

Sligo Creek/Wheaton/Northwest Branch

Once before the time of air conditioners, Washingtonians escaped the muggy oppressive summertime shores of the Potomac by riding the train to the city of Takoma Park. Takoma Park was established in 1883. Vacationers from the District stayed in cottages, the architecture of which still dominates the home style in the area. Nearby, Sligo Creek flowed in a valley that now contains one of the area's nicest paved hiker/biker trails. The trail draws people to Takoma now because it goes through the middle of urban zones while still giving the feel of green space and while still giving the same chance to cool off. Nearby to Sligo, and running approximately parallel from the northwest to southeast are the Rock Creek, Long Branch and Northwest Branch stream valleys trails. The last two of these are part of the Anacostia Tributary Trail System. The routes described here use the Sligo Creek trail and join-up with the other parks and trails.

Strategically placed, Sligo Creek and its trail span 9.5 miles from West Hyattsville to Wheaton Regional Park. It's a crucial east/west link in the network of paved pedestrian and cycling trails in the Washington area. At its southeast end, beginning at the Northwest Branch trail, the Sligo Creek trail passes along flood dykes and open ball fields. It gently rises through a narrowing shaded valley which is narrowest within the city of Takoma Park. There the creek and trail slice the visible bedrock underneath a canopy of mature trees. Major improvements to the trail and the Sligo Creek Parkway near Takoma Park were made in the 1990's. They including new bridges and erosion control projects, that keep the gradient steady and manageable. The Sligo Creek Parkway parallels the trail and creek. Near Takoma Park, a segment of it between Maple Drive and Piney Branch Rd. is closed to auto traffic during the daytime on Sunday (Mar-Nov 9AM-6PM, Dec-Feb 9AM-4PM). When closed, the parkway is popular with walkers and in-line skaters. Further north as the trail wraps around downtown Silver Spring, the valley widens and brightens again. Ample shade is still provided over the trail however. A relative abundance water fountains and restrooms provide further comforts. Many major roads intersect the trail on the way to Wheaton Regional Park and may require waiting at a stoplight when crossing. The traffic lights are generally spaced enough so as not to become too frequent a nuisance for those running casually.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-95), take New Hampshire Avenue south for 1.2 miles. Turn right on Piney Branch Rd. proceeding 1.4 miles. Turn right on Sligo Creek Pkwy. and start one-tenth of a mile ahead on the left side of the road, from the parking lot near the tennis courts. Many other trail access points line the parkway also.

Area Routes

Adelphi Loop (9.2 miles, VII)

Crossing up and out of the Sligo Creek valley near Takoma Park and dropping down to the Northwest Branch valley, near New Hampshire Avenue, one initially passes through the largely Hispanic sections of Takoma Park upon paved sidewalks. These sidewalks are relatively uninteresting for running and sometimes run-down but they don't last long. The Northwest

Branch Trail, is maintained just for hikers and bikers and is well worth the effort to get there. It parallels its namesake watercourse, is largely unknown and little traveled. That combination makes its beauty all the more a good thing to savor. From the trail, you'll see small rapids pass through rocky banks and steep shaded hillsides. You'll also pass by the Adelphi Mill, now converted to a recreation center. The mill was built in 1796 and was used as a grist mill and for wool carding. The route and trail change again quickly after the mill. It's already less dramatic at the cricket field before hitting the crossing of University Blvd., Rte. 193 (If you want a shorter route and all you wish to explore is the Northwest Branch Trail, start at the cricket field parking (West Park Rd.) and follow the route backwards up and back the Northwest Branch). After Rte. 193, the trail continues through a more popular park and picnic area. It becomes less well maintained for a while afterward, with few signs to assure you how to stay on-trail at a few intersections. Keep in mind that some of the neighborhoods along here are low income and have higher than average crime rates. Take precautions. Watch where you are going and if you can, go with a friend. In Kirkwood Park, an un-herald intersection with another paved trail on the right marks the beginning of the Sligo Creek Trail, the return leg of the trip. After crossing the creek and getting through a thicket, large grassy fields open-up and serve as the local soccer hangout. After crossing Riggs Rd., a more celebrated trail head is marked with a large sign and map. The pavement and neighborhoods improve quickly and the surrounding parks get shady again. Some of the best parts of the trail and route are between New Hampshire Ave. and Piney Branch Rd.

Northwest Branch (14 or 8.6 miles, X or VIII)

This route starts out on the same path as the Adelphi Loop, but when you hit the Northwest Branch Trail, instead of going downstream, go left and upstream. Footing for the much of the route is unpaved, and rough. Runners will be dancing their way over rocks and mud and through twists and turns. Those who look for this kind of excitement along with the scenery will love it.

On the route, the Northwest Branch trail is paved initially. It follows the V-shaped valley along the quiet but quickly flowing creek. Few people use the trail here. Perhaps it's the obstacles of crossing two feeder streams without bridges or the apparent dead-end after them where the pavement ends, that keeps people away. The crossings are easy to get past. The water, when flowing, goes over flat concrete so that if you are on foot, you probably won't get wet over the sole of your shoe, unless it's been raining. The "dead-end" is actually a fork. Going uphill a quarter-mile and +100ft vertically, the right hand unpaved trail ends at Oakview Dr. The left hand trail however, is the beginning of what can be a six-mile unpaved adventure that continues along side the Northwest Branch. No bicycling is allowed on the unpaved portions of the Northwest Branch trail. At first, the footing is rocky and a few large fallen logs are likely to require climbing over. Rocks can be hidden under fallen leaves too. After passing under the Capitol Beltway, I-495 which is high in the air above, the trail improves significantly. Just before reaching Colesville Rd., Rte 29, your progress will slow again. Large boulders in the way require hiking over. Fortunately, they'll slow you down enough to help you notice the small waterfalls and rapids in the creek. Once on the other side of Rte. 29, you can see water pouring over a dam. The trail remains unpaved. Consider the trail as un-marked but occasionally you might see a few blue blazes. Eight-milers, will turn off quickly, climbing up out of the valley on residential street sidewalks, then descending into the Sligo Creek valley for the return.

Fourteen milers will follow along the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) pipelines which are mostly buried under the trail. A few dips in the trail at feeder streams reveal unattractive aqueducts. However, the four miles of secluded uninterrupted woods and trail are havens to wildlife. Herds of deer, owls, Great Blue Herons and Kingfishers can be seen. A few rock formations make for peaceful settings along the trail and stream which are calendar perfect in the fall. Mountain Laurel blooms abundantly in May. When reaching Wheaton Regional Park, the dirt and often muddy trail becomes cinder. Many turnoffs abound but if you first head toward the nature center, Pine Lake, and then the Athletic Complex, you'll get where you need to. The Brookside Nature Center offers information as well as water and restrooms. It is open 9AM-5PM Tuesday-Saturday, 1PM-5PM Sunday all year except for some holidays. The climbing gets steeper once in Wheaton Regional Park. Topping-off as you leave the park, you'll have climbed almost 300ft. since first getting to the Northwest Branch Trail. Following the paved Sligo Creek Trail back down, pass pleasant areas with both shade and open fields. Water and restrooms are also available.

Trail of Two Cities (8.15 miles, VII)

This loop traverses between the linear Sligo and Rock Creek parks in two places. In-between the parks it passes through downtown Takoma Park on one end and downtown Silver Spring on the other. You'll see both the town's municipal clocks. Pedestrian traffic in the hearts of the downtown areas will slow you as will several road intersections. Once through these however you'll see the better sides of city life as you pass through some of the more well kept and quieter urban areas. Springtime azaleas and other flowering shrubbery are great accents on-route. The trip through Rock Creek National Park is on park roads. Part of the roads are closed to cars 7AM Saturday-7PM Sunday and holidays.

Long Branch/Sligo (6.4, 4.2 or 3.4 miles, VI, IV, III)

The relatively little known Long Branch Trail provides a good opportunity for making shorter trips in the area (don't confused this with a trail by the same name that's part of the Accotink Trail system in Virginia). The upper portion of the largest loop described, rambles through streets, fields, dirt and paved trails. Though there are many turns, the way is easy to follow because it stays parallel and close to the stream valley of the Long Branch. The community center off of Piney Branch Rd. is approximately at the half-way dividing line between upper and lower portions of the longest loop. Piney Branch Rd. provides options from there for the shortest loops. The lower portion of the largest loop is more defined by the paved Long Branch Trail. Residential streets finally connect the route to the return uphill leg along the Sligo Creek Trail.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia/Maryland Border
Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Military Road
Rock Creek Park, MD - Ken-Gar Palisades
College Park/Riverdale
Martin Luther King Jr. Recreational Park

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Mark's Kitchen - American, Korean and vegetarian meals; 301 270-1844; 7006 Carroll Ave;
Takoma Park

Savory - coffee, deserts, meals; 301 270-2233; 7071 Carroll Ave, Takoma Park

Takoma Park Farmer's Market (Sundays 10AM-2PM, April-December); 7000 Carroll Ave,
downtown Takoma Park

Taliano's - pizza, subs & music - 301 270-5515

Entertainment and Edification

Long Branch Community Center - gym, weight room - 301 431-5702

Brookside Gardens - well manicured landscaping & greenhouse - 301 949-8230

Brookside Nature Center - Wheaton Regional Park - 301 946-9071

Wheaton Regional Park Indoor Ice Rink - 301 946-7033

Adelphi Mill - off the Northwest Branch Trail

Chuck and Dave's Bookstore - books, toys - 301 891-2665

National Capital Trolley Museum - 301 384-6088

Site of The Silver Spring; Newell St. and East-West Hwy

American Film Institute - planned for the future in downtown Silver Spring

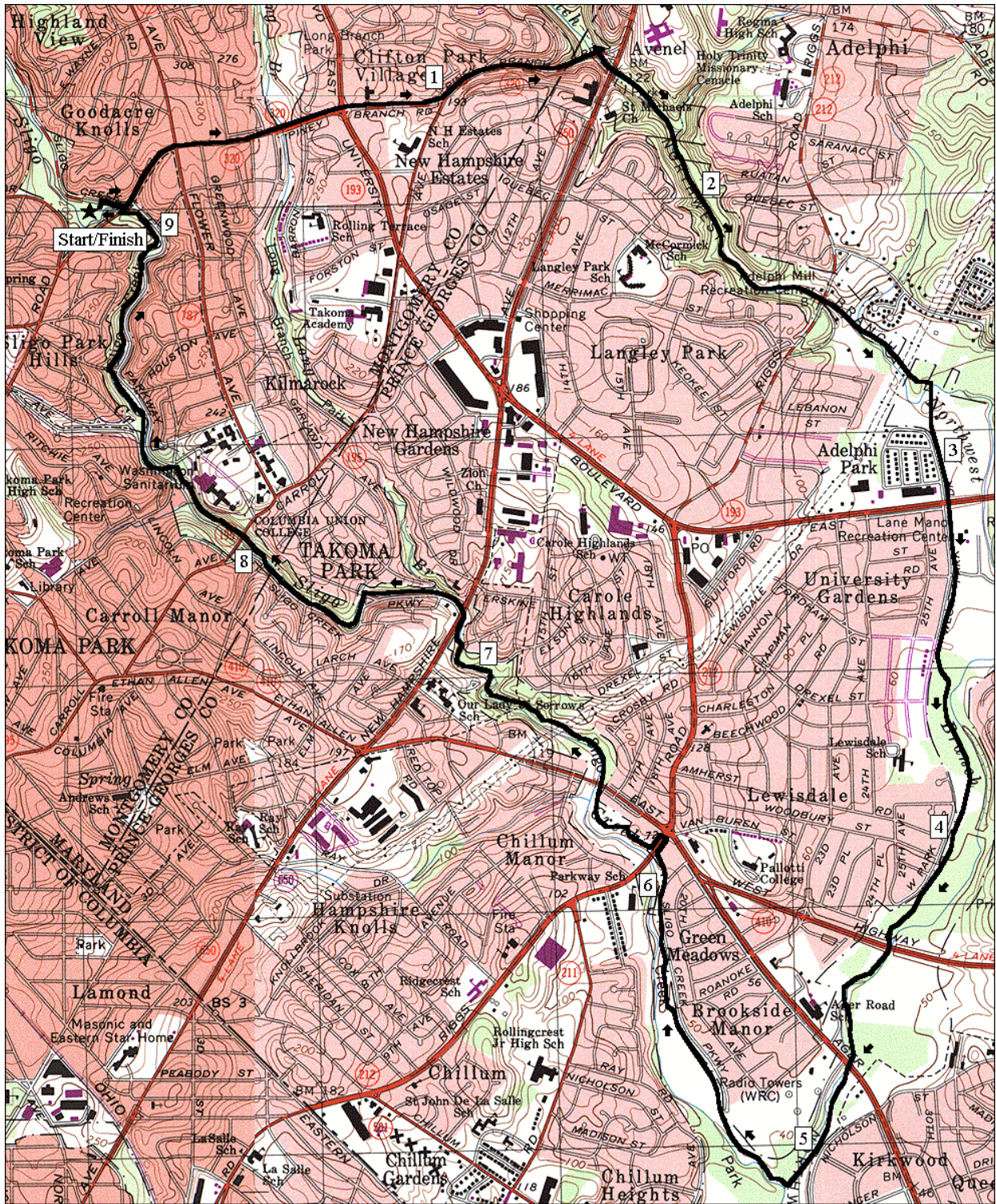
Adelphi Loop

Distance: 9.2 miles

Rating: VII; paved paths through stream valleys & sidewalks

- | | | | |
|---------|---|----------|--|
| R 0.0 | Sligo Creek Trail, from parking lot | R 5.1 | Sligo Creek Trail head (unmarked; wooden bridge over Northwest Branch) |
| L 0.1 | Piney Branch Rd; on sidewalk | 5.7 | Green Meadow Community Center (water when open) |
| 0.75 | University Blvd, Rte 193 | | |
| L 1.5 | on the ramp to the Northwest Branch Trail, just before New Hampshire Dr; left again onto the trail crossing under Piney Branch Rd | BL 6.0 | Sligo Pkwy (onto shoulder) |
| 1.6 | New Hampshire Ave underpass | R/L 6.2 | Riggs Rd (trail is straight ahead but no crosswalk; cross at Riggs Rd/East-West Hwy TL; water) |
| 1.8 | drainage crossing | | |
| 2.0 | Denis Wolf Rest Stop (bench) | R 6.3 | Sligo Creek Trail head at Riggs Rd |
| 2.4 | Riggs Rd underpass & Adelphi Mill | 6.45 | East-West Hwy |
| 2.55 | drainage crossing | | |
| 2.95 | Cricket field, (alternate parking/start) | R/L 7.2 | cross New Hampshire Ave after wooden bridge to stay on trail |
| 3.15 | University Blvd, Rte 193 | L 7.5 | Garland Ave; after wooden bridge to stay on trail |
| 3.2 | Lane Manor Park; X trails, stay parallel to West Park Dr (water/toilet/pool) | 7.95 | Carroll Ave bridge underpass |
| 3.35 | Lane Manor Park road (unmarked) | 8.2 | Maple Ave |
| 3.65 | drainage crossing | 8.4 | narrow wooden bridge (!) |
| 3.75 | drainage crossing | | |
| 4.4 | East-West Hwy underpass | | |
| BL 4.55 | at wooden bridge & parking lot to stay on NW Branch Trail (unmarked) | L/R 8.55 | Park Valley Rd stone bridge |
| | | R/L 9.1 | Piney Branch Rd |
| BR 4.6 | trail X at football/soccer field to stay on NW Branch Trail | L 9.2 | into tennis court parking lot |
| 4.75 | Ager Rd underpass | | |
| 5.0 | pass near X on L of Nicholson St & The Mall; see large water tanks straight ahead | | |

Adelphi Loop



Northwest Branch

Distance: 14 or 8.6 miles

Rating: X or VIII; sidewalks, paved and unpaved trails through stream valleys

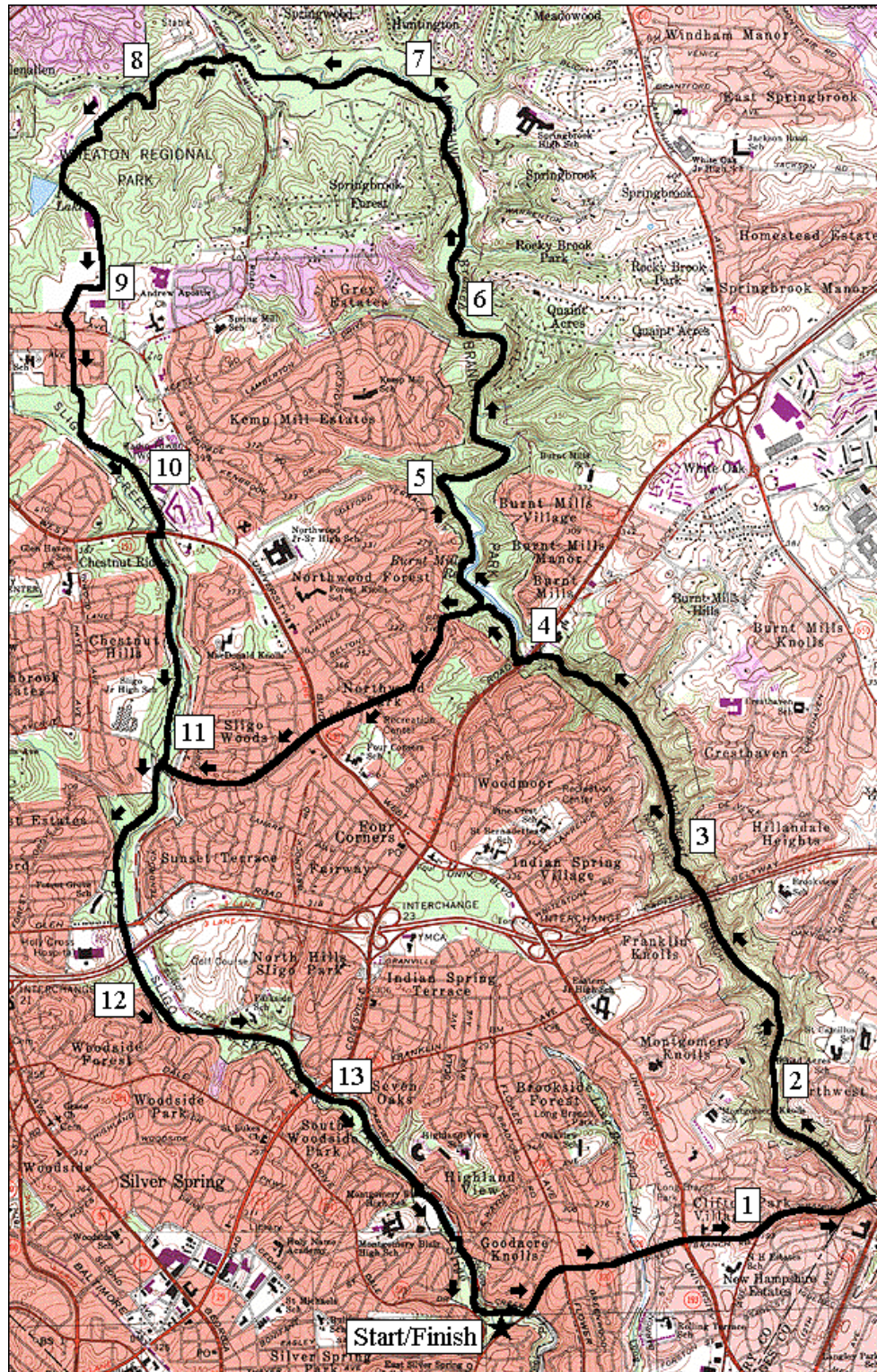
14 Mile Route

			7.9	go uphill; pass sign and dirt trail pointing to nature center
R	0.0	Sligo Creek Trail, from tennis parking lot		
			R	8.05 sign: 1/8 mile to nature center
L	0.1	Piney Branch Rd; on sidewalk		
	0.75	University Blvd, Rte 193	R	8.1 Tom's trail; toward nature center)
L/R	1.5	ramp past bridge to Northwest Branch Trail, just before New Hampshire Dr	BL	8.2 through nature center parking (water & restrooms); trail to Pine Lake at end of parking
	2.25	water drainage (!)		
S	2.6	begin dirt trail (rocky next 0.3 mile)	R	8.4 sign: Pine Lake 1/4 mile
	2.9	Capitol Beltway underpass		
	3.85	boulders/rock scamper/waterfalls ahead	L	8.65 at Pine Lake; trail toward athletic complex sign shows 1/4 mile
BL	4.0	parking lot		
CL	4.1	Colesville Rd, Rte 29 (!)	S	8.75 through ice rink parking; continue on road bear R past the tennis courts
R	4.15	trailhead and gully, after bridge over creek	S	9.35 becomes Orbaugh Ave at Arcola Ave (!)
	4.25	dam on R		
<*			L	9.55 Sligo Creek trail (food/water on L at 9.95)
BR	4.45	trail X before wood bridge & aqueduct on R	CR	10.2 University Blvd at Sligo Pkwy
BR	4.65	trail X, wood bridge & aqueduct on R		
BR	4.85	trail X, wood bridge & aqueduct on R	L	10.3 Sligo Creek trail (11.1, water on L)
			>*	
R	5.0	after double blue blaze, down, cross gully		11.15 Dennis Ave (unmarked)
BR	5.05	trail X		11.8 Forest Glen Rd (unmarked)
				11.9 Capital Beltway underpass
L/R	5.95	open area, X gully, mud & rock cliff ahead	L/R	12.45 at wooden bridge to stay on trail
	6.2	small gully		12.85 Colesville Rd, Rte 29
	6.6	begin gravel & cinder trail surface		13.1 water to R near tennis ct
	6.95	overhanging rock	R/L	13.5 at wooden bridge to stay on trail
S	7.65	at Kemp Mill Rd X (Wheaton Reg Park)	L/R	13.65 Wayne Rd (cross at TL)
R	7.75	horse trail loop (signs toward nature center)	R	14.05 tennis court parking

* 8.6 Mile Route

		BR	4.9	Dennis Ave
BL	4.45		5.35	University Blvd
			5.9	Sligo Pkwy
S	4.6			
		L	5.95	Sligo Creek trail unmarked (pickup cues at mile 11.15 on 14 mile route)

Northwest Branch



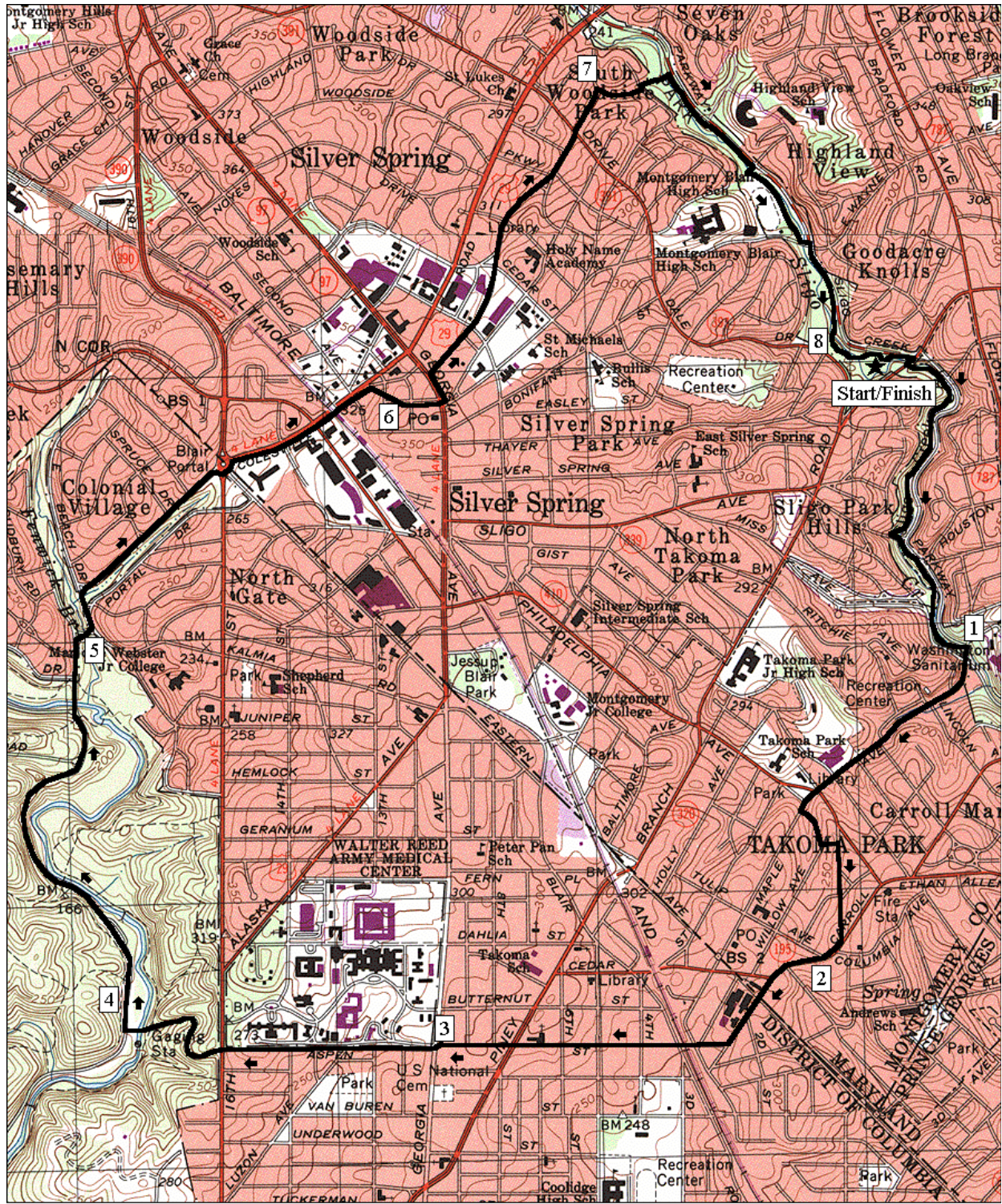
Trail of Two Cities

Distance: 8.15 miles

Rating: VII; paved trails through stream valleys, urban sidewalks, paved roads

R	0.0	Sligo Creek Trail, from parking lot	R/L	5.0	Kalmia Dr & E Beach
				5.05	S Portal Dr
CR/L	0.1	Piney Branch Rd; to stay on trail; cross Sligo Cr 4 more times ahead	CR	5.1	N Portal Dr
L/R	0.65	at Park Valley Rd to X Sligo Cr	XS	5.2	N Portal
	0.8	narrow wooden bridge (!)		5.5	16 th St; N Portal becomes Colesville Rd, Rte 29 (!)
CR	1.0	Maple Ave		5.8	Rte 410 East-West Hwy & metro
	1.5	Philadelphia Ave, Rte 410	CR	5.9	Wayne Dr
L	1.55	Valley View Ave (! one-way opposite direction, use sidewalk)	CL	6.15	Georgia Ave
R	1.7	Park Ave	CR	6.25	Ellsworth Dr (follow bike route signs)
R	1.95	Caroll Ave		6.35	Fenton Dr (one way opposite direction road ahead-use walkway)
S	2.1	becomes Laurel Rd at S Caroll Ave (Takoma Park metro visible to R)		6.95	Dale Dr
			R	7.0	Bennington Dr
R	2.3	Aspen St	L/R	7.15	Bennington Ln & down toward Sligo Creek
	2.4	metro and RR underpass			
	2.85	Piney Branch Rd	BL/R	7.2	trail X; to wooden bridge (! stairs at end of bridge-water near tennis courts); R at T on Sligo Creek Trail
	3.0	Georgia Ave			
S	3.5	Sherrill Rd into Rock Creek Park at 16 th St gate; road closure Sat 7AM- 7PM, Sun & holidays	R/L	7.35	bridge; to stay on trail & X creek
R	3.85	Beach Dr (gate for weekend closure)	L/R	7.75	at Wayne Ave to stay on trail
	4.1	gate for weekend closure		7.95	wooden bridge over creek
	4.3	trail X (footbridge to R)		8.1	wooden bridge over creek
BR	4.65	to stay on Beach Dr at Wise Rd (! gate for weekend closure)	R	8.15	into parking lot to finish
R	4.85	W Beach Dr			

Trail of Two Cities



Long Branch Loops

Distance: 6.4, 4.2 or 3.4 miles

Rating: VI, IV or III; paved trails through stream valleys, urban sidewalks, paved roads

6.4 Mile Route

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L 0.0 Sligo Creek Trail, from parking lot

L/R 0.4 at Wayne Ave to stay on trail

R/L 0.55 at wooden bridge to stay on trail
0.95 water at tennis court on L

R 1.0 cross Sligo Pkwy to Worth Ave

L/R 1.1 Hamilton Ave; stay on Worth Ave

R 1.15 Franklin Ave

R 1.75 Seminole St. (! one-way opposite direction,
use shoulder)

BR 1.8 Long Branch Pkwy (gravel road; small
grass field)

R/L 2.0 R on wooden bridge; L on
Wilmer St (optional dirt trail to L of bridge
& exit at bridge leading to Garland Ave)

L 2.1 Wendell St

BL 2.2 E Schuyler St; dirt trail heads to L; runs
onto Wayne Ave

L 2.35 Garland Ave

BR 2.5 up the dirt trail into the park; proceed
counter-clockwise around tennis court

L 2.6 Long Branch Trail (paved w/sign showing
1.2 to Carroll Ave)

2.7 Long Branch Community Center (water;
restrooms)

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2.8 Piney Branch Rd (! no crosswalk)

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R/L 2.9 bridge over Long Branch

BL 3.3 onto Haddon Dr (unmarked)

BL 3.35 onto Long Branch Trail (at X with Houston
Ave)

S 3.6 onto Long Branch Pkwy (unmarked)

L 3.7 Carroll Ave on sidewalk

R 3.8 Glenside Dr

R 4.35 New Hampshire Ave

R 4.4 Sligo Creek Trail

L 4.7 Garland Ave; after wooden bridge to stay
on trail

5.15 Carroll Ave bridge underpass

5.4 Maple Ave

5.6 narrow wooden bridge (!)

L/R 5.75 Park Valley Rd stone bridge

R/L 6.3 Piney Branch Rd

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L 6.4 into tennis court parking lot

* 4.2 Mile Route

R 0.0 Sligo Creek Trail, from parking lot

L 0.1 Piney Branch Rd; on sidewalk

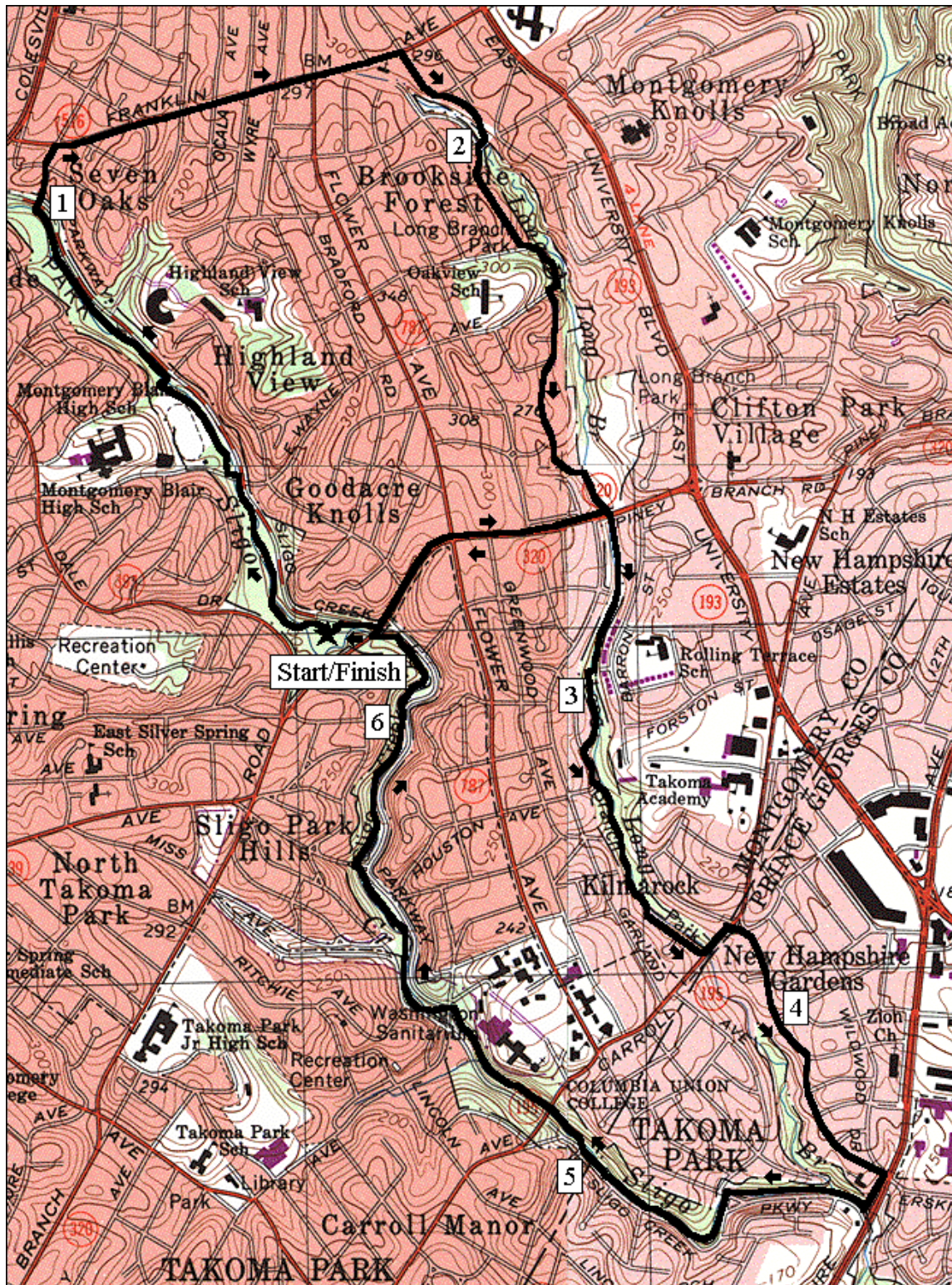
R 0.6 Long Branch Trail; cross Piney Branch Rd
at driveway to community center (! no
crosswalk; pickup cues at mile 2.9 on 6.4
mile route)

** 3.4 Mile Route

R 2.8 Piney Branch Rd (on sidewalk)

R 3.3 Sligo Creek Trail; after Sligo Pkwy (pickup
cues at mile 6.4 on 6.4 mile route)

Long Branch Loops



MN TN
11°

0 1/2 1 MILE
0 1000 FEET 0 500 m 1000 m

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