

Rock Creek Park, MD - Lake Needwood

Lake Needwood, is a reservoir located at the end of the north end of the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail. At the other end, Rock Creek empties into the Potomac River near Thompson Boathouse, on the edge of Georgetown. Were you to follow the trails and Beach Drive to Lake Needwood, you would have to go just over 23 miles to get there. The lake itself is surrounded by parkland with both open and tree covered areas. It's also close to Lake Bernard Frank. Trails loop each lake as well as connect the lakes. The grounds at Lake Needwood are used by the Montgomery County Road Runners Club for their cross country race series. Picnic facilities and boat rentals are available.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take either of the I-70 spurs north. Approximately 4 miles west of the merge, turn right (east) on Rte. 28 (Montgomery Ave), into Rockville. Follow the signs for Rte. 28 through the city. After crossing Viers Mill Rd., approximately 2 miles from I-70, turn left onto Norbeck Rd. to stay on Rte. 28. After 1.3 miles on Norbeck Rd., turn left onto Avery Rd. After 1.9 miles, turn left into Lake Needwood Park. At the T intersection 0.3 miles later turn left. After 0.15 miles, the road becomes one-way and you must turn right. Pass by the lake shore and after 0.3 miles turn right into the parking lot leading toward the open field. The Rock Creek hiker-biker trail head is located at the end of the parking lot.

Area Routes

Lake Needwood Loop (2.5 miles, II)

To get around Lake Needwood, it is necessary to use some roads and several unmarked and unpaved trails. The land surrounding the lake is hilly but most of the hills are avoided by this route. Start at the end of the parking lot at the trail head of the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail. Head toward the lake, then bear left on the gravel road that crosses the field diagonally and goes up the hill. The hill is actually the lake's dam. Follow the road across the dam and beyond as it rolls gently through the woods and crosses two pipeline clearings. Several side trails are visible but the route continues straight. At one point you will follow a bend left and away from the lake to a T-intersection. Turn right at the intersection, then right again on a grassy trail back toward the lake. As you near Needwood Rd., bear right. Turn right again on the park road. Follow the road up a hill and back down past picnic and parking areas until a wooden bridge is visible crossing an arm of the lake. Bear right just past the wooden bridge following the trail along the shore. The visitors center and boat rental house will become visible on a peninsula jutting into the lake. Stay to the left of it. After passing it, remaining close to the shore, finally bearing left as you near the start.

Lake Frank Loop (5.45 or 6.6 miles, VII or VIII)

This hilly route offers an abundance of good views and unpaved trail running. Leaving Lake Needwood on the paved Rock Creek hiker-biker trail, first go downhill for a little over a mile. Just before the bend in the trail at the 13 mile marker, an unpaved and unmarked trail continues straight, to the left of some fenced-in pumping equipment. Bear left, at the point when the suspension bridge is on your right. The trail now climbs quickly, then steeply before reaching the top of Lake Frank's dam. Once there, a paved trail, the Lakeside Trail denoted by "LS" markings, takes you counter-clockwise around the lake. The trail stays fairly level before climbing and ending at an old parking lot. The lot and road at the other end is closed (the road is a good place for doing interval training but views of the lake are limited). At the far end of the road, pass another closed parking lot. The now unpaved Lakeside Trail continues on. It does not climb or rise much initially. Look for a picturesque view as the rocky North Branch, the main source of Lake Frank's waters, bends sharply around rocky shores and empties into the lake. After climbing one hill, then dropping down to cross a small feeder stream on stones, there is an opportunity to cross the 60 foot-wide North Branch, on wet stones. The shorter route uses the crossing. The extended route continues on one-half mile further over double-track to Muncaster Mill Rd. It crosses the creek there and returns using the other bank of the North Branch to rejoin the regular route at the step-stone crossing.

After the stone crossing, continue downstream along the edges of the North Branch. Though you're still on the lake shore, the trail is now called the Sleepy Hollow Trail (marked "SH"). It passes through the splendid rock formations, visible earlier from the other bank as part of the picturesque view. Further ahead, after crossing a wooden bridge to a T intersection, think counter-intuitively and turn right, away from the lake, continuing up a hill. This is still the Sleepy Hollow Trail. Turn left at the next intersection however, onto the Big Pines Trail (marked "BP"). The trail really gets hilly from this point, for most of the way back to Lake Needwood. The next intersection lets you bear left back onto the Lakeside Trail. After several challenging hills and finally nearing the dam again, turn right up a steep paved trail to the secondary Lake Frank parking lot. The primary Lake Frank parking area is accessible from Muncaster Mill Road. Starting from either lot makes a shorter loop around Lake Frank. Just looping Lake Frank using the stony creek crossing and without any spur trails to either parking lot, is approximately 3.16 miles. It's 4.31 miles around if you go to Muncaster Mill Rd.

At the secondary parking lot, continue straight to and across Avery Road. On the other side, a faded blue blaze on a tree signals the location of a little used steep unpaved hiking trail. The hiking trail emerges near a stop sign less than 130ft south of Southlawn La. on the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail. Return on the Rock Creek trail 0.7 miles to the Lake Needwood parking area.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Rock Creek Park, Aspen Hill
Rock Creek Park, Ken-Gar Palisades
Seneca Creek State Park, Lake Clopper

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Samwoo Restaurant - Korean and Japanese Cuisine - 301 424-0495 or 301 294-9266
Olney Ale House - vegetarian and contemporary meals - 301 774-6708
Soup's On - (301) 340-7766

Entertainment and Edification

Needwood Mansion - 301-948-5053
Needwood Lake Boat Shop - 301-762-1888
Meadowside Nature Center - Lake Frank - 301 924-4141

Lake Needwood

Distance: 2.5 miles

Rating: II; unpaved trails, roads with some small hills

R 0.0 from the Rock Creek trail head; toward the lake

L 0.0 gravel road that crosses the field diagonally and goes up to the dam

0.5 pipeline clearing

0.65 second pipeline clearing

BL 0.8 follow the main trail left, away from the lake

R 0.9 at a T; the trail is grassy

R 0.9 trail X on R

BL 1.0 trail from the R merges near the lake

R 1.2 down the steps on the R toward the road

R 1.2 Needwood Rd (unmarked) along the lake

R 1.4 Beach Dr (unmarked) into the park

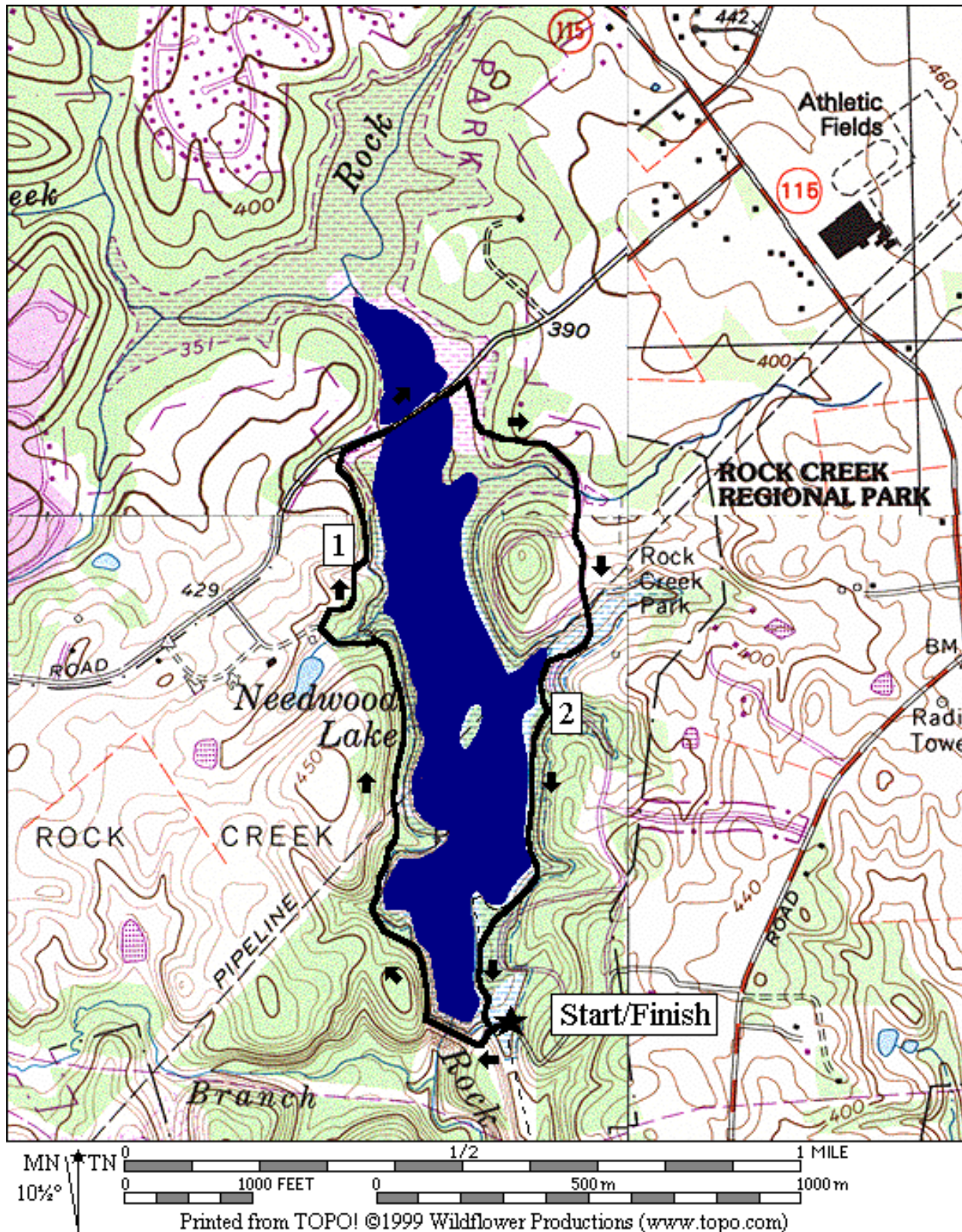
R 1.95 leave the road after passing a wooden bridge on the R; go toward a shoreline trail

BL 2.35 trail X on L before the boat rental building to skip the peninsula; continue along the lake's shore

2.5 complete the loop to where the gravel road leaves the parking lot

2.5 Rock Creek Trail head at the parking lot

Lake Needwood



Lake Frank Loop

Distance: 5.45 or 6.6 miles

Rating: VII or VIII; paved and unpaved trails; some steep hills on the last half of the route

5.45 Mile Route

L	0.0	south from the parking lot on the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail	L	3.0	trail X on L crosses North Branch Rock Creek on stones (! slippery)
	0.65	Southlawn La	>*		
	0.7	trail X on L unpaved (return route)	L	3.0	Sleepy Hollow Trail (SH) after crossing creek
	0.95	Avery Rd			
S	1.15	onto unpaved trail just before mile mark 13, where the trail turns R to cross Rock Creek	R	3.35	at T after crossing a wooden bridge to continue on Sleepy Hollow Trail
L	1.2	trail X on L; suspension bridge on R	L	3.4	Big Pines Trail (BP); R to N Center
BR	1.25	at fork in trail to go up to the dam	BL	3.55	Lakeside Trail (LS)
				3.65	Old Nasty Trail (ON) on R
R	1.35	Lakeside Trail (LS) (paved)	R	4.35	at fork to paved trail
S	1.8	trail ends at old parking lot	BR	4.35	paved trail; further up steep hill
	1.95	sharp bend in road to L	S	4.5	trail ends at parking lot
	2.1	Trailway Rd on R			
BL	2.25	into old parking lot before road ends	S	4.55	trail head across Avery Rd (unmarked)
S	2.35	Lakeside Trail continues (LS)	R	4.75	Rock Cr Trail (paved, unmarked)
	2.9	cross small stream on stones		4.8	Southlawn La
	2.9	Sunfish Trail on R (SF)		5.45	trail ends at Lake Needwood parking
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6.6 Mile Route*

	3.0	trail X on L crosses creek	BL	3.85	to stay on MM at stairs on R
BR	3.2	to stay on trail (follow blazes); L fork is a dead end	S	4.1	MM trail becomes Sleepy Hollow Trail (SH) at stairs on R; R is to Nature Center (0.1 mile)
L	3.5	Muncaster Mill Rd	S	4.15	trail X on L crosses creek; (pickup at mile 3.35 on 5.45 mile route)
L	3.55	Muncaster Mill Trail (MM) (unmarked) after crossing creek			

Lake Frank Loop

