

Fran Uhler Natural Area/Race Track Spur

There are plenty of county and city parks in within Bowie, Maryland. The Fran Uhler Natural Area is one of the most recently acquired and it keeps growing. The area preserves wetlands along the Patuxent River and is an old destination for bird-watchers and fishers. A nature trail through it wanders beside the river banks and the surrounding feeder streams. Except for the nature trail, bicycles are allowed on the trails in the area. The routes only start in the Fran Uhler Natural Area before going into Uhler Park and Lakes that is located north of Bowie State University. From Uhler Park and Lakes, you can follow the Race Track Spur railroad grade to the Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Trail (WB&A). The WB&A, also on an abandoned railway, is a paved 5.6 mile long trail through Prince Georges County from Lanham to Bowie. It was just completed in November 2000. Anne Arundel County also has begun to extend the WB&A trail from Bowie toward Annapolis where it may one-day connect to the Baltimore and Annapolis Trail however there is no bridge over the Patuxent River yet. The abandoned WB&A Railroad started operation in 1903 and transported passengers between Washington and Baltimore for 32 years. Both Fran Uhler Park and Lakes and Patuxent River Park are used for orienteering meets put on by the Quantico Orienteering Club. Be aware that beavers constantly change the landscape often flooding trails in wet seasons.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take Rte. 450 north. Stay to the right after the first light (it's within a quarter mile of the beltway) and turn right at the next onto Lanham Severn Road (Rte. 564). Just over five miles after getting on Lanham Severn Road, after the bridge over the railroad, follow the right-of-way though a left turn onto 11th Street in old Bowie. About a mile later, turn left at the stop light onto Laurel Bowie Rd. (Rte. 197). Pass the next traffic light, and turn right after the bridge over the railroad onto Lemons Bridge Rd. Follow this nearly one mile to the gate at Fran Uhler Natural Area and park on the left.

Area Routes

Fran Uhler Lakes and Park (3.85 or 3.05 miles, III or II)

This route starts along Lemon's Bridge Rd. and parallels the active railroad. It is somewhat paved at first but not for long. After passing the signed nature trail on the left, the trail makes a U-turn to the right to cross under the tracks at a bridge near the Patuxent River. Don't be tempted to cross the tracks early. The commuter trains pass quietly and quickly along this stretch. As the route leaves the active tracks, it follows the bed of the old Race Track Spur line. The abandoned rail spur, used to transport passengers from far and wide to the now defunct Bowie Race Track. As of 1999, the spur is surfaced with rough gravel and dirt. The route leaves the spur as it passes under high tension power lines, and passes by a moat-like pond and nature demonstration area. The area around the pond appears to be recovering from years when it was used for sand and gravel operations. Many gravel and dirt roads loop and intersect near here. Stick to the route so as not to get lost. The short route option however breaks-off near the pond to go to the commuter rail station and the turn for it is easily identified by being one of the few right turns on route. Skipping that, continue around the pond to reach short paved trails which

take you to the north end of Bowie State University campus. Go around the university on sidewalks, and for a short stretch on the shoulder of Jericho Park Rd. near the main entrance of the university. Avoid traffic on the Laurel Bowie Road by crossing back under the railroad tracks through the Bowie Rail Station. Lemon's Bridge Rd. after that is quiet and down-sloping but watch out so as not to be on the inside at the one blind curve. The few cars that do drive the road tend to come around fast.

Race Track Spur (5.05 miles, IV)

The first mile of this mostly out and back route starts the same as the Fran Uhler Lakes and Park route. It breaks off while under high tension power lines. A winding unpaved trail kept-up by off road recreation vehicles skirts the banks of the Patuxent River. One spot a quarter mile past the power lines is particularly scenic. You might see a Great Blue Heron fishing the swift and healthy looking waters. This trail eventually returns to the railroad grade for the out and back portion of the route to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission plant and the WB&A Trail. The trail on the spur is not yet maintained. Running shoes and bicycle tires tend to sink in the loose gravel making it tough to run or ride through. Most of the old railroad ties have been removed but some remain.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Trail, Glenn Dale
Foxhill Park, Bowie, Maryland
Patuxent Research Refuge North Tract
Beltsville Agricultural Research Center

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Outback Steakhouse (301) 464-5800
La Hacienda (301) 262-8800

Entertainment and Edification

Marietta Mansion - plantation home of Supreme Court Associate Justice Gabriel Duval,
1752-1844 - (301) 464-5291; TDD 277-8456
Railroad Museum - 301 809-3089

Fran Uhler Lakes and Park

Distance: 3.85 or 3.05 miles

Rating: III or II; gravel and dirt roads, some sidewalks & paved road, mostly flat

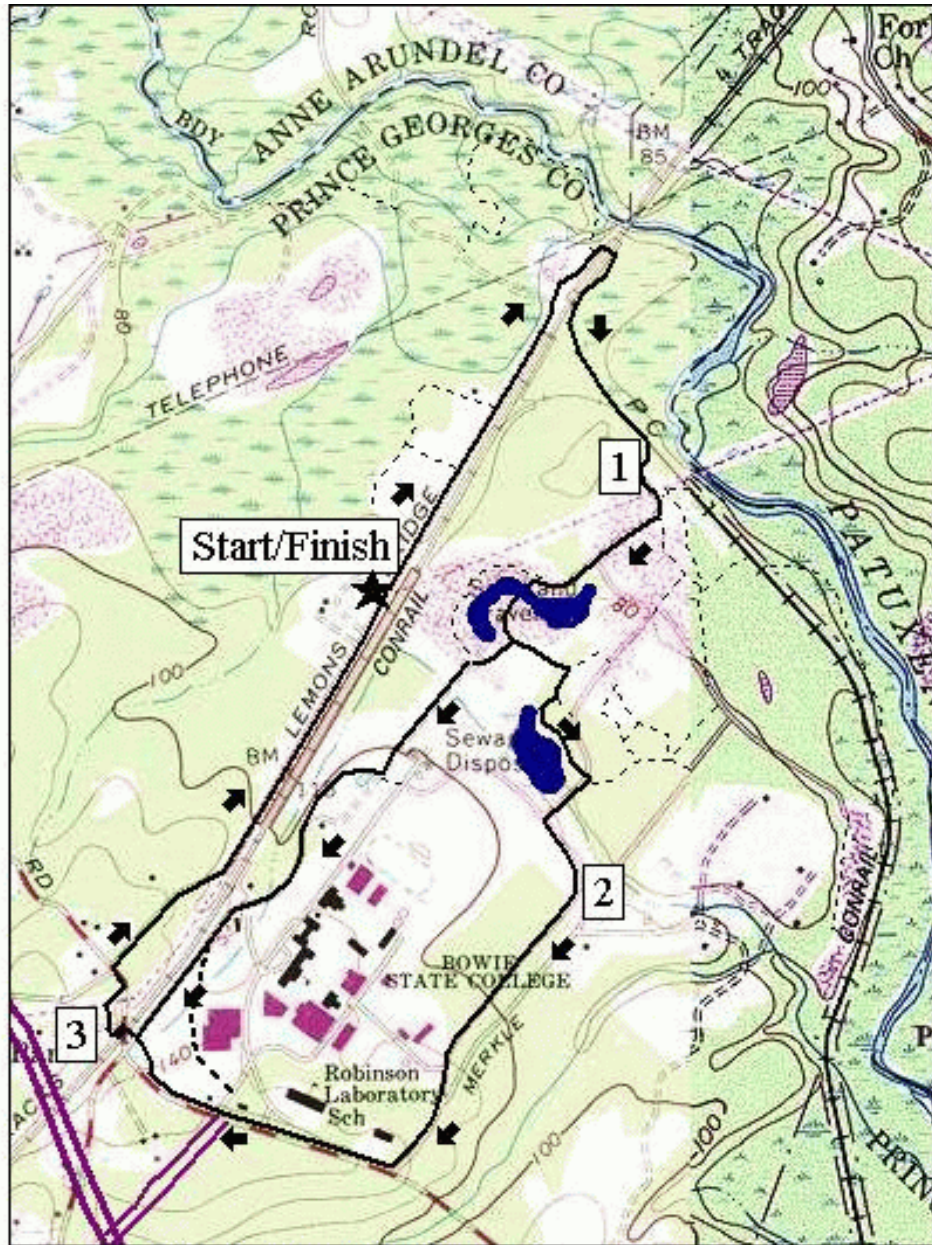
3.85 Mile Route

- | | | | | | |
|----|------|--|----|------|--|
| L | 0.0 | Lemon's Bridge Rd from parking | CL | 1.9 | Loop Rd; Bowie State University |
| | 0.25 | trail X on L | | | |
| | 0.3 | trail X on L | R | 2.5 | at T onto Jericho Rd (! unmarked, use shoulder) |
| | 0.5 | road X on L | | | |
| | 0.55 | Nature Trail on L | | 2.7 | Bowie State University entrance; go straight toward train station and commuter lot |
| | 0.6 | railroad underpass | | | |
| BR | 1.05 | Rd X under power lines | | | |
| L | 1.3 | trail X on L goes to wooden bridge over moat-like pond | BL | 2.95 | Tunnel to Southbound Trains, in tunnel turn R twice |
| | 1.4 | trail X on R | >* | | |
| <* | | | R | 3.05 | R at tunnel exit; through parking lot toward parking lot exit |
| R | 1.6 | paved trail X on R | | | |
| | | | R | 3.15 | Lemon's Bridge Rd |
| BR | 1.65 | paved trail X on R | | | |
| | | | L | 3.85 | gate in road just past parking |
| R | 1.8 | trail ends at T w/unpaved road | | | |

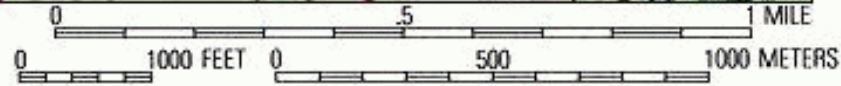
*3.05 Mile Route

- | | | | | | |
|----|-----|--|----|-----|--|
| R | 1.4 | Rd X on R | BR | 2.2 | through commuter trail parking lot as road bends left |
| BL | 1.5 | through gate at Rd X on R | | | |
| R | 1.7 | Rd X at T; L is toward track and parking; Bowie State University | R | 2.3 | Tunnel to Southbound Trains, in tunnel turn R twice (pickup cues at mile 3.05 on 3.85 mile route; end is 3.05 miles) |

Fran Uhler Lakes and Park



MN | TN
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Race Track Spur

Distance: 5.05 miles

Rating: IV; gravel and dirt roads, dirt trails and loose gravel railroad grade

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|---------|---|--------|---|
| L 0.0 | Lemon's Bridge Rd from parking | R 2.65 | utility road (water treatment plant is to the L) |
| 0.55 | Nature Trail on L | | |
| 0.6 | railroad underpass | U 2.8 | WB&A Trail on R (parking) |
| L 1.05 | Rd X under power lines | L 2.9 | trail X on L; before the water treatment plant; RR grade (! loose gravel and RR ties) |
| BL 1.1 | trail splits under power lines (go toward the river) | | |
| 1.25 | scenic view of river | BR 3.4 | trail leaves the RR grade |
| L 1.35 | trail X; R goes to RR grade | 3.45 | creek crossing (! no bridge) |
| L 1.75 | Race Track Spur RR grade (! loose gravel and RR ties) | BR 3.5 | trail joins the RR grade again |
| 1.85 | trail X on L & R | 3.7 | trail X on L & R |
| BL 2.1 | trail leaves the RR grade | 3.8 | trail X on R |
| 2.1 | creek crossing (! no bridge) | 3.8 | trail X on L |
| BL 2.15 | trail joins the RR grade again | 3.95 | trails merge under power lines |
| | | R 4.0 | Rd X under power lines |
| | | 4.45 | RR underpass |
| | | 4.5 | Nature Trail on R |
| | | 5.05 | gate at parking |

Race Track Spur

