

Fort Hunt Park

We have a federal budget surplus to thank for Fort Hunt Park, which is two miles north of Mount Vernon, President George Washington's home. In 1890 the excess funds were set aside for coastal defenses. The existing Fort Washington across the Potomac River in Maryland was strengthened with artillery batteries and new land. Some were built in what is now Fort Hunt Park. The batteries were designed to remain hidden and to launch artillery over the trees onto the river. The aim was guided by spotters who would relay commands. Even though the batteries were near a quarter mile from the river bank, the artillery of the day could shoot completely across the river from both sides. Today Fort Hunt Park is a quiet place. A bustle of activity can sometimes be found on summer and spring weekends near the pavilion however, when company parties, high school reunions, and every day picnickers come. Besides restrooms and the pavilion, few other amenities are in the park. Fort Hunt High School cross country meets were once held here and road races still are.

The park, maintained by the National Park Service, is mostly flat. Most of a loop road in it is one way traffic; the inner lane of the one way section is closed to traffic. Cyclists train on it regularly since you can safely go faster there than on the busier more narrow and winding Mt. Vernon Trail. The loop road is good for in-line skaters too however debris after storms or anytime in the fall can pose a hazard. Some small hills and most of the trails in the park are along the east and south borders, near the river. The trails are not marked but most are easy to follow. None are paved but some are on gravel roads. There are several easy access points to the paved Mt. Vernon Trail which goes along the Potomac River. The Mt. Vernon Trail can be followed north 15 miles to Rosslyn. From the front entrance of Ft. Hunt Park to the parking lot at Mt. Vernon is 2.72 miles. A paved trail can be followed even further, another two miles past Mt. Vernon to Grist Mill Park.

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 0.7 miles, turn left at a traffic light onto Belle Haven Rd. At the end of Belle Haven Rd., half a mile later, turn right on the George Washington Parkway. Go 4.6 miles, then turn right toward Ft. Hunt Park and Old Ft. Hunt Rd. Bear left into the park at the turn-off for Old Ft. Hunt Rd. on the right. Turn right at the T-intersection, with the park loop road. Turn left again almost immediately and start from the Area A parking lot, near the pavilion.

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 it crosses over the beltway and leaves Alexandria, it becomes the George Washington Parkway. After 5.7 miles, turn right toward Ft. Hunt Park and Old Ft. Hunt Rd. Bear left into the park at the turn-off for Old Ft. Hunt Rd. on the right. Turn right

at the T-intersection, with the park loop road. Turn left again almost immediately and start from the Area A parking lot, near the pavilion.

Area Routes

Fort Hunt Park Loop Roads (1.2, 1.6 or 1.45 miles, I)

The park loop road is 1.22 miles around. Runners, walkers and cyclists use it often to work-up to a distance that they are comfortable with training at. By staying on a shorter loop, they do not risk getting too far from water, restrooms or their car. This route shows two options to extend the basic loop. The first is on a paved loop road extension. In recent years the extension has been closed to auto traffic. The second is on a gravel road that sometimes can be wet. When training in on it in my younger years with friends, we had contests while doing intervals in the rain. The winner was the muddiest and always the one who fell.

Sheridan Point (1.95 or 1.85 miles, II)

Using the service road that runs through the open middle of the park, to get onto the outer extension of the park loop road. Turn left on one of two dirt trails (no bicycles), and reach the river near the intersection of the George Washington Parkway and River Farm Dr. The Potomac River, wide and flat here, makes a gradual turn forming Sheridan Point as you head north. The Mt. Vernon Trail is tree covered at first as you wind through some wetlands. Look for wild yellow irises blooming at the end of May. They can be seen from a wooden bridge before you reach a water fountain. Going on, gently climb with good views of Fort Washington across the river. Come-into Fort Hunt Park through the main entrance.

East/West Boulevard (5.2 or 5.3 miles, IV)

The way north of Fort Hunt Park on the Mt. Vernon Trail is slightly hilly at first. The trail is away from the river and it cuts across the watershed drainage that empties into the Potomac. There is plenty of shade however. At some points hilltop views do open-up to Fort Washington and other parts of Maryland. People often gather at these to watch fireworks over the fort during the Forth of July holiday. Going on you will pass Collingwood Rd. The trail flattens out somewhat for the next mile. Before Alexandria Ave. is a water fountain that was installed in 1994 by the Road Runner's Club of America. Coming back, some runners and cyclists prefer to use West Boulevard Dr. Perhaps it's a habit. Most of the Mt. Vernon trail was built in 1973 but the two mile section of the Mt. Vernon trail along West Boulevard Dr. wasn't built until around 1978. West Boulevard Dr. is quiet, sunnier and slightly less hilly than the trail. Another option for a return is to cross the stone bridge over the parkway on Alexandria Ave., and return on East Boulevard Dr. This road is even quieter than West Boulevard Dr. At Collingwood Rd., cross back over the parkway to the Mt. Vernon Trail, and return. A third option as with any of the routes in this guide is simply to go out-and-back.

Mount Vernon (5.9, 5.7, 9.7 or 10.2 miles, VI, V, X or X)

One of my favorite runs is the out-and-back trip to Mt. Vernon on the Mt. Vernon Trail. Leave Fort Hunt Park out the entrance gate or on a dirt trail and carefully cross the George Washington Parkway. Once on the Mt. Vernon Trail great views of the river and Maryland can be seen. If you look carefully, glimpses of Mt. Vernon can be seen too. The land across the river from

Mt. Vernon is Piscataway Park. Behind it, the view is protected by a scenic easement (lobbied for to ensure the view from Mt. Vernon remains true to history). Flat at first, the Mt. Vernon Trail rolls up and down bluffs overlooking the water and is only partially shaded. After crossing Little Hunting Creek on a stone bridge for the George Washington Parkway, it gets more shaded for the next mile. None of the hills are notably difficult compared to other average hills in the Washington area. The last one however, just before reaching the Mt. Vernon parking lot, is the toughest. The steepest section of that hill was graded and straightened in the 1990's (only 90 ft. over half-a-mile). If you're in-good shape you'll run past the average cyclist who is trying to ride up it. Most people prefer to simply go out and back to Mt. Vernon but if you go on, you can continue on a paved trail for another two miles. One option included here goes to Washington Mill Park, where you can make a loop on a small unpaved trail. Another option goes further to Grist Mill Park where the trail simply ends.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Belle Haven Park and Marina
Jackson M. Abott Wetland Refuge/Fort Belvoir
Fort Washington Park
Piscataway Park

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Cedar Knoll Inn on the Potomac Restaurant - 703 799-1501
Village Warf Restaurant - 703 765-0661

Entertainment and Edification

Mount Vernon - George Washington's home - 202 780-2000
Grist Mill Park - off Mt. Vernon Memorial Hwy., Rte. 235 near Route 1
Huntley Meadows Nature Center - (703) 768-2525
Gum Springs Historical Society - 8100 Fordson Rd, Alexandria, VA - (703) 799-1198

Fort Hunt Park Loop Roads

Distance: 1.2, 1.6 or 1.45 miles

Rating: I; flat, paved, partly shady park roads; gravel road through woods on the extension

1.2 Mile Route

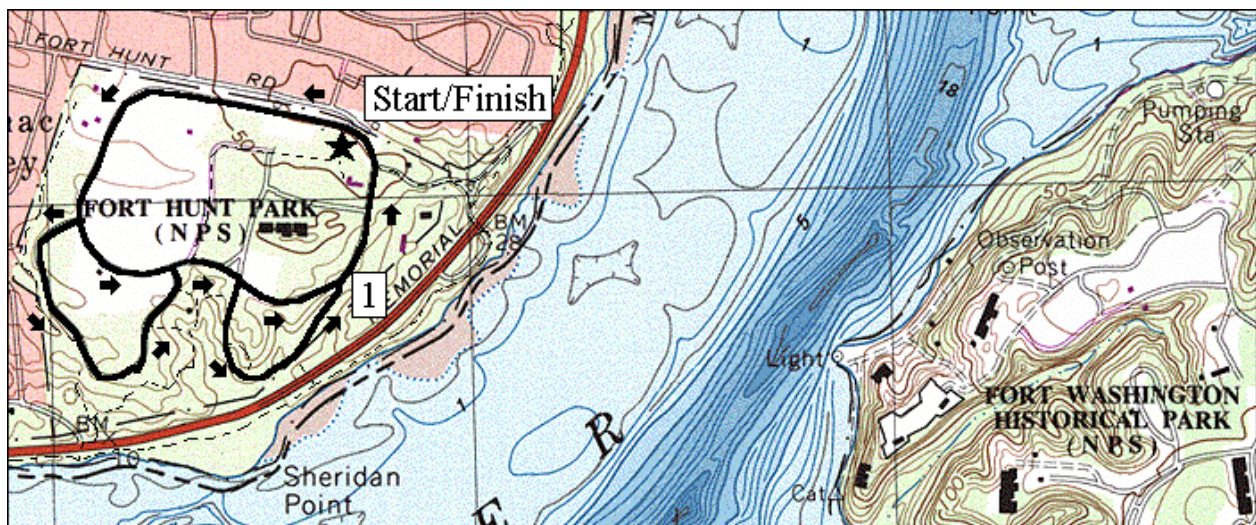
	0.0	go counterclockwise on the park loop road from Area A parking		0.75	service road on L
	0.35	stables/ranger station on R	<*	0.85	service road; L & R (R is Area E-6 – unmarked)
<*	0.55	park loop extension road on R	>*	1.0	trail X on R (gravel road)
>*	0.7	park loop extension road on R		1.15	park exit road on R
				1.2	Area A parking

*1.6 Mile Route

	0.55	park loop extension road on R (gate)		0.95	gravel service road on R
R	0.65	trail X on R (unmarked)	R	1.1	at T; park loop road (pickup cues at mile 0.75 on 1.2 mile route)
	0.85	trail X on R toward River Farm Dr			

**1.45 Mile Route

R	0.85	service road (gravel) (R is Area E-6 – unmarked)
	1.05	trail X on R toward GW Pkwy and Mt. Vernon Trail
R	1.2	park loop road (pickup cues at mile 1.15 on 1.2 mile route)



Sheridan Point

Distance: 1.95 or 1.85 miles

Rating: II; gravel roads, dirt and paved trails, moderate hills & good river views

1.95 Mile Route

0.0 from the park loop road at Area A, head toward the pavilion

BR 0.05 on the gravel service road through the row of trees

R/L 0.4 R on the paved park loop road; L at next X to outer the extension

0.45 driveway on L

<*

L 0.55 gravel road on L goes down steep hill

0.6 trail on L merges (triangle)

R 0.65 trail X on R goes up hill

0.8 trail X on R from park road (! sticker bush ahead in summer)

>*

0.8 trail X on R

0.85 trail X on R

R/L 0.9 emerge from woods; R toward River Farm Rd; cross GW Pkwy; L on Mt Vernon Trail

1.25 water fountain

1.3 xwalk on L (across grass) goes to trail into Fort Hunt Park

1.65 tunnel under GW Pkwy on road (! limited sight)

L 1.75 at water fountain; use the road to go into Fort Hunt Park

1.8 entrance gate into Fort Hunt Park

R 1.9 park loop road at T

L 1.95 into Area A parking

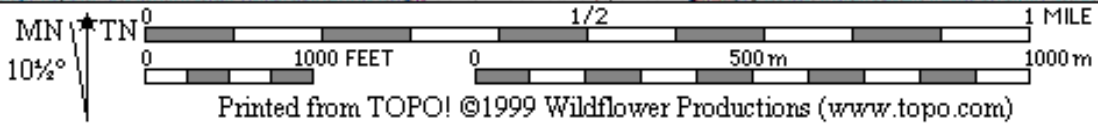
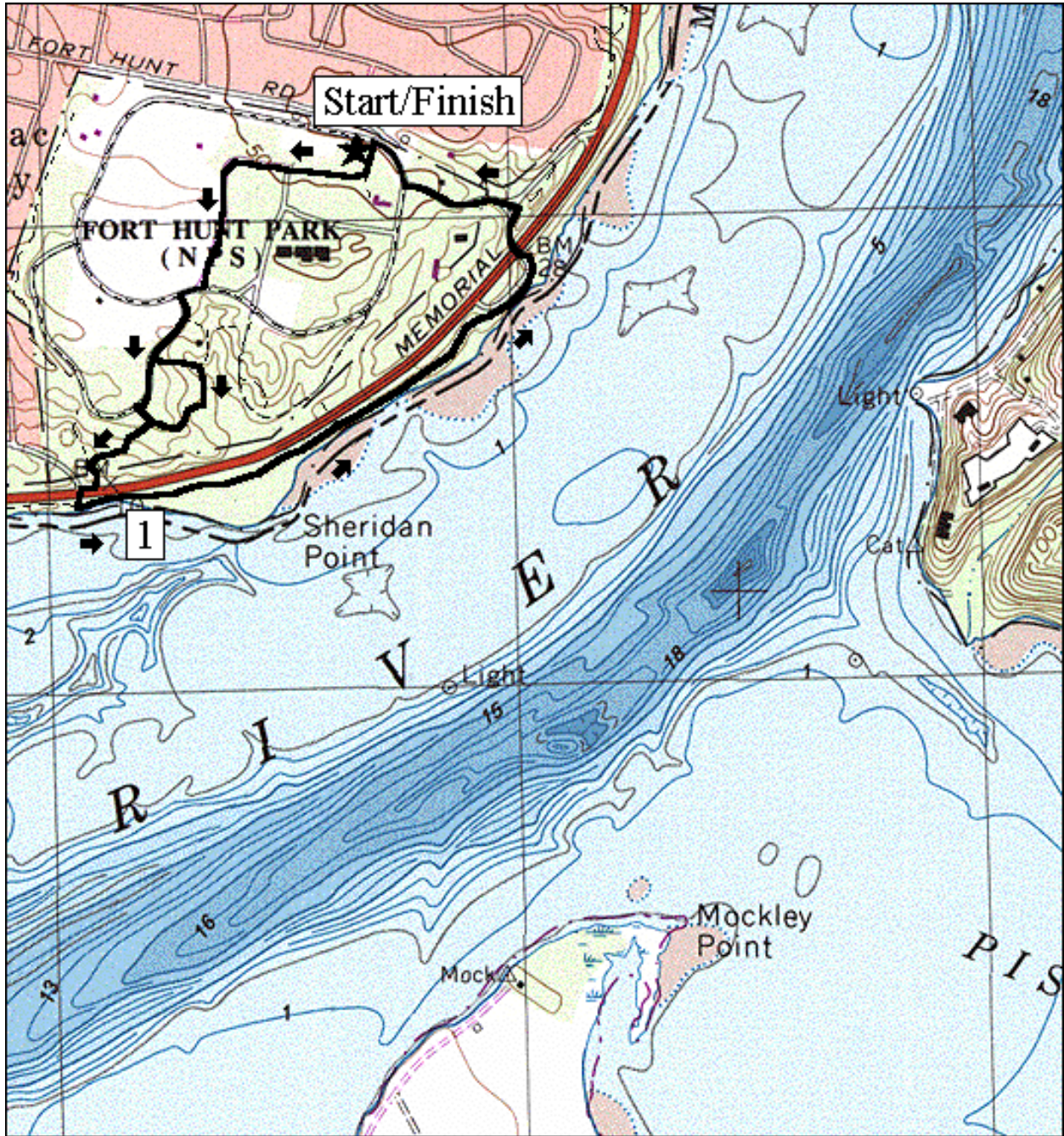
*1.85 Mile Route

S 0.55 gravel road on L goes down steep hill

L 0.65 trail on L (unmarked/dirt)

R 0.7 trail X at T (pickup cues at mile 0.8 on 1.95 mile route)

Sheridan Point



East/West Boulevard Drive

Distance: 5.2 or 5.3 miles

Rating: VI; paved trails and roads, some hills & a few good river views

5.2 Mile Route

R 0.0 from the park loop road at Area A, go clockwise on the park loop road

L 0.05 park exit road on L

L 0.2 Mt Vernon Trail (MVT)(water fountain)

0.3 cross exit ramp from GW Pkwy

0.7 Waynewood Blvd

1.6 Collingwood Dr

2.1 Wellington Rd

<*

UL 2.6 Alexandria Ave at T (water); UL onto West Blvd Dr

3.15 Wellington Rd

S 3.65 cross Collingwood Dr; West Blvd Dr becomes Ashwood Dr

L 3.7 West Blvd Dr

L/R 4.5 L on Waynewood Blvd; R on MVT

4.9 cross GW Pkwy exit ramp

>*

R 5.0 at water fountain; use road to go into Fort Hunt Park

5.05 entrance gate into Fort Hunt Park

R 5.15 park loop road at T

L 5.2 into Area A parking

*5.3 Mile Route

2.95 Kent Rd becomes East Blvd Dr

R 2.6 Alexandria Ave at T (water); stone
bridge over GW Pkwy

R 3.65 Collingwood Rd; cross GW Pkwy (!)

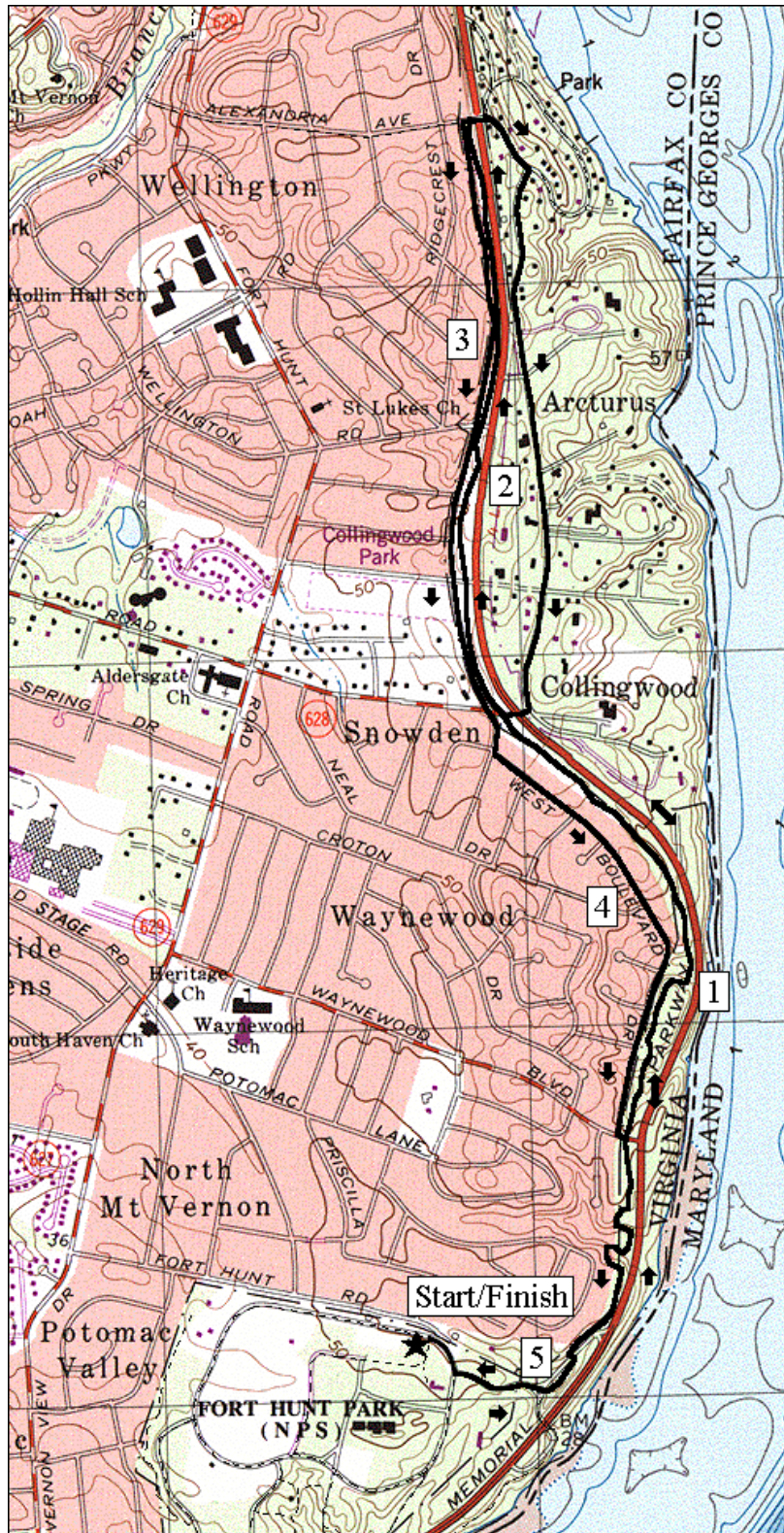
R 2.65 Southdown Rd; leave MVT

L 3.7 Mt Vernon Trail

4.6 Waynewood Blvd (pickup cues at
mile 5.0 on 5.2 mile route)

R 2.75 Kent Rd

East/West Boulevard Drive



MN 10 1/2° TN 0 1/2 1 MILE
0 1000 FEET 0 500m 1000m
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Mount Vernon

Distance: 5.9, 5.7, 9.7 or 10.2 miles

Rating: VI, V, X or X; paved trails, moderate hills & good river views

5.9 Mile Route

		<***
		U 2.95 parking lot
		>***
R 0.0	from the park loop road at Area A, go clockwise on the park loop road	3.0 wall at top of hill
<*		3.9 end stone bridge over Little Hunting Creek
L 0.05	park exit road on L	4.0 parking on L at Riverside Park (outhouses)
		4.85 parking at River Farm Dr; Mile Marker 2
R 0.2	Mt Vernon Trail (MVT)	5.25 GW Pkwy xwalk on L (across grass)
	0.3 tunnel under GW Pkwy on road (!)	5.6 tunnel under GW Pkwy on road (!)
	0.65 GW Pkwy xwalk on R (across grass)	
>*		L 5.7 at water fountain; into Fort Hunt Park
	1.05 parking at River Farm Dr; Mile Marker 2	
	1.9 parking on R at Riverside Park (outhouses)	R 5.85 park loop road at T
	2.0 begin stone bridge over Little Hunting Cr	
	2.9 wall at top of hill	L 5.9 into Area A parking

*5.7 Mile Route

		L 0.35 trail X on L; cross GW Pkwy at crosswalk
S 0.05	park exit road on L	R 0.45 Mt Vernon Trail (pickup cues at mile 1.05 on 5.9 mile route)
L 0.2	trail X on L (unmarked/dirt)	

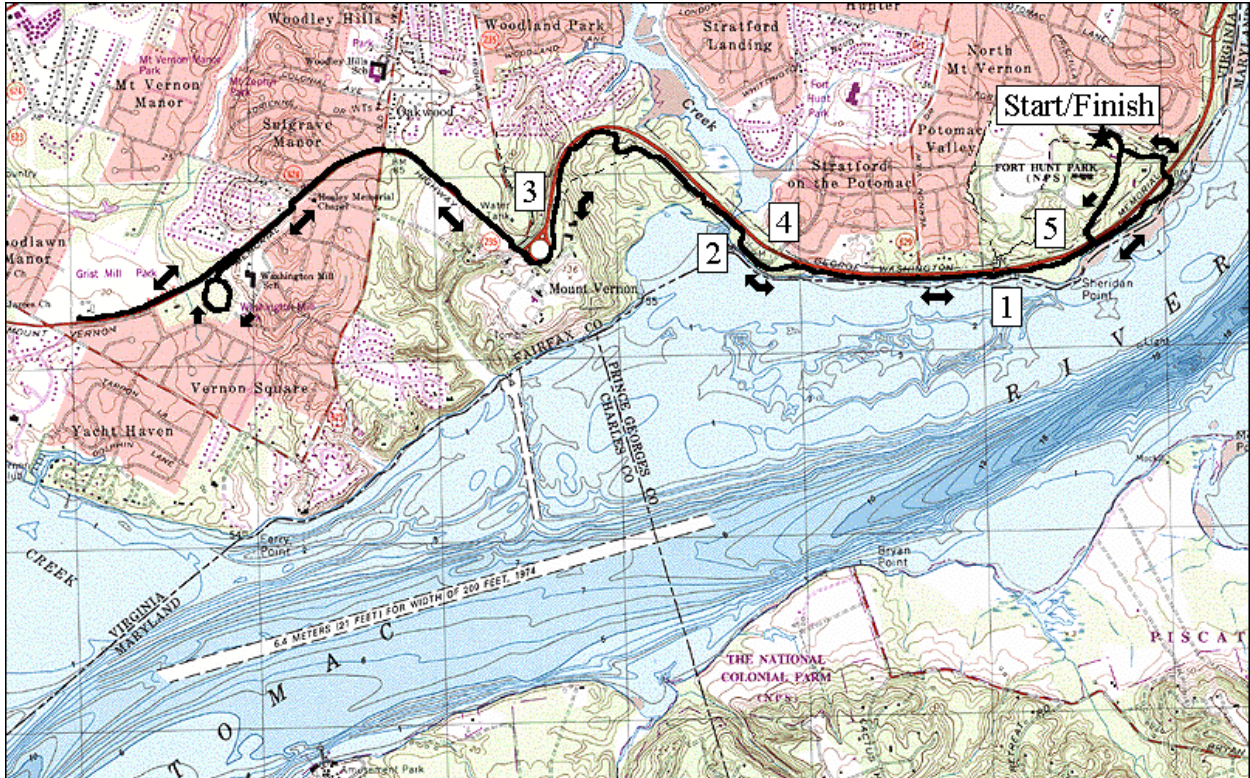
**9.7 Mile Route

		Park
S 2.95	trail ends at parking lot	R 4.75 trail X before road
R/L 3.1	at end of parking lot (water); around circle	BL 5.05 trail X on L (loop is complete; head back)
XS 3.25	at Mt Vernon Hwy, Rte 235	S 5.15 paved trail along Mt Vernon Mem Hwy
	3.85 Old Mt Vernon Rd	>***
XS 4.15	at Old Mill Rd	XS 5.5 at Old Mill Rd
<***		5.8 Old Mt Vernon Rd
BL 4.5	trail X on L (dirt/unmarked) before paved trail crosses road at Southwood Dr	XS 6.4 at Mt Vernon Hwy, Rte 235; around circle
L 4.65	trail X (sharp L; gravel); Washington Mill	R/L 6.55 into parking lot (water)
		6.75 Mt Vernon Trail head (pickup cues at mile 3.0 on 5.9 mile route)

***10.2 Mile Route

		U 5.1 Grist Mill Park parking
XS 4.5	cross road at Southwood Dr; use shoulder; trail X on L (dirt) before crossing	5.55 trail ends at Peartree Landing; use shoulder
	4.65 trail head at Peartree Landing	XS 5.65 at Southwood Dr to paved trail; trail X on R (pickup cues at mile 5.5 on 9.7 mile route)

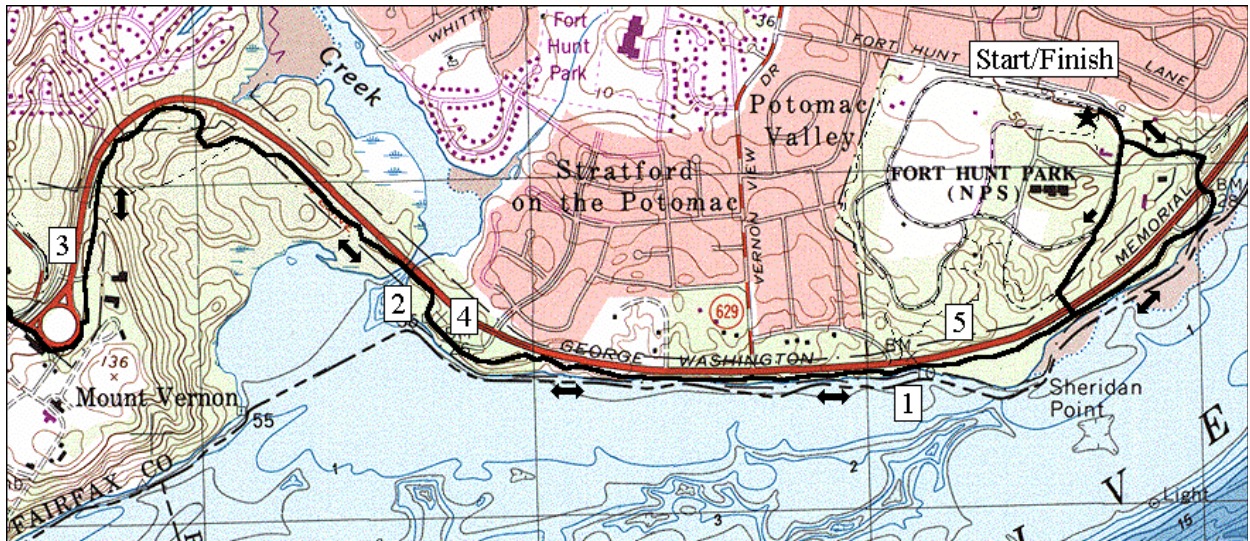
Mount Vernon



MN ↑ TN
10 1/2°

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(Mount Vernon detail)



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