. Continue 3.6 miles to Route 643 in Syria. Follow 0.8 mile on Route 643 to Route 600. Continue on Route 600 nearly 6 miles, past the Whiteoak Canyon parking area to the Berry Hollow parking area. If Berry Hollow is full, drop off your packs if desired, then return to Whiteoak Canyon parking, and hike up the road from there.

Remember to bring:

- your backcountry permit! (required for all overnight stays in the backcountry);
- water and/or water purification system;
- rope for hanging food;
- topographic map;
- appropriate footwear with ankle support;
- common sense – be prepared to turn around!