

## Mason Neck

Being off the beaten path anywhere within 13 miles of Washington D.C. sometimes seems like an impossibility. Mason Neck is one of the exceptions to the rule. Unlike other quiet areas around Washington, that are often narrow green oases centered on stream valleys, most of the Mason Neck peninsula is either refuge or park. The peninsula extends almost six miles into the Potomac River and its tributary bays. It's south of Mount Vernon, and north of Woodbridge. Land use in the Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge is based on what's best for the animals first, not the visitation opportunities for people. The adjacent Mason Neck State Park was saved from development by The Nature Conservancy, then sold to the Virginia. Some houses do exist on the peninsula but with no bridges for roads to adjacent areas, the stimulus for development has been minimized.

What was saved is habitat for bald eagles, osprey, deer and other wildlife. Most of the land is wooded and not hilly. The state park has a visitor center, nature trails and view blinds for seeing nesting sites. You can look across Belmont Bay to Woodbridge from the park's shore. Don't go in early summer. In mid-June my personal experience would have been wonderful but for the persistent and painful biting black flies that thought I was one of the many deer in the area. If only I could have run like a deer then... With all the trees, the fall foliage is apt to be the best time to go and by then the flies will not be around. Other attractions nearby are Gunston Hall and Pohick Bay Regional Park (see the Pohick Bay section of this guide).

### Getting There

#### From the Capital Beltway

Take Rte. I-95 south for 6.7 miles to the Lorton exit. Turn left off the exit ramp onto Lorton Rd. Turn right approximately 0.8 miles later onto Armistead Rd. Go only 0.2 miles and turn right onto Richmond Hwy., Rte. 1. At the top of the hill 0.9 miles ahead, turn left onto Gunston Rd. Pass the golf course, Pohick Bay Regional Park, and Gunston Hall, then turn right onto High Point Rd.; a little under 4.5 miles from Richmond Hwy. Pass the Woodmont Trail parking area in the Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge on your left and continue into the Mason Neck State Park. Depending on when you go, a nominal entrance may be charged. Bear right after the gate, and right again where the road turns 90 degrees to stay on High Point Rd. Park on the right near the Kanes's Creek Trail head, just before reaching the Visitor Center which is near Belmont Bay.

### Area Routes

#### Bay View (2.45 or 1.9 miles, I)

This route starts with a meander through flat woods on a dirt trail. It gets more interesting as you go. The Kane's Creek Trail goes out east of the road and does almost a complete, but small loop. Turn off the pseudo loop, onto the Wilson Spring Trail. This crosses the park road heading southwest, and drops in and out of small a stream valley. Turning left on the Bay View Trail, you'll see the effect of a 1986 forest fire which burned 5 acres. The trees still stand and live but there is a wealth of undergrowth with blueberries and huckleberries. Continuing on, you get an overlook of a marsh area. The blazed trail oddly does a short loop back to cross itself before

dropping down to go across the marsh on a wooden bridge. After crossing the marsh, run along the shore of Belmont Bay and back toward the Visitor Center.

### Woodmarsh Trail (6.25 miles, V)

Utilizing High Point Rd. leave the Mason Neck State Park to get into the Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge. The road, the same one you will drive-in upon, is flat with light traffic, and little or no-shoulder. It's wooded with a slight uphill grade going out to the refuge. The Woodmarsh Trail is wide and unpaved. It snakes past forested wetlands before making a clockwise loop that skirts the Great Marsh on the south side of the Mason Neck peninsula. Some trails branch out from the loop but these are likely to be closed due to the proximity of eagle nesting sites. After completing the loop, return the way you came.

### **Nearby and Connecting Zones**

Pohick Bay  
Prince William Forest Park

### **What to do Afterward**

#### Food and Drink

Polo Grill - 703 550-0002  
Shadys Deli - 703 550-8266  
picnic

#### Entertainment and Edification

Gunston Hall - 703 550-9220  
Pohick Bay Regional Park - pool and picnic facilities, hiking and boating - 703 352-5900

## Bay View

Distance: 2.45 or 1.9 miles

Rating: I; mostly dirt nature trails; some easy hills; shady

### 2.45 Mile Route

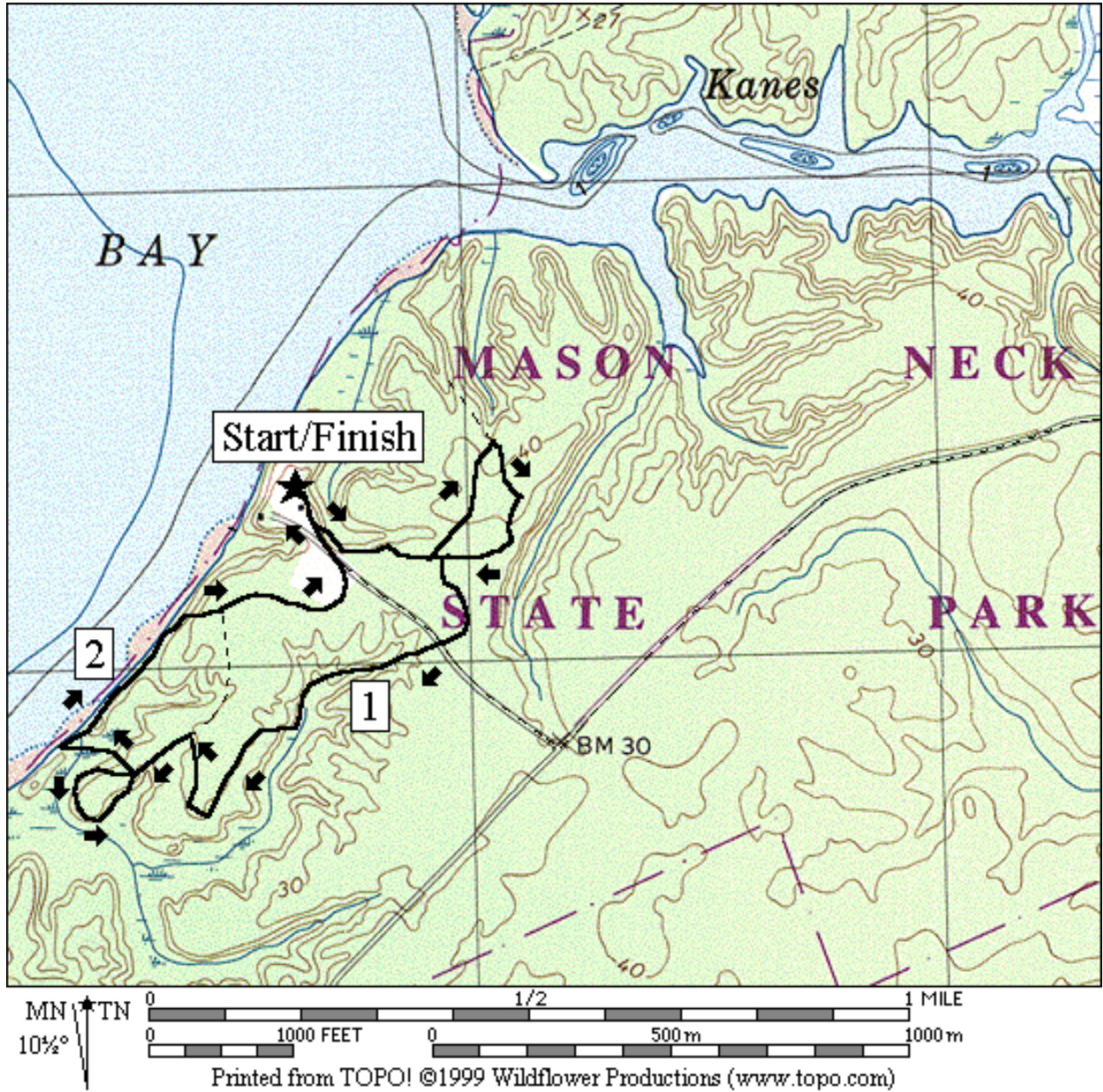
- 0.0 from the parking lot near the Visitor Center, take the Kane's Creek Trail into the woods (blue blazes)
- <\*
- L 0.2 at the trail X on L; begin a loop
- R 0.45 trail X on L to Observation Blind
- R 0.5 trail X; R is toward Visitor Center
- L 0.75 Wilson Spring Trail on L (yellow blazes)
- >\*
- 0.85 cross High Point Rd.
- L 1.55 Bay View Trail (red blazes)
- 1.6 burn area
- 1.65 Bay View Trail X; trail crosses itself
- 1.8 Bay View Trail X; trail crosses itself
- R 1.9 trail X at shoreline (Belmont Bay)
- S 2.15 Bay View Trail start/finish on R; go S onto the park road
- L 2.35 left on High Point Rd toward the Visitor Center
- 2.45 Kanes's Creek Trail on R

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S 0.2 Kane's Creek Trail loop; trail X on L

R 0.2 Wilson Spring Trail on R (pickup cues at mile 0.85 on 2.45 mile route)

# Bay View



## Woodmarsh Trail

Distance: 6.25 miles

Rating: V; paved road and a nature trail loop; long easy grades; shady

- 0.0 from the parking lot near the Visitor Center and the Kane's Creek Trail head, take High Point Rd toward the park exit
- 0.25 Wilson Spring Trail crosses the road
  
- L 0.45 High Point Rd turns left; gravel road is on R and is closed
- 1.65 maintenance road on R
- 1.7 park entrance/exit gate
- 1.75 gravel road on R
  
- R 2.05 Woodmarsh Parking
  
- R 2.1 Woodmarsh Trail (blue blazes)
  
- R 2.85 trail X; loop portion of the Woodmarsh Trail
  
- L 3.05 trail X on L to Hickory Pass; S is closed for eagle nesting site
  
- BL 3.15 at trail X on R; R is closed for eagle nesting site
  
- R 3.4 trail X; complete the loop portion of the Woodmarsh Trail
  
- L 4.1 Woodmarsh Parking
  
- L 4.15 High Point Rd
- 4.55 gravel road on L
- 4.6 park entrance/exit gate
- 4.65 maintenance road on L
  
- R 5.85 High Point Rd turns R; gravel road S ahead is closed
- 6.0 Wilson Spring Trail crosses the road
- 6.25 Kanes's Creek Trail head on R



# Woodmarsh Trail



MN TN  
10%



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