

Shenandoah National Park

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide



Trip Name: South District Highlights in 8 days

Description: Great views, waterfalls, swimming holes and wilderness areas

Entry: 81 MP - Big Run OL/Doyles River Pkg

Exit: 81 MP - Big Run OL/Doyles River Pkg

Map(s): PATC #11 South District

Level: Advanced

Total Length: 69.2 to 59.1 miles

Day One

Campsite: North Fork Moormans River - backcountry

10 to 12.5 miles

Hike down Doyles River Trail for 2.2 miles.

Hike upstream on Jones Run Trail for 2.5 miles.

Turn left onto the Appalachian Trail (AT), hiking southbound 2.5 miles.

Turn left onto North Fork Moorman's River (NFMR) Road for 1.4 miles to the park boundary and exit the park (all gravel road).

Continue on NFMR Road another 0.8 miles and reenter the park. Note – bear right when the gravel road splits. If in doubt, follow the river downstream and you will not get lost.

NFMR becomes a Trail upon re-entering the park (it is still an old road bed with an interesting history). Look for a place to camp any time after Shop Run, 1/2 mile into the park.

Day Two

Campsite: Wildcat Ridge Trail - backcountry

9 to 11.3 miles

Continue hiking downstream on NFMR Trail (total on NFMR Trail is 3.0 miles).

You will exit the park again while in the Sugar Hollow Reservoir area - continue following the main road and the river. When you reach a sizeable gravel parking area, walk to the river and look across the river for the yellow gate marking South Fork Moorman's River (SFMR) Road on the other side (total 0.3 mile in reservoir area).

Cross the river and hike up SFMR Road 2.1 miles.

Turn right onto Turk Branch Trail and hike 2.1 miles to Turk Gap Trail.

Cross the parking area to the AT, then hike northbound on the AT for 2.3 miles.

Turn left onto Wildcat Ridge Trail, hiking about 2 miles to the stream.

Follow the stream upstream (off trail) to find a place to camp.

Day Three

Campsite: Paine Run - backcountry

8.8 to 10.2 miles

Continue hiking down Wildcat Ridge Trail for about 0.7 mile.

Turn right onto Riprap Trail and hike 3.6 miles.

Turn left onto the AT, hiking northbound 2.5 miles to Blackrock Gap.

Turn left onto Paine Run Trail and hike 2 to 3.4 miles, camping when ready.

Day Four

Campsite: Madison Run Road - backcountry

7.4 to 9.8 miles (add 1 mile for Furnace Mountain Summit)

Finish hiking Paine Run Trail, if necessary (0 to 1.4 miles).

Hike up Trayfoot Mountain Trail for 4.0 miles.

Turn left onto Furnace Mountain Trail, hiking 3.4 miles.

Be sure to enjoy the view from the summit of Furnace (0.5 mile each way)

Camping option one – There are places to camp off to your left (west) 0.3 mile before you cross the stream on Furnace Mountain Trail.

Or turn right onto Madison Run Fire Road and hike one mile for camping option two:

Camping option two -- After one mile turn right off of the road near the Austin Mt Trail and cross the stream. There are some level areas on the south bank where you may camp.

Day Five

Campsite: Lewis Peak - backcountry

8 to 8.3 miles

Finish hiking Furnace Mountain Trail if needed (0.3 mile).

Turn right onto Madison Run Road (if you camped on Furnace) and hike 0.6 miles.

Turn left onto Austin Mountain Trail, hiking 3.2 miles.

Turn left onto Rockytop Trail and hike 1.8 miles.

Turn left onto Lewis Peak Trail and hike 2.4 miles.

Find a place to camp in this remote, seldom visited wilderness area.

Day Six

Campsite: Big Run Portal/Loop Trails - backcountry

6.4 to 8 miles

Hike back up Lewis Peak Trail for 2.4 miles.

Turn left onto Rockytop Trail and hike 3.5 miles.

Turn right onto Big Run Portal Trail, hiking to the stream (0.5 mile to the bridge) before looking for a place to camp. (Be sure to use a pre-existing campsite if you want to hike the optional day hike).

Day Seven

Campsite: Big Run Portal/Loop Trails - backcountry

Optional day – Circuit day hike – 8.7 miles

Leave your camp set up with permit on tent and food secured, taking your valuables with you.

Hike upstream on Big Run Portal Trail (1.4 miles from the bridge).

Turn left onto Rocky Mountain Run Trail, hiking 2.7 miles.

Turn left onto Brown Mountain Trail, hiking 4.6 miles.

Return to your campsite along Big Run Portal.

Day Eight

4.2 to 6.2 miles

Hike upstream on Big Run Portal Trail (2 to 4 miles depending on campsite).

Turn left onto Big Run Loop Trail, hiking 2.2 miles.

Hike across Skyline Drive to return to your vehicle.

Notes

This trip is for advanced backcountry campers skilled in navigation and finding pristine campsites. You'll find many people hiking and camping on Jones Run and Doyles River, and to a lesser extent on Wildcat Ridge and Riprap, on the weekends. Try to plan your trip so that you are not camping on these trails on a Friday or Saturday. This is truly a highlight hike of the southern district in Shenandoah National Park, and with some planning, you'll enjoy solitude as well.

The multiple stream crossings on Big Run Portal and NFMR can be knee to waist high when the water is up. Beware in the spring and after heavy rains.

Options

This basic South District Highlights trip has several options - see other trip plans 6 to 8 nights.