

Shenandoah National Park

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide



Trip Name: Hogback Mountain and Thornton River

Description: Views, poplar forests, park history, and fishing stream (open for harvest)

Entry: 19 MP - Keyser Run

Exit: 19 MP - Keyser Run

Map(s): PATC # 9 North District

Level: Experienced or Advanced

Total Length: 18.4 miles

Day One

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

3.7 to 7.7 miles

Cross Skyline Drive to find spur trail to the Appalachian Trail (AT).

Turn left onto the AT and hike south 2 miles.

Turn left onto Sugarloaf, hiking 1.4 miles.

Turn right onto Pole Bridge Link and hike 0.3 mile.

Turn left onto Piney Branch and hike 4 miles.

Look for places to camp below Hull School Trail junction.

Day Two

Campsite: Thornton River Trail - backcountry

3 to 6 miles

Return to the Hull School Trail junction.

Turn southeast on Hull School Trail, hiking 1.3 miles.

Turn right onto Thornton River Trail, hiking approximately 2 miles.

Camp somewhere along the upper reaches of Thornton River Trail.

If you leave the river, be sure to first pick up water for the night. There are very few places to camp with 1 mile of Skyline Drive.

Day Three

8 to 9 miles

Hike up Thornton River Trail, continuing across Skyline Drive (1 to 2 miles).

Turn right onto AT and hike north 7.2 miles.

Notes

There are several potential high water crossings along this route. Use caution and have a backup plan if you need to turn around, especially in the spring or after heavy rains.

Options

There are numerous ways to modify the trip by changing where you park to access the AT. Here are two examples: You can shorten this hike by parking at MP 21.1 parking and joining the AT there (this shortens the total hike by about 4 miles, but misses the good views from Hogback). Or, if you have a second vehicle, you can park one at Elkwallow Picnic Area, shortening your hike on day three by 4.5 miles.
