

Battery Kemble Park

Battery Kemble Park has literally gone to the dogs. The affluent residents of northwest Washington, stop off here to run and socialize their pets, to socialize themselves, and to enjoy the open space. It's quite a pleasant place as long as you like dogs. In the space of an hour, I observed 20 or 30 dogs along with their masters. Everyone speaks dog. The excited dogs bark at one another and the owners talk in their special "dog voices" to soothe the right social interplay. The dogs don't always obey even if they do listen. All that I saw were friendly, and not one chased me; not even the owners. The friendliness was accompanied by creativity. I heard dog names of Nimzo, Rasputan Greta and others. Masters used lacrosse sticks to throw chase balls up the grassy bowled hill. One person, not interested in the dogs, did attract dog attention. He used the as yet unpopular "mountain" in-line skates, to race down the grass hill in a manner that skiers would ski it. Fortunately he did not fall even after many runs down the slope.

The hilly mile long park, is part of the National Park system. Primarily a stream valley, the top end near American University is at 380ft in elevation; near some of the highest and most expensive land in the city. The lower end at under 100 ft. abuts the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) National Historical Park near Fletcher's Boathouse. The C&O Park is along the Potomac River so, one can cover almost 400 vertical feet in a short distance. Some of the hills are unavoidable, but some horizontal and some well graded trails make it more manageable. Bicycles are not allowed on the park trails.

Getting There

From Montgomery County, Maryland

Exit the Capital Beltway (I-95) at the River Road (Rte. 190) and Cabin John Parkway exit, onto the Cabin John Parkway. The Cabin John Parkway merges onto the southbound Clara Barton Parkway after 1.3 miles. At the Chain Bridge intersection, 3.35 miles later, the road changes its name to Canal Road. This intersection also is as far as you can go southbound during evening rush hour, because during that time, traffic is one way northbound, leaving D.C. (cut through the city or see directions from Virginia below to get there during evening rush hour). Turn left one-half mile after Chain Bridge onto Arizona Avenue. At the next traffic light, turn right onto MacArthur Boulevard. After 0.45 miles, turn left onto Chain Bridge Rd. Turn right after 0.85 miles into the park, then proceed to the only parking lot.

From Northern Fairfax County, Virginia on the Capital Beltway

Take the George Washington Parkway southbound for 8.5 miles to Francis Scott Key Bridge. After crossing the bridge into Georgetown, turn left onto M Street. Seven tenths of a mile later, turn left onto MacArthur Boulevard. Turn right after 1.5 miles onto Chain Bridge Road. After 0.85 miles turn right into the park, then proceed to the only parking lot.

From Southern Fairfax County, Virginia

Exit the Capitol Beltway, I-95, northbound onto Henry G. Shirley Highway (I-395). After approximately 9.5 miles, take the left exit just before the 14th Street Bridges, northbound onto the George Washington Parkway. Stay in the left lane following the signs toward Arlington Memorial Bridge. At the next merge however, bear right to go under Memorial bridge. After crossing under Memorial bridge, at the next merge move to the left lane following signs for Rte. 50 west. Quickly move to the right lane and take the next exit onto Meade St. This becomes Lynn St. before crossing the Potomac River on Key bridge. At the light at the end of the bridge, turn left on M Street. Turn left again after 0.7 miles onto MacArthur Blvd. After 1.55 miles, turn right on Chain Bridge Rd. After 0.85 miles turn right into the park, then proceed to the only parking lot.

From Prince Georges County and the Capital Beltway (I-95)

Take New York Avenue (Rte. 50) west (approximately 10 miles) to Mt. Vernon Square. Continue straight one block, then bear right on Massachusetts Avenue, and go 4.2 miles across the city. At Ward Circle, take Nebraska Avenue southwest toward American University (to the left as you enter the circle). After one-half mile turn left onto Chain Bridge Road. After 0.4 miles, turn left in to the park and proceed to the only parking area.

By Metro Rail

The nearest metro rail station is the Tenleytown station, 1.7 miles away. From it, take Wisconsin Ave. to Tenley Circle. Turn right onto Nebraska Ave. Turn left on Chain Bridge Rd., then left again into the park.

Area Routes

Crosstown Trails (6.05 miles, VII)

The crosstown trails are the Wesley Heights Trail, the Whitehaven Trail, and the Dumbarton Oaks Trail. They traverse east/west and stay within narrow wooded strips of land along the tributaries to Battery Kemble Run, Foundry Branch, and Rock Creek. Connecting Battery Kemble Park, Glover Archbold Park, and Rock Creek Park, the strips of woodland are a surprising and hidden remnant of the city, long ago developed elsewhere. Within them, it's hard to believe that you're in the middle of the city, even when you can see the houses and buildings on the nearby edges. The parks appear relatively safe and pleasant. Many hikers use them.

A lollipop course, the Crosstown Trails route starts from the low end of the Battery Kemble parking lot. Facing the exit road, the dirt Battery Kemble Trail is to the left, going down into the woods. The first major trail intersection, as well as all the dirt trails on the route, is well marked. The tree covered Wesley Heights Trail climbs often steeply until it crosses Foxhall Rd. It then drops sometimes steeply down to the Glover Archbold Trail. Along the way, English Ivy covers the ground in many places. Though somewhat handsome, the Ivy threatens the mature trees in the park. The park service is trying to eliminate it. Turning right on the Glover Archbold Trail continue downhill but gather your strength for a climb ahead. Turn left on the Whitehaven Trail. It quickly climbs through the forest, then past a community garden, to an open field. Dog owners gather in this field too. A water fountain diagonally across the field points the way of the trail.

Descend past the field to another open field and the intersection of the Whitehaven Parkway and 37th Street. Skip the trail on the other side of 37th Street which goes up the very steep and badly eroded hill. Instead use the parkway to cross Wisconsin Avenue, then pickup Whitehaven Road (diagonally to the left). At the end of Whitehaven Road, on the right side is the signed trail head for both the Normanstone Trail, and the Dumbarton Oaks Trail. Take the Dumbarton Oaks Trail, going down the switchback, past the swamp, the field, the stone bridge, and ending at Lovers Lane. Come back on the Montrose Park Connector (see more descriptions under Georgetown Loops in the Rock Creek Park, Thompson Boathouse chapter, and Dumbarton Oaks in the Rock Creek Park, Pierce Mill chapter). The connector route is relatively flat which again offers you the chance to gather strength for the climb back. Going up the Glover Archbold Trail is relatively easy because it's well graded. The exertion will come as you push up back to Foxhall Rd along the already traveled Wesley Heights Trail. After Foxhall Rd., you are practically home free.

Wesley Heights (4.0 miles, IV)

Joseph Cambell once remarked to the effect that the tallest structures in a city represented what was most important to the people who lived in it. He had in mind European cathedrals as well as skyscrapers in cities like New York and Chicago. Washington has the Washington Monument, and laws preventing new buildings from being built taller than the capital dome. The Washington Cathedral predates that law however. It sits on higher ground and definitely has its place on the skyline. Close to Battery Kemble Park is even higher ground and some of the structures there are higher than the cathedral. Some of the high ones (not all are taller than the cathedral) include: antennae towers for the U.S. Naval Security Station, WRC Television and Radio, National Presbyterian Church, and Fox Television.

Get your climbing to high places done early on this route that passes by some of the above tall structures. From the low end of the parking lot, with your back to the exit road, head through the lot uphill and through the grass field ahead. The Battery Kemble Trail will soon appear more defined as it goes up to the top of the park. Use the sidewalks on Nebraska Ave. to continue. Many students run back and forth from American University here. Pass around Ward Circle, then turn right at the Van Ness Street. From there, turn at the trail head for the Glover Archbold Trail. The trail is unpaved, but blazed. Shady and cool, it descends through the park gently along Foundry Branch, crossing a few roads. Turn right onto the Wesley Heights Trail and start climbing again. The trail tops out and is steep near the intersection with Foxhall Rd. Finish with a steep descent into Battery Kemble Park, and a gentle climb to the parking lot.

Washington Palisades (4.8 or 3.85 miles, V or IV)

Many transportation routes parallel the Potomac River. Besides roads and trains, are three suitable for foot or bicycle within easy reach of Battery Kemble Park. Starting at the low end of the parking lot with your back to the exit road, head uphill through the lot and through the grass field at the other end. The Battery Kemble Trail will soon appear more defined as you go up to the top of the park. From there, bear left onto Loughboro Road.. Note that Nebraska Avenue changes its name at Foxhall Rd to Loughboro Road. Descend, sometimes quickly, on the tree covered sidewalk. The road changes its name again after Macarthur Blvd. to Norton St. At the end of that, turn right onto an informal unpaved path for the regular route or turn left onto

Potomac Avenue for a shorter route. The unpaved path for the regular route ends shortly at the Capital Crescent Trail, not far from the Montgomery County/Washington D.C. border. The paved Capital Crescent Trail continues descending very gradually all the way to Fletcher's Boathouse where water and restrooms are available. Construction is currently underway here on the bridge over the canal. The current best way to Reservoir Rd. is to circle to the right and go through the tunnel under the canal to the intersection with Canal Rd. Crossing Canal Rd. is dangerous if you are impatient. Wait for the traffic lights that are out of sight in both directions, to clear the way for you. Follow Reservoir Rd. on the narrow sidewalk to MacArthur Blvd., then make a sharp left. Still on a sidewalk, look for the Battery Kemble trail head sign on the right side of the road; where the road becomes wooded on both sides (the Discovery Creek Children's Museum in the Conduit Road Schoolhouse also cues the location of the trail and is the rejoin point for the shorter loop. Climb the Battery Kemble Trail to the parking area. Most of the grade is gentle up to the parking lot.

For the short route, Potomac Ave. offers some good views of the river and the houses across it on the Virginia side. A second and shorter dirt path on the right also joins to the Capital Crescent Trail and can be used if you change your mind and want a longer route after all. Staying on Potomac Ave., turn left instead on Galena Pl., then right on a dirt trail on an unpaved old railroad grade. The dirt path eventually leaves the grade turning up to MacArthur Blvd. to become the Battery Kemble Trail and join the regular route.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Rock Creek Park, Thompson Boathouse
Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Military Road
Bethesda
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, Lock 7
Iwo Jima Memorial
Donaldson Run/Potomac Overlook Regional Park

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Guapo's; Tenleytown - Mexican Cuisine - 202 686-3588
Listrani's - Italian Gourmet - 202 363-0620

Entertainment and Edification

Abner Cloud House -
Fletcher's Boathouse - canoe rentals

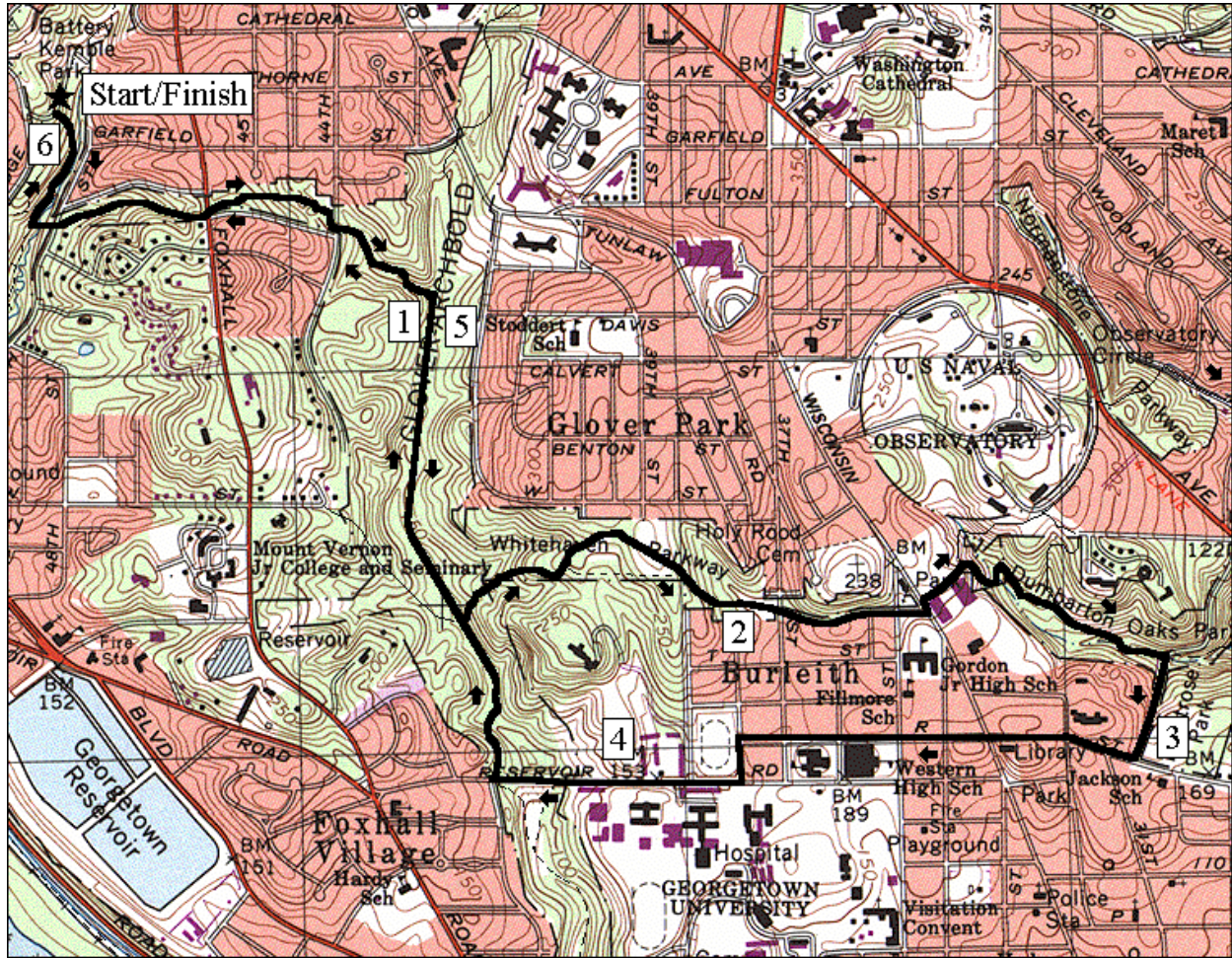
Crosstown Trails

Distance: 6.05 miles

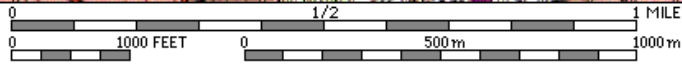
Rating: VII; hilly unpaved blazed trails, sidewalks

- R 0.0 from the end of the parking lot, head south, downhill on the Battery Kemble Trail (blue blazed)
- L 0.2 Wesley Heights Trail (faded orange and/or white blazes); before wooden bridge; up steep hill
0.25 49th St
0.55 Foxhall Rd
- R/L 0.75 44th St
- L 0.9 at trail X on R to cross the stream on stones
- BL 0.95 after crossing the creek on stones; trail X on R
- R 1.0 at T after crossing Foundry Branch; Glover Archbold Trail; blue blazes
- L 1.5 Whitehaven Trail; orange blazes
- L 1.65 to stay on trail; away from houses
- S 1.9 across field toward water fountain
2.0 trail X
- BR 2.2 onto Whitehaven Pkwy at 37th St
- L/R 2.45 at Wise Ave; onto Whitehaven St
- R 2.5 Dumbarton Oaks Trail; continue down past switchbacks, wetland and the grassy field
- R/L 2.85 at stone bridge
- R 2.9 Lover's Lane (unmarked)
- R 3.05 R St at T
3.3 Wisconsin Ave
- CL 3.75 38th St
- CR 3.8 Reservoir Rd
- R 4.2 Glover Archbold Trail at 44th St
- L 4.3 at T after crossing the creek; to stay on the Glover Archbold Trail
4.55 Whitehaven Trail on R
- L 5.05 Wesley Heights Trail; & cross Foundry Branch
- BR 5.1 to cross stream at trail X on L
- R 5.15 after crossing stream; trail X on L
- R/L 5.3 at 44th St
5.5 Foxhall Rd
5.8 49th St
- R 5.85 Battery Kemble Trail
6.05 parking

Crosstown Trails



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Wesley Heights

Distance: 4.0 miles

Rating: IV

- L 0.0 from the low end of the parking lot, head uphill to the high end, across the grass field to the Battery Kemble Trail (blue blazed)

- R 0.3 onto the sidewalk for Nebraska Ave at Foxhall Rd
- 0.6 New Mexico Ave

- R 0.7 counterclockwise around Ward Circle on sidewalks

- R 0.8 Nebraska Ave on sidewalks

- R 1.2 Van Ness St

- R 1.35 Glover Archbold Trail head at bottom of hill; follow blue blazes

- BR 1.95 at open field before road
- 2.05 Massachusetts Ave (down stairs after crossing; follow blue blazes)

- L/R 2.5 Cathedral Ave (unmarked)

- L/R 2.65 New Mexico Ave (unmarked)

- R 3.0 Wesley Heights Trail; cross Foundry Branch

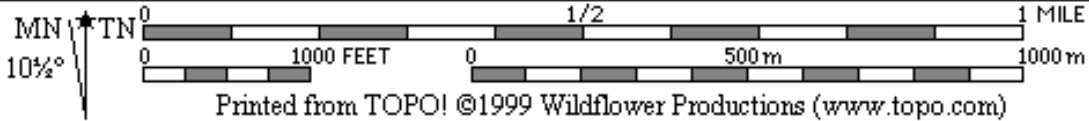
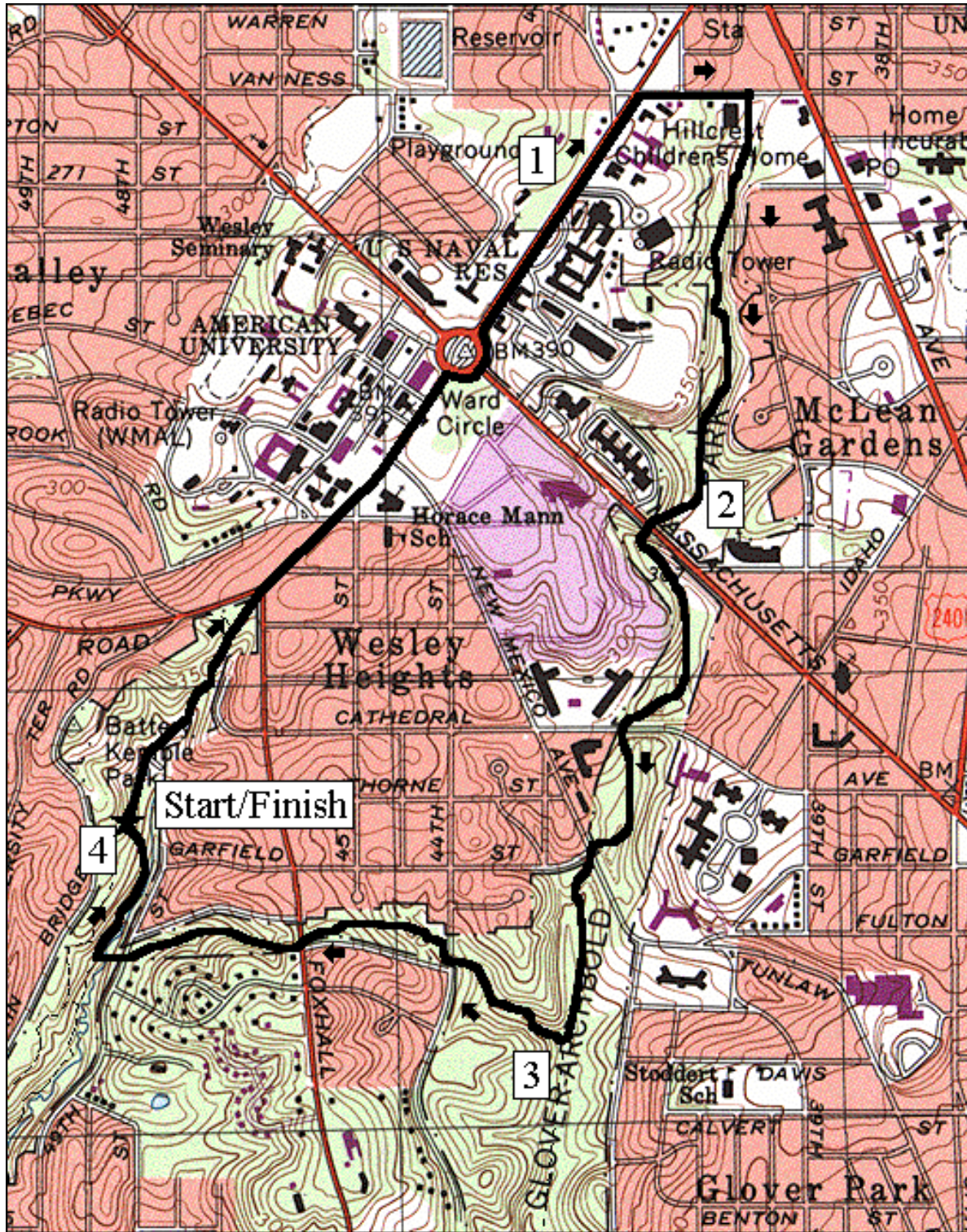
- BR 3.05 to cross stream at trail X on L

- R 3.15 after crossing stream; trail X on L

- R/L 3.25 at 44th St
- 3.5 Foxhall Rd
- 3.75 49th St

- R 3.8 Battery Kemble Trail
- 4.0 parking

Wesley Heights



Washington Palisades

Distance: 4.8 or 3.85 miles

Rating: V or IV; paved and unpaved trails; uphill finish

4.8 Mile Route

- L 0.0 from the low end of the parking lot, head uphill to the high end, across the grass field to the Battery Kemble Trail (blue blazed)

- L 0.3 onto the sidewalk for Loughboro Rd
- 0.55 Arizona Ave on L
- 1.15 Dalecarlia Pkwy on R
- 1.45 MacArthur Blvd; Loughboro Rd becomes Norton St
- <*
- R 1.6 unpaved trail along fence

- L 1.65 Capital Crescent Trail
- 2.05 trail X on L to Potomac Ave
- 2.55 trestle bridge over Canal Rd & canal

- R 3.1 ramp to Fletcher's Boathouse

- R 3.15 park access road (gravel); through tunnel
- 3.4 cross Canal Rd (!); becomes Reservoir Rd; use sidewalk on R

- XS 3.55 sidewalk ends; use sidewalk on L

- L 3.75 MacArthur Blvd
- >*
- R 4.2 cross MacArthur Blvd at Conduit Rd Schoolhouse on L; Battery Kemble Trail; sign is across MacArthur Blvd; main trail is to R at split after entering woods
- 4.6 Wesley Heights Trail on R
- 4.8 parking; Battery Kemble Park

*3.85 Mile Route

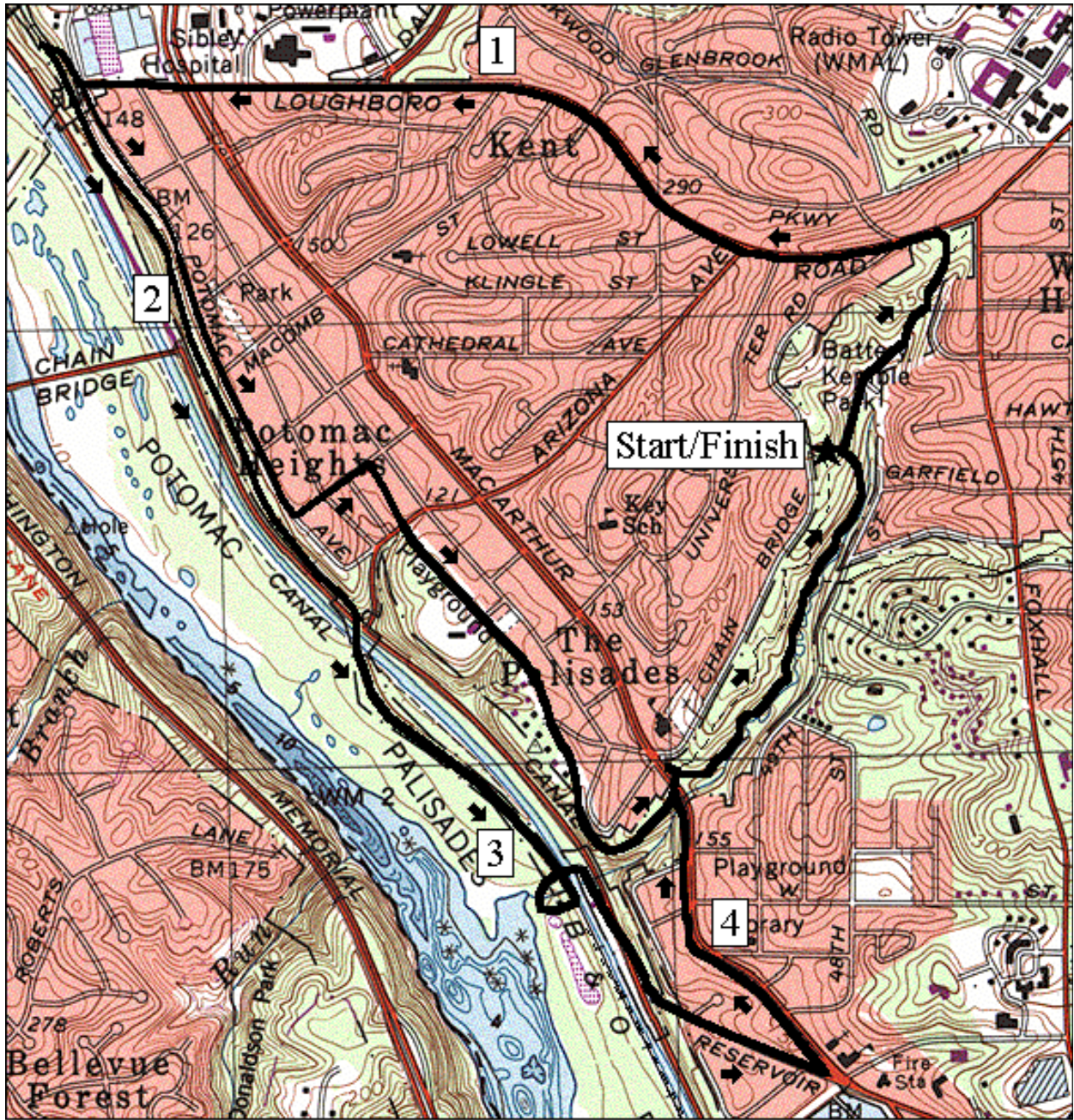
- L 1.6 Potomac Ave
- 1.9 trail X on R to Capital Crescent Trail

- L 2.25 Galena Pl

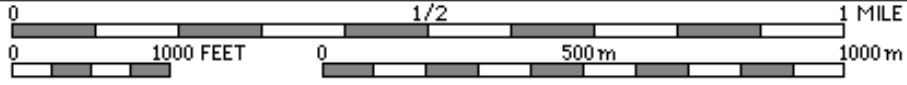
- R 2.4 unpaved trail head; old RR grade
- 2.5 bridge over Arizona Ave

- BL 3.1 RR grade ends but the trail continues uphill (pickup cues at mile 4.2 on 4.8 mile route)

Washington Palisades



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