



EXCLUSIVE CONTENT

WEEKENDS

EAST



Panther Creek is your constant companion.

COOLING OFF COHUTTA WILDERNESS, GEORGIA

COLD WATER DROPLETS splash up and around me as I ford the refreshing Conasauga River for the umpteenth time. I stop for a quick break on a boulder in the middle of the brisk current, and think ahead to my destination: a camp above the 70-foot Panther Creek Waterfall. If I hurry, I will be able to enjoy some well-deserved solitude there before dark. But then again, what's the rush? When I'm out in scenery like this, the only speed I need is slow. *By Ryan Wamsley*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE CHESTNUT LEAD TRAILHEAD ON FS 68

- 1) Follow the **Chestnut Lead Trail** for 2.1 miles then turn left onto the **Conasauga River Trail**.
- 2) After 3.8 miles and 16 fords of the Conasauga River, follow signs to the right for the **Panther Creek Trail**.
- 3) Cross the Conasauga for the 17th time and

look for the **Panther Creek Trail** on the south side (hiker's right) of Panther Creek.

- 4) Follow the **Panther Creek Trail**, crossing the creek multiple times, for 1.5 miles to the base of a 70-foot waterfall. Angle away to the left, climb a bluff, and find your campsite.
- 5) Next day, return to the **Panther Creek** and **Conasauga River Trails**, and cross the river for the 18th time.
- 6) A half-mile later, cross **Tearbitches Creek**, and turn left onto the unsigned **Tearbitches Trail**.
- 7) Hike 3.5 miles south on **Tearbitches Trail** to **FS 68**.
- 8) Turn left onto **FS 68** and walk west for 1.5 miles to your car.

CAMPSITE PANTHER CREEK FALLS (MILE 7.1)

There are half a dozen campsites (first-come, first-serve) for the taking above the falls, clustered amidst large boulders and fragrant old-growth Eastern hemlocks. If you can nab the spot right above the falls, you'll score the best view. Otherwise, hike a few hundred feet more for a larger site with fewer boulders.

TRIP OPTIONS

Extend your trip 14 miles by starting and

ending at the southern terminus of the 7-mile-long Emery Creek Trail. This trail travels north past two waterfalls before climbing Little Bald Mountain to a primitive camp at Ball Field. The break in the tree canopy there is perfect for stargazing.

WET FEET

This trip fords the Conasauga River 18 times and there are no bridges, so expect to get wet. Use trekking poles or sticks for balance and bring dry footwear and socks for camp. After hiking .3 mile on Tearbitches Trail the second day, you can safely put on dry footwear. Caution: The river can become dangerous after heavy rains.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 34.8536, -84.6157; on FS 68 (Conasauga Lake Road) **PERMIT** None **SEASON** Late spring to late fall; the road to the trailhead closes from January 1 through early March. **INFO** cohuttawildernesshiking.com; bit.do/CohuttaWild

Distance 15.1 miles (loop)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



COASTAL PARADISE

FALSE CAPE STATE PARK, VIRGINIA

WHEN I ARRIVE at a small sign marking the entrance to False Cape, I'm already 5 miles into my trip. There's no vehicle access to this state park—the only one of its kind in Virginia. In order to backpack through its loblolly pines and live oaks and camp along its undisturbed shoreline, you must hike to the trailhead. That'd be a bummer if the extra 5 miles were boring. Luckily, the coastal wetlands of Back Bay are the perfect preamble to this quiet park. Without cars or RVs, False Cape feels utterly deserted. I venture down the coastline, splitting forests, marshes, and dunes, and taking time to inspect a shipwreck from the 1800s. Here, I feel as much like an explorer as a hiker, and I'm happy to be both. *By Chris Olson*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE LITTLE ISLAND TRAILHEAD

- 1) On the east edge of **Little Island** spit, hike 1.6 miles south.
- 2) At the obvious opening in the dunes, veer .2 mile inland.
- 3) Pick up the **East** or **West Dike Trail** (only one will be open due to migratory bird pat-

terns), and trek 3.2 miles south to the False Cape State Park trailhead at mile 5.

4) Continue 1.3 miles south on the **Sand Ridge Trail**, which crosses marshy migratory bird habitat to an intersection.

5) Take the **False Cape Landing Trail** to a junction at mile 8.6.

6) Turn east to claim an oceanside site .4 mile away.

7) With a daypack, retrace your steps to the **False Cape Landing Trail** and keep going 1.7 miles south to the Wash Woods ruins, where shipwrecked voyagers settled in the 1800s.

8) Hike northeast to the shore and follow the beach to camp at mile 13.6.

9) Next day, head .4 mile back to the False Cape Landing Trail and retrace your steps 8.6 miles to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE BACKCOUNTRY SITES 7-9 (MILE 9)

Claim an oceanfront campsite (\$11; reserveamerica.com). Pitch your tent above the high-tide line and keep an eye out for bottlenose dolphins popping above the surf. (If it's windy, make camp 200 yards back among the live oaks.)

WILDLIFE

Swans, herons, ibises, and egrets headline the migratory bird species that call False Cape home in late spring. In the morning, scan the sand for tracks from red foxes or feral hogs. Loggerhead sea turtles nest on the shoreline in May (give them space, and avoid using a headlamp, which can confuse hatchlings

trying to scoot to the ocean).

HISTORY

This itinerary takes you to Wash Woods, where you can spy ruins of the 19th-century town's graveyard and church. The steeple was built with cypress from the John S. Woods schooner, one of a handful of ships to run aground off False Cape (mariners frequently mistook it for Cape Henry and traveled too close to shore—hence the name). From Wash Woods, hike 1.5 miles south to explore one of these doomed vessels: the *Clythia*, which crashed in 1894. (Time it for low tide for best exploring.)

WATER

Unfortunately, BYO. Haul in a gallon per person per day. You can top off at the faucet at mile 6.3 (at the junction with the Dike and Sand Ridge Trails).

DO IT TRAILHEAD 36.6936, -75.9245; 15 miles south of Virginia Beach off Sandpiper Rd.

SEASON April to October (Back Bay's interior trails are closed November to March) **PERMIT** Required (\$25/night); reserve by phone.

CONTACT bit.do/false-cape-sp

Distance 22.6 miles (lollipop-loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



A wild pony wades in the Atlantic.

COAST TO COAST

ASSATEAGUE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE, MARYLAND, AND CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, VIRGINIA

I ADMIT, when I organized this hike, the main sell was Assateague Island. Kicking through sand along the Atlantic and camping on the beach were huge draws. But as I dogleg away from the shore into Chincoteague, I realize that tacking on the extra park offers more than easier logistics. I look up to see birds of every color. Red-breasted mergansers, common loons, and double-crested cormorants float in the salt marsh, while on the fringes, egrets, ibises, and herons stalk the shallows. I watch a bald eagle float on a thermal. It's springtime and I'm smack in the middle of the Great Atlantic Flyway, where 300 avian species stop over every March. It's almost like I planned it. *By Eric J. Wallace*

TURN-BY-TURN

FROM THE ASSATEAGUE ISLAND RANGER STATION

1) Find the beach access and follow the shore 12.6 miles south past 15-foot sand dunes and maritime forest to the **State Line Backcountry Camping Area**. (For a shorter first day, pull off at the Pine Tree campsite near mile 5.1.)

2) Next day, continue south along the shore, crossing into Virginia and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge near mile 13.6. Keep hiking south along white-sand beaches and bayside salt marshes to an inland trail (called **D Dike** on maps) at mile 21.9.

3) Take the short, .3-mile trail north to **Service Road**.

4) Follow the gravel path 1.9 miles past swamps and forests that draw thousands of migratory birds.

5) Veer north onto **Beach Road**, and take it .9 mile to your shuttle car, 100 yards past the bridge.

CAMPSITE

STATE LINE BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING AREA (MILE 12.6)

Pitch your tent above the high-tide line, using nearby dunes as natural windbreaks. The east-facing vantage over the surf makes for great sunrises, and the stargazing is tops as well, thanks to one of the darkest night skies in the Mid-Atlantic. Tip: Store your food in a bear canister or rodent-proof sack—Assateague's wild ponies are hungry and crafty. Campsites here are first-come, first-serve.

WILDLIFE

Assateague Island's 150 wild ponies survive on salty marsh grass and rainwater. (Their forebears are believed to have been placed on Assateague centuries ago to avoid fencing taxes.) Look for the ponies near the forest or, if you're lucky, wading through the surf.

Spring's seasonal visitors include thousands of migratory birds: Along the shore, scan for brown pelicans gliding over the ocean and sandpipers, plovers, shearwaters, petrels, and gulls tiptoeing near the breakers. In the interior, glimpse egrets, ibises, and other waterfowl near the ponds; great blue herons in the trees; and larks, swallows, warblers, vireos, and red-winged blackbirds darting through the brush.

WATER

Pack it in; the only freshwater on Assateague Island is in unreliable puddles. In mild conditions, we recommend bringing a gallon per person per day.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 37.9231, -75.3540; 14 miles east of New Church, VA, on Chincoteague Island. There's street parking and a number of businesses that allow overnights; we left a car at the McDonald's without issue. **TRAILHEAD** 38.2062, -75.1516; 1 hour and 15 minutes north of the shuttle car on Bayberry Dr. in Maryland. **SEASON** Year-round; fall to spring is best to avoid the bugs. **PERMIT** Required (\$10); obtain at the Assateague Island Ranger Station or the Toms Cove Visitor Center. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapAssateague-Chincoteague (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/asis

Distance 25 miles (point to point)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



Pass Stafford Beach on day two; if time allows, spend the night in a grove of live oaks.

ETERNAL SUMMER

CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE, GEORGIA

BEACH GETAWAYS ARE not my thing: Crowds, heat, and sitting around all day make me restless. But backpacking on a beach has me reconsidering my prejudice. I've hiked miles barefoot along a sandy shore without passing another human on Cumberland Island, a national seashore reserve tucked away on the southeast coast of Georgia. The place is quiet year-round—just 50,000 people visited in 2017—but even more so in January. That leaves the live oak forests, wide beaches, and clear, 60°F weather all for me and the wild horses that I see grazing in the dunes. The herd lives on the island year-round, and now I think they may be onto something. *By Ryan Utz*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM SEA CAMP

- 1) Follow the social trail .2 mile inland to a junction.
- 2) Head north on the **Parallel Trail**, ducking

through a corridor of live oaks, to Little Greyfield Crossing at mile 1.9.

3) Split east to reach the beach, and hike 3.6 miles north on the sand to where the **Willow Pond Trail** emerges from the forest on hiker's left. (Feel free to collect shells along the way; your permit allows it, as long as the shell is unoccupied.)

4) Follow the **Willow Pond Trail** 1.4 miles inland to Hickory Hill.

5) Next morning, trek south on the **Parallel Trail** from camp, taking it all the way back to Sea Camp at mile 12.1.

CAMPSITE HICKORY HILL (MILE 6.9)

Palmettos, pines, and large, sprawling live oaks shade this cozy spot. Claim one of the tent sites, and get freshwater at the well a mile north along the Yankee Paradise Trail. Reserve site online.

WILDLIFE

Poke around in the palmettos around dawn and dusk to spot armadillos foraging. For the feral horses, look in the dunes, where they munch on the grasses. The herd of roughly 150 is likely descended from horses of the British occupation. Beginning in May, some 500 loggerhead sea turtles will build their nests on the empty beaches (don't approach

them, of course).

HISTORY

Park visitation numbers be damned, humans have been drawn to Cumberland's seclusion and scenery for centuries. Case in point: the ruins of the Dungeness Mansion, occupied by the British during the War of 1812 and later owned by Andrew Carnegie. Explore it by linking the River Trail and Main Road 1.7 miles south from the trailhead. From camp at Hickory Hill, take the Yankee Paradise and Duck House Trails 2.2 miles to visit the Plum Orchard Mansion, built in 1898 and also occupied by the Carnegies.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 30.7643, -81.4697; a 45-minute ferry ride east of St. Marys (\$28 round-trip; cumberlandislandferry.com)

SEASON Year-round **PERMIT** Required (\$9); obtain from the visitor center or recreation.gov. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapCumberlandIsland (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/cuis

Distance 12.1 miles (lollipop-loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



Wander through longleaf pines.

JUNGLE BOOGIE

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA

PINE NEEDLES MUFFLE my footsteps as I tread along the overgrown path, occasionally ducking out of reach of saw palmetto fronds. The sun splinters through the longleaf pine canopy, shining on the turkey oaks that grow in the sandy soil. Though I don't see any, I know black bears and feral hogs lurk in this forest. It's a wild place, perhaps the wildest part of the 1,100-mile Florida Trail, and yet it's not protected as a wilderness area. No, this 15-mile section of the trail lies within a military base. Just 20 miles away, jets from the 33rd Fighter Wing sit, ready for action. But here, the Florida Trail twists past steep ravines, rare wetlands, and the largest tract of virgin longleaf pine left in North America—all of which have been inherently protected from development since the turn of the 20th century. It's a part of Florida that's nearly disappeared—but it's on full display here. *By Erika Zambello*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE OLD SR 285 TRAILHEAD

- 1)** Follow the **Florida Trail** 7.7 miles west through longleaf pine woods, passing multiple creeks with sandy bottoms, to a road.
- 2)** Turn south (hiker's left) on clay **RR 220** to cross Titi Creek on a wooden bridge.
- 3)** Continue west on the Florida Trail, tracing the edge of shallow, grassy JR Walton Pond and then ducking back into titi forest for the final push to the Pearl trailhead on SR 85.

CAMPSITE JR WALTON POND RECREATION AREA (MILE 8.3)

The five campsites here come with fire rings and water views. Since they're car-accessible, aim for the spot on the opposite (east) shore, which is offset from the road and feels a bit more backcountry. The open pine canopy is a virtue in November when nights are typically clear. Anglers can land bass or pickerel in the 4-acre pond. (Note: Dispersed camping is prohibited on the base. There are two designated camp areas, and they're both car-accessible and first-come, first-serve.)

GEOLOGY

Water here drains through the sand hills and emerges clear and cool in shallow creekbeds, called "steepheads." These springs provide critical freshwater to the forest. Pass a handful on the trail, including Gum, Dog, Big Fork, Titi, and Silver Creeks, all lined with aquatic

vegetation and pitcher plants. Wade in the sandy-bottomed creeks, and keep an eye out for cream-colored darters.

WILDLIFE

Scan for green anoles and snake-like glass lizards warming themselves trailside. Black bears and white-tailed deer live in these woods, but are elusive. (Best bet: Look for them making their way to water sources at dawn and dusk.)

EASIER LOGISTICS

To avoid the shuttle, do it as an out-and-back, spending night two at the Pearl Campsite near mile 14 in a clearing surrounded by saw palmettos. Next day, retrace your steps through the Air Force base for a 28-mile trip.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 30.6871, -86.5723; 3 miles south of Crestview on FL 85 **TRAILHEAD** 30.7181, -86.3675; a 17-minute drive east from the shuttle car on FL 285 **SEASON** Year-round; November is great because it's less buggy and the end of hurricane season. **PERMIT** Required (\$5/person per night); obtain from the Jackson Guard in Niceville or online. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapEglin-AirForceBase (\$15) **CONTACT** eglin.isportsman.net

Distance 15.6 miles (point to point)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ●●●●●





Spend the first night among the cypress trees at Barred Owl Roost near mile 5.2.

ANIMAL HOUSE

ROANOKE RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NORTH CAROLINA

“I PULL MY OAR out of the tea-colored water and let my boat bob in the cypress grove. As soon as my canoe comes to a rest, the landscape starts moving. A caramel-colored water snake hangs from a tree branch, craning its neck in my direction. A black armored turtle perched on a log seems to resent my intrusion and disappears in the brown water with a small splash. I feel a world away, and yet I’m just an hour and a half outside Raleigh, paddling Devils Gut, a tight, cypress-filled neck of the Lower Roanoke River. Over the course of our 21-mile route, my party will navigate tree-choked swamps and wide flatwater. We’ll see great egrets standing near the banks and listen to barred owls calling at night. It’s the best safari you can find this close to home.” *By Kathy Kyle*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM GARDNER CREEK ACCESS IN ROBESON MARINA

- 1) Launch beneath US 64, and paddle 3.7 miles north through twisty, 30-foot-wide **Gardner Creek**.
- 2) Veer east into **Devils Gut**, following the brownish river .8 mile downstream.
- 3) Turn north into **Lower Deadwater Creek**

and float .7 mile to the Barred Owl Roost Platform to camp.

4) Back in Devils Gut, continue south to the **Lower Roanoke River** at mile 7.3.

5) Paddle another 8 miles past Astoria and Jamesville to Broad Creek.

6) Hang a left (west) into **Broad Creek**, going .6 mile upstream to camp at the Cow Creek Platform.

7) Next day, retrace your strokes downstream to the **Lower Roanoke River**.

8) Continue 2.1 miles to the **Thoroughfare**, a narrow channel that connects the Roanoke and Cashie Rivers.

9) Veer north into the flow, and go 2 miles to the Cashie.

10) Head 1.4 miles northwest up the wide **Cashie River** to the takeout in Sans Souci.

CAMPSITE 1 BARRED OWL ROOST PLATFORM (MILE 5.2)

There’s room for a few tents and chairs on this wooden stage that sits in a grove of 100-foot-tall cypresses (reservation required). Beginning at dusk, listen to the platform’s namesakes hooting and cooing; their song pattern sounds like “Who cooks for you?” (Note: BYO water for the whole trip.)

CAMPSITE 2 COW CREEK PLATFORM (MILE 15.9)

Come May, blue flag iris blooms frame this site (reservation required), while red-shouldered hawks sweep overhead. If you position tents near the 30-foot-tall ash trees, you can fit three with water views.

WILDLIFE

The Roanoke River hosts beavers, river otters,

and the state’s highest concentration of black bears—as well as venomous cottonmouths, which look unfortunately similar to nonvenomous banded water snakes. Identify the former by its heart-shaped head and narrow neck.

GRUB

On day two, paddle through Jamesville, a tiny (population 464) community on the Lower Roanoke. Near mile 8.9 (around 35.8132, -76.8930), pull ashore at Cypress Grill, an unassuming wooden shack with tasty Southern fare, including fried herring, hush puppies, slaw, and sweet tea.

WHEN NATURE CALLS

There are no privies and going in the woods isn’t permitted. Instead, bring a lidded, 5-gallon bucket lined with a trash bag and cat litter.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 35.9112, -76.8171; 18 miles east of Williamston on Woodard Rd. (You can hire a shuttle and rent boats from Roanoke Outdoor Adventures in Williamston; prices vary, inquire at roanokeoutdoor-adventures.com.) **TRAILHEAD** 35.8114, -76.9329; 38 minutes south of the shuttle car on US 64 **SEASON** April to June and September to November **PERMIT** Required (\$25 per party per night); reserve online. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapLowerRoanoke (\$15) **CONTACT** roanoke-riverpartners.org

Distance 21 miles (point to point)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



Some sections of Big Cypress have bronze, tannin-stained water—but it's still clear.

SECRET GARDEN

BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE, FLORIDA

THE WATER IS cool against my calves and shockingly clear, reflecting the tangle of cypress roots, pond apples, and Jamaican dogwoods above. But I don't have time to stop and stare—I need to make miles. I average roughly a mile per hour in the wet segments of this 31.3-mile section of the Florida National Scenic Trail, and today the path has been mostly underwater. I wade through Big Cypress Swamp until dusk before looking for a dry patch. When I finally spot a mound of soil that peeks just above the coffee-colored, tannic drink, I sling my hammock. It's unusual to camp so close to the water's surface, a feeling that catches an edge as the night sucks the colors out of the day. Sure, it'd be easier to do the Florida Trail in spring, when the water has nearly dried up, but what's the fun of hiking through a dry swamp? *By Melanie Radzicki McManus*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM OASIS VISITOR CENTER

- 1) Pick up the **Florida National Scenic Trail** and follow it 9.7 miles north through sawgrass prairies and pine flats to **10 Mile Camp**.
- 2) Continue 13.3 miles north beneath stands of cypress and through calf-deep water to **Oak Hill Camp**.
- 3) Alternate hiking on dryland and wading through water to mile 30.2, where an unnamed, gravel doubletrack crosses the trail (near 26.153778, -81.068567).
- 4) Turn north (hiker's left) on the doubletrack and follow it 1.2 miles to the trailhead on I-75.

CAMPSITE 1 10 MILE CAMP (MILE 9.7)

The easy (dry) miles leading to this spacious camp are a perfect warm up for the swamp. Find this trailside, spot (first-come, first-serve) tucked in a pine grove. Top off water in the nearby cypress-filled swamp. (Pre-filter through a handkerchief if it's muddy.)

CAMPSITE 2 OAK HILL CAMP (MILE 23)

Set up camp on this forested bump that rises just inches above the water. The smallest campsite in Big Cypress, it can fit only a handful of tents (first-come, first-serve). Warning: It can be buggy here before the first hard freeze. Mesh netting recommended.

VEGETATION

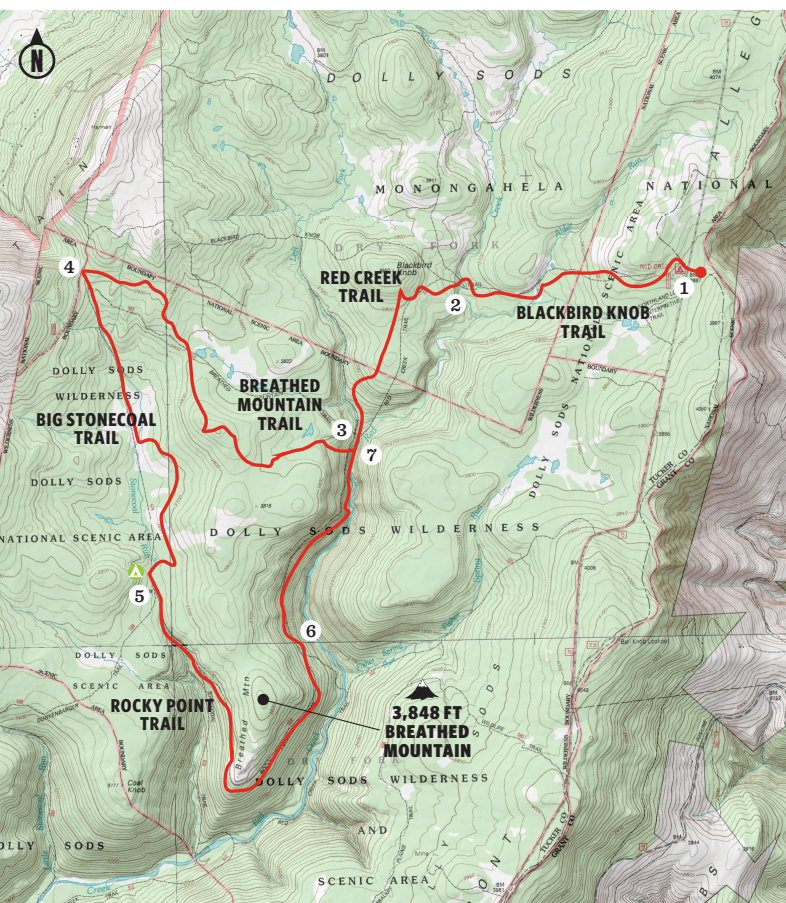
The first half of this route passes through tall, thick sawgrass, a sedge plant with blades edged with tiny, sharp teeth. (Wear pants and long sleeves.) In the latter half of this route, look for swamp natives like airplants, which grow on the trunks of cypress trees. The cardinal airplant (Big Cypress's largest) provides a pop of red amid the swamp's greenery.

WILDLIFE

Look for alligators and water moccasins near the trail (give each a wide berth). Elusive Florida panthers and black bears also call this preserve home.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 26.167941, -81.072347; 43 miles west of Andytown on I-75 (no commercial shuttles) **TRAILHEAD** 25.857384, -81.033544; 1 hour 15 minutes south of the shuttle car on US 41. **SEASON** November through March **PERMIT** Required (free); register at the trailhead **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapBigCypress (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/bicy

Distance 31.3 miles (point to point)
Time 3 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



MOUNTAIN MAGIC

DOLLY SODS WILDERNESS, WEST VIRGINIA

I PUFF MY WAY up a short, steep climb through hardwood forest and pick a route through a rock garden, hiking poles clacking against stone. When I look up from the slopes of 3,848-foot Breathed Mountain across the Monongahela, it feels as though I've been transported to the far reaches of the Northeast: The wide view is replete with upland bogs and red spruce. One place it doesn't bring to mind is West Virginia. But locals know the best of our state looks a world away. I'm midway through a 15.1-mile loop across the high plateau of the Alleghenies, and it's something I need to keep reminding myself when I wend through blueberry thickets and rock outcroppings that put other states to shame. I don't want to be anywhere else. *By Nathan Pipenberg*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE BLACKBIRD KNOB TRAILHEAD

1) Follow the **Blackbird Knob Trail** 2.3 miles west through rhododendron tunnels to a

Y-junction.

2) Peel off to the south (hiker's left) on the **Red Creek Trail**, and take it 1.1 miles south to another intersection.

3) To do the loop around Breathed Mountain counterclockwise (saving the best scenery for day two), head 2.7 miles west onto the **Breathed Mountain Trail**.

4) Veer south onto the **Big Stonecoal Trail** and take it 3.2 miles to a junction.

5) Turn onto the **Rocky Point Trail** and follow it around Breathed Mountain and past views of the Sods to its end at the Red Creek Trail near mile 11.3.

6) Follow the **Red Creek Trail** 1.3 miles north back to complete the loop portion of the lollipop.

7) Retrace your steps 3.4 miles to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE BIG STONECOAL (MILE 8.6)

Find a site on the left (east) of the Big Stonecoal Trail near a thick stand of red spruce, along a sandy bank of the river. This flat expanse was a lumber camp at the turn of the 20th century. From here, take a short spur to an 18-foot waterfall just south of camp.

WILDLIFE

The vast stretches of blueberries (fruiting July and August) attract summer hikers and

four-legged foragers. Forest rangers in the Monongahela say they hear reports of more bear encounters in the Dolly Sods than anywhere else in the state. Also, due to the relatively high elevation, the Sods are home to species like snowshoe hares and saw-whet owls, which are more commonly found several degrees of latitude to the north.

TERRAIN

The highest plateau east of the Mississippi (ranging from 2,500 feet to 4,700 feet in elevation), the Dolly Sods feels distinctly out of place south of the Mason-Dixon line. The cold, windy climate stunts the forests and exposes the rocks.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 39.033569, -79.314117; 15 miles southwest of Maysville on FS 75

SEASON Year-round; early summer is best for flora, and late summer is best for blueberries

PERMIT None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapBreatedMountainLoop (\$15)

CONTACT bit.do/breathed-mountain **TRIP**

DATA backpacker.com/breathed-mountain-loop

Distance 15.1 miles (lollipop-loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



Longleaf pines line a waterway in the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge.

SWAMP SEASON

okefenokee national wildlife refuge, georgia

CYPRESS TREES SHAWLED in gray moss shield my crew of eight from the sunshine. We float through a cluster of lily pads as our aluminum canoes clunk off roots in the narrow canal of coffee-colored water. A doe looks up at us while nibbling on some moss, unconcerned with our intrusion. Here, in the Lower 48's largest blackwater swamp, she must not get many visitors. We're less than an hour into a 21-mile paddle and we've already seen a group of tumbling otters, a hawk, and a gator—each one more disinterested in us than the last. Given that our only intention was to flee the cold for T-shirt weather, I'll consider this a landslide win. *By Kathy Kyle*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM KINGFISHER LANDING

- 1) Paddle .3 mile north to the dark-water **Suwannee River**.
- 2) Turn east into the flatwater and go 1.1 miles to another confluence.

3) Split north into the **Middle Fork Suwannee River** and follow it 4.3 miles.

4) Veer east into a signed, 4-foot-wide channel and paddle 3.3 miles to **Floyds Island**.

5) Retrace your strokes 8.7 miles to the original junction near the put-in.

6) Instead of returning to the launch, keep going 1.5 miles to **Mixons Hammock**.

7) Head 1.7 miles back to the launch.

CAMPSITE 1 FLOYDS ISLAND (MILE 9)

Spend night one in a simple, metal-roofed hunting cabin built in the 1920s. There are four rooms (no furnishings; bring a pad) that surround a living room with a wood-burning stove. Pack something for happy hour on one of the covered porches, as well as your gaiters: Floyds extends about 5 miles. Reserve the cabin (\$15/person; recreation.gov). If it's taken, tent camp nearby (same permit needed).

CAMPSITE 2 MIXONS HAMMOCK (MILE 19.1)

The best spot for tent camping in the area is on this tiny island. Paddle ashore and follow the footpath less than .5 mile to the first-come, first-serve clearing (room for 10 tents) amid saw palmettos. At night, listen for barred owls—or any of the other 234 birds that call the refuge home. (It's also \$15/

person.)

WILDLIFE

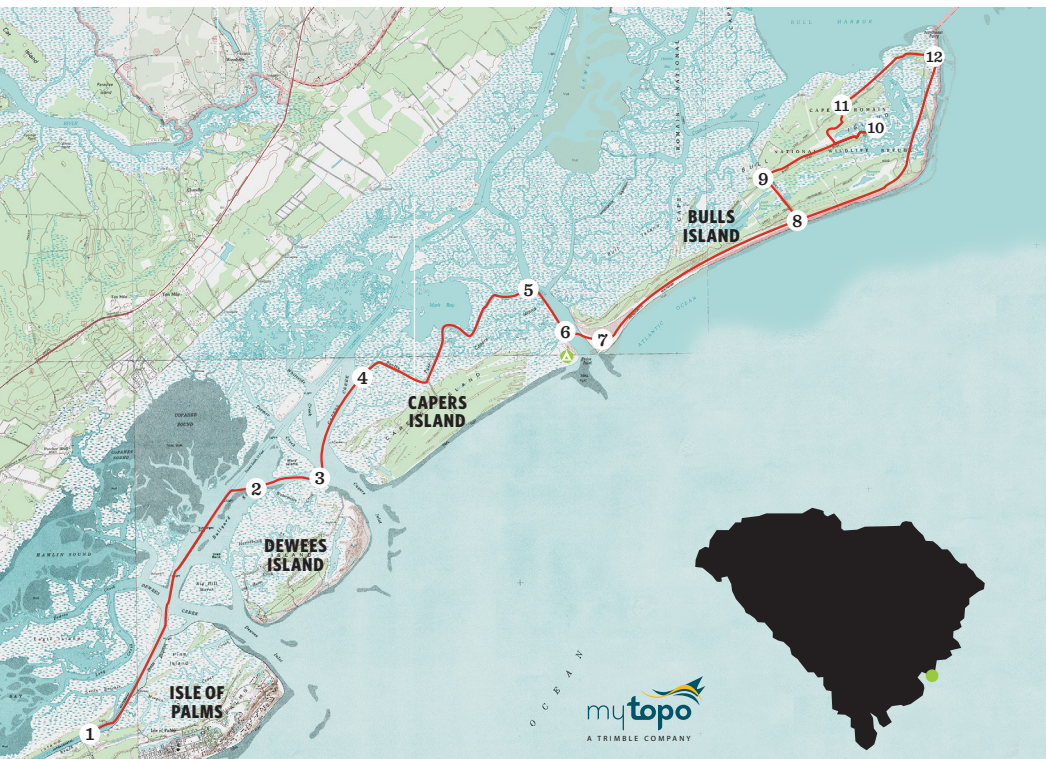
November to March is best for viewing because the birds are more active and the alligators are dormant (making their prey, like otters, more active). Keep an ear out for the trilling of sandhill cranes, and scan for red-shouldered hawks surveying the swamp from tree branches. Yellow-bellied sliders and snapping turtles lounge on logs.

DO IT PUT-IN 30.827873, -82.361155; 18 miles northeast of Fargo off GA-177 **SEASON** October through May (beware the aggressive gators in spring) **PERMIT** Required (\$15/night per person); reserve at recreation.gov. **BOAT RENTALS** Stephen C. Foster State Park rents canoes for \$50 per day. **WATER** The tannic water is technically A-OK if filtered, but you have a boat, so bring a gallon per person per day (in mild conditions). **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapOkefenokee (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/okefenokee **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/okefenokee

Distance 20.8 miles (out and back)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



FLOAT A WILD COAST

CAPE ROMAIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, SC

IDIPMY paddle into the brackish water and cut through the surf, trying to keep pace with my companions—a pod of bottlenose dolphins. The outgoing tide propels my kayak through an estuary in the Lowcountry, a low-lying coastal area outside of Charleston where land, sea, and river converge. I'll float 10.5 miles through the Intra-coastal Waterway and a slew of tidal creeks to the sandy north end of Capers Island today—an easy paddle that only takes three hours—before tenting on the beach. Tomorrow, I'll explore the next island by foot, where I hope to see loggerhead turtles and alligators. Then I'll retrace my strokes—maybe I can keep up with the dolphins on the way out. *By David Kuczki*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE ISLE OF PALMS LANDING

- 1)** Wait for an outgoing tide and paddle 4 miles northeast through the **Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway** to marker #103. Tip: Hug the bank for an easier time avoiding other boats and their wakes.
- 2)** Veer east (paddler's right) into deep-water **Watermelon Creek** and continue .9 mile toward Capers Island.

- 3)** Head 1.4 miles into **Capers Creek**.
- 4)** Turn east into **Santee Pass**, a deep-water, narrow tributary, and float 3.1 miles past the mudflats of Mark Bay to an intersection with **Price Creek**.
- 5)** Head .7 mile south into Price and paddle ashore at **Capers Island**.
- 6)** Navigate across .2-mile-wide Price Creek to the southern shore of **Bulls Island** at mile 10.5. Tip: Paddle diagonally into the tide if flow is swift.
- 7)** Leave your boat above the high-tide line and hike 3.3 miles northeast on **Front Beach**.
- 8)** Turn northwest on sandy **Beach Road** and follow it .7 mile. (Only federal service vehicles are allowed on Bulls Island, so don't expect car traffic on these "roads.")
- 9)** Veer northeast on grassy **Sheepshead Ridge Road** and take it 1.6 miles to its terminus for a view from the 16-foot-tall observation tower.
- 10)** Retrace your steps .5 mile to **Alligator Alley** and follow the sandy trail .7 mile as it zigzags north to an intersection.
- 11)** Turn northeast onto grassy **Old Fort Road** and take it 1.5 miles to the tip of the island at Northeast Point.
- 12)** Follow the shore 6.6 miles south and west to the south beach of Bulls Island.
- 13)** Retrace your strokes across Price Creek to camp and, next day, to the put-in.

CAMPSITE NORTH BEACH ON CAPERS ISLAND (MILE 10.3)

You won't have to throw elbows to get the best spot on this island. Capers is only accessible by watercraft, so nab a space above the

high-tide line on the north beach. Gators don't live on Capers, but don't push your luck: Follow LNT guidelines and don't wash your dishes in any body of water.

WATER

Pack in all water—the creeks are brackish. We recommend a gallon per person per day in mild conditions. In a bind? There's a picnic area with running water on Bulls Island just north of the intersection of Beach and Sheepshead Ridge Roads (mile 14.5).

WILDLIFE

Bulls Island is replete with exotic animals. For birds—there are more than 290 species here—stay awhile at Jacks Creek (near mile 18). Highlights include ring-necked teals, canvasback ducks, plovers, American oystercatchers, and black skimmers. Also at Jacks Creek: alligators. The big lizards, which don't hunt on land, often sun themselves on the banks here. Then there are the loggerheads; Bulls is one of the most active nesting sites for these reddish-brown turtles. Back on Capers, bobcats lurk in the maritime woods and deer browse in the forest fringes.

DON'T MISS

Both islands have a "boneyard beach," or expanse of coastline that has eroded enough to the point where the skeletal remains of the maritime forest are now in the surf. On this itinerary, you'll hike through Bulls' boneyard beach on day two (miles 20 to 21); time it for low tide so you can wander among the fossilized trees. Capers' boneyard makes for a great time-killer if you miss the incoming tide to paddle back to the put-in: From camp, follow the coastline .8 mile southwest on foot to reach the haunting thickets of sun-bleached oaks, cedars, and pines.

DO IT PUT-IN 32.805776, -79.759305; 16 miles east of Charleston off 41st Ave. **RED TAPE** Bulls Island is closed at night, so be sure to get back to Capers by sunset. **GEAR UP** Coastal Expeditions (coastalexpedition.com) in Isle of Palms rents kayaks for about \$55/day. The shop is less than 100 yards from the put-in. **SEASON** October through April for ideal weather and fewer mosquitoes **PERMIT** Required (free) for camping; contact the South Carolina Dept. of Natural Resources (843-953-9360; ThomasT@dnr.sc.gov) to have one sent to you. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/bpmapcapersandbulls (\$15) **CONTACT** fws.gov/refuge/cape_romain **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/capersandbulls

Distance 35.8 miles (lollipop-loop, including paddling and hiking)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



Spotting elk in Cataloochee Valley is all but guaranteed—that's their primary hangout spot.

HIKE WITH ELK

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, NC

THE TROUT IN the stream next to my campsite were elusive, but not the elk. Six of them strolled past me at the trailhead as I geared up for a 14.2-mile overnight loop on the Cataloochee Divide in the eastern corner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I took it as a good omen and began the ridgewalk, which undulates across grassy balds and passes some of the biggest, oldest poplars in the park. While Great Smoky Mountains might be the most visited park in the system, Cataloochee is far from the crowds that flock to the Appalachian Trail and gateway towns at the western entrance. With a bit of luck, you can see as many elk as people. It's enough to make me forget those wily trout. *By Graham Averill*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE POLLS GAP TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head south on the **Hemphill Bald Trail** to a junction at mile 5.7.
- 2) Take a sharp left and head west, staying on the Hemphill Bald Trail 3.1 miles to a fork.
- 3) Continue 1.8 miles west on the **Caldwell Fork Trail** to another junction.
- 4) Veer south onto the **Rough Fork Trail** and take it 3.6 miles back to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE BACKCOUNTRY CAMPSITE 41 (MILE 9)

Bring your fly rod (and patience); this site is steps from Caldwell Fork, a stream with knee-deep pools full of brook trout. It's one of a few sites (permit info below) by the creek, and you'll be just .3 mile east of some of the biggest poplars in the park (some have trunks 10 feet in diameter).

ELK

Reintroduced to the park in 2001, Manitoban elk are thriving: The population stands at an estimated 200 animals. Scan for the 700-pound ungulates in pastures and clearings near forested areas and streams at dawn and dusk.

KILLER VIEW

From Gooseberry Knob, a grassy bald equipped with Adirondack chairs, you can see 50 miles into the Black Mountain Range. It's worth the .7-mile spur from the Hemphill Bald junction at mile 5.7 on this route. June bonus: The hardwood canopy is at its most lush, and the high elevation means you'll escape the Smokies' notorious heat.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 35.563287, -83.161635; 18 miles northwest of Dellwood on Heintooga Ridge Rd. **SEASON** April to November **PERMITS** Required for camping (\$4 per person; smokiespermits.nps.gov) **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapCataloocheeDivide (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/grsm **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/cataloocheedivide

Distance 14.2 miles (loop)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



WEEKENDS

NORTHEAST



The sunset view from
West Bond

CLIFFSIDE TRAVERSE

WHITE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST, NEW HAMPSHIRE

IT'S NOT THE climbing that takes my breath away. It's the way that the trail, enclosed by northern hardwoods for miles, suddenly pops out above them, and there it is: every peak, valley, and forested hill in the Pemigewasset Wilderness, with the summit of Mt. Washington in the distance and not a single sign of civilization in between. It goes on like this for a mile atop Bondcliff, and the easy footing means I frequently swivel around and see all the White Mountain peaks I have climbed, and all the ones I've yet to. First is 4,540-foot West Bond, just a mile up the way, which hangs out over the void between here and Franconia Ridge. I push up the trail. I've got a date with a sunset. *By Philip Werner*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE LINCOLN WOODS TRAILHEAD

- 1) Take the **Lincoln Woods Trail** 4.8 miles north and east along the East Branch Pemigewasset River to an intersection.
- 2) Turn north (hiker's left) onto the **Bondcliff**

Trail and follow it 5.4 miles across 4,265-foot Bondcliff Mountain and 4,698-foot Mt. Bond. There's a short scramble before you pop above treeline on Bondcliff that locals jokingly call the Hillary Step.

- 3) Veer .5 mile west on the **West Bond Spur Trail** to the 4,540-foot summit of West Bond. From the summit, there's a good view of Lincoln Slide, an avalanche scar down the west face of Mt. Lincoln along Franconia Ridge.

- 4) Back on the main path, continue .1 mile on the **Bondcliff Trail** to the short spur to your camp at the **Guyot Campsite and Shelter**.

- 5) Retrace your steps 10.4 miles (if skipping a second visit to the top of West Bond) to return to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE GUYOT CAMPSITE/SHELTER (MILE 11.4)

A .2-mile spur off the Bondcliff Trail delivers you to the Guyot Campsite. There are four single-tent platforms, two double-tent platforms, and a shelter that sleeps 12 (first-come, first-serve; \$10/person per night from Memorial Day to Columbus Day). Latecomers are asked to share tent platforms or camp in an overflow zone which makes for a long schlep to water. Dispersed camping and sleeping in the alpine zone are both prohibited (the latter is OK if there's 2 feet of snow on the ground).

COLORS DU JOUR

Any of the hardwood species in the Pemi is a showstopper in early October, but taken

together, they're almost garish. Look for paper birch (yellow), white ash (yellow fading to purple), black cherry (yellow and orange), red maple (red-orange and yellow), and red oak (dark red) in one of the Northeast's prettiest displays of fall colors.

TRAIL MAGIC

Pack some extra candy bars. The Guyot Campsite is a popular stopping point for AT thru-hikers, and the ones that are still around in September are the last of the northbound class and still have 357 miles to go to reach Katahdin.

MAKE IT LONGER

This hike represents the first leg of the 31-mile Pemigewasset Loop, one of New Hampshire's premier routes. Instead of heading back from Guyot, continue on the AT and Franconia Ridge Trail to climb six additional 4,000-footers, including the peaks of Franconia Ridge, before ending back at Lincoln Woods trailhead. Set aside two nights for the trip.

DO IT TRAILHEAD Lincoln Woods (44.0639, -71.5876); 5 miles east of Lincoln off NH 112E

SEASON June to November **PERMIT** None

CONTACT fs.usda.gov/whitemountain

Distance 21.8 miles (out-and-back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



A top-down view into the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania

EASTERN CANYONLAND

BLACK FOREST TRAIL, PENNSYLVANIA

ISWEAR THIS trail is giving me amnesia. Over the last two hours or so, I felt the grind as I climbed yet another thousand feet out of a deep, steep gorge. But at the summit of Hemlock Mountain, my memory of the struggle is wiped totally clear: Pine Creek cuts into the forested, emerald hills, creating what locals call the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania. I want to get lost in the view across the 400-foot-wide ravine, but I cannot linger. Up next is a thousand-foot descent followed by a 1,300-foot climb. Chances are good I'll forget those hills as well. But I'll always remember having this land of wilderness, waterfalls, and bubbling springs all to myself. *By Ryan Utz*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE VILLAGE OF SLATE RUN

- 1)** Note the orange blazes. The 42-mile **Black Forest Trail** is a long and winding route with connections to other nearby trail systems, but it's well-marked.
- 2)** Start by hiking north up a 1,200-foot ridge.

After a few miles, give all the elevation back as the trail bottoms out at **Slate Run** (mile 6), a primo trout stream.

3) At mile 13, the trail crosses **PA-44**. After a long descent along **County Line Branch**, climb to the Barrens (mile 19), where stunted forest allows for downcanyon views.

4) Cross **PA-44** again at mile 23.5, followed by a series of climbs and descents in and out of small tributaries of Pine Creek.

5) Optional: At mile 31 you can hike **Naval Creek Run Road** for about a mile to arrive back at Slate Run village if you want a shorter itinerary. Otherwise, most of the remaining 11 miles run along a plateau until mile 40, where you will take in the final views of Slate Run valley and descend.

CAMPSITES

Camping is allowed almost anywhere along the trail (usual LNT caveats notwithstanding), and you'll likely encounter established sites every 2 miles or so. This creates an opportunity to take the trail at your own pace. Fancy moving water? Find sites with nearby waterfalls at miles 7, 15, 27, and 31. If views are more your thing (and you still want water), throw down at miles 10, 18, 24, and 36. You can't go wrong, and the abundance means you won't have to share.

WILDLIFE

This vast forest is home to a cast of creatures more commonly associated with the West,

including black bears, bald eagles, and bobcats. In warm, sunny conditions, be wary of timber rattlers, especially on the final descent of a rocky ridge at mile 40. The many streams the trail crosses (including Slate Run) afford excellent angling opportunities, including a chance to catch (and release) native brook trout.

TOWERING TREES

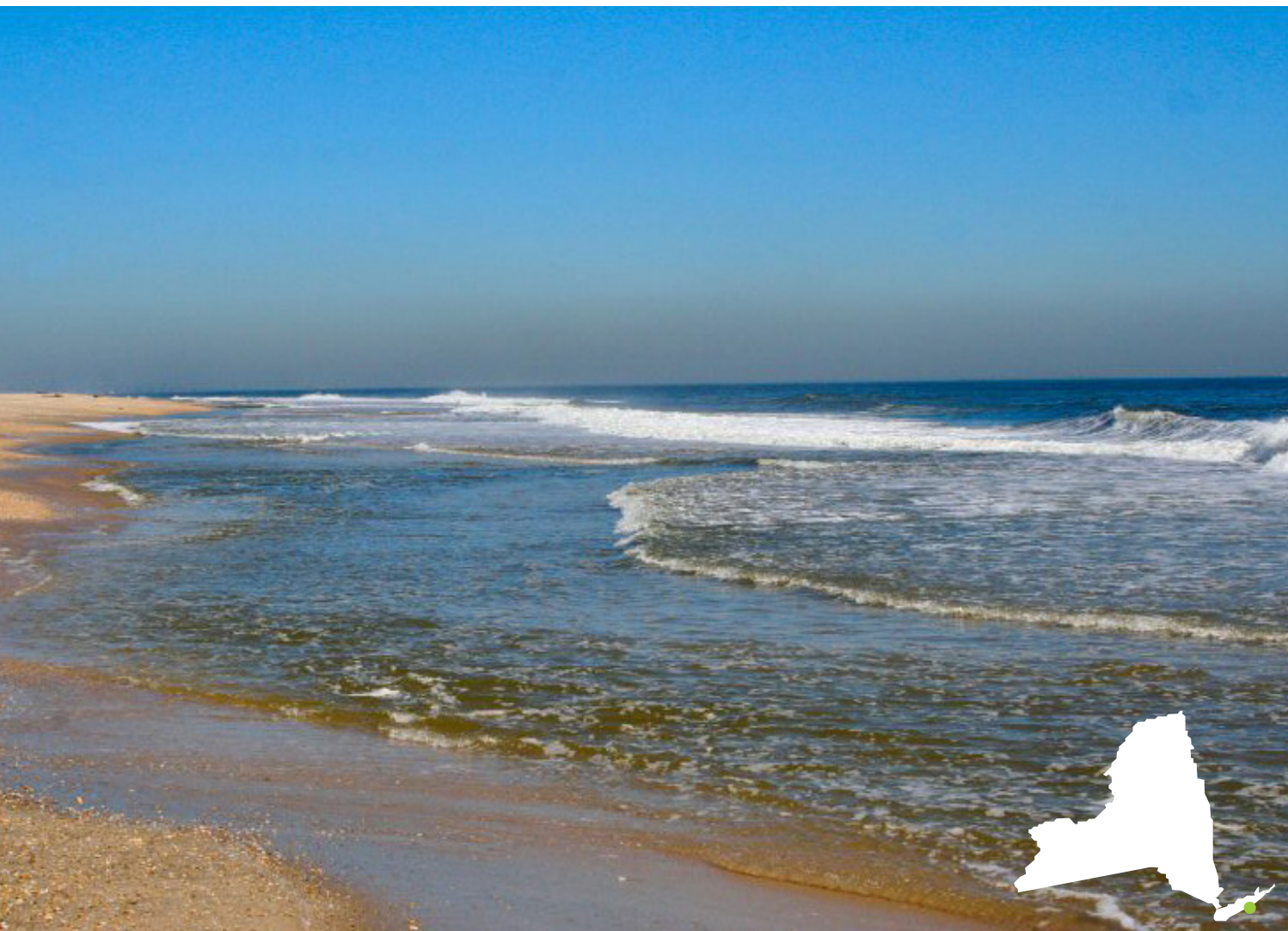
The forests along Black Forest Trail were clear-cut for timber more than a century ago. However, one giant hemlock that avoided the sawmill (and the pests) still stands at the end of a .4-mile spur at mile 35.1. The impressive girth (4-foot diameter) and stature (about 120 feet) of this specimen offer a glimpse of what these forests once looked like.

DO IT TRAILHEAD Slate Run (41.4743, -77.5116); less than 2 miles uphill from the village of Slate Run across the creek from Pine Creek Road. **SEASON** Year-round; mid-September to mid-October is the best for fall foliage. **PERMIT** None, but a few ecologically sensitive spots along Slate Run ask you to self-register. **CONTACT** bit.do/BlackForestTrail

Distance 42.2 miles (loop)

Time 3 to 5 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



LIFE'S A BEACH

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE, NEW YORK

IDON'T HAVE TO go far to lose the tourists on Fire Island. That's really saying something—it took me only a couple of hours to get here from New York City. Hoisting an overnight pack, I squeeze past the day trippers and storefront shoppers and journey into solitude, following the empty shoreline through the hazy blur of sun on sand. When it feels right, I veer into the dunes and make a private, oceanside camp. I sit, I think, and I savor the way the low, evening sun turns the Atlantic orange. Seems simple, but this time tomorrow I'll be back in the fray, so I might as well take it slow. *By Justin Bailey*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM DAVIS PARK FERRY TERMINAL

- 1) Follow **Trustees Walk** .2 mile south to the ocean.
- 2) Turn northeast and follow the shoreline 1.5 miles to the **Western Zone** boundary. Camp anywhere in the subsequent 2.6-mile-long swath; the writer stopped at mile 3.4 overall.
- 3) Next day, retrace your steps to the ferry terminal.

CAMPSITE WESTERN ZONE DUNES (MILE 3.4)

The tent real estate in this 2.6-mile-long area is virtually endless. Camp close to the dunes to avoid high tide—currents here are strong enough to sweep you out to sea—and consider bringing an umbrella or rigging a tarp for shade. The soft sand makes for a luxurious night's sleep, but also makes setup a nightmare if you don't stake your tent properly (buy sand-specific stakes or read up on dead-man anchors at backpacker.com/tent-anchors before heading out). Pack in all water; there's a spigot on Trustees Walk.

WILDLIFE

In summer, look for humpback whales and

bottlenose dolphins just offshore. Harbor seals occasionally take snoozes on the beach. Red foxes like to patrol the shoreline at dusk (store your food in a hard container). Summer bummer: Bring bug spray and beware the ticks.

GETTING HERE

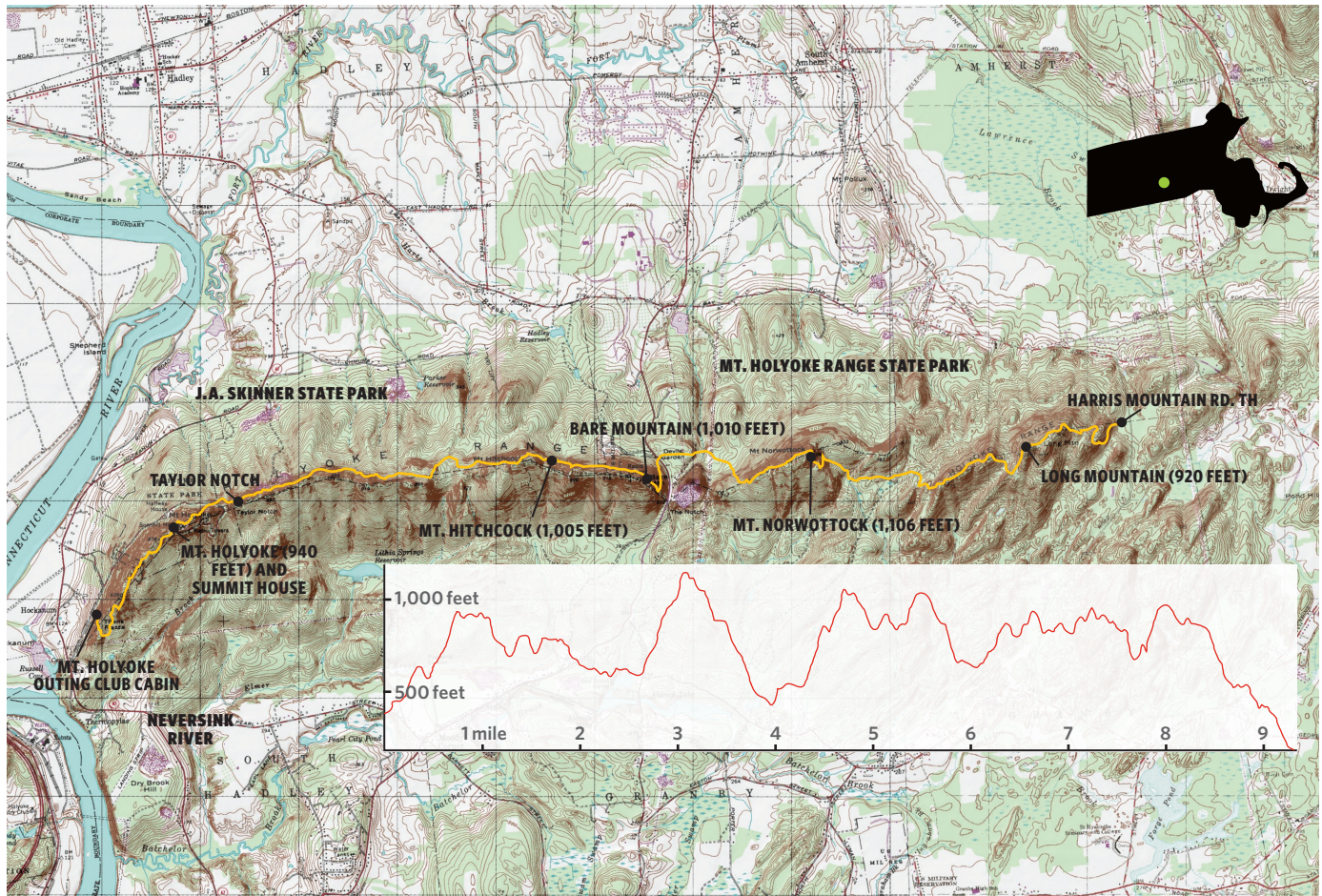
Nice perk: You can reach Fire Island via public transit. Take the Long Island Railroad out of NYC Penn Station to the south shore of Long Island (Patchogue). Walk 1 mile south along Cedar Avenue to the Davis Park ferry terminal.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 40.6858, -73.0046; a 20-minute ferry ride (\$17 round-trip) from Patchogue **SEASON** April to October **PERMIT** Required (\$25); reserve online. **CONTACT** nps.gov/fiis

Distance 3.4+ miles (out and back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



PASTORAL UPRISING

MT. HOLYOKE RANGE & J.A. SKINNER STATE PARKS, MASSACHUSETTS

DAYLIGHT IS BEGINNING to burn off the morning fog, opening the views beyond the oxbow below and into the Berkshires and Vermont. Here, in western Mass, where valleys slope down to the Connecticut River and brick storefronts, it's all very bucolic. But then: The Mt. Holyoke Range and its slew of 1,000-foot peaks flash across the horizon like a lightning bolt. You can traverse the rippled ridgeline in 9 miles across two state parks, or, like I do, as an out-and-back after a night in a rustic cabin beneath Mt. Holyoke. As I'm doubling back, I get to once again see summer's mountain laurel and hear the songbirds, and yet the view feels completely new. *By Olivia Dwyer*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM HARRIS MOUNTAIN ROAD

- 1) Take the **Metacomet-Monadnock Trail** 4.2 miles west across Mt. Holyoke Range State Park to MA 116, tagging five knobs on the way.
- 2) Enter J.A. Skinner State Park via the Bare Mountain trailhead and continue 3.8 miles west to 940-foot **Mt. Holyoke**.
- 3) Circle around the Summit House, then proceed on the **M-M Trail**, which barrels downhill along a former tram line to the **Mt. Holyoke Outing Club Cabin** near mile 9.3.
- 4) Head back to Harris Mountain Road for an 18.6-mile out-and-back (or hike .1 mile out to a shuttle car on Old Mountain Road).

CAMPSITE MT. HOLYOKE OUTING CLUB CABIN (MILE 9.3)

Do the hike east to west so you can take advantage of this old outpost. Find the humble wood cabin (\$35 for the whole thing; bit.do/holyoke-cabin-rental) nestled into the hillside as the descent starts to mellow out. Inside, snag one of four cots, and enjoy a woodstove and electric lights.

HIGH-STYLE FINISH

Summit House opened in the 1850s as a mountaintop retreat for tourists and creative types. Acquired by the state in 1940, the restored structure now offers a culture fix for

hikers: Explore a museum with artifacts from the hotel's past, or, on Thursday nights in summer, linger for folk and blues concerts (\$10) as sunset rays flood the balcony.

BIRDS

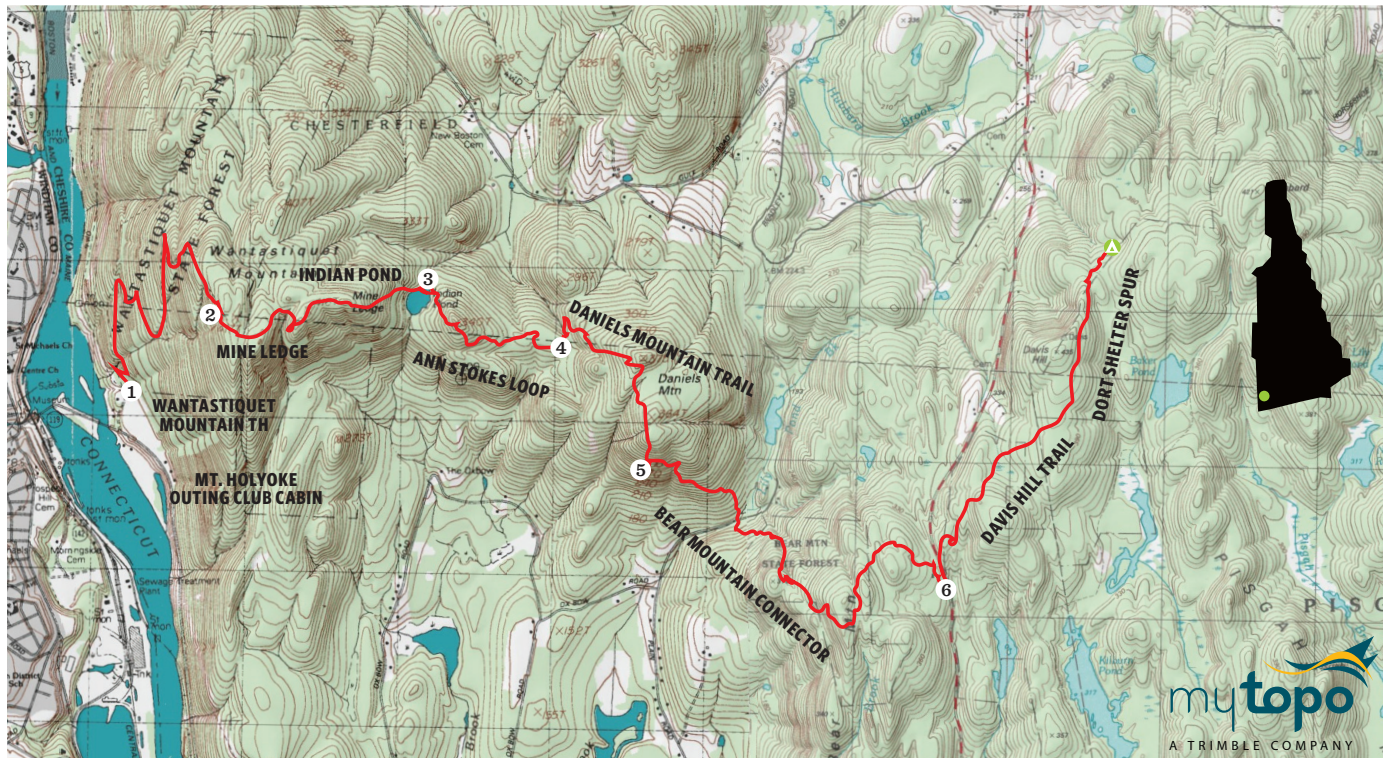
The range's east-west orientation makes for a powerful windbreak. Mountain slopes convert northwest gusts into updrafts—and ideal hunting grounds for birds of prey. Look up to spot broad-winged hawks, kestrels, and even the occasional bald eagle. Solo flyers drift through in spring and summer; migration traffic peaks in September.

WATER

There are no reliable creeks on this route, but you can top off at the Notch Visitor Center (mile 4.2) and the Summit House (mile 8) between May and October.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 42.3075, -72.4709; 7 miles east of Hadley on Harris Mountain Rd.
SEASON May to October **PERMIT** None
CONTACT bit.do/mt-holyoke-sp

Distance 18.6 miles (out and back)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



A VIEW OF YOUR OWN WANTASTIQUET MOUNTAIN NATURAL AREA AND PISGAH STATE PARK, NEW HAMPSHIRE

DAYLIGHT IS BEGINNING to burn off the morning fog, opening the views beyond the oxbow below and into the Berkshires and Vermont. Here, in western Mass, where valleys slope down to the Connecticut River and brick storefronts, it's all very bucolic. But then: The Mt. Holyoke Range and its slew of 1,000-foot peaks flash across the horizon like a lightning bolt. You can traverse the rippled ridgeline in 9 miles across two state parks, or, like I do, as an out-and-back after a night in a rustic cabin beneath Mt. Holyoke. As I'm doubling back, I get to once again see summer's mountain laurel and hear the songbirds, and yet the view feels completely new. *By Olivia Dwyer*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE WANTASTIQUET MOUNTAIN TRAILHEAD

- 1) Follow the **Wantastiquet Mountain Trail** 2 miles along gentle switchbacks to the 1,322-foot summit for a view across the Connecticut River into Vermont.
- 2) Continue east to a junction just beyond

Indian Pond, near mile 3.4.

- 3) Stay right, veering south on **Ann Stokes Loop**, which follows the ridge for .9 mile.

- 4) Peel north onto the **Daniels Mountain Trail**, crossing the forested, 1,214-foot summit to an intersection at mile 5.3.

- 5) Near Moon Ledge, turn east (hiker's left) onto the **Bear Mountain Connector** and go 2.5 miles to Pisgah State Park.

- 6) Proceed 1.6 miles north on the **Davis Hill Trail** to the spur for the Dort Shelter, a .2-mile detour north.

- 7) Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE DORT SHELTER (MILE 9.6)

This three-sided, Adirondack-style lean-to can fit six comfortably (first-come, first-serve). It's in a grove of birch, ash, and low-lying ferns and has a fire ring. Since the W-M Trail doesn't appear on topos yet, chances are good you'll have the shelter all to yourself. So far, it's the only designated (read: legal) site on the entire W-M Trail.

ROUTEFINDING

The W-M Trail connects many smaller, intersecting trail networks, and there are a lot of junctions and different markers to follow. Brush up on your map and compass skills before heading out, and, as a good rule of thumb, keep your eyes peeled for blue diamonds outlined in white, denoting the longer W-M Trail toward Mt. Monadnock in the east.

THRU-HIKE IT

This itinerary ticks off just the westernmost piece of the new, 50-mile W-M Trail. From

the Davis Hill Trail (step 6), you can continue 20 or so miles along a patchwork of trails to reach Keene, New Hampshire. From there, a bike path and a repurposed railbed connect you with the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail, which leads to the path's end at Mt. Monadnock. For maps and information, visit chesterfieldoutdoors.com.

FOLIAGE

Fall color here typically peaks in the first two weeks of October. Most hikers flock to the big-ticket views on the eastern half of the W-M Trail (like Monadnock), so you'll likely score those to yourself on this trip: Overlooks at Mine Ledge (mile 2.6), Indian Pond (3.4), and Moon Ledge (5.3) are all worth short detours.

WATER

The only reliable water source on this route is Indian Pond near mile 3.4. Be sure to get enough to last the rest of the night before continuing on. Or, if you prefer, you can tack on about .7 mile from the shelter to reach Baker Pond.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 42.8529, -72.5485; 3 miles north of Guilford, VT, on Mountain Rd.
SEASON May to October **PERMIT** None
CUSTOM MAP bit.do/BPmapWMtrail (\$15)
CONTACT bit.do/w-m-greenway

Distance 19.2 miles (out and back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



GREEN WITH ENVY

MT. GRACE STATE FOREST, MASSACHUSETTS

THERE'S GREEN, and there's September green. When I emerge onto the fire tower capping 1,621-foot Mt. Grace, I'm greeted by the second. Between the evergreens, clusters of chartreuse-hued hardwoods are starting their engines for the fall color show, brightening to neon levels before they turn. I'm here on the New England Trail, savoring a quiet, two-night trip before the leaf-peepers descend on the place, and this is the way to do it: I'm the only hiker on this metal aerie—reached via one of the area's most popular dayhikes. The view of the vast forestland and remote countryside sweeps 360 degrees. I'm reluctant to descend back into the dark, leafy corridor below, but it will lead to another summit much like this and, even better, a true backcountry campsite. The New England Trail isn't completely finished yet, but

that doesn't mean it isn't ready for backpacking. You just have to know where—and when—to go. *By Melanie Radzicki McManus*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM MA 78

- 1) Follow the **New England (NET)/M-M Trail** 1.5 miles south to 1,618-foot Mt. Grace, the highest peak on the NET.
- 2) Descend via the **Old Snowshoe Trail**, ducking through a hardwood forest to the state forest boundary at mile 2.7.
- 3) Turn west onto **Northfield Road**, once part of the historic 5th Massachusetts Turnpike, before returning to the woods on the NET.
- 4) Continue west on the NET, ascending 1,285-foot Stratton Mountain to its summit tent platforms at mile 8.
- 5) Follow the NET south off Stratton to the Gulf Road trailhead at mile 10.5.

CAMPSITE STRATTON MOUNTAIN (MILE 8)

Don't miss your alarm at this northeast-facing spot. With your back to the hardwoods, soak in the view, which stretches into three states: See New Hampshire's 3,166-foot Mt. Monadnock 50 miles north and Vermont's 3,130-foot Mt. Ascutney 20 miles northeast, as well as Mt.

Grace east across the valley. There's a cabin on Stratton (reservation required), but the two tent platforms are relatively new and unknown, so you shouldn't have an issue landing one (first-come, first-serve).

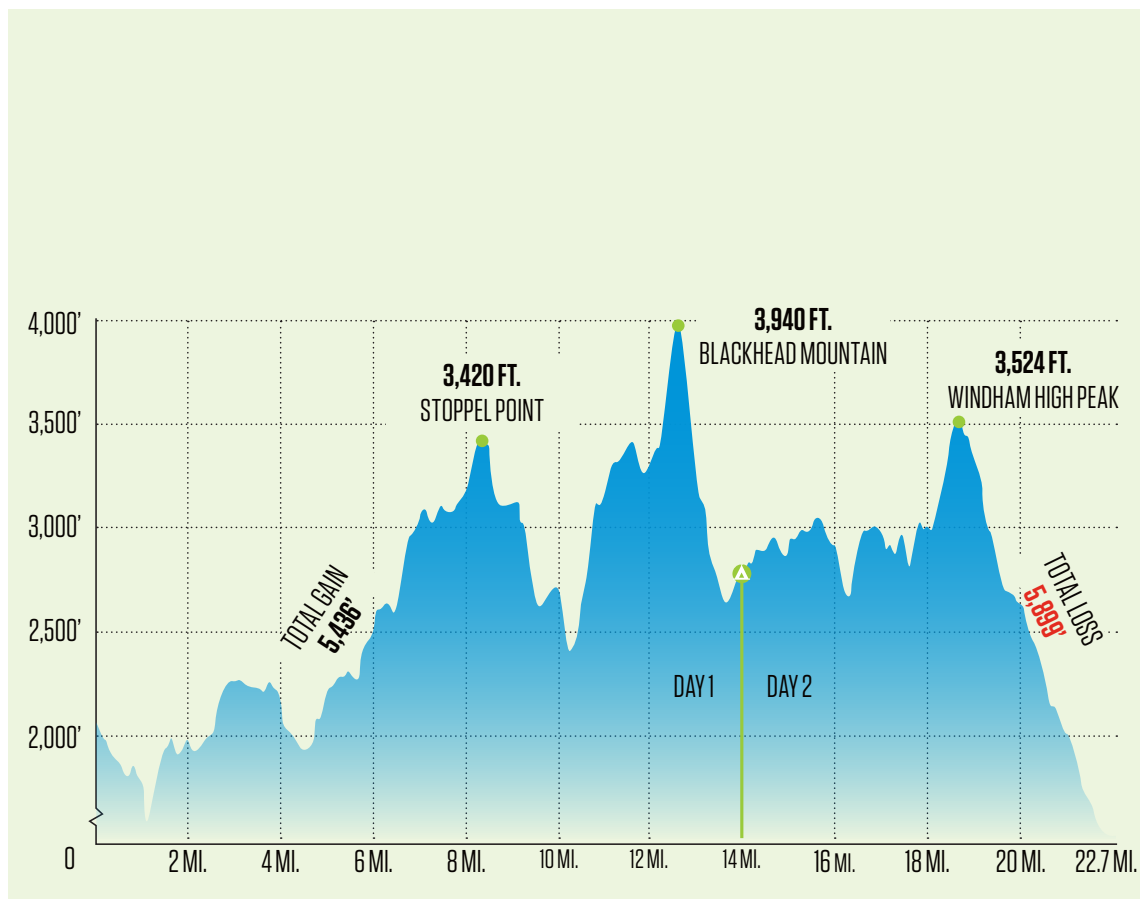
HISTORY

The Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike, authorized in 1799, was one of more than 60 stagecoach toll roads that operated in Massachusetts during the early 1800s. The route connected Leominster, Athol, Greenfield, and Northfield before it was decommissioned in 1833. The NET travels along a portion of the old route near mile 2.7 on this itinerary.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 42.6596, -72.4190; 8 miles east of Bernardston on Gulf Rd.

TRAILHEAD 42.7062, -72.3487; a 23-minute drive northeast from the shuttle car **SEASON** Year-round **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapMtGrace (\$15) **CONTACT** newenglandtrail.org

Distance 10.5 miles (point to point)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



ON EDGE

CATSKILL PARK, NEW YORK

EVERY FOOTSTEP TAKES you higher on Blackhead Mountain's southeastern flank. The narrow trail barrels through the hardwood forest, over twisted roots and jumbled rocks, and to a summit thick with spruce and fir. When the canopy thins, I scramble atop another shoulder and spin around to gauge my progress. The Escarpment Trail gets top billing in the Catskills, and this vista deserves the hype. The 1,600-foot shale wall towers above the pastoral Hudson Valley, the eastern fringe of a landscape that inspired 19th-century artists, novelists, and resort titans. It spurs me forward along the route's northern half, where I climb peaks that top out above 3,500 feet, dip into cool hemlock groves, and duck beneath vibrant green maples. The superlatives remain as true as the panoramas, tumbling off to infinity. *By Olivia Dwyer*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE SCUTT ROAD PARKING AREA

1) Pick up the blue-blazed **Escarpment Trail**,

which snakes north past dozens of cliff-top overlooks with views across the Hudson River to Vermont and Massachusetts. Near mile 14, descend from 3,940-foot Blackhead Mountain, keeping an eye out for the junction for the Batavia Kill Lean-to.

2) Follow the spur .2 mile west to camp.

3) Back on the main trail, continue 4.8 miles north along a jagged ridge to 3,524-foot Windham High Peak.

4) Close the final 3.5 miles west to the NY 23 parking lot.

CAMPSITE BATAVIA KILL LEAN-TO (MILE 14.2)

This tidy shelter, rebuilt in 2017, offers a reliable stream for water resupply, as well as a fire pit. Set in a forest clearing, it makes for a rare backcountry observatory for stargazing. (Or camp sooner off of Dutcher Notch; see Solitude.)

SOLITUDE

Prefer a private campsite? Scout one anywhere between North Mountain and Windham High Peak. Here, within the wilderness area boundaries (between miles 7 and 19 or so), dispersed camping is allowed below 3,500 feet. Good bet: At Dutcher Notch (mile 10.6), take a .3-mile detour west to find level ground and a reliable spring.

ADD A TRIP

The Catskills boast 35 peaks taller than 3,500 feet. Tack on another day to double your haul: From Blackhead's summit, a 2.1-mile spur runs west across 3,980-foot Black Dome and 3,940-foot Thomas Cole Mountain.

WATER

The same geology that serves up dramatic rock formations here allows groundwater to percolate rapidly. Carry plenty of H₂O, and if you run dry on day one, take the spur from Dutcher Notch (see Solitude, above). The final resupply waits at Batavia Kill Lean-to (mile 14.2).

EASY OPTION

Stage bite-size hikes from North-South Lake Campground (\$22/night for NY residents) at the Escarpment Trail's southern terminus.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 42.3127, -74.1903; 12 miles west of Cairo on NY 23. **TRAILHEAD** 42.2007, -74.0584; 30 minutes southeast of the shuttle car on N. Lake Rd. **SEASON** May to November **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapEscarpmentTrail (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/catskill-park

Distance 22.7 miles

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



PINELAND PARADISE

WHARTON STATE FOREST, NEW JERSEY

IT'S EASY TO slip into the trance of my footfalls. I'm following a sandy trail along the lazy, coffee-colored Batsto River, snaking through a maze of pitch pine and blueberry bushes, lost in my thoughts. Two miles in, a grove of lofty white cypresses growing out of a flooded swamp breaks my reverie. I drop my pack to inspect them and notice that they shelter a trove of purple-spotted, insect-eating pitcher plants. It won't be the last surprise on my weekend-size sampler of the 54-mile Batona Trail. Tonight, a chorus of whip-poor-will calls will serenade me to sleep, and tomorrow, hiking back on the Mullica River Trail, I'll hear the distinct, nasally sound of the tree frogs endemic to this area. Here in the Pine Barrens, there's a lot more than meets the eye. *By Ryan Utz*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE BATSTO VILLAGE VISITOR

CENTER

1) Head 2.2 miles north on the **Batona Trail/Batsto White Trail**.

2) Continue 4.2 miles on the **Batona Trail** to the Quaker Bridge.

3) Follow signs for "Lower Forge," trekking 1.3 miles to the riverside **Lower Forge Campsite**.

4) Next day, retrace your steps to the **Quaker Bridge**.

5) Cross the Batsto River via the trestle bridge and hike southwest on the **Wilderness Connector Trail** to an intersection at mile 9.9 (overall).

6) Turn south on the **Mullica River Trail**, which loops 5 miles back along its cypress-lined namesake to the Visitor Center.

CAMPSITE LOWER FORGE (MILE 7.7)

Take the clearly marked spur off of the Batona Trail to camp beside the tannin-tinted Batsto River. There are nine sites (each big enough for two tents), but the best are 1, 6, and 9, which rise above the water on aerie-like, pitch pine-shaded perches (reserve in advance at camping.nj.gov). Don't let the Batsto's brown color fool you into carrying back-breaking amounts of water, though: Tannins (from decaying trees) are harmless and won't clog your filter.

WILDLIFE

You might forget you're in the Garden State: Black bears, river otters, and bald eagles call this area home. In June, spend time in the flooded cypress groves at dusk to listen for the unique honk of the Pine Barrens tree frog, found nowhere else on earth.

GEOLOGY

The Pine Barrens, a 1.1-million-acre tract of woods and swamps, used to be the floor of a massive sea. When the water retreated, it left behind layers of sand. While this soil—called "sugar sand"—is too dusty and acidic to support crops, many plants thrive here. In addition to white cypress, look for sassafras, sweetgum, and oak, as well as carnivorous pitcher plants, sundews, and bladderworts.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 39.6453, -74.6472; 8 miles east of Hammonton on Batsto Rd. **SEASON** Year-round **PERMIT** Required for overnighting (\$5/night); obtain from the Batsto Village Ranger Station. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapPineBarrens (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/wharton-state-forest

Distance 14.9 miles (loop)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



Mt. Marcy looms above the Van Hoevenberg Trail.

WINTER WONDERLAND

HIGH PEAKS WILDERNESS, NEW YORK

THE WIND WHIPS up a flurry of snow from beyond the threshold of our three-walled shelter and deposits it onto my sleeping bag. I crack an eyelid to see the crystals catch in the moonlight, a sparkling pile of glitter on my cocoon. Then it's still, the sort of deafening silence that only winter brings. The calm is hard to believe after the weather on 5,344-foot Mt. Marcy. Earlier in the day, I stood on the scalped summit, bracing myself against fierce gusts among the miniaturized balsams that poked out of the wind-scoured snow. But the view was one of a kind: Shellacked with sheets of ice, rows of blue-tinted Adirondack High Peaks outran my vision. That's what I remember when I close my eyes at night—not the wind or the cold. A quick wiggle in my sleeping bag shakes off the snow and I return to my dreamland—and warm memories of Marcy's wild summit. *By Ryan Wichelns*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE HIGH PEAKS INFORMATION

CENTER ON ADIRONDACK LOJ ROAD

1) Follow the **Van Hoevenberg Trail** 2.4 miles south through rolling stands of pin-straight pines and snow-covered marshes to **Marcy Dam**.

2) Take the north approach to 5,344-foot Mt. Marcy by staying on the easy-to-follow, blazed Van Hoevenberg Trail, which leads 5.1 miles to the top of the peak at mile 7.5. (Expect to use traction devices on the final push.)

3) Retrace your steps to camp and the trailhead.

CAMPSITE MARCY DAM LEAN-TO (MILE 2.4)

Stage your summit bid from any of five classic Adirondack shelters that rim the former pond. We like the one tucked at the foot of slide-scarred Wright Peak on the southwestern shore for its seclusion and view of Avalanche Pass, but all the lean-tos are likely to be empty come winter. Don't forget a shovel: You may need to do some snow-removal housekeeping. Ambitious winter warriors can make a full-on snow camp .7 mile farther in a wind-protected spot below Phelps Mountain.

FANCY FOOTWEAR

The Van Hoevenberg Trail is Mt. Marcy's thoroughfare for a reason: The 7.5-mile north approach never gets steeper than 30 degrees and never harder than class 2. Use basic flotation like snowshoes or skis below treeline, then switch to slip-on traction devices (like Kahtoola MICROspikes) at higher elevations

when the snowpack thins out.

BAG MORE PEAKS

Good conditions up top? Keep going. Instead of retracing your steps off Marcy, downclimb its southwestern flank .7 mile on-trail to the saddle at 4,300 feet. From here, link the Mt. Marcy, Lake Arnold, Lake Arnold Crossover, and Avalanche Pass Trails on a clockwise circuit back to Marcy Dam, bagging 4,925-foot Mt. Skylight, 4,826-foot Gray Peak, and 3,944-foot Cliff Mountain en route. The whole detour is roughly 11 miles.

SEE AN ICEFALL

From camp, connect the Avalanche Pass and Lake Arnold Crossover Trails just over a mile to see 25-foot Indian Falls, a blue Popsicle come winter. Clamber up the slope to the top of the cascade for views of the ice-covered MacIntyre Range. (Note: Indian Falls is trail-side near the tail end of the peakbagging mission described above.)

DO IT TRAILHEAD 44.182815, -73.963703; 15 miles southwest of Keene at the end of Adirondack Loj Rd. **SEASON** November to April for winter conditions **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapMtMarcy (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/adks-high-peaks

Distance 15 miles (out and back)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



Nab this vantage of Lake Colden on the path to Mt. Marshall.

SUMMIT FEVER

MACINTYRE RANGE, NEW YORK

THE TRAIL DROPS like a mine shaft below treeline on the flank of 5,114-foot Algonquin Peak. I'm at the bottom, 2,000 vertical feet down, looking up. Progress is always slow in the High Peaks of the Adirondack Mountains, but it's especially so here. I clamber over tangled roots, choss piles, and boulders made slick by the stream that plummets along the route, sometimes reaching hand over hand as I crane my neck skyward. We summited 4,360-foot Mt. Marshall yesterday, and today we have three more peaks on the docket. Once we gain the ridgeline, they'll unfold like a red carpet: Iroquois, Algonquin, and Wright Peaks, each rising above the gold-, copper-, and scarlet-tinted hardwoods like the points of a crown. In the 'Daks, there are no gimme peaks, but I'm on a roll. *By Olivia Dwyer*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE HIGH PEAKS INFORMATION CENTER

- 1) Take the **Van Hoevenberg Trail** 2.3 miles to Marcy Dam.
- 2) Continue 2.9 miles south on the **Avalanche Pass Trail**, which climbs to Lake Colden.

- 3) At the trail register, skirt Lake Colden's west shore en route to the **Beaver Point Lean-to**, .9 mile away.
- 4) Retrace your steps to the trail register.
- 5) Veer northwest on the **Algonquin Trail** and take it 1.7 miles to an intersection.
- 6) Bag 4,840-foot **Iroquois** via a 1.4-mile out-and-back.
- 7) Continue 4 miles northeast across the MacIntyre Range, netting 5,114-foot **Algonquin Peak** near mile 10.4 and 4,580-foot **Wright Peak** near mile 11.3 (via a short spur).
- 8) Bear north on the **Van Hoevenberg Trail** and retrace your steps about .5 mile to Adirondack Loj.

CAMPSITE BEAVER POINT LEAN-TO (MILE 6)

The sheer rock faces above Avalanche Pass frame the view from this three-sided shelter. Occupied? A second lean-to is a short walk south, or you can follow signs 20 yards uphill from Beaver Point to campsites. (All are first-come, first-serve.)

BEAR CANISTERS

Black bears patrol the High Peaks for errant crumbs. Backpackers must store food in bear canisters (rent one at the High Peaks Information Center for \$8). Be sure to cache canisters 100 feet from camp and kitchen.

LANDSLIDES

Fine-grained soil covers the Adirondacks. When rain or snowmelt overloads these thin layers, landslides result. Note the legacy of

Hurricane Irene: This 2011 event uncovered bare white rock atop Mt. Colden's Trap Dike and created the new Wright Peak slide, visible at looker's right from Marcy Dam.

DAY TRIP

Tack on 4,360-foot Mt. Marshall via a 4-mile out-and-back from Lake Colden. Hike .4 mile southwest to Herbert Brook, where a cairn on the east bank marks the start of Marshall's herd path. Navigate blowdown, streams, and rockslides to the .5-mile ridgeway.

LATE BLOOMERS

When glaciers receded 12,000 years ago, alpine tundra blanketed New York. Today, winds up to 120 mph and some 10 months of frost preserve alpine habitat above 4,000 feet. Look for white diaspensia (blooming in June), yellow alpine goldenrod (August), pink Lapland rosebay (summer), and white mountain sandwort (summer) on open summits—and step only on rock.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 44.183243, -73.963008; 93 miles south of Lake Placid on Adirondack Loj Rd. **SEASON** June through October **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/PmapMacIntyreRange (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/high-peaks-adks

Distance 14.5 miles (lollipop-loop)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



HIKE IT ALL

HICKORY CREEK WILDERNESS, PENNSYLVANIA

I WAKE TO gathering sunlight and chirping sparrows, but I lie back in my hammock. I have plenty of time for a restful morning—cup of strong coffee and a big breakfast—before knocking off the remainder of this 12.8-mile loop through the Alleghenies' northern hardwoods. The only designated wilderness in Pennsylvania with trails, Hickory Creek is both wild enough to earn the highest level of federal protection, and small enough to hike in a mellow weekend. Maybe I'll have a second cup of joe. *By Nathan Pipenberg*

TURN BY TURN FROM THE HICKORY CREEK TRAILHEAD

1) Head 1.4 miles west then south through a

corridor of red maples and white oaks on the **Hickory Creek Trail** to a junction and the beginning of the loop.

2) Continue south (hiker's left) to do the loop clockwise for a longer first day, traveling through stands of 60-foot-tall eastern hemlocks and along a stream to a small meadow at **Jack's Run** at mile 7.1.

3) Continue on the Hickory Creek Trail through sparser forest and past sandstone rock formations to the original junction at mile 11.4.

4) Retrace your steps 1.4 miles to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE JACK'S RUN (MILE 7.1)

Pitch a tent in the small meadow that's trimmed with black-eyed Susans this time of year. Bring a hammock: Two perfect trees in the area make for a great hang site. (Get tips and gear picks for hammock camping on page 51.) Find reliable water in the brook just north.

Bragging Rights

Pennsylvania has just two designated wilderness areas, and the other is a collection of tiny river islands. So tick off this trip, and you'll have checked off every wilderness trail mile in the state.

ROUTE-FINDING

To preserve the wilderness character of this trail, land managers went light on the blazes. You'll want a map (Trails Illustrated #738/739; natgeomaps.com) and compass.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 41.698591, -79.252689; 15 miles south of Warren on Hearts Content Rd.

SEASON Year-round (it's skiable in winter)

PERMIT None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapHickoryCreekLoop (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/allegheeny-nf **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/hickory-creek-loop

Distance 12.8 miles (lollipop-loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



EASY SUMMITTS SLIDE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS, NEW YORK

I SPY A CAIRN through a small opening in the stand of yellow birches ahead. I take my cue and walk through the leafy tunnel, pausing a minute to enjoy the view of the 11-mile-long blue expanse of the Ashokan Reservoir and the pastel tones of the farmlands that surround it. The hardwoods flutter near me as I try to count the steeples in the sleepy country towns below. Views in the Catskills, like this one along serpentine Cross Mountain, aren't as extreme as those from the Adirondacks to the north, but they may be better. Between the mellow, shaded ridges and open forests, the beauty is close at hand on summits like these, which is why I'm stringing together six of them on this 19.2-mile shuttle hike. It's a peakbagging mission, but it feels oddly relaxing. *By*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM LANE STREET IN PHOENICIA

- 1) Switchback 1.6 miles up to the ridge of 2,240-foot Romer Mountain on the **Phoenicia East Branch Trail**.
- 2) Follow the gentle spine to mile 8.3.
- 3) Turn north (hiker's right) onto the **Terrace Mountain Trail** and take it 1.2 miles to the **Terrace Mountain Lean-to**.
- 4) Retrace your steps to the junction.
- 5) Take the **Burroughs Mountain Trail** across Wittenberg, Cornell, and the Catskill's tallest, 4,180-foot Slide Mountain, to an intersection at mile 14.9.
- 6) Descend 4.3 miles on the **Phoenicia East Branch Trail** to your shuttle car.

CAMPSITE TERRACE MOUNTAIN LEAN-TO (MILE 9.5)

Hiking an extra 1.2 miles to a shelter might seem like a lot. Luckily, in this case, it's more about the journey than the destination. Meadows, blueberry bushes (ripe in July), and views back to the day's earlier summits are worth the trip. The lean-to (free; first-come, first-serve) sleeps eight. Top off water at one of the creeks on Cross Mountain before; it's dry.

DROP A LINE

After descending to the crystal-clear East Branch of the Neversink River on day two of this trip, take a break beneath the hemlocks

to cast for brown, brook, and rainbow trout.

KEEP HIKING

In the 1930s, when the Long Path was created, you wouldn't have seen any blazes or signposts. Instead, it was a succession of points of interest that intrepid hikers could link however they chose: trails, roads, or bushwhacks. Today the 357-mile route from Fort Lee, New Jersey, to Altamont, New York, mostly threads together preexisting trails, including the first half of this route from Phoenicia to Wittenberg Mountain, which was just added to the Long Path in 2014.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 41.965820, -74.452463; 13 miles northeast of Grahamsville at the end of Denning Rd. **TRAILHEAD** 42.079902, -74.320686; 37 miles northeast of the shuttle car via Frost Valley and Oliverea Rds. off NY 28 **SEASON** April to November **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapSlide-MountainTraverse (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/slide-mountain-wild **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/slide-mountain-traverse

Distance 19.2 miles (point to point)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●




Get this view of the Greens from the fire tower on Stratton Mountain.

DISTANCE DREAMING

GREEN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST, VERMONT

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE APPALACHIAN TRAILHEAD ON VT 9

IT'S EASY TO feel like an outsider when you're a weekend hiker sharing a shelter with four Long Trail and Appalachian Trail vets. That's the way I started the evening. But now, sitting in the fire tower on top of 3,748-foot Glastenbury Mountain, I start to feel like an insider. The orange-pink light of sunset washes over Stratton Mountain, where in 1909 James P. Taylor conceived the first long-distance trail in America. I'm just hiking a tiny piece of his historic route—a quiet ridge draped in New England hardwoods—and already I know, deep down, that there's only one thing to do: keep walking. *By Ryan Wichelns*

1) Head 9.1 miles north over Maple Hill and Little Pond Mountain on the **Appalachian/Long Trail** (plan to linger at the open vista near mile 3.9) to the **Goddard Shelter** , just below the Glastenbury summit.

2) Continue 9.4 miles north, eventually winding downhill to **FS 71**.

3) Cross the gravel path and proceed 1.9 miles east and north on the **Long Trail** to your shuttle car at the parking area on Kelley Stand Road.

CAMPSITE GODDARD SHELTER (MILE 9.1)

You don't find many shelters this close to a

mountain's summit in the Northeast, which makes Goddard a treat. Drop your pack at the spacious lean-to (room for 10), then climb 10 minutes to the fire tower on top of Glastenbury to catch the sunset. Return to Goddard for social hour on the front porch; expect a thru-hiker motley crew. The shelter is first-come, first-serve (free), and there are tent sites in either direction, including one just below Glastenbury's summit.

ADD A PEAK

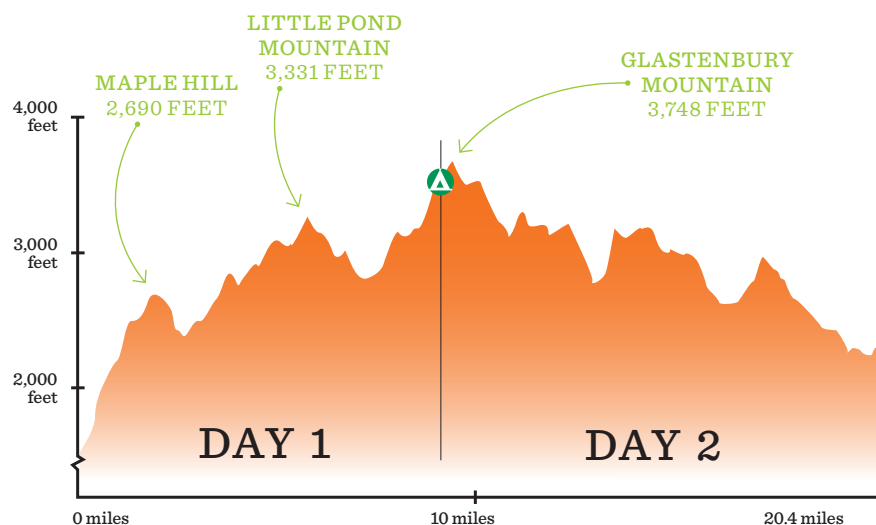
From your shuttle car on Kelley Stand Road, continue 3.3 miles north on the Long Trail to bag 3,940-foot Stratton Mountain, Vermont's eighth-tallest peak. Not only was a Stratton trip the genesis of the Long Trail in 1909, but a few years later, during the trail's construction, Benton MacKaye's own Stratton hike spurred his idea for a path traversing the entire Appalachian chain.

CAMPFIRE STORY

The area is the site of at least five (but perhaps as many as 10) disappearances. The most famous: In 1946, an 18-year-old student at Bennington College went for a hike from VT 9 to Glastenbury Mountain and was never seen again. The area is now referred to as the "Bennington Triangle."

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 43.061171, -72.967758; 20 miles southeast of Manchester on Kelley Stand Rd. **TRAILHEAD** 42.885110, -73.115580; 50 minutes southwest of the shuttle car on VT 9 **SEASON** April to November **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapLongTrailsection (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/green-mountain-nf **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/longtrailsection

Distance 20.4 miles (point to point)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ●●●●●





Reach Sunrise Mountain's summit by daybreak and you'll know why it got its name.

MOVEMENT FOR MIGRATION

STOKES STATE FOREST, NEW JERSEY

AMBER MAPLE LEAVES flit around me as I trek northeast on the Appalachian Trail along Kittatinny Ridge. A screech overhead reminds me that this blushing forest signals more than just fall's arrival—it marks the appearance of thousands of guests. The first third of this 15.1-mile route traces Kittatinny Ridge, which thousands of birds of prey use as a guideline when migrating south. I look up and see a flock of red-tailed hawks floating on thermals. I still have a few miles to make before my lakeside camp, and for a moment, I'm jealous.

By Katrina Rossos

TURN-BY-TURN FROM CULVERS GAP

1) Take the **Appalachian Trail** 5.6 miles north-east along Kittatinny Ridge to a junction. (Cross the 1,653-foot summit of Sunrise Mountain at mile 5.3.)

2) In order to do the trip as an overnight, from here you need to connect roads (some gravel, some paved) to land at the closest designated campsite, so veer west off the ridge and link the **Cartwright, Swenson, and Tinsley Trails**

3.4 miles to **Skillenger Road** at mile 9.2.

3) Follow the gravel road .6 mile west and north to 8-acre **Lake Ocquittunk** .

4) Retrace your steps .4 mile down the road.

5) Pick up the **Blue Mountain Trail** and take it 1.9 miles southwest.

6) Connect **Kittle** and **Coursen Roads** 1.1 miles south.

7) Pick up the **Coursen Trail** and go 1.4 miles southwest to **Sunrise Mountain Road**.

8) Walk .7 mile back to the parking lot on the narrow, gravel road.

CAMPSITE LAKE OCQUITUNK (MILE 9.6)

If you're not thru-hiking, then you're limited to designated frontcountry campgrounds in Stokes State Forest. Luckily, hardwood-rimmed Lake Ocquittunk can feel pretty backcountry if you grab one of the tent sites on the northeast shore. The lake is stocked with rainbow and brown trout, so cast a line for dinner. Reserve a space online ahead of time (\$20 to \$25 per night; reserveamerica.com).

RAPTOR REVIVAL

In autumn, see thousands of golden eagles, Coopers and sharp-shinned hawks, turkey vultures, and American kestrels stream over the summit of Sunrise Mountain, one of the highest points on 28-mile Kittatinny Ridge. The raptors (and more than 150 species of songbirds) follow the ridgeline south en route to the Bahamas. Hawks typically fly closer to the ridge than the others, so scan for them at

dawn when the air currents are lowest. (They fly by throughout the day, but the updrafts carry them higher in the sky as the day progresses.)

FOLIAGE

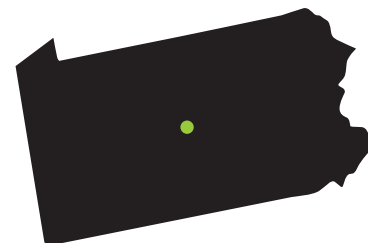
Perfectly situated in a transition area between the hickory and oak woods of the central Eastern states and the maple, birch, beech, and hemlock trees of the more northern forests, Stokes State Forest delivers kaleidoscopic color every fall. Get the best of it in mid-October.

FIRE TOWER

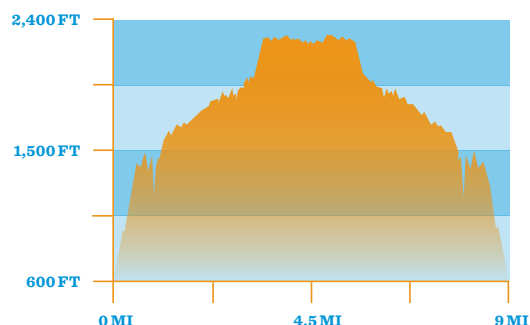
Climb to the top of 47-foot-tall Culvers Lookout Fire Tower near mile 1.7. Spot the winding Delaware River to the west and the wooded Kittatinny Valley and rolling Highlands to the east.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 41.180555, -74.787657; 4 miles northwest of Branchville on Sunrise Mountain Rd. **SEASON** Year-round; spring and fall for temps in the 60s **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapKittatinnyRidge (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/stokes-sf **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/kittatinnyridge

Distance 15.1 miles (loop)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



ELEVATION PROFILE



STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

ROTHROCK STATE FOREST, PENNSYLVANIA

SUCKING AIR, I collapse against a boulder. I'm on step 800, and I don't need a Fitbit to verify—it's printed on the chiseled stone in front of me. I'm less than a half-mile into a quick, 9-mile overnight up 2,321-foot Jacks Mountain via the Thousand Steps Trail, which means I should have just 200 more boulder-stairs to go. I heave my pack over my shoulders and try focusing on the abstract of spring-green slopes and flowering putty-root orchids. I think about the pristine mountaintop I'll camp on tonight. How good it feels to knock out the first overnight of the season. I hit step 1,000 and look up—there are still another 37 steps before the plateau. But who's

counting? *By Matt Mills*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE THOUSAND STEPS TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head north on the **Thousand Steps Trail**, climbing 900 feet in .5 mile, to the top of the stone staircase.
- 2) Take a hard left (west) onto the **Standing Stone Trail** and go 3.7 miles to 2,265-foot Shorb's Summit.
- 3) Retrace your steps.

CAMPSITE SHORB'S SUMMIT

Post up in the natural clearing just northeast of wooded Shorb's Summit for the most wind-protected camp. If you don't land this spot (it's first-come, first-serve), you must pick from any of the other social sites near the summit (camping is only allowed within Rothrock State Forest on this route). Pack in all water.

HISTORY

You think your commute is rough? In the first half of the 20th century, workers had to travel to and from the sandstone quarry on Jacks

Mountain via the Thousand Steps Trail. The half-mile-long stairway climbs nearly 1,000 feet—making it almost as steep as the steepest section of the iconic Angels Landing path in Zion National Park, which ascends 700 feet in about a quarter of a mile. (Mining operations on Jacks Mountain shut down in the early 1950s.)

WATER

There is a seasonal stream just beyond the old quarry (near mile .6), but you should plan to pack in all water. We recommend a gallon per person per day in mild conditions.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 40.391437, -77.913451; 3 miles west of Mt. Union on US-22 W **SEASON** Year-round **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapJacksMountain (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/rothrock-state-forest **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/jacksmountain

Distance 9 miles (out and back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



Hikers cross Mt. Washington.

EAST COAST ALPS

WHITE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST, NEW HAMPSHIRE

THE BIG WINDOWS around the table where we're eating are frosted over, revealing just a hazy silhouette of a golden peak beneath the setting sun. It looks oddly placid—given that just a few hours ago, I braced myself against 30 mph winds atop 6,288-foot Mt. Washington, the Northeast's high point and a location infamous for having the world's worst weather. "Good" conditions for this three-day, 14-mile ridgewalk across Big Wash and Mts. Clay, Jefferson, and Adams are relative; but if you brave the gales, whiteouts, and frigid temps, it can feel like the poor man's traverse of the Alps. But like a true Alps trek, brutal conditions come with luxe accommodations. We bed down first in Harvard Cabin and then tonight at Crag Camp, the Randolph Mountain Club's regally located wood cabin at 4,200 feet in the shadow of Adams. I can see my breath crystallize in the cone of my headlamp, but the clouds blasting across the ridgeline outside remind me that we have it pretty good. *By Ryan Wichelns*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM PINKHAM NOTCH

1) Climb 2.1 miles west on **Tuckerman Ravine Trail** to its junction with the **Raymond Path**. (Boots with sturdy soles should be sufficient

below treeline.)

2) Continue .2 mile north to **Harvard Cabin**.

3) Retrace your steps .2 mile and pick up the winter standard route on **Lion Head Trail**, which climbs 1.9 miles up Mt. Washington. (Strap on crampons above treeline.)

4) Pick up the **Gulfside Trail** and head 4.7 miles north off the summit to **Thunderstorm Junction** (bag Clay at mile 5.6 and Jefferson at mile 7.1).

5) Tack on a .6-mile out-and-back to summit New Hampshire's second-tallest peak, 5,774-foot Mt. Adams, before dropping down the mountain's north shoulder to **Crag Camp** at mile 10.5 via the **Spur Trail**.

6) Link the **Randolph Path** and **Short Line** 3.5 miles north to your shuttle car at Appalachia.

CAMPSITE 1 HARVARD CABIN (MILE 2)

Open between December 1 and April 1, this cabin (above, right) is a hub for Huntington Ravine's climbers and skiers, but makes a cozy shelter for anyone braving Mt. Washington. Weather reports are radioed in from the summit station every morning, while a woodstove keeps the 16-person shelter toasty. Take a 10-minute walk uphill for panoramic views of Hunt's gullies. To reserve the Harvard Mountaineering Club shelter, sign in at Pinkham Notch before you head up (\$15/person; harvardmountaineering.org).

CAMPSITE 2 CRAG CAMP (MILE 10.5)

The Appalachian Mountain Club huts that link the Presidential Traverse and beyond shut down in winter, leaving smaller groups like the Randolph Mountain Club to take up the slack. But that's OK because the view

from Crag Camp south across King Ravine to Mts. Adams and Madison is top-notch (and much cheaper). The unheated shelter (\$20/person; first-come, first-serve; pay at the cabin) can sleep up to 20 year-round.

WEATHER

Conditions on Mt. Washington are spicy, to say the least. Always check weather beforehand at bit.do/mtwash-weather; for a safe trip, target winds less than 50 mph. If conditions turn when you're above treeline, retreat (preferred) or follow cairns to the bunker-like observatory buildings at the summit. Crampons and an ice axe are recommended.

SPRING SKIING

Haul your skis if you have avalanche know-how: Save hours, literally, by cruising the ridges between peaks and down King Ravine from Crag Camp. Bonus: Tuckerman Ravine, the East's classic backcountry skiing objective, is less than a mile from Harvard Cabin.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 44.371447, -71.289296; 6 miles west of Gorham on Route 2

TRAILHEAD 44.257310, -71.253161; 17 miles south of shuttle car at Pinkham Notch **SEASON** December to April for a wintry ascent

PERMITS None **CUSTOM MAP** [\\$15](http://bit.do/BPmapMtWash) **CONTACT** fs.usda.gov/whitemountain **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/mtwash-in-winter

Distance 14.2 miles (point to point)
Time 3 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



EASY LIVING

ZALESKI STATE FOREST, OHIO

I LOUNGE IN a hammock slung beneath a canopy of old oaks, laughing with my hiking partners. We're reminiscing about our childhoods spent exploring these woods and the lily pad-covered marshes in the northern Appalachians as a bottle of cheap whiskey makes its rounds. Scattered light leaks through the treetops as the sun dips below the horizon, turning the already-russet leaves into a crimson canopy. Looking around, I think the place hasn't changed much in the past two decades. We only have 5 miles to go on this quick, 11.2-mile loop, but like these woods, we're in no hurry. Nostalgia takes time—and we have plenty of it.

By Ashley M. Halligan

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE BACKPACKING TRAILHEAD ON OH 278

- 1) Pick up the main trail and take it to the beginning of the **South Loop** at mile .6.
- 2) Tackle the loop counterclockwise, following the path 5.8 miles through dense oak forest to **Campsite 2**.
- 3) Pick up the main trail and continue 4.2 miles counterclockwise to close the loop at mile 10.6.
- 4) Retrace your steps .6 mile to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE CAMPSITE 2 (MILE 6.4)

Pitch a tent in a thick oak forest near the hike's midway point. Pack in your water or call ahead to check if the nearby faucet is running (the water tanks are refilled weekly). There's no dispersed camping here, but the site is big enough to share, with room for a dozen tents. If it's already occupied (doubtful this time of year), be courteous and find an out-of-the-way flat spot within the grove.

CAMPFIRE STORY

Locals say the ruins of an old coal-mining town called Moonville rest at the bottom of the marshes where beavers now build their dams.

MAKE IT LONGER

Zaleski is Ohio's second-largest forest, covering 27,000 acres, so there's plenty to explore. To boost your weekend, hike the full, 28.8-mile Backpacking Trail: After finishing the South Loop, link to the West and North Loops.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 39.331187, -82.340193; 19 miles west of Athens off OH 278 **SEASON** Year-round; fall foliage peaks the third week of October **PERMIT** Required (free); self-register at the trailhead. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapSouthLoop (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/zaleski-sf

Distance 11.2 miles (lollipop loop)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●