

Trail Notes for the Jones Mountain-Staunton River Circuit

Description: The base circuit is a strenuous 11.5 mile trek with approximately 2400 feet of elevation gain. Additional mileage and elevation can be added by including out-and-backs to the Jones Mountain Cabin and Fork Mountain radio tower (for a nice view) and/or adding the Fork Mountain Trail and another segment of the Laurel Prong Trail to the loop. Highlights include the cliffs of Hazeltop, the alternating rock gardens and Mountain Laurel tunnels of Jones Mountain, a view from Bear Church Rock and the beautiful Staunton River with its cascades and waterfalls. You'll also pass a couple of slab piles, remnants of a logging operation over 100 years old.

Note: Google Maps tends to use woods roads that are closed to the public in its SNP directions. Confirm your route with a real map. The hike starts in the Bootens Gap parking lot on the east side of Skyline Drive just south of mile marker ...

Trail Notes: From the parking area follow the Conway River Road for just a few steps and then turn left (north) onto the AT. In 0.45 miles turn right onto the blue blazed Laurel Prong Trail. Follow the edge of the cliffs above you to the junction with the Cat Knob Trail in another 1.01 miles. Turn right onto it and climb steeply for 0.54 miles to the junction with the Jones Mountain Trail. Turn right onto it. In 0.67 miles a pink trail comes in from the right. This is part of the Rapidan WMA. Stay straight on the Jones Mountain Trail. At about 1.25 miles you will walk through one of several rock gardens. This one has some partial views into the Staunton River watershed on the left. In another 1.01 miles begin to switchback down from the mountain. Look for a short unmarked but obvious trail on the left that leads to Bear Church Rock and a nice vista.

Continue down the Jones Mountain Trail and reach the spur to the cabin in 0.44 miles from the vista. It's a 0.62 mile round trip if you want to visit it. Follow the signs to the Staunton River Trail. You'll reach it in another 0.63 miles. Turn left onto it and immediately cross Garth Spring Run. You will cross the river twice as you climb out of the valley. In 1.38 miles arrive at dirt/gravel Fork Mountain Fire Road. Turn left onto it. In 0.72 miles reach a trail post on the left. You have three options here: continue up the fire road to a nice view at a radio tower then return to complete the circuit, take the yellow blazed Fork Mountain Trail then the Laurel Prong Trail south to rejoin the loop or make a hard left on the blue blazed Jones Mountain Trail and hike through "The Sag" to the junction with the Cat Knob Trail in another 0.95 miles. Here we describe the latter. Once you reach that junction simply turn right onto the Cat Knob trail and retrace your initial steps back to Bootens Gap.