

Belle Haven Park and Marina

South of Alexandria, just off the Potomac River is Belle Haven, a picnic park and marina. The area has Scottish roots. In the 1730's merchants traded tobacco in a warehouse there. The river seems to change character here as it flows toward the Chesapeake Bay. It widens at the mouth of Cameron Run where Great Blue Herons and Snowy White Egrets fish on the tidal mud flats. Hydrilla growing in huge mats visible in the summer, was once a scourge of boaters. It disappeared in the 1970's but now is a sign of the river's health returning. The Dyke Marsh, further south is now a wildlife refuge where more avian residents such as red winged blackbirds can be seen. A gravel and dirt road through a sanctuary south of Belle Haven makes a nice short out-and-back hike from Belle Haven. The Mt. Vernon Trail parallels the river and the George Washington Parkway. The Mt. Vernon Trail was built in 1973. The parkway was completed in 1932. Before either of them people such as Eleanor Roosevelt used to horseback along the river.

Getting There

From Virginia on the Capital Beltway

Take Exit 1 headed south on Richmond Hwy., Route 1. Once on Route 1, stay in the right lane to take the next exit for Fort Hunt Rd. Once on the exit ramp, you'll need to stay in the left lanes, bearing left and passing through the traffic light across Route 1 to get onto Ft. Hunt Rd. After 1.1 miles, turn left at a traffic light near the shopping center onto Belle View Blvd. At the end of Belle View Blvd., after 0.6 miles turn left on the George Washington Parkway, and move to the right lane. Turn right into Belle Haven, then immediately turn left toward parking areas. Start from the water fountain near the restrooms.

From Maryland on the Capital Beltway

Be in the right lane when coming over the Wilson Bridge, and take the first exit toward Mt. Vernon. The exit ramp actually puts you on Church St. but at the traffic light you can turn right onto Washington St. As Washington St. crosses over the beltway and leaves Alexandria, it becomes the George Washington Parkway. After 1.25 miles, turn left into Belle Haven. Immediately turn left again toward parking areas. Start from the water fountain near the restrooms.

Area Routes

Southdowns (5.35, 6.05 or 6.3 miles, V, VI, VI)

Following the Mt. Vernon Trail south, the way is initially flat and more sunny than not. The George Washington Parkway is visible on the right and Dyke Marsh lies hidden behind the trees to the left. As you go further however, a long wooden bridge carries you over part of Dyke Marsh across its major waterway. On the other side the trail remains flat but is wooded and shady. A view of a lagoon-like area the river opens up to the left just before a long and gradual hill begins. The paved trail runs out before reaching the top. The route and the Mt. Vernon Trail is then on the quiet Northdowns Rd. Finally reaching the top at the stone bridge for Alexandria Ave. on the right, one option is to leave the Mt. Vernon Trail (water is available if you go 0.09 miles further on the Mt. Vernon Trail—courtesy of the Road Runner's Club of

America in 1994) and go straight on to Southdowns Rd. That way makes a small loop by going downhill past several houses and along the river back to Northdown Rd. The road becomes gravel at one point. Glimpses of the river can be seen here, but private properties prevent you from getting to the shore for a good view. Once you reach Northdown Rd. turn right and return on the Mt. Vernon Trail.

Going right to cross the stone bridge over the parkway, also leave the Mt. Vernon Trail for the road just ahead. A large loop back along Ft. Hunt Rd. and the Paul Spring Branch can be made. The loop is on a mostly paved trail but it's not nearly as nice nor smooth as the Mt. Vernon Trail. It stays close to Ft. Hunt Rd. but is good for a change if you're tired of out and back's on the Mt. Vernon Trail. The trail goes on sidewalks for a short way before becoming surfaced with bluestone at Mt. Vernon District Park. In this park, another optional extension is available. This extension can be somewhat hard to follow however. There are some white blazes for a dirt trail but parts of it don't get a lot of use and are rough. On the extension, a steep downhill on a second easier to follow dirt trail returns you to the bluestone trail along Ft. Hunt Rd again. Just before leaving the park area for either route, you will pass a public ice rink at the bottom of the hill that is occasionally used by the Washington Capitals ice-hockey team for practice. Use the flat sidewalk along Belle View Blvd. to get to the Mt. Vernon Trail again. The only obstacle on that leg of the route is crossing the George Washington Parkway at the end of Belle View Blvd. There's no traffic light but crossing is not too bad if you're patient enough to wait for a break.

Jones Point (3.7 or 3.55 miles, II)

Look across the water to your left before you start this route and you'll see part of your destination. Heading north, the Mt. Vernon trail is on a flat sliver of land that curves along a cove of the riverbank. It's often breezy here in the wintertime but hot and somewhat stagnant during the day in the summertime as the heat rises off the water. For part of the stretch, there are no trees. In-line skaters enjoy it just about any time though it's not long before you reach the Alexandria city limits. The municipal border, on the stone bridge crossing over Cameron Run, is a popular place with birders. They setup spotter scopes on the vantage the bridge provides. After passing the condominiums the paved trail runs out. Use the sidewalk along South Street and cross under the Capital Beltway. Major renovations are expected here as the Wilson Bridge is rebuilt. Much of Jones Point Park, the southernmost point of Washington, D.C. may be lost. The federal lighthouse in that park was built in 1790 and operated until 1856. Cadwalader Jones, for whom the area is named for, had built a cabin there in 1692. Because of the bridge construction, the way through may be much different than it is in the year 2000, at the time of this writing, but one positive side of it is that a hiker-biker path is planned for the bridge to cross into Maryland. As it is, just as you cross under the beltway, turn right on Jones Point Rd. Jones Point Rd. is quiet but has an industrial feel to it. The route gets better when you turn left on the paved Mt. Vernon Trail, just before hitting the river. The trail leaves the river quickly however, and soon ends again after passing more woods on the left, with the back yards of houses on the right. A short option turns uphill on Franklin St. then uses Lee St. to return to Jones Point Rd. Going on into the city a little further, turn left on the Cameron Run Trail through a tunnel for an old railway. Return on Royal St. sidewalks, crossing back under the beltway, and back on the paved Mt. Vernon Trail to Belle Haven.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Cameron Run Regional Park
Dangerfield Island

Ft. Hunt Park
Tucker Athletic Complex/Henson Trail

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Brenner' Bakery Bellview Alexandria - some of the best cookies around Washington, D.C.
- 703 765-4688

Krispy Kreme Doughnut Co. - an old time favorite - 703 768-0300

Outback Steakhouse - 703 768-1067

Sutton Place - gourmet foods in Old Town Alexandria - 703 549-6611

Chin's Kitchen - tasty Chinese carryout food - 703 765-4600

Dishes of India - 703 660-6085

Entertainment and Edification

Dyke Marsh - for a warmdown hike out and back through the bird sanctuary

Mt. Vernon Recreation Center-Ice Rink & Pool - 703 768-3224

Stone Mansion and Stoneybrooke Park - home of a friend of George Washington built this home
in 1777 - 703 938-8835

Gadsby's Tavern Museum - 703 838-4242

Collingwood Library & Museum - 8301 E Boulevard Dr, Alexandria, VA - (703) 765-1652

American Horticultural Society - 8:30AM-5:30PM Mon-Fri - 703 768-5700

Southdowns

Distance: 5.35, 6.05 or 6.35 miles

Rating: V, VI, VI; shaded paved trails with suburban streets and sidewalks; some hills

5.35 Mile Route

		2.55 Kent Rd on R
L	0.0	south on the Mt Vernon Trail (MVT) from the water fountain/restroom
	0.15	cross the marina road
	0.4	Belle View Blvd on R
	0.75	begin long wooden bridge; Mile 7
	1.0	parking; West Grove Blvd (phone)
	1.55	begin wooden bridge at lagoon
	2.2	trail ends; begin Northdown Rd
	2.35	Southdown Rd on L
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S	2.45	Southdown Rd; MVT goes R on Alexandria Ave (stone bridge)
		2.95 to Northdown Rd at sign
		R 3.0 Northdown Rd (MVT)
		3.15 MVT head at end of Northdown Rd
		3.75 end wooden bridge at lagoon
		4.35 parking; West Grove Blvd (phone)
		4.65 Mile Marker 7 after long bridge
		5.0 Belle View Blvd on L
		>*
		5.2 cross the marina road
		5.35 water/restrooms; Belle Haven Park and Marina

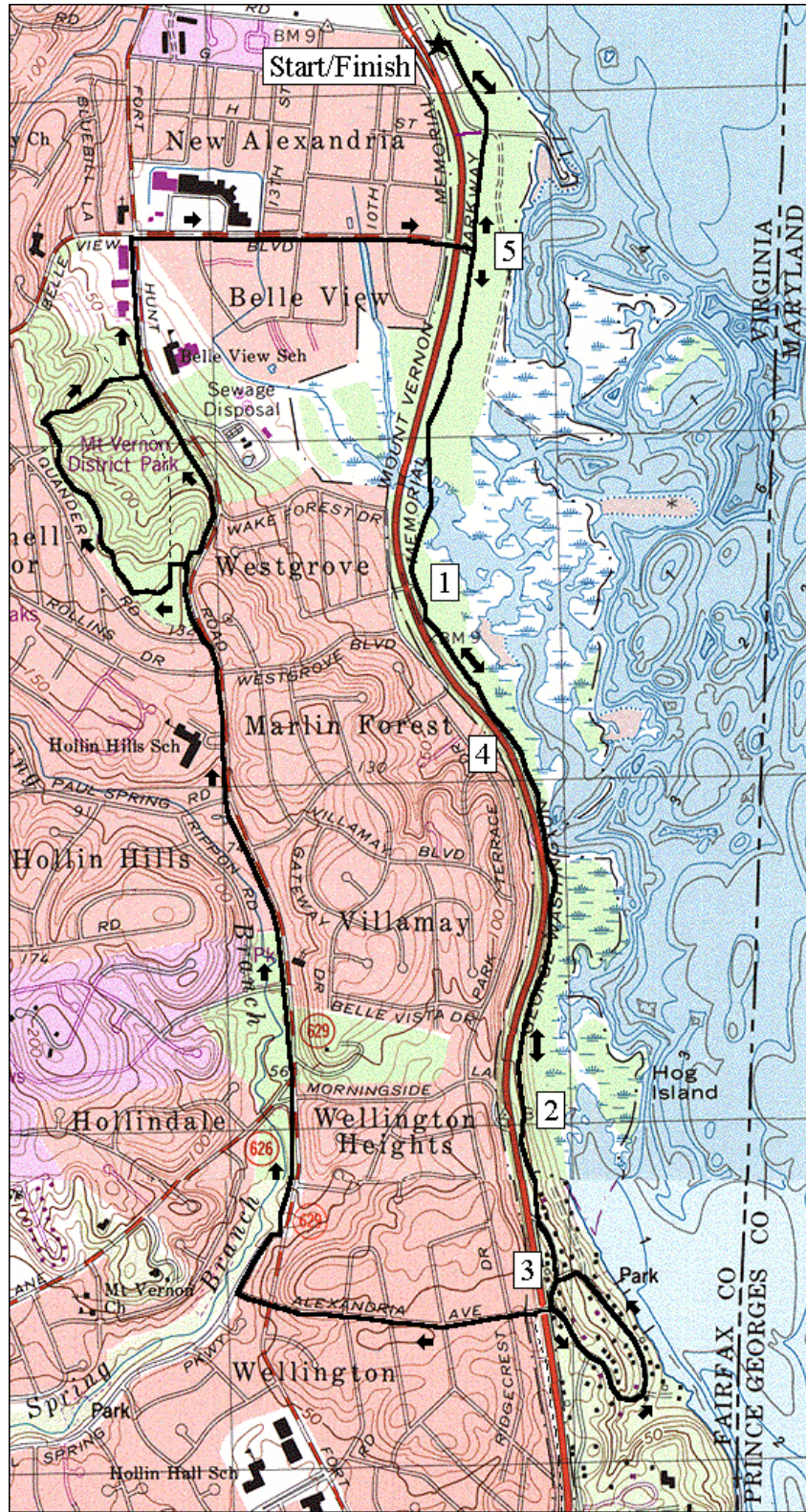
*6.05 Mile Route

		3.95 Pauls Spring Rd on L
		4.25 Quander Rd on L
R	2.45	Alexandria Ave bridge over pkwy
		<**
		4.4 trail X on L (unmarked/unpaved) before steep downhill
S	2.45	MVT goes L after stone bridge; (water to L 0.05 miles) use shoulder
		4.8 trail X on L (unmarked/unpaved) before small wooden bridge
		2.95 cross Ft Hunt Rd (!)
		>**
R	3.0	Paul Springs Pkwy
		R 5.05 Belle View Blvd
L	3.15	paved trail along Ft Hunt Rd
		CL 5.65 cross GW Pkwy onto MVT (pickup cues at mile 5.2 on 5.35 mile route)
		3.4 Sherwood Hall La/Morningside La

**6.3 Mile Route

		R 4.6 trail X on R; S is to road
		4.8 cross the gully (!); then BR to follow the white blazes
L	4.4	trail X on L (unmarked/unpaved) before steep downhill
		BR 4.9 go S at first X; then BR down the hill
L	4.45	at T; follow occasional white blazes
		5.0 trail X L&R
		4.5 trail X on R
		L 5.1 at T; trail along Ft Hunt Rd (pickup cues at mile 5.05 on 6.05 mile route)
		4.6 trail X on L

South Downs



MN TN
10°

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

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Jones Point

Distance: 3.7 or 3.55 miles

Rating: II; paved flat trails and some street sidewalks; mostly flat and sunny

3.7 Mile Route

0.0 north on the Mt Vernon Trail (MVT) from the water fountain/restroom

0.75 stone bridge over Cameron Run; Alexandria city limit

R 0.95 South St; use sidewalk

L 1.15 Royal St goes under the Capital Beltway, I-95

R 1.2 Jones Point Rd

1.3 Lee St (unmarked gravel road) on L

1.35 road to Jones Point lighthouse on R

L 1.5 paved trail head (MVT) at Potomac River's edge

R 1.85 paved trail ends, use Union St

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1.9 Franklin St on L

L 2.05 Cameron Run Trail head on L goes into tunnel

L 2.2 Royal St; use sidewalk

2.5 Jones Point Rd on L; go S under the Capital Beltway, I-95

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R 2.55 South St; use sidewalk

L 2.75 trail head (MVT) before Washington St

2.95 stone bridge over Cameron Run; Fairfax County border

3.7 water fountain/restrooms; Belle Haven Park and Marina

***3.55 Mile Route**

L 1.9 Franklin St; short steep uphill

L 1.95 Lee St (becomes gravel before next turn)

R 2.25 Jones Point Rd

L 2.35 Royal St (pickup cues at mile 2.55 on 3.7 mile route)

Jones Point

