

Rock Creek Park, Pierce Mill

The Pierce Mill, the starting area for this zone, was the last mill to operate in Rock Creek. It is still standing and dates back to 1811-1820. The busy mill's operations ended in 1897 when the main shaft broke. By then steam powered mills were cheaper to operate. The mill and accompanying carriage house were built with rock quarried north of it, a mile upstream in the Broad Branch. Some of the granite walls are 24 inches thick. In a barn next to the mill, local art can be bought today. Amongst the many owners and millers associated with Pierce Mill, were residents of Kingle Mansion. The mansion which was built in 1823, has ten rooms, is three stories tall, and is on a hill just a short distance south of the mill. In 1890, the National Park Service came into ownership of Kingle Mansion and currently houses Park Headquarters there.

This section covers the Zoo and the Melvin Hazen portions of Rock Creek National Park. All the separate parks listed within are maintained by the National Park Service. The National Zoological Park is a part of the Smithsonian Institution. It is situated on a western hillside of the Rock Creek valley and offers nice views of the city south and east of it. Of course its main attractions are the animal exhibits. Spring days there can be very crowded.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-95)

Take Connecticut Avenue south for 4.6 miles. Turn left on Tilden Street. After 0.5 miles, at the bottom of the steep hill, turn right into a parking area just opposite the Art Barn on the left. Note that much of Beach Dr. northward of Pierce Mill is closed to traffic on weekends.

From the Memorial Bridge (Rte. 50) over the Potomac River

Take the Rock Creek Parkway 3 miles north. Turn right on Beach Dr. After 1.8 miles, turn left onto Tilden Street, and left again into a parking area just opposite the Art Barn on the right.

By Metro Rail

Alternatively, ride metro's red line to Cleveland Park station which can be used as an alternative start to the Melvin Hazen/Zoo loop.

Area Routes

Melvin Hazen/Zoo (3.25 miles, IV)

This route has four distinct parts to it. The first, Melvin Hazen Park, is a stream valley tributary to Rock Creek. It's in a close to natural state and is one of the few major tributary streams to Rock Creek under which there is no sewer pipe buried. The main trail in it climbs steeply from Rock Creek in a stair step fashion past several small cascades. It even goes up and down a little as it makes four easy stream crossings on stones. At Connecticut Avenue, a half mile from Rock Creek and 150 vertical feet higher, the route leaves the trail and is on the sidewalk. The contrast is abrupt. The concrete sidewalk on Connecticut Avenue is almost level, and full of activity. The dirt Melvin Hazen Trail is quiet, shady and few people visit it. When looking back at the trail below it appears as does a view of many mountainside trails. Note that from Connecticut

Avenue, you are only at the mid-point of the Melvin Hazen Trail. One could continue through the woods on the other side for another half mile, then through a connector route, proceed a few city blocks further to the trail head at the top of Glover Archbold Park. From the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail in the Rock Creek valley, to Glover Archbold Park, is a distance of 1.9 miles.

Running on Connecticut Avenue is not hard. The sidewalks are wide, the foot traffic manageable, and the people are friendly. The activity is exhilarating and shows the nicer side of living in the city. Pedestrian traffic gets a little busy near the shops and stores at the Cleveland Park metro station (use this as an alternate start). Keep one eye on the shops as you pass by for an eating spot to come back to later. There are many good ones with a few bakeries too.

The National Zoo offers a chance to slow down and take in the sites on the way back to the Rock Creek valley. You can see some the city skyline from the zoo also. The grounds are open to the public 5/1-9/15 6AM-8PM, 9/16-4/30 6AM-6PM (admission is free). Go early or late to avoid crowds which can be thick on nicer days. I observed the Kangaroo quietly hopping around in the snow one evening at dusk. The Olmstead Walk gently winds its way down the hillside past major exhibits and is the main way through the Zoo. Water fountains and restrooms can be found along side it.

Back inside Rock Creek Park, take the hiker-biker trail upstream to just past the underpass for Porter St. Though Porter Street is not marked from the trail, it's easily identified by a trestle bridge. The trail uses the trestle bridge to go over Rock Creek, just before the underpass of Porter St. Cross the parkway exit ramp to Porter St. to get onto a carriage road which climbs gently to the front of Kingle Mansion. Take the driveway to an unpaved trail head that leads back to Pierce Mill.

Dumbarton Oaks (6.75 miles, VI)

To get to Dumbarton Oaks from Pierce Mill, take the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail south and down stream. On it follow the creek bends around Kingle Mansion, the National Zoo, and the many magnificent arched bridges that span the valley. The bridges show workmanship in stone and concrete not found in many more modern structures. Some of them like Taft Bridge which carries Connecticut Avenue, gracefully tower a hundred feet overhead. At Connecticut Avenue, Beach Drive ends and the major transportation route through the Rock Creek Park is the Rock Creek Parkway. Shortly after crossing the ramp from it to Woodley Park, the trail dips down to Shoreham Hill Bridge to cross the Rock Creek. Instead of following the trail over the bridge and creek, take the dirt footpath that stays on the west (right) side of the creek. This is the Parkway Trail. The trail is wide and gently down sloped until the end of it. Pass the Normanstone Trail on your right which is your return route. Some of the trees there are 130 years old and little distinguishable from virgin forest. A little further, just before the underpass for Massachusetts Avenue, a quarry is visible on the right. There dark Norite stone, a type of basalt was once sea bottom. The Norite underlies much of Georgetown. The quarry provided for the structures built within the gardens at Dumbarton Oaks. The Parkway Trail leaves Rock Creek and rises abruptly before ending at Dumbarton Oaks and Lover's Lane.

Dumbarton Oaks is a marvelous little park tucked away in the midst of Georgetown. The formal gardens and mansion can be visited for a fee. However, Dumbarton Oaks Park and the Dumbarton Oaks Trail which passes through it are free, and much charmed. The Dumbarton Oaks Trail changes dramatically from one end the other. Tree covered at first, it resembles some of the formal gardens you must pay to see. After passing by some waterworks and crossing the stone bridge, it opens in to a small bowl shaped field with some wild flowers. Continuing further uphill the trail is more loosely defined. Bear to the left across the field and away from the gravel path trailing to the right. A dirt path passes through wild shrubbery and a swampy section then climbs a dirt switchback on the left side of the bowl.

The top of the switchback is the end of the Dumbarton Oaks Trail and also the beginning/end of Whitehaven Street. Turn right and take the Normanstone Trail (see the sign) uphill a little further. The trail skirts a chain-link fence which is on the circular boundary line of the U.S. Naval Observatory. Many of the nations's clocks are keep in synch by the atomic clock run inside the observatory. This dirt portion of the trail ends near an entrance gate to the observatory, and continues on the sidewalks of a road (Observatory Circle is unmarked). Going downhill now, pass the British and New Zealand Embassies to where Observatory Circle intersects Massachusetts Avenue. The avenue itself bends at the intersection to maintain the circle shape of the property line. Cross Massachusetts Avenue at the traffic light and continue on the dirt trail directly opposite. The trail is blue blazed and steeply drops back into the Rock Creek valley. It again is along roads for a way but blue blazes are visible on telephone poles to keep you oriented. Keep heading downhill, bear left when possible until another sign and dirt trail head is visible. The Normanstone Trail ends at a T intersection with the Parkway Trail. Turn left and head back up to Pierce Mill the way you came.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Rock Creek Park,
District of Columbia/Maryland Border
Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Military Road

Rock Creek Park,
Thompson Boat Center
Battery Kemble Park

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Firehook Bakery; Cleveland Park - sandwiches, breads, soup, outdoor patio (202) 362-2253

Byblos Deli Cleveland Park - Mediterranean Cuisine (202) 364-6549

Uno - Cleveland Park - pizzeria - 202 966-3225

Perry's - Adams Morgan - sushi - (202) 234-6218

Entertainment and Edification

Pierce Mill - 202 426-6908

Uptown Theatre - largest commercial movie screen in Washington D.C. - 202 333-3456#791

National Zoological Park - 202 673-4800

Kingle Mansion - on the trail - see Melvin Hazen/Zoo

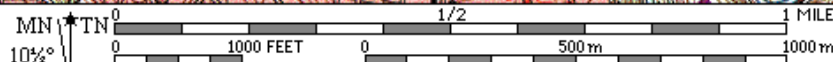
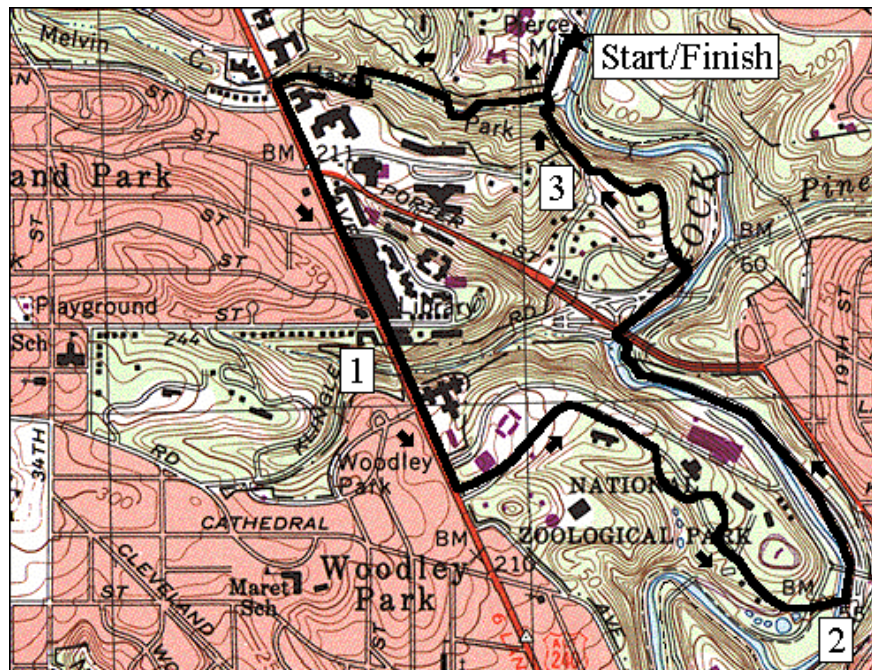
Washington National Cathedral - tours - 202 537-6207

Melvin Hazen/Zoo

Distance: 3.25 miles

Rating: IV; unpaved blazed trails, sidewalks, hiker-biker trails

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>0.0 from the parking lot, head south past the restrooms on the grass</p> <p>R 0.1 Melvin Hazen Trail (yellow blazes); before wooden bridge; up steep hill</p> <p>L 0.55 Connecticut Ave on sidewalk
0.75 Cleveland Park metro station</p> <p>L 1.2 Pedestrian Entrance to the National Zoo; Olmstead Walk open (5/1-9/15 6AM-8PM); (9/16-4/30 6AM-6PM); closed 12/25</p> <p>S 1.95 at parking & over the bridge for Rock Creek</p> <p>L 2.0 Rock Creek hiker-biker trail</p> | <p>L 2.65 at paved trail X on L; after the trestle bridge & underpass for Porter St; cross the exit ramp coming from the Rock Creek Parkway</p> <p>BR 2.7 onto gravel carriage road; uphill (Do Not Enter sign at the gate is for cars)</p> <p>R 2.95 paved driveway for Kingle Mansion</p> <p>R 3.05 unpaved trail head on right at bend in driveway (not blazed)</p> <p>BR 3.1 trail splits</p> <p>R/L 3.15 R down steep hill; L toward wood bridge; Western Ridge Trail</p> <p>3.2 Melvin Hazen Trail</p> <p>3.25 parking and restrooms</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|



Printed from TOPO! ©1999 Wildflower Productions (www.topo.com)

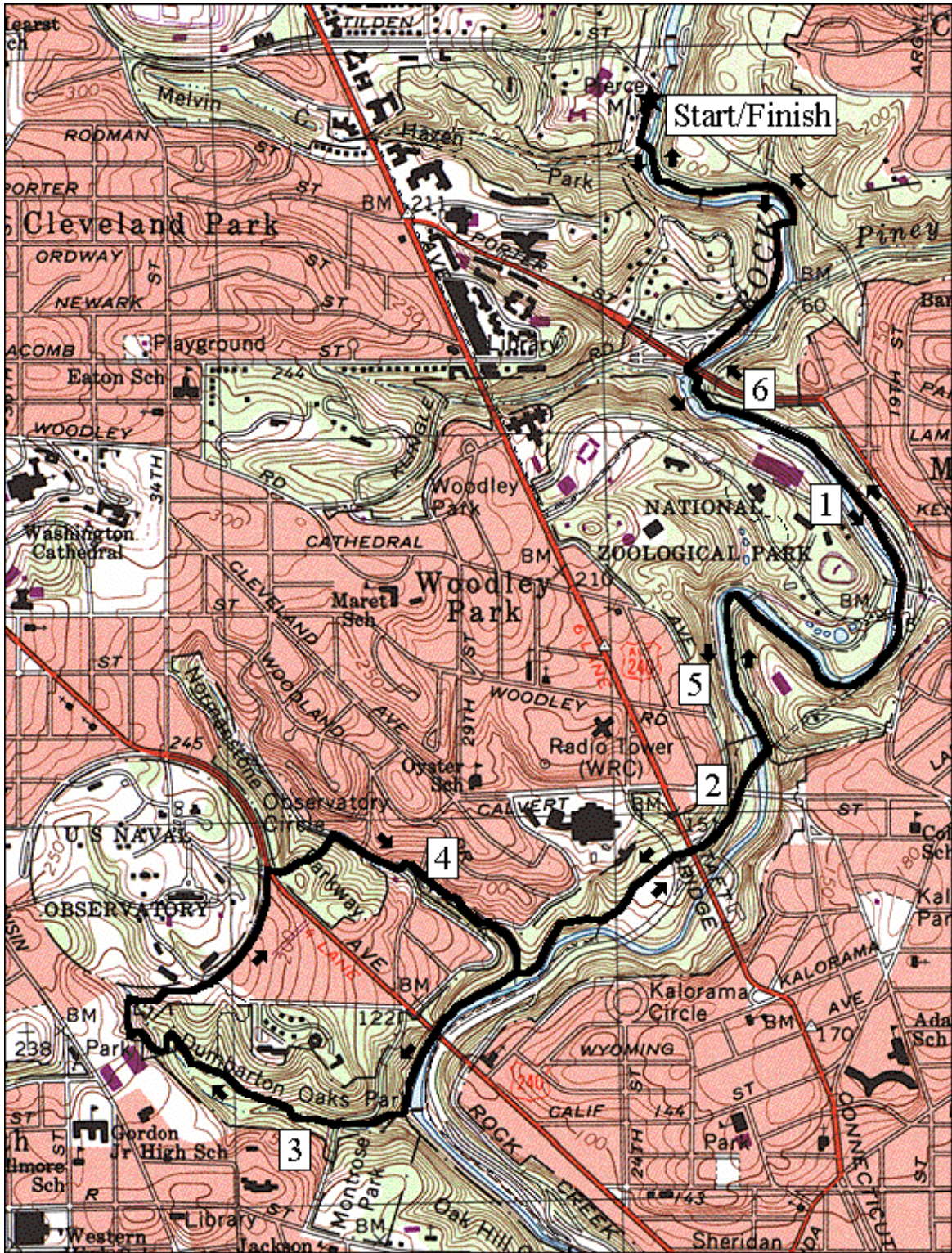
Dumbarton Oaks

Distance: 6.75 miles

Rating: VI; paved and unpaved trails, some sidewalks

- | | | | |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| R 0.0 | head downstream, south, from the water fountain on the paved Rock Creek hiker-biker trail | R 3.35 | Normanstone Trail at Whitehaven St; follow trail along fence (blue blazes) |
| 0.05 | Hazen Bridge over Rock Creek | BR 3.55 | onto sidewalk for Observatory Circle; Observatory gate on L |
| 0.4 | Bluff Bridge over Rock Creek and Western Ridge Trail on R | S 3.75 | cross Mass Ave; pick-up the marked trail head going down into the woods |
| 0.65 | underpass for Porter St and Kingle Ford Bridge (trestle) over Rock Cr | BR 3.9 | Normanstone Dr (follow blue blazes) |
| 1.25 | Zoo entrance on R | L 3.95 | onto Edgevale Terr at 30 th St X |
| 1.45 | through gate into Zoo grounds to avoid tunnel; gate is open (5/1-9/15 6AM-8PM); (9/16-4/30 6AM-6PM); closed 12/25 | L 4.15 | Rock Creek Dr |
| BR 1.9 | exit gate for Zoo grounds | R 4.15 | Normanstone Trail into woods at signed trail head |
| 2.0 | underpass for Calvert St (large arch) | L 4.25 | Parkway Trail at T |
| 2.15 | Connecticut Ave ramp X | BL 4.4 | Rock Creek hiker-biker trail (paved) |
| R 2.35 | Parkway Trail; just before Shoreham Hill bridge for the Rock Creek Trail | 4.6 | Connecticut Ave ramp X |
| 2.5 | Normanstone Trail on R (return route) | BL 4.85 | avoid tunnel; Zoo grounds gate |
| 2.65 | Mass Ave underpass (large arch) | 5.35 | exit Zoo grounds |
| L/R 2.95 | at Lover's Lane (unmarked); into Dumbarton Oaks Park | 5.5 | Zoo entrance on L |
| R/L 3.0 | over the stone bridge; follow gravel road up until the open field, cross the field to a dirt trail on the L side; climb to the switchback and road | 6.1 | Kingle Ford Bridge (trestle)over Rock Cr and underpass for Porter St |
| | | 6.4 | Bluff Bridge over Rock Creek and Western Ridge Trail on L |
| | | 6.7 | Hazen Bridge over Rock Creek |
| | | 6.75 | water fountain near Pierce Mill parking |

Dumbarton Oaks



MN TN
10 1/2°



Printed from TOPO! ©1999 Wildflower Productions (www.topo.com)