

Description: This is a strenuous 5.4 or 7.8 mile loop in the Shenandoah National Park. Most of the work comes early on as you climb steeply up and over rocks, gaining 1500 feet of elevation in about 1.8 miles (1000 ft over a mile). If you think your buttocks muscles need some tightening-up then this is your hike! But honestly, once you've gained the ridge top almost all of the strenuous part is over. The short version of this hike utilizes a fire road as a return route and passes a graveyard along the way. The longer route follows Piney Branch with several nice little falls and cascades along the way. You'll have to cross it twice but usually without much difficulty.

Directions from Westbound US211 East of Sperryville:

1. Before US211 becomes a 2-lane road turn right onto Rt622.
2. In about 2 miles turn left onto Rt614. Rt614 will become a gravel road. Follow to its end (3 miles after turning off of Rt622) and park at the gravel parking area.

Trail notes: From the parking area follow the blue blazed Little Devil's Staircase Trail North. At first the gorge is wide and the tread is rocky. As you proceed along the gorge will get much narrower and steeper ... and, of course, rockier. You'll cross Keyser's Run several times as it percolates between all of the rocks and boulders. Be sure to look behind you as you climb for partial views. Near the end the trail gets very steep and then makes a hard left and reaches the ridge on a much more gradual pitch.

At 1.88 miles from the start reach a 4-way intersection. To the left and right is yellow blazed Keyser Run Fire Road. Straight ahead is blue blazed Pole Bridge Trail. If you opt for the shorter route turn left onto Keyser Run Fire Trail. In about 2.2 miles pass Bolen Cemetery and arrive at the intersection of Hull School Fire Road. Turn left, remaining on Keyser Run Fire Road and follow it back (1 mile) to your cars.

For the longer loop, continue straight through the 4-way intersection onto blue blazed Pole Bridge Tr. In about 0.93 miles turn left onto blue blazed Piney Branch Trail. Descend 2.8 miles to the intersection of Yellow blazed Hull School Fire Road. Turn left here.

At 0.78 miles from the last trail junction arrive at the junction of yellow blazed Keyser Run Fire Road (left and straight). Proceed straight on Keyser Run Fire Road for about another mile to get back to your car.