

Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia/Maryland Border

If you haven't visited Rock Creek Park before, this is one of the best places to start. From here, you can cover the northern portion of the park inside the District, as well as the surrounding areas at the border of Washington, D.C. and Maryland. The National Park Service maintains the park inside Washington D.C. borders. North of the District, Rock Creek park is maintained by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC).

The park is wider and hillier in the District. It's a large scale oasis of green space in the heart of the city. It offers paved and unpaved trails, ball fields, picnic areas, horseback riding, golfing, a Nature Center, an amphitheater, many historical landmarks, and surprising natural beauty. It's a real asset to the region, not just for the city of Washington. It's also generally unknown by those living in the suburbs. The National Park Service describes it as "one of the largest forested urban parks in the United States, containing a wide variety of natural, historical, and recreational features in the midst of Washington, D.C."

Many forces were involved in the creation of the park. The part inside the District was created in 1890 which makes it one of the oldest national parks. The sometimes wet valley and steep hillsides were less attractive for early developments. An article in the Washington Post (February 15, 1999 A17, by Marc Fisher) on the creation of affluent Chevy Chase (located north and west of the park) argues that developers wanted the park. According to that article, one of the Chevy Chase developers was William Stewart, then a Senator from Nevada who said it took "2000 acres out of the market" thus raising real estate prices. The article continues to say "developers also saw the park as a way of buffering white Northwest from increasingly black sections on what they called the 'wrong side of the park.'" Economic disparity and differing racial predominance exists around the park today but it's not so clearly demarcated in terms of east and west of the park, nor so plainly prejudiced.

North of the city in Montgomery County, the MNCPPC has done an excellent job in designing and maintaining the paved Rock Creek trail. Amenities of the park in Maryland in general are less extensive but the paved trail is better. The facilities and comforts in Maryland include picnic areas, ball fields, ball courts, and Nature Centers. Routes in this section reach Silver Spring, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, and the northern part of Rock Creek park inside the District.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take Connecticut Avenue south for 1.2 miles. Turn left on East-West Highway (Rte. 410) following it 0.8 miles. Turn right on Beech Drive proceeding on it for 1 mile. Turn left just before the District of Columbia boundary line, into the parking lot.

Area Routes

Boundary Lines (2.6 miles, II)

A small wonder is what you will find in this short loop through the woods. People walking dogs, hikers, horseback riders, and runners all seem to come here in comfortable, uncrowded numbers. They come to get away from it all and they succeed too. Following the Valley Trail (blue blazed) south, and over the bridge crossing the Rock Creek, the route is wide and mostly smooth. Some segments however, tend to retain water and stay muddy longer than others. For a way, the trail follows the park's eastern boundaries. A short climb after the first mile is followed by a descent again to a tranquil wooded overlook of the Rock Creek. This view is dotted like an Impressionist painting with blooming dogwoods in the spring. Leaving the Valley Trail and crossing Beach Drive, the trail gets hillier with a steady and sometimes rocky climb that's nearly half a mile long. Once joining the Western Ridge Trail (green blazed), the hardest work is over. Only one more short but steep rise remains. Relax and enjoy the view of the wooded hillsides on the way back down.

West Side Story (5.6 or 8.2 miles, VII or IX)

West of the parking area along Oregon Ave. is a lesser known paved hiker-biker trail that traverses lengthwise, most of the main body of Rock Creek Park. The trail is about 6ft wide, bumpy and hilly so most cyclist forego it for the smoother Beach Dr. that is closed on weekends. To get to the trail from the parking lot, leave heading north into Maryland on Beach Dr., then quickly loop back into the District of Columbia again on Daniel Rd. and Oregon Ave. Along the way you will pass many well kept houses in Chevy Chase. Just getting this far, you'll have run up, down, and up again over significant hills. At the hiker-biker trail continue the roller-coaster motion as you travel south and across the grain of the area's drainage. Short portions of the hills can be steep. Just before Military Road the hardest work is done and the short and long routes split.

Turn left for the short route onto another unnamed hiker-biker trail and descend to Joyce Rd. and Beach Drive. From that intersection the path along Beach Dr. is fairly flat. The short route is on Beach Drive after crossing Bingham Dr. (the long route joins the short route here too).

Back at the split, the longer route crosses Military Rd. and after a initial climb to the Nature Center, it gets easier than the first part of the route. Water and restrooms are available in the Nature Center. From there simply follow Glover Rd. as it stair-steps its way down various small plateaus past picnic areas. Eventually the plateaus become a narrow ridge with views of the Rock Creek valley below. The ridge itself runs-out with a descent to Broad Branch Rd. and Beach Dr. Return on Beach Dr. Most auto traffic is kept out on weekends (7AM Sat-7PM Sun & holidays). As elsewhere in the park, Beach Dr. parallels the Rock Creek. The section from Broad Branch Rd. on the way to Joyce Rd. is more remarkable than elsewhere however. The tumbling rapids of the creek make it more reminiscent of a fine mountain stream in the Shenandoah National Park than the usual stream found in a typical Washington, D.C. city park. The creek falls (you will climb) more quickly here than anywhere else along its natural course (70ft in 1.6 miles). The man-made and often photographed Boulder Bridge seems to make a statement to the natural beauty surrounding it. Stay on Beach Rd. after the intersection with

Joyce Rd. At Bingham Rd., both the short and long routes join together.

Only one more significant climb remains. It's a half-mile gentle and steady grade before Wise Rd. After the intersection, traffic is briefly permitted on route. There is no trail or shoulder on this short segment so some caution is necessary as drivers cross to the east and west sides of the park. The home stretch is almost flat.

Chevy Chase (9.05 miles, VIII)

The land surrounding the Rock Creek Park on the north and west sides of the park is Chevy Chase. According to the same Washington Post article cited above, "the name stems from the Cheviot Hills which are along the English-Scottish border." Though "Hills" was dropped from the name, it is an appropriate description. On this route, three well graded, marked and maintained trails will get you over or around them. First take Beach Dr. north, and turn east to cross the creek. This is actually the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail maintained by the MNCPPC but it's not very well distinguished from the roads until after crossing East-West Hwy. After only 0.3 miles past East-West Hwy. an old railroad bridge will be visible. It rises high above, as the trail gets close to the creek and was once part of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. The railroad right-of-way still goes all the way to Georgetown. Part of it is currently named the Georgetown Branch Trail and it is open for hikers and bikers. The railroad bridge is unusable now but it will be rebuilt and become part of the existing Capital Crescent Trail in the future.

After the railroad bridge, cross back over the creek and turn left onto what is a connector to the main part of the Georgetown Branch/Crescent Trail. The main trail at first is cinder and shady. The trail very gradually climbs through quiet neighborhoods. Cross Connecticut Ave. at a traffic light then pass between high fences while looking at the nicely manicured golf course of the Columbia country club. In downtown Bethesda, the trail becomes paved just before an 1,100 foot (0.2 mile) lighted tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue. The tunnel avoids most of the Bethesda traffic and marks the top of the hill. The tunnel is open from 6AM to 10PM. After exiting the tunnel, continue down the Capital Crescent trail. Go only 0.6 miles, then leave the trail at the Bethesda Pool (open to the public). Cut through the pool parking lot and cross Hillandale Rd to another inconspicuous paved trail. This is actually the smaller segment of the discontinuous Little Falls Trail. 100ft later turn left on the unmarked paved trail up to and through Norwood Park. The initial climb here is a bit steep. Sunny Norwood Park has ballfields, water and portable restrooms.

After leaving the park the route is on the streets and sidewalks. A left on Wisconsin and a right on Bradley Lane will put you on the edge of the older part of Chevy Chase. At first you will border the Chevy Chase Village country club. After crossing Connecticut Ave., as you get closer and closer back to Rock Creek Park, Bradley and the other roads become more personable. Houses and yards are well kept. Spring-time colors make it very memorable. It's downhill too.

At the left turn onto Beech St. from Western Ave., the route continues downhill. You may optionally go straight 0.05 miles and, turn left on the unpaved Pinehurst Trail (parallel to Beech St.) to get into Rock Creek Park sooner. The bumpy Pinehurst Trail crosses the creek several times without bridges, then crosses Oregon Rd. just like the queued route following Beech St.

does. It then intersects the bicycle trail also. For your troubles on the option, you get into the woods more quickly but add 0.2 miles to the route. Whether you take Beech St., or the Pinehurst Trail to get there, turn left on the hiker-biker trail to Wise Rd. then return on the unpaved Western Ridge Trail to the parking lot.

Silver Spring (5.55 or 6.65 miles, V or VI)

Silver Spring is the missing link in travel along paved hiker-biker trails that could connect Maryland's eastern and western trails around the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. There are designated bike routes through Silver Spring, but these are on the roads. This route shows three ways that you can get from the central network of trails at Rock Creek, to and from Silver Spring. The Trail of Two Cities route in the Sligo Creek/Wheaton/Northwest Branch section of this guide, shows one additional way and also shows how to get from Silver Spring to the Sligo Creek hiker-biker trail in the Anacostia Tributary Trail System.

First, take Beach Dr. north of the District (maintained by MNCPPC), following the trail until it connects with the Georgetown Branch/Crescent trail. Most of this segment is actually on roads but it is through park land, usually light in traffic. The Georgetown Branch trail is at first a connector route that climbs upward on street sidewalks until it hits the railroad grade. The unpaved trail on the railroad grade will soon be paved and made part of the Capital Crescent Trail (if the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail prevail—you can help them at 202 234-4874 or www.cctrail.org). In 1999 the railroad grade was a lonely place not well maintained. After only a short way, the railroad grade runs out in an industrial area. A detour on a bridge over an intersecting and operational railway puts you on residential roads and sidewalks in the Woodside neighborhood. Traffic on the roads picks-up, then peaks at the Silver Spring metro station. From there, the reverse occurs. Traffic decreases with the drop in elevation, all the way back into Rock Creek Park.

The longer route skips the Georgetown Branch/Capital Crescent Trail. Instead it goes further up the Rock Creek Trail, past the wooded Audubon Society property, and then turns right on a little used intersecting paved trail. This trail is located just less than a tenth of a mile before where the Rock Creek Trail crosses Jones Mill Rd. Identify it by a sign pointing to Linden Lane. The trail crosses the Rock Creek and curves right going between the hillside and the Rock Creek. This quiet section of park was covered in an impressive uniform green carpet of flood-land springtime undergrowth. The plants bloom with hundreds of small yellow flowers. The trail ends at a T intersection with an old and closed-off concrete surfaced road. The road is Ireland Lane and in either direction, it climbs through the woods, along streams, and out of the valley. If taken to the right, it climbs steeply, then dead-ends behind the Walter Reed Hospital Annex. Go left at the intersection instead. The climb is easier, it avoids the dead-end and avoids a temptation to trespass on Walter Reed property. The climb to the left is lovely but takes significant effort. From the T intersection to Linden Lane, 0.43 miles, it gains 130 vertical feet. Linden Lane is semi-industrial and semi-residential. Second Ave., where you reconnect with the shorter route, is residential until you get further into Silver Spring's downtown.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Bethesda

Rock Creek Park, Military Road

Rock Creek Park, Pierce Mill

Sligo Creek/Wheaton/Northwest Branch

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Delhi Dhaba - Indian food - Bethesda - 301 718-0008

Il Forno - Pizza - Bethesda - 301 652-7757

Thai Derm - “Noodles House”- Silver Spring - 301 589-5341

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

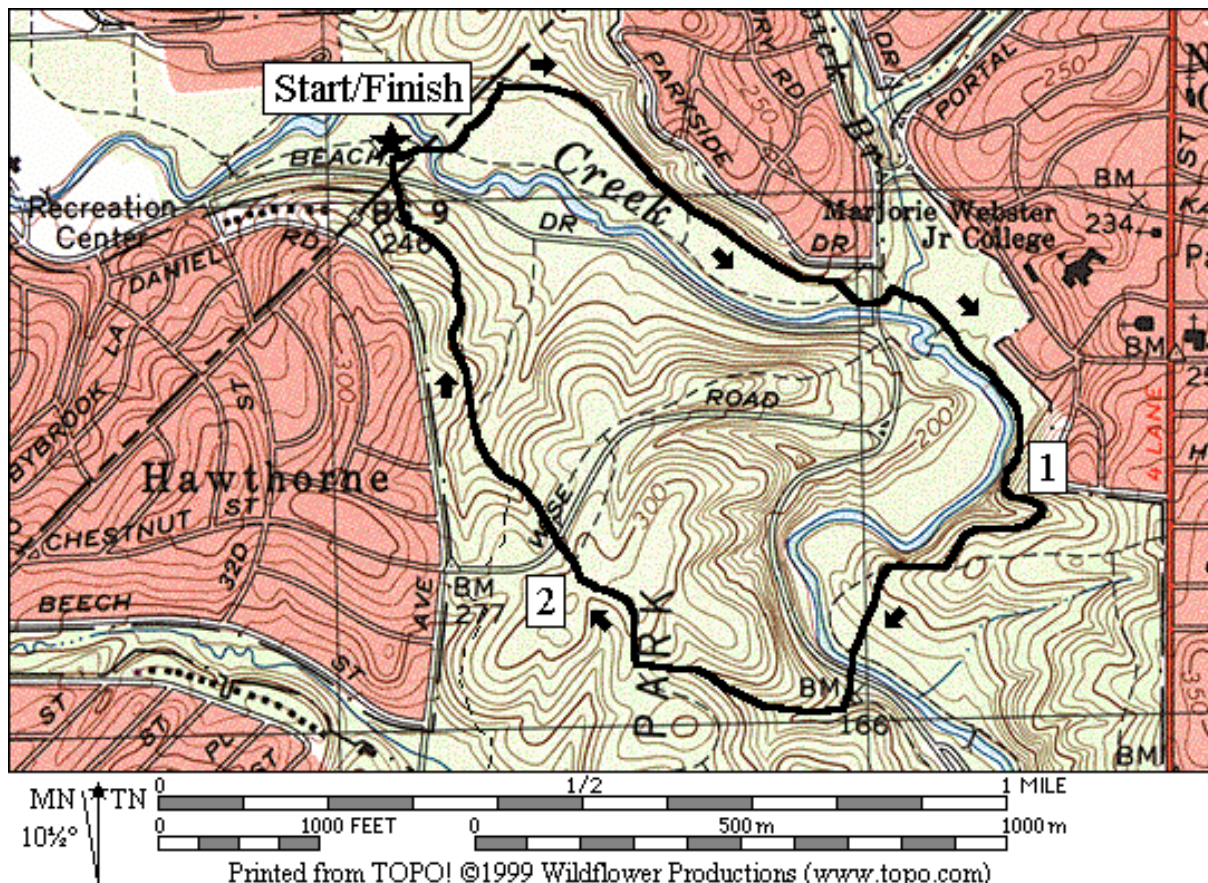
National Capital Trolley Museum - 301 384-6088

Boundary Lines

Distance: 2.6 miles

Rating: II; some hills; unpaved blazed trails through wooded parkland

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>S 0.0 Valley Trail toward Rock Creek from the parking lot (blue blaze)</p> <p>0.05 Boundary Bridge over Rock Creek</p> <p>0.2 Boundary Trail on L</p>
<p>BR 0.65 to stay on Valley Trail at X w/ramp to West Beach Dr</p> <p>0.7 underpass to West Beach Drive</p>
<p>BR 0.75 to stay on Valley Trail at X w/ramp to West Beach Dr</p> <p>1.0 rock cliff on L; begin climb</p> <p>1.3 Pine Trail on L</p> <p>1.4 trail to overlook on R</p> | <p>R 1.5 trail to Riley Spring Bridge; (sign shows 1.6 miles to Military Rd & 1.4 miles back to Boundary Bridge)</p> <p>1.55 cross Beach Dr; follow trail into woods and up the hill</p>
<p>BR 1.85 Western Ridge Trail; (green blazed)</p> <p>2.05 cross Wise Rd</p>
<p>S 2.6 cross Beach Drive into parking lot</p> |
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West Side Story

Distance: 5.6 or 8.2 miles

Rating: VII or IX; hilly, on hiker-biker trails and roads

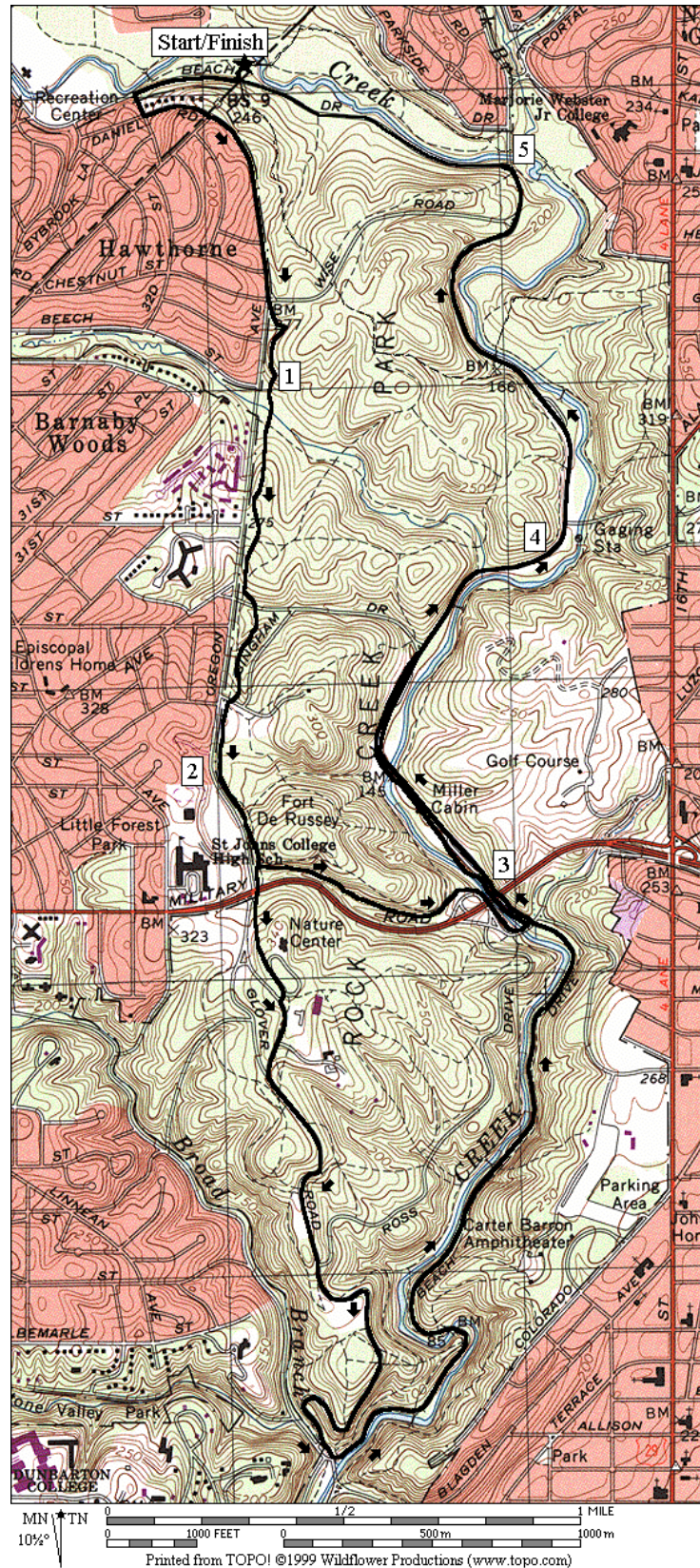
5.6 Mile Route

R 0.0	north; on Beach Dr from parking	BL 2.85	as Joyce Rd crosses Rock Creek
L 0.25	Wyndale Rd	BL 2.9	Beach Dr
		3.2	bathrooms on R across Beach Dr
L 0.25	Daniel Rd		
0.4	becomes Oregon Ave at X w/Western Ave; DC/MD border	BR 3.6	merge onto Beach Dr at Bingham Rd >*
		4.05	Sherrill Rd on R
BL 0.85	onto hiker-biker trail at Wise Rd	4.35	gate for weekend closure; (7AM Sat- 7PM Sun & holidays)
BR 0.85	merge with hike-biker trail		
1.15	Pinehurst Trail	S 4.85	Wise Rd on left (! traffic from cars crossing the park & no shoulder)
1.55	Bingham Dr (unmarked)		
<*			
L 2.2	on paved trail before Military Rd	BL 5.0	to stay on Beach Dr at Wise Rd (! gate for weekend closure)
2.75	Military Rd. underpass		
		R 5.6	parking

*8.2 Mile Route

S 2.2	go straight to cross Military Rd	BL 3.85	paved trail at bottom of hill; before bridge
BR 2.4	through Nature Center parking lot (water, bathrooms in the center on L)	L 3.95	Beach Dr
		4.4	Boulder Bridge
R/L 2.45	to leave parking lot; onto Nature Center & maintenance access road	5.5	Joyce Rd
		5.8	bathrooms on R (open year round)
BL 2.65	Glover Rd	6.25	(pickup cues at mile 4.05 on 5.6 mile route)
3.15	Ross Dr on L merges		

West Side Story



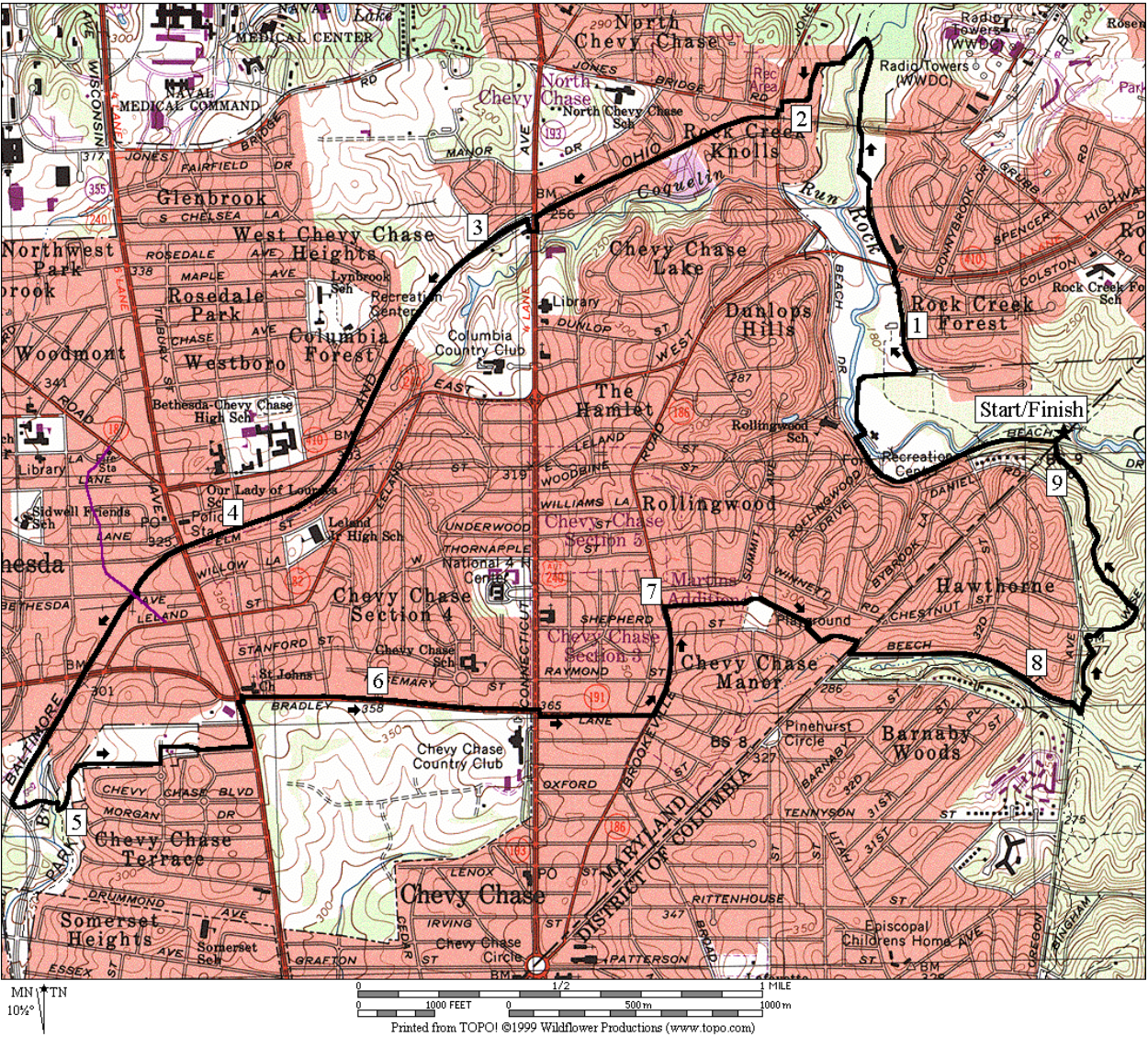
Chevy Chase

Distance: 9.05 miles

Rating: VIII; paved and unpaved trails, roads & sidewalks; mostly well graded

R 0.0	north; Beach Dr from the parking lot	L paved trail (to Norwood Park)
R/L 0.55	at parking lot; follow Bike Route sign to footbridge over Rock Creek; Meadowbrook La (water, bathroom)	L/R 5.3 Norwood Park parking; pass Norwood Rd; R onto paved trail (water and portable outhouse)
BL 0.85	to stay on Meadowbrook La (stables)	L 5.45 Norwood Rd
BL 1.15	onto paved trail after crossing East-West Hwy (water at 1.25)	L 5.55 Wisconsin Ave
L 1.75	connector TR to Georgetown Branch/Crescent Trail	CR 5.65 Bradley Lane
L 1.9	Susanna La (unmarked)	CL 6.7 Brookville Rd
L 2.05	Jones Mill Rd	R 6.95 Turner La; before gas station & stores; continue on footpath (7.2; water) at road end and continue following Turner La downhill
XS 2.05	at X with Jones Bridge Rd; use crosswalk	L 7.4 Cummings La
R 2.1	Georgetown Branch/Crescent Trail	R 7.5 Western Ave
L/R 2.75	at Conn Ave to cross Conn Ave at Chevy Chase Lake Dr TL	L 7.5 Beech St
R/L 2.8	after crossing Conn Ave; R on sidewalk/trail then L on trail into the woods	S 8.1 at Oregon Ave; into woods on unpaved unmarked path
CR 4.2	Bethesda Ave at Woodmont Ave	L 8.05 hiker-biker trail in Rock Creek Park
L 4.25	Capital Crescent Trail; before auto dealer lot	BR 8.35 trail splits at top of hill before road
L 4.85	Little Falls Pkwy and immediate L again through Bethesda Pool parking; cross Hillandale Rd onto paved trail.	R 8.4 Wise Rd
R/L 5.0	R at T (Little Falls Trail); immediate	L 8.5 Western Ridge Trail (green blaze, unpaved)
		9.05 parking lot

Chevy Chase



Silver Spring

Distance: 5.55 or 6.65 miles

Rating: V or VI; varied roads, sidewalks and paved trails; some urban areas

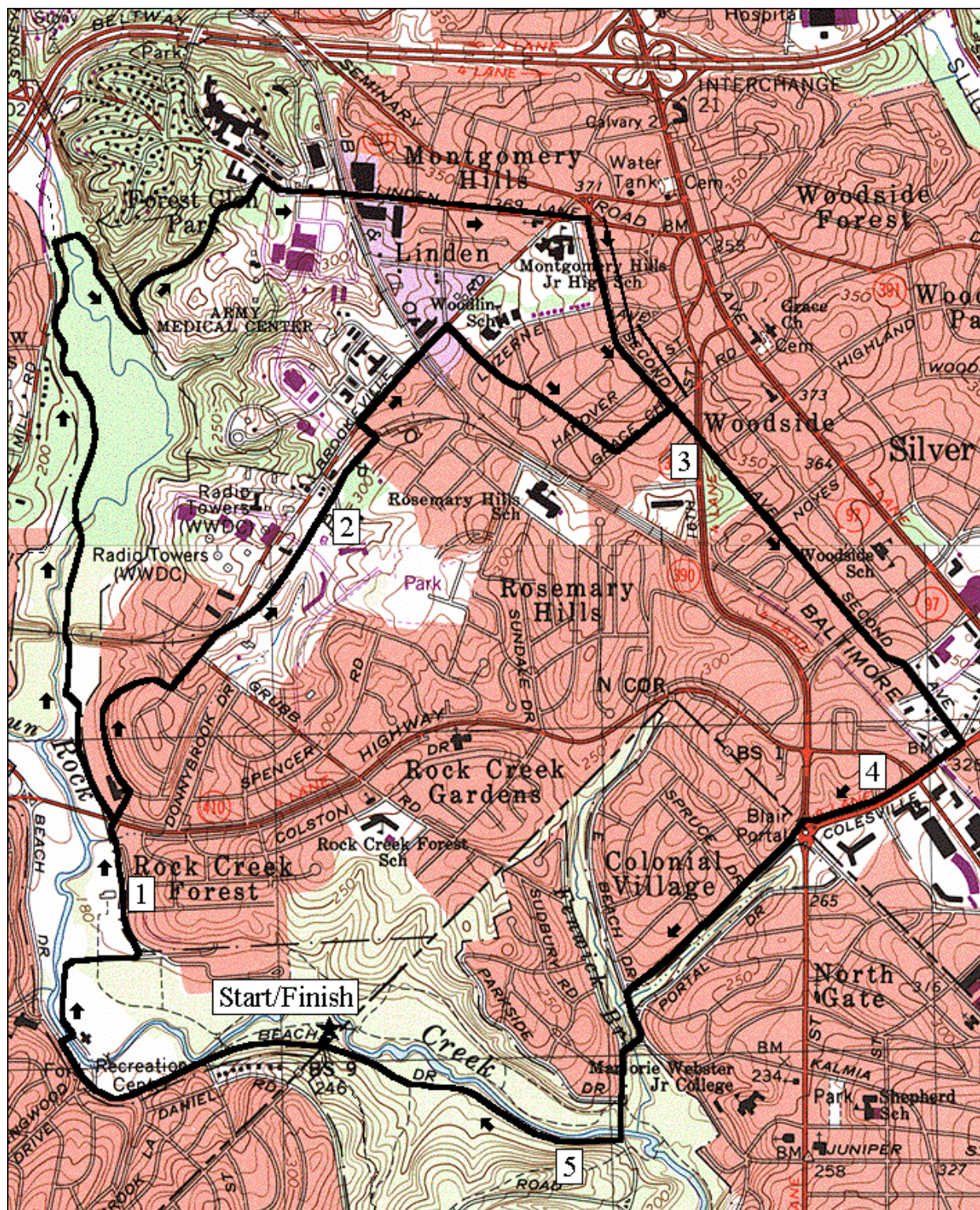
5.55 Mile Route

R	0.0	north; Beach Dr from the parking lot	R	2.15	Brookville Rd
R/L	0.55	at parking lot follow Bike Route sign to footbridge over Rock Creek; Meadowbrook La (water, bathroom)	R	2.4	Warren St; use path at road barrier to continue on Warren at 2.45
			L/R	2.6	at Louis Av; onto 3 rd Ave
BL	0.85	to stay on Meadowbrook La	L	2.8	Grace Church Rd at T
<*			>*		
BR	1.15	onto sidewalk to stay on Meadowbrook La after crossing East-West Hwy; leave Rock Creek trail and Meadowbrook Park; follow Georgetown Branch Trail signs	R	2.95	2 nd Ave
				3.0	16 th St
			R	3.8	Colesville Rd, Rte 29 (metro)
				3.9	East-West Hwy
L	1.2	Freyman Dr (uphill)	S	4.15	cross 16 th St to N Portal Dr (!)
L	1.5	Terrace Dr	L	4.6	E Beach Dr
S	1.6	leave road to Georgetown Branch Trail; Grubb Rd is on R	R/L	4.7	Kalmia Dr & W Beach Dr
BR	1.65	merge onto railroad grade	R	4.9	Beach Dr
L	2.15	Stewart Av;	R	5.55	into parking lot to finish

*6.65 Mile Route

BL	1.15	onto paved trail after crossing East-West Hwy (water at 1.25)	CR	3.05	Linden Ln
BR	1.75	connector trail to Georgetown Branch/Crescent Trail on L; after crossing Rock Creek	R	3.65	Second Ave.(pickup cues at mile 2.95 on 5.55 mile route)
R	2.3	paved (initially) trail on R before Jones Mill Rd crosses Rock Creek			
L	2.6	onto Ireland Ln at T (unmarked)			

Silver Spring



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0 1000 FEET 0 500 m 1000 m

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