

Description: This is a moderate 7.5 mile loop in Catoclin National Park, MD. It features a pleasant walk along Big Hunting Creek on an un-official fisherman's trail, 1200 feet of total elevation gain and what seems like one great vista after another. Being about an hour and thirty minutes away from Baltimore and Washington and mere minutes from the Pennsylvania border makes this is a very popular hiking venue in the region. With its popularity come the crowds. I prefer to hike it in the winter when the solitude is far greater and one is more apt to get a clear day to enjoy the four fantastic vistas. I'll admit that the best views are in fall when the surrounding hardwood forest is aglow with the reds, oranges and yellow of the season. Fortunately the Visitor Center has a pretty large overflow parking lot.

Directions from U.S.15 in Thurmont MD going north:

1. Take the exit ramp for Rt77.
2. At the end of the ramp bear right (west).
3. Follow the signs to the Catoclin Mountain Park Visitor Center at the junction of Park Central Road on the right.

Trail Notes: The Park service did away with blazes several years ago in an attempt to make the park seem more like wilderness. With the exception of the unofficial Fisherman's Trail all trail intersections are well posted with details and distances. Furthermore the trails are well worn. It is almost impossible to get lost here if you bring this map or one you can obtain for free at the Visitor Center. The trails colored in blue and red are certified with a GPS unit. The yellow trails were drawn in using the Park's free map as a reference. I have not walked them so cannot comment on their condition. There are other trail segments shown on the park map but I did not find their intersections with the trails we walked so I left them out. These notes describe the longest possible circuit which includes all of the vistas in the park. Shorter loops with fewer vistas can be made by utilizing the yellow trails shown here.

Starting at the Visitor Center, cross MD 77 and walk over to Hunting Creek. Turn left and follow the creek downstream, soon walking in the shade of Hemlock trees as you go. Keep an eye out for trout in the stream. Eventually you will pick up an obvious footpath used by fishermen. Follow it east. At two points the hill on the left will force you up onto the road but you should be able to descend to the creek in only a handful of steps. As you near the Cat Rock Trail parking lot the bank will become just too steep and rocky. Climb up to the road, cross to the opposite shoulder and walk east on Rt77 a short distance to the trailhead to Chimney Rocks on the left (0.97 miles from the visitor Center).

Turn left onto this trail and begin to climb, with the aid of switchbacks, to Chimney Rocks. You'll pass the Crow's Nest Trail on the right and in about 0.9 miles reach the spur trail to Chimney Rocks.

After enjoying the view return to the main trail and follow the sign directing you to Wolf Rocks. Reach the spur trail for Wolf Rocks in 0.48 miles. Climb around this unique Quartzite outcrop but watch out for the deep crevices!!!

Return to the main trail and turn right following the signs for Thurmont Vista. In 0.37 miles pass a sign for a cut-off trail leading to Park Central Road and the Visitor Center. Continue straight following the sign for Thurmont Vista.

Arrive at Thurmont Vista in 0.7 miles from the last trail junction. Here you can enjoy the view on a bench or one of several rocks.

Return to the main trail and turn right following the sign toward Park Central and Hog Rock. In 0.22 miles come to an intersection with a near parallel trail with a sign – “Camp Airy”. Continue downhill on the main trail.

In another 0.15 miles arrive at a four way intersection. Turning left takes you back to the Visitor Center. Going straight leads you out to Park Central Rd. Turning right will take you to Hog Rock Vista. Turn right.

In another 0.65 miles arrive at the Blue Ridge Summit Overlook. Enjoy the view and return to the main trail and turn right. From here the remainder of the trip will be flat or downhill with the exception of a few short hills on the Nature Trail.

In 0.25 miles arrive at a picnic area on Park Central Road with latrines. Cross Park Central Road and follow the Hog Rock Nature Trail for 0.39 miles to the last of the vistas, Hog Rock. From here you can see much of what you traveled with views of the backs of Chimney Rocks and Thurmont Vista to you left. To the right you might spy Cat Rock which we visit on another hike.

From here follow the signed trail to the right. Descend quickly, passing the Nature Trail (the return leg) on the left at 1.0 mile and soon arrive at Rt77. Turn left on the shoulder of Rt77. In a short distance cross the road and follow the gravel trail and boardwalk to view Cunningham Falls.

Return to the Nature Trail and turn right onto it. The sign says that the distance is 1.2 miles back to the Visitor Center. I think it's more like 1 mile. There are a few low hills here as you weave in and out of some neat rock formations but generally speaking this is an easy piece of trail worth enjoying as you return to your car.