

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide

Three Nights

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



Simmons Gap and Big Run

Standard - Circuit

Level: Experienced or Advanced

Total Length: 43.5 to 45.5 miles

Trip Description: Wilderness valley, excellent camping and fishing (open for harvest)

Entry: Simmons Gap Road Boundary
South District; East side; Route # 628

Exit: Simmons Gap Road Boundary
South District; East side; Route # 628

Map(s): PATC #11 South District

Day One

Campsite: Patterson Ridge Trail - backcountry

7.5 to 8.5 miles

Hike up Simmons Gap Fire Road, 1 mile to Skyline Drive and look for cement post indicating the Appalachian Trail (AT).

Turn left onto the AT, crossing Skyline Drive, and hike south 5.8 miles.

Turn right to Ivy Creek Maintenance Hut and spring (no camping in this area), 0.1 mile off the AT; pick up water.

Continue on Ivy Creek road, about 0.3 mile.

Cross Skyline Drive and hike up Patterson Ridge; dry-camp after hiking 0.3 mile to 1.3 miles.

Day Two

Campsite: Big Run Portal/Loop Trails - backcountry

8.2 to 11.2 miles

Retrace your steps to the AT (0.7 mile to 1.6 miles).

Turn right on the AT and hike south another 3.2 miles.

Turn right up Doyles River Trail 0.1 mile, then cross Skyline Drive to the Big Run Overlook, and access the Big Run Loop Trail.

Hike down Big Run Loop Trail, 2.2 miles.

Turn right and hike down Big Run Portal Trail 2 to 4 miles, looking for a campsite after a 1/2 mile.

Day Three

Campsite: Doyles River Trail - backcountry

11 to 13 miles

Continue hiking down Big Run Portal Trail another 0.2 mile to 2.2 miles (total of 4.4 miles).

Turn left onto Rockytop Trail and hike 5.7 miles.

Rockytop Trail ends at Big Run Loop Trail. Proceed straight ahead (don't turn left!) for 0.7 mile and the AT.

Turn right onto the AT, hiking south 1.9 miles.

Turn left onto Jones Run Trail and hike 2.5 miles to the intersection with Doyles River Trail.

Look for a place to camp downstream from the confluence of Doyles River and Jones Run.

Day Four

13.3 miles

Hike up Doyles River Trail, 2.2 miles.

Turn right onto the AT and hike north 10.1 miles.

Turn right down Simmons Gap Fire Road, hiking 1 mile to return to your vehicle.

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Notes

This is a strenuous hike with lots of elevation change in addition to long miles.

The wilderness valley of Big Run is the largest drainage in the park and has excellent camping and fishing. There are so many possible places to camp, so take your time to find one that you really like and that is legal..

Be aware: There are many stream crossings on Big Run Portal, and in the spring and after a heavy rain the lower crossings may be knee to waist high.

Parking at the Simmons Gap Fire Road boundary access is very limited. Be sure to pull your car all the way off the road.