

Rock Creek Park, Military Road

This section covers the central portion of Rock Creek National Park and some surrounding areas. All the separate parks listed within are maintained by the National Park Service. A surprising number and variety of unpaved hiking trails can be found inside Washington D.C. city limits. Some of these trails are deep within the Rock Creek park away from sight or sound of cars and the rest of the city. Some are along thin green strips of land in the heart of the city. As Rock Creek carves its way down to its mouth at the Potomac River, steep and rocky hillsides are exposed.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-95), take Georgia Avenue south for 0.5 miles. Turn right on 16th Street. After 2.9 miles, turn right on Joyce Rd. Bear left at the golf course and proceed to the bottom of the hill 0.5 miles. Turn right on Beach Drive. Turn left into the first parking lot, parking at the far end.

Area Routes

Northwest D.C. (14 miles, X)

Anyone who has driven across northwest Washington, D.C. in rush hour traffic before, can attest that it is a long trip and that it makes you wish there was a better way. If you've trained for a long run, you'll be ready for it. This grand tour of northwest Washington, D.C. first makes a stiff climb out of the Rock Creek valley on a hiker-biker trail. You continue climbing up on the sidewalks of Nebraska Avenue. By the time you reach the Tenleytown, you will probably be out of breath, but you will have gotten to the high point of the route. Your reward is a descent of 350 vertical feet in the next 3.1 miles on the Glover Archbold Trail to the shores of the Potomac River. Glover Archbold Park, like Rock Creek Park is part of the National Park system, and is a lesser known oasis of greenery in the city. It's a stream valley for the Foundry Branch. The trail is unpaved and tree covered most of the way. There are only 4 street crossings. Most of the footing is very good. A stretch of it actually is on top of sewer pipe, but you will hardly notice and the surroundings are very pleasant. At the end of the Glover Archbold Trail, tunnel under M Street, then take the Crescent Trail a short way to its finish in Georgetown. Follow the shore toward Thompson Boat Center, then start the well graded Rock Creek hiker-biker trail gradually back uphill. A short section of this passes on the National Zoo grounds (gates close this segment off 5/1-9/15 6PM-8AM, 9/16-4/30 6PM-6AM; the tunnel for Beach Drive can be used when the gates are closed but it is dangerous with room enough for the width of only one pedestrian). At Broad Branch Rd., the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail ends. The route is then on Beach Drive back to the start. This section of Beach drive is closed on weekends (7AM Sat-7PM Sun & holidays). Water is available in several places in Rock Creek Park but nowhere along the Glover Archbold Trail.

Bingham Road (3.5 or 2.4 miles, III or II)

This shaded loop starts with a section of the Valley Trail. The Valley Trail stays east of the Rock Creek and is almost all dirt. Just like the Western Ridge Trail it stretches from the north at the Boundary Bridge on the Maryland/D.C border, to the south at Bluff Bridge near Piney Branch Parkway and below. As valleys generally are, it is easier to travel than ridges (like the Western Ridge Trail). The Valley Trail hardly ever gets very far from the Rock Creek. Blue blazes mark it. At the north end of the route, leave the Valley Trail crossing from east to west over the Rock Creek and climbing up to the Western Ridge Trail. A drop to Pinehurst Branch, and another climb will bring you to a paved trail just before Bingham Rd. The trail along Bingham gently puts you back in the valley. Return along Beach Drive to the parking area. The short route doesn't go as far north and bypasses one climb. In exchange, you get an easier grade but must cross the Pinehurst Branch two extra times on stones. The crossing on stones is easily accomplished without getting wet.

Western Ridge Trail (4.2 or 3.3 miles, V or IV)

The Western Ridge Trail is a mix of paved and dirt paths stretching from the north at the Boundary Bridge on the Maryland/D.C border, to the south at Bluff Bridge near Piney Branch Parkway. As ridges go they offer good views but you generally must climb up to them from a valley. This route holds true to that rule. A stiff climb up the paved trail parallel to Military Road, gets you up to the Western Ridge Trail. After a brief dip when crossing Military Road, the apex of the route is reached at the Nature Center parking lot. The trip to the Nature Center parking takes you off the official green blazed Western Ridge Trail but is more direct and also beneficial since water and restrooms are available for the weary. From the Nature Center parking lot, a short section on roads and an access trail return you to the Western Ridge Trail and its green blazes.

The good views are presented later on the way down to the valley and also on the way back. The route rolls its way downhill toward Broad Branch Rd. and the Rock Creek. Footing on this portion of the Western Ridge Trail is generally good but can require care when leaves cover roots and some loose rocks. In an open grassy area designated an Equitation Field, a coral will appear on the left. For the short route, turn sharply left before the coral, to a horse trail on the other side of Glover Rd. The short route is almost a mile shorter and avoids a second but smaller climb out of the valley. The regular route leaves the Western Ridge Trail just after passing the coral by first bearing right, then bearing right 70ft. later at another trail split. It goes downhill crossing Glover Rd. onto a paved path at the bottom of the hill, in the valley. Continuing on the path for just 250ft. on the paved trail, a sign for the Western Ridge Trail will become visible on the steep hillside to your left. Pass it but turn left immediately afterward onto the grass, at first staying in the valley parallel to Beach Drive. Return instead on a horse trail, the head of which is marked by two white posts at the far edge of the grass field. The horse trail is wide. It climbs one significant hill skipped by the short route, onto the ridge again where good views of the valley below are to be had. The short route eventually merges and you descend to the valley again. The horse trail in the valley is soft, fairly flat, shady and pleasant as it follows the grade of the Rock Creek upstream back to Joyce and Military Roads.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia/Maryland
Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Pierce Mill
Rock Creek Park, Thompson Boathouse
Battery Kemble Park
Sligo Creek
Iwo Jima Memorial

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Booeymonger - soups and deli sandwiches - 202 686-5805
Guapo's - Mexican Cuisine - Tenleytown - 202 686-3588
Armand's Chicago Pizzeria - 202 547-6600

Entertainment and Edification

Rock Creek Nature Center & Planetarium - 202 426-6829
National Zoological Park - 202 673-4800
Carter Barron Amphitheater - events such as Shakespeare in the Park - 202 426-6837
Washington National Cathedral - 202 537-6207

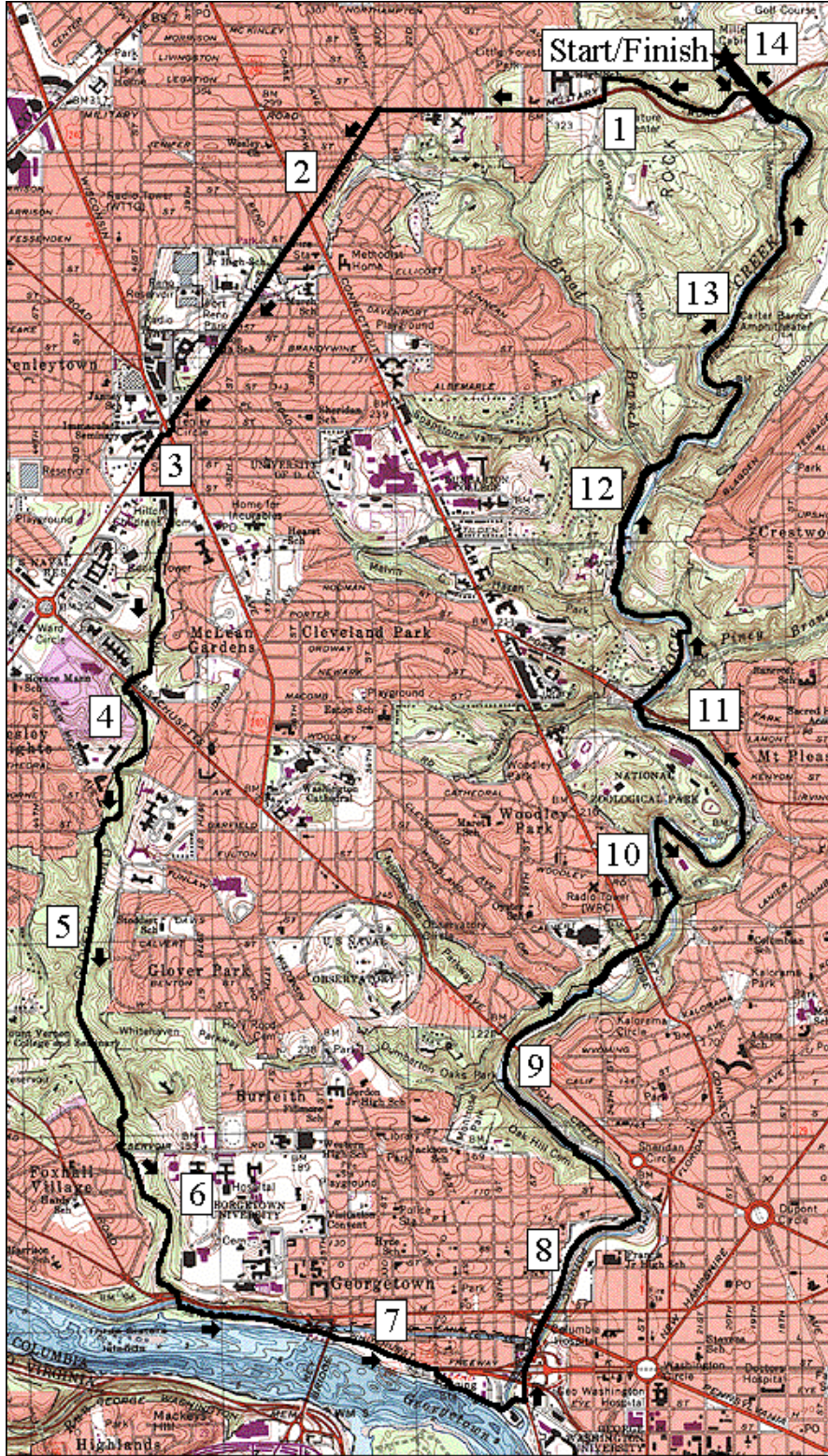
Northwest D.C.

Distance: 14.0 miles

Rating: X; Early hills; sidewalks, unpaved blazed trails, hiker-biker trails, roads

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|----------|---|----------|---|
| L 0.0 | on paved trail (head south) from the north end of the parking lot at Picnic Area 6 | L/R 6.25 | down stairs before MacArthur Blvd to old underpass (! 6.5' head clearance) |
| R 0.25 | at Joyce Rd; continue on paved trail | L 6.35 | Crescent Trail (paved) |
| L 0.95 | at T before Oregon Ave | S 6.7 | trail ends; continue on Water St |
| CR 1.0 | Military Rd. | BR 7.2 | at Wisc Ave on L; Harbour Parking on R; through park to wooden dock |
| L 1.7 | Nebraska Ave | L 7.45 | before Thompson Boathouse |
| 2.1 | Connecticut Ave | L 7.55 | Rock Creek Trail |
| S 2.9 | clockwise through Tenley Circle; Wisconsin Ave | 7.65 | underpass for Whitehurst Freeway |
| L 3.05 | 41 st St | 7.75 | C&O Canal Towpath/Penn Ave |
| CL 3.15 | Van Ness St | 8.65 | Devils Chair Bridge |
| R 3.25 | Glover Archbold Trail; at the bottom of the hill; follow blue blazes | 9.4 | Shoreham Hill Bridge & Parkway Trail on L |
| BR 3.85 | at open field before road | 9.6 | Connecticut Ave ramp X |
| 3.95 | Massachusetts Ave (down stairs after crossing; follow blue blazes) | L 9.85 | through gate into Zoo grounds before tunnel; open (5/1-9/15 6AM-8PM); (9/16-4/30 6AM-6PM); closed 12/25 |
| L/R 4.35 | Cathedral Ave (unmarked) | 11.2 | underpass for Porter St |
| L/R 4.55 | New Mexico Ave (unmarked) | 11.8 | underpass for Tilden St |
| 4.9 | Wesley Heights Trail on R | BR 12.15 | onto Beach Dr after crossing Broad Branch Rd |
| 5.4 | Whitehaven Trail on L | 12.65 | Boulder Bridge |
| R 5.6 | over stream (Foundary Branch) to stay on Glover Archbold trail (follow blue blazes) | 13.75 | Joyce Rd |
| L/R 5.7 | cross Reservoir Rd at 44 th St; R downhill into & across open field | L 14.0 | 2 nd entrance for Picnic Area 6 parking |

Northwest D.C.



Bingham Drive

Distance: 3.5 or 2.4 miles

Rating: III or II

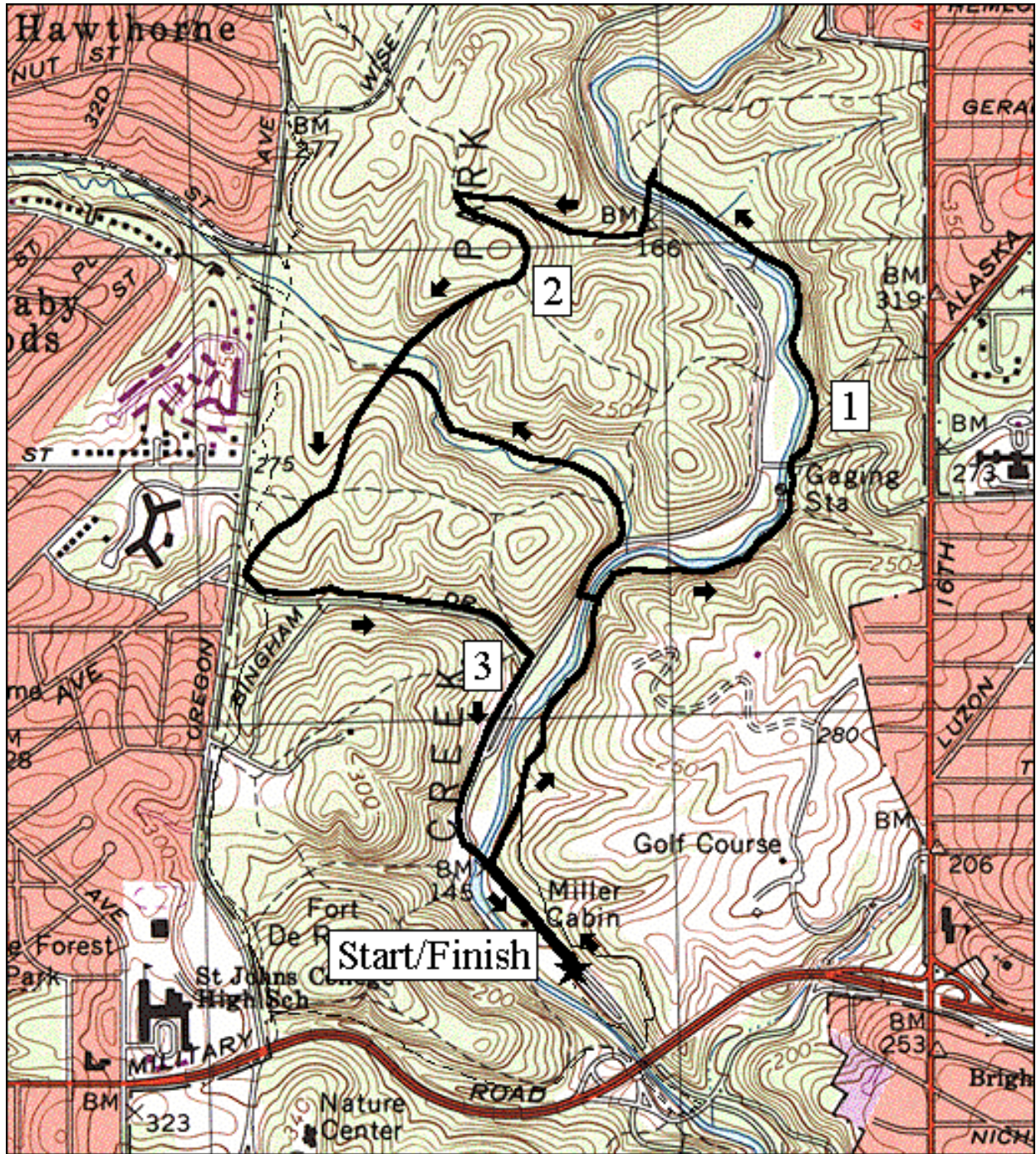
3.5 Mile Route

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|---------|---|---------|---|
| L 0.0 | on Beach Dr (head north) from the north end of parking at Picnic Area 6 | BR 1.55 | cross Beach Dr; follow trail into woods and up the hill |
| R 0.15 | on unpaved trail going upstream before bridge over Rock Creek | L 1.8 | Western Ridge Trail (green blazed) |
| BL 0.3 | Valley Trail (blue blazed, unpaved) <* | 2.2 | Pinehurst Trail X after crossing creek >* |
| BL 0.9 | trail X; to Sherrill Dr underpass after Whittier Trail on R | R 2.4 | at T to stay on Western Ridge Trail; follow green blazes |
| BL 0.95 | trail X; to stay on Valley Trail | L 2.55 | on paved hiker-biker trail and L again at X before Bingham Dr ; downhill along Bingham Dr |
| 1.0 | Holly Trail on R | R 3.0 | to stay on trail before Beach Dr |
| L 1.45 | leave Valley Trail to Riley Spring Bridge at trail X (sign shows 1.6 miles to Military Rd & 1.4 miles to Boundary Bridge) | 3.5 | parking at Picnic Area 6 |
| 1.5 | Beach Drive | | |

*2.4 Mile Route

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|--------|-------------------------------------|--------|---|
| L 0.55 | toward Rolling Meadow Bridge | L 1.15 | Western Ridge Trail (green blazed, pickup cues at mile 2.4 on 3.5 mile route) |
| R 0.6 | Beach Dr | | |
| L 0.7 | Pinehurst Trail at bridge and Xwalk | | |
| 0.85 | cross Pinehurst Branch on stones | | |
| 1.1 | cross Pinehurst Branch on stones | | |

Bingham Drive



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Western Ridge Trail

Distance: 4.2 or 3.3 miles

Rating: V or IV; paved and unpaved trails; shady with excellent views

4.2 Mile Route

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|---------|--|---------|--|
| L 0.0 | on the paved trail (head south) from north end of parking at Picnic Area 6 | R 2.1 | 3 way split after Equitation Field; leave Western Ridge Trail; downhill |
| R 0.25 | at Joyce Rd; continue on paved trail | S 2.35 | cross Broad Branch Rd; paved trail |
| L 0.95 | at T before Oregon Ave | L 2.4 | on grass after passing Western Ridge Trail (sign) on L; toward white posts |
| 1.0 | Military Rd; continue paved trail | | |
| BR 1.15 | through Nature Center parking lot (water, bathrooms in the center on L) | S 2.45 | white posts mark horse trail at woods |
| | | 2.7 | trail X; R is toward Boulder Bridge |
| R/L 1.2 | to leave parking lot; onto Nature Center & Maintenance access road | BR 2.95 | trail X to the valley |
| | | >* | |
| | | 3.25 | trail X on L |
| BL 1.4 | Glover Rd | 3.3 | Rapids Bridge on R to Beach Dr |
| BR 1.45 | unpaved horse trail to Western Ridge Trail | CR 3.9 | Joyce Rd; onto the hiker-biker trail |
| L/R 1.5 | Western Ridge Trail (green blazes) | L 3.95 | to stay on trail at Beach Dr |
| <* | | 4.2 | north end of the parking lot |

*3.3 Mile Route

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|-------|---|-------|--|
| L 2.1 | on grass immediately before Equitation Field & coral | L 2.3 | horse trail X (pickup cues at mile 3.25 on 4.2 mile route) |
| 2.15 | cross Glover Rd; horse trail head near large stone marker; downhill | | |

Western Ridge Trail

