

Damascus Recreational Park

Amongst some of the higher land in Montgomery County is a park supported by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC). The park is little used. It has picnic areas, baseball, softball and soccer fields. In the valley to the north is the Magruder Branch, a tributary to Great Seneca Creek. The hilly Magruder Branch Trail follows the creek for most of the way. It too is little used. While traveling up and back on a recent Fourth of July weekend, albeit a hot one, you could almost count the people, pets and deer seen just by using your fingers.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take I-270 headed west. About 14 miles from the beltway, take Exit 16, Ridge Rd. headed east. After 1 mile, cross Federick Rd (Rte. 355), and continue following Ridge Rd. which is also Rte. 27 at this point. After 3.75 miles more, turn right onto Kings Valley Rd. Damascus Recreational Park has 3 entrances. Pass the tall futuristic sculpture, and take the third left turn into the park (for baseball fields 1&2). The trail head is at the end of the lot on the left end.

Area Routes

Magruder Branch Trail (6.9 miles, VIII)

This hilly route is interesting. Starting at close to 700 feet in elevation, the first three-quarters of a mile rolls and climbs up to a ridge while being mostly in the open sun. In doing this, the paved Magruder Branch Trail parallels a park road. A few water fountains and restrooms can be found along it. Unfortunately, there are no more water stops on the route until the return. After reaching the ridge, the next half mile of trail enters woodland and drops over 130 feet to the Magruder Branch. The valley formed by the creek is narrow and very shaded—unusual for being over 560 feet in elevation in the county. The trail goes upstream along the creek, crossing it many times and even being over it on longish wooden bridges where it has become woodland marsh. Note that the bridges can be slippery when wet—especially for bicycles). Gradually, the trail climbs 130 feet over the next 1.75 miles. A steep switchback climb up to Valley Park Drive adds more height. After Valley Park Drive, the trail passes a small pond and soon ends in a residential street at over 760 feet; 3.5 miles from the trail head at the other end. Damascus High School is further up the hill and can be reached by a dirt trail through the trees. Follow the residential street back to Valley Park Drive and the Magruder Branch Trail, then return as you came out.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Little Bennett Regional Park
Seneca State Park, Lake Clopper

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Ledo Pizza - 301 482-0700
Little Far East II - 301 253-8600
Juliano's Brick Oven Pizza - 301 921-0199
Weis Colonial Bake Shop - 301 253-9428

Entertainment and Edification

Montgomery County Fairgrounds - 301 963-3247
Little Bennett Regional Park - 301 972-9222

Magruder Branch Trail

Distance: 6.9 miles

Rating: VIII; hilly, mostly wooded paved trails

- L 0.0 trail head from the parking lot (water and restrooms at 0.25 miles)
- 0.55 cross park road near road X (portable toilet)
- 0.8 trail X on R to houses (unmarked)
- 0.8 trail X on L to houses (unmarked)
- 1.25 wooden bridge over Magruder Branch at bottom of hill; trail bears L after crossing going upstream
- R 1.75 Sweepstakes Rd (!)

- L 1.8 Magruder Branch Trail
- 2.4 trail X on L on wooden bridge; to houses
- 2.6 power line/fiber optic cable X
- 3.2 cross Valley Park Drive after steep switchback climb to continue the paved trail

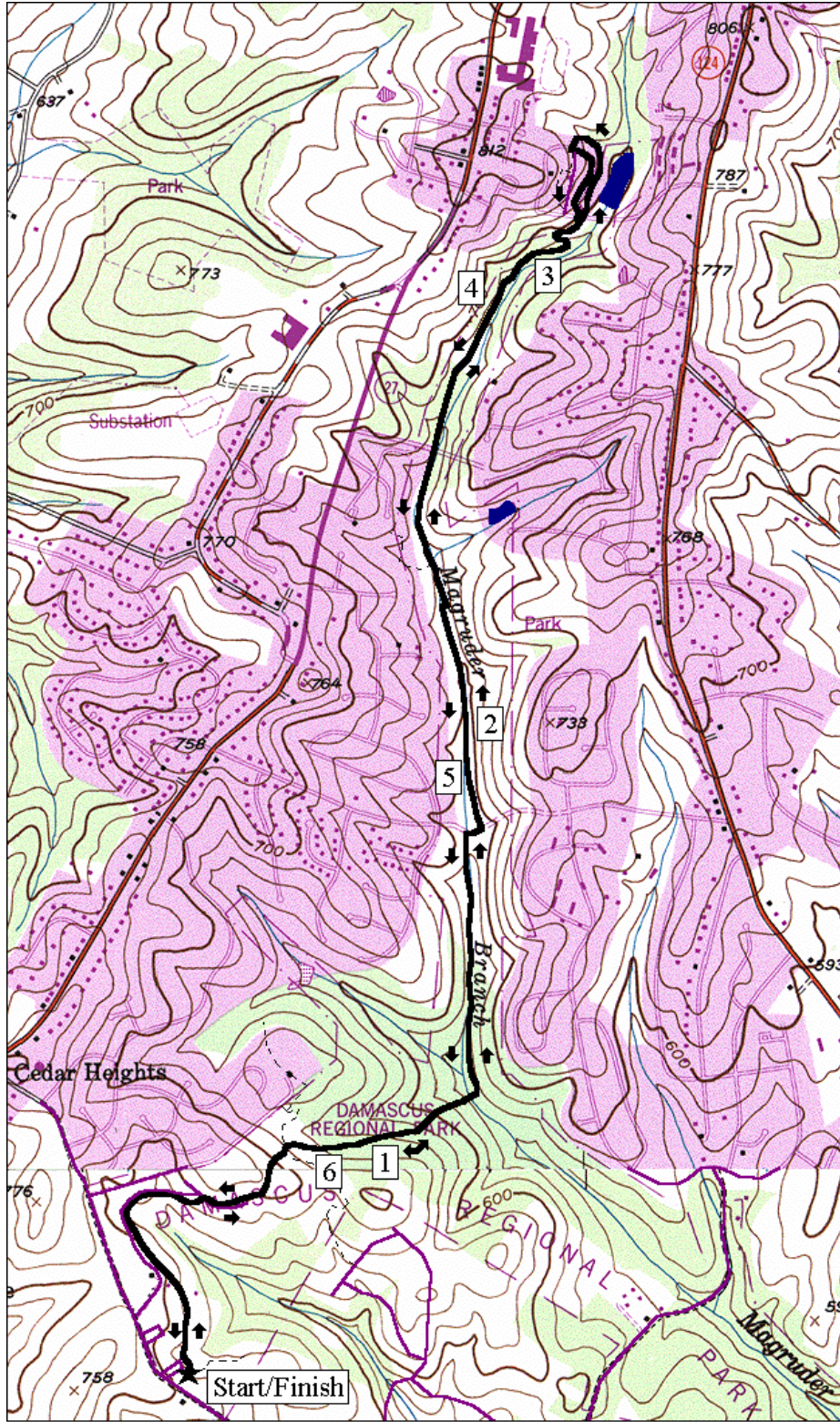
- L 3.5 Shelldrake Rd at trail end

- L/R 3.7 onto Magruder Branch Trail at Valley Park Drive
- 4.3 power line/fiber optic cable X
- 4.5 trail X on R on wooden bridge; to houses

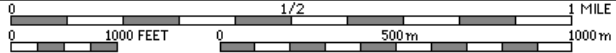
- R 5.1 Sweepstakes Rd (!)

- L 5.15 Magruder Branch Trail
- 5.65 trail bears R on wooden bridge over Magruder Branch; at bottom of hill
- 6.1 trail X on R to houses
- 6.1 trail X on L to houses
- 6.35 cross park road near road X
- 6.9 parking (water and restrooms at 6.65 and 6.85 miles)

Magruder Branch Trail



MN ↑ TN
10½°



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