

Patuxent Research Refuge North Tract

During the early 1990's as many military bases were closed around the country, a lot of them were converted to park land and refuges. As Fort George G. Meade was reduced in size, 8,100 acres from it was added to the adjacent Patuxent Research Refuge and became known as the refuge's north tract. Where tanks, military transport vehicles and ordinance were tested, is now a land going wild again. Already, there's plenty of wildlife to be found. On one of my typical visits I've encountered one or more of the following: deer, beaver, heron, egrets, black snakes or muskrats. The Patuxent River separates the North Tract from the rest of the refuge. The Little Patuxent River crosses through the North Tract. Management of the land is not like that of a park. It's primarily managed to serve as a wildlife research refuge and is the only wildlife research refuge of its type in the country. Visitation by people is a secondary goal and is channeled more toward educational experiences. Entry is free however, all visitors must sign-in and carry a permit while on the grounds. Fair warning is given to stay on designated trails. It may be possible that unexploded shells could be found. Sometimes sections of the refuge are closed for hunting or even for ordinance testing on the nearby remaining grounds of Fort Meade. Hours are limited, especially during winter. The whole refuge may be closed on some holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years Day) so call ahead (410-674-3304, TDD 410 674-4625) before visiting. Horse flies can plague your visit in June but the rest of year is nice. Running, hiking, bicycling and even cross country skiing are allowed on most of the trails described here.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take the Baltimore Washington Parkway, I-295, north toward Baltimore. After 8.8 miles, exit onto Laurel Fort Mead Road (Rte. 198) headed east. After 1.7 miles, turn right onto Bald Eagle Drive (look for the small Patuxent Wildlife Refuge sign before the ball fields on the right). Turn left into the Visitor Contact Station, park and sign-in.

Area Routes

West Trails (7.1, 4.65 or 5.55 miles, VI, IV or V)

A rainbow of different "trails" are linked together west of the Visitor Contact Station – Green, Blue, Red, Yellow. They are marked with small narrow posts. The posts have different colored circles with arrows inside that point the direction. The "trails" are generally gravel and sand roads like that which is found on the C&O Towpath but often much wider. Grades are not steep and few last long. The Yellow Trail is my favorite of the lot but none of the trails are aesthetically exceptional compared to many other area parks. Trees line the trails most of the way. The principal attraction to them is the solitude and soft ground that can be conducive for good running or easy mountain biking. An old cemetery off the Yellow Trail, and Rieves Pond off the Green Trail are among the few focal points of interest. Watch for the sign posts carefully. The trail markings on posts don't always stand-out against the backgrounds. There are usually gates to keep you from going on many intersecting roads that are off-limits however.

Lake Allen (5.65 or 5.75 miles, V)

Previously named Soldier Lake, Lake Allen was renamed to honor Brigadier General David J. Allen. The General was instrumental in preserving the area for the wildlife. Most people come to the lake to fish. To visit it yourself, take the Wildlife loop road east. First, pass Telegraph Rd., once a major thoroughway between Baltimore and Washington that is no more than a dirt road here (near Greenbelt, this old road is now called Good Luck Rd.). Next, cross over the silent running Little Patuxent River and go up and down a long straight stretch of road. After turning right on a gravel and dirt road, turn right again onto a "Jogging Trail" to begin the loop around the 13 acre lake. Lots of geese hang-out around the dam. Pass a beaver habitat just before completing the loop and starting back. The Pine Trail is an optional detour on the return that breaks-up the long straight stretch on the way back. It parallels the Wildlife Loop and is easy initially. It soon gets sandier and can be a little overgrown. Finally it passes the site of Ellicott's Chapel 1840-1868 before rejoining the Wildlife Loop road.

Wildlife Loop (12.1 miles, X)

The Wildlife Loop is a paved road that serves as the principal auto route through the refuge. It is lightly traveled. Though it is called, and could be made into a loop, a necessary segment is kept closed. According to refuge volunteers, the closure is to discourage those who would race around the loop. Along the way to the closure gate, you can see open fields, marsh areas, and a small part of the Little Patuxent River. The crescent out and back route has a few hills and long grades. Some of the prettier parts are closer to the turn around area than to the beginning.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Laurel River Walk

Beltsville Agricultural Research Center

Fran Uhler Natural Area/Race Track Spur

Baltimore Washington International Airport, Thomas A. Dixon Jr. Aircraft Observation Area

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Olive Garden - 301 498-0881

Old Country Buffet - 301 725-4713

Entertainment and Edification

Patuxent National Wildlife Refuge and Visitor Center - short hikes, waterfowl, indoor nature exhibits, tram tour (301) 497-5760

Montpelier Mansion - Snowden family home circa 1871 - (301) 953-7572; TTY (301) 779-5321

West Trails

Distance: 7.1, 4.65 or 5.55 miles

Rating: VI, IV or V, gently rolling gravel roads surrounded by trees

7.1 Mile Route

L 0.0	from the Visitor Contact Station	>**	
R 0.05	Wildlife Loop	L 3.85	at gate to stay on Red Trail
		4.35	power lines
BR 0.05	Green Trail (sign to Rieve's Pond)	L/R 4.5	at T to Blue Trail
		>*	
S 0.65	Blue Trail is S; Green Trail turns L	5.0	power lines
<*			
BR 1.3	Red Trail	L 6.0	Green Trail to Rieve's Pond
<**		6.05	Rieve's Pond
R 1.5	Yellow Trail		
		R 6.45	at T to stay on Green Trail
L 2.2	to stay on Yellow Trail at X; cemetery on R after turn	S 7.05	Wildlife Loop
L 2.55	at T to stay on Yellow Trail	L 7.1	Bald Eagle Dr
		7.1	Visitor Contact Station
BR 3.25	Red Trail		

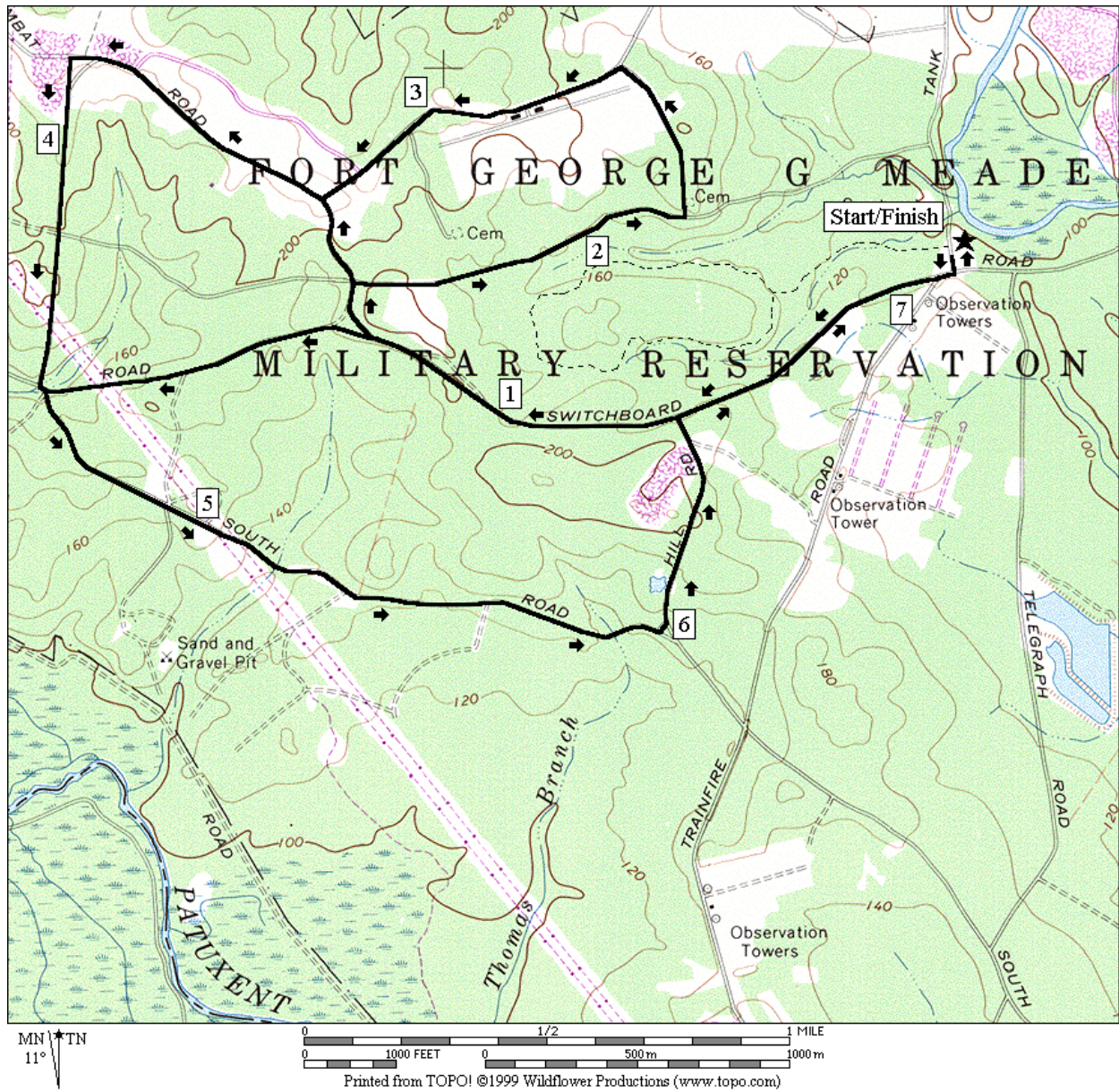
4.65 Mile Route*

S 1.3	Red Trail on R	L 2.05	at bottom of hill after power lines to stay on Blue Trail (pickup cues at mile 5.0 on 7.1 mile route; end is 4.65 miles)
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5.55 Mile Route**

S 1.5	Yellow Trail on R	S 1.65	to stay on Red Trail (pickup cues at mile 3.85 on 7.1 mile route; end is 5.55 miles)
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West Trails



Lake Allen

Distance: 5.65 or 5.75 miles

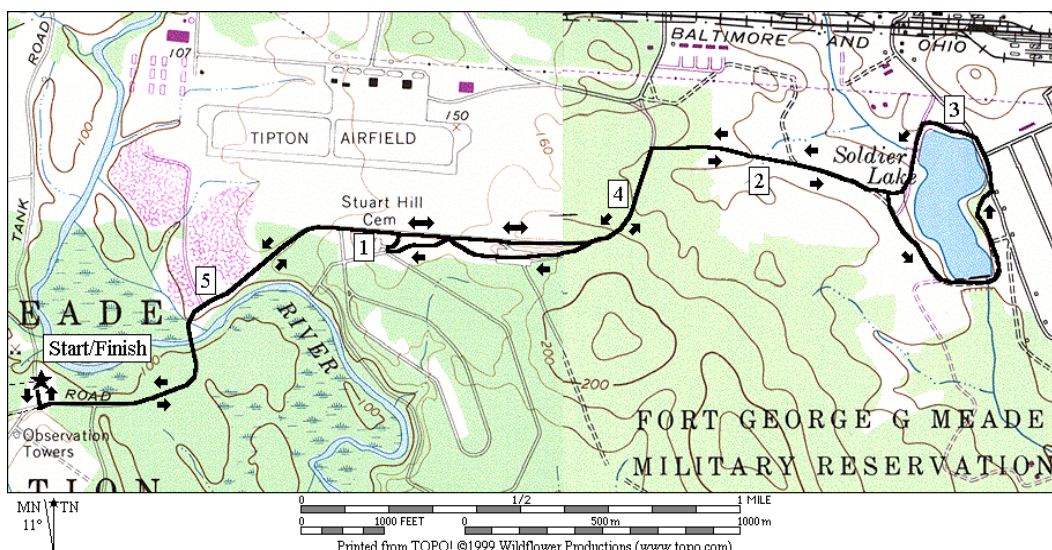
Rating: V, long easy grades on paved and gravel roads; sunny

5.65 Mile Route

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| <p>L 0.0 from the Visitor Contact Station</p> <p>L 0.05 Wildlife Loop</p> <p>0.15 Telegraph Rd</p> <p>0.45 begin Little Patuxent River bridge</p> <p>1.05 Pine Trail on R (near cemetery)</p> <p>1.2 Pine Trail on R</p> <p>1.5 Pine Trail on R</p> <p>R 1.75 gravel road to Lake Allen on curve</p> <p>R 2.3 Jogging Trail on R</p> <p>BL 2.55 toward dam</p> <p>2.65 bridge over dam</p> | <p>L 2.65 at Rd X to follow around lake</p> <p>L 2.95 at Rd X to follow around lake</p> <p>3.2 pipe bridge (beaver dam on R)</p> <p>3.3 Jogging Trail on L</p> <p>L 3.9 Wildlife Loop</p> <p><*</p> <p>4.15 Pine Trail on L</p> <p>4.45 Pine Trail on L</p> <p>4.6 Pine Trail on L</p> <p>>*</p> <p>5.15 begin Little Patuxent River bridge</p> <p>5.5 Telegraph Rd</p> <p>R 5.6 Bald Eagle Dr</p> <p>5.65 Visitor Contact Station</p> |
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5.75 Mile Route*

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|---|---|
| <p>L 4.15 Pine Trail on L</p> <p>4.5 TR X on R to Wildlife Loop road (unmarked)</p> | <p>R 4.65 TR X on R at Ellicott's Chapel site</p> <p>L 4.7 L on Wildlife Loop road (unmarked) (pickup cues at mile 5.15 on 5.55 mile route)</p> |
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Wildlife Loop

Distance: 12.1 miles

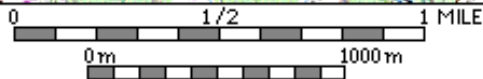
Rating: X, out and back on rolling paved roads; mostly sunny

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|--------|--|---------|--|
| L 0.0 | from the Visitor Contact Station | U 6.05 | at gate that closes road |
| R 0.05 | Wildlife Loop | 6.55 | Bailey Bridge Marsh on R (Little Patuxent River) |
| 0.05 | Green Trail on R to Rieve's Pond | 6.85 | Cattail Pond on R |
| 0.55 | Education Center on L (portable outhouse) | 7.05 | New Marsh on R |
| 1.05 | Green Trail on R to Rieve's Pond | 7.55 | K Training Hunting |
| 2.15 | Duvall Bridge Rd | 8.6 | South Rd on R |
| 2.75 | Scout Site 1 | 8.9 | K Training Hunting (portable outhouse) |
| 3.0 | Scout Site 2 | 9.1 | Scout Site 2 |
| 3.2 | K Training Hunting (portable outhouse) | 9.3 | Scout Site 1 |
| 3.45 | South Rd on L | 9.95 | Duvall Bridge Rd |
| 4.55 | K Training Hunting | 11.1 | Green Trail on L to Rieve's Pond |
| 5.05 | New Marsh on L | 11.55 | Education Center on R (portable outhouse) |
| 5.25 | Cattail Pond on L | 12.0 | Green Trail on L to Rieve's Pond |
| 5.55 | Bailey Bridge Marsh on L (Little Patuxent River) | L 12.05 | Bald Eagle Dr |
| | | 12.1 | Visitor Contact Station |

Wildlife Loop



MN ↑ TN
11°



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