

# Backcountry Camping Trip Guide

Two Nights

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



## Thornton River and Piney Branch

Standard - Circuit

**Level:** Experienced or Advanced

**Total Length:** 18.4 miles

**Trip Description:** Homesites, poplar forest, cascading mountain streams, small waterfalls

**Entry:** 25 MP - Thornton River Parking

**Exit:** 25 MP - Thornton River Parking

**Map(s):** PATC # 9 North District

### Day One

Campsite: Thornton River Trail - backcountry

3 miles

Hike down Thornton River Trail 2.9 miles.

Camp. One option for finding level areas to camp is continuing downstream on Thornton past the Hull junction, then heading off-trail to your left (north).

### Day Two

Campsite: Piney Branch Trail (below Hull Schl) - backcountry

8.8 miles

Turn north on Hull School Trail and hike 0.7 mile.

Turn left onto Fork Mountain Trail, hiking 1.2 miles.

Stay straight on Piney Ridge Trail, hiking uphill 2 miles.

Continue uphill a short distance on the service road to reach the Appalachian Trail (AT).

Turn right onto the AT and hike 0.5 mile.

Turn right onto Piney Branch Trail and hike 4.4 miles.

Camp below the Piney Branch/Hull School Trail junction.

### Day Three

6.6 miles

Turn west onto Hull School Trail.

Hike 3.5 miles on Hull School Trail to Skyline Drive.

Cross Skyline Drive and hike up service road to Byrd's Nest #4, 0.4 mile.

Facing the open side of the shelter, hike to the right side to find Neighbor Mountain Trail.

Hike down Neighbor Mountain Trail 0.9 mile and bear left, continuing on Neighbor.

Hike a short distance further (0.1 mile) to AT junction.

Turn right onto AT, hiking north 1.4 miles.

Turn right onto Thornton River and hike 0.3 mile to vehicle.

### Notes

There are multiple stream crossings on this route which can have high water in the spring and after heavy rains.