

Trail Notes for Patterson Ridge-Big Run Portal Loop

Description: This is a strenuous 11.4 mile trek (12.2 miles if you visit the swimming hole) in the southern district of Shenandoah National Park utilizing Patterson Run, Big Run Portal, Big Run Loop, AT and Frazier Discovery Trail. The Patterson Ridge and Big Run Portal Trails are true backcountry. The Koyote Kid and I didn't see one other hiker there. You may see an occasional hiker on the Big Run Loop Tr and even more on the AT and the Frazier Discovery Trail but the views seen from the last two are well worth sharing with others. We lost count at the number in the vicinity of the campground. The total elevation gain is approximately 2300 feet. There are 3 or 4 stream crossings. the lower ones might be technically challenging during periods of high water.

This would make a nice short overnight backpack trip. Campsites along the Big Run Portal Tr have been noted on the map.

[Google Maps Custom Directions](#)

Note: Google Maps and other mapping software often use fire roads in their directions. These roads are not open to the public. Confirm your route with other maps. This hike starts at the Loft Mountain Wayside south of mile marker 79 on the west side of the road. Optional starting points are at the Loft Mountain Campground Store and at the Big Run Overlook south of mile marker 81.

Trail Notes: From the Wayside turn left/north and walk a few yards up Skyline drive on a grassy Shoulder. Turn left onto yellow blazed Patterson Ridge Tr. The first 100 yards or so are a steep climb but from there the next 3 miles are either flat or downhill. Partial views can be had through the trees in places but one has a sense that if you bushwhacked a little to the south edge of the ridge you might get better views.

At 3.21 miles arrive at the yellow blazed Big Run Portal Tr. To visit the swimming hole turn right and hike 0.43 miles to a major stream crossing, crossing Rocky Mountain Run and passing a blue blazed trail of the same name on the right as you go.

To continue on, reverse directions, passing Patterson Ridge Tr, now on your left. In another 1.51 miles you'll pass a nice bench along the stream on your left which is protected by a canopy of Hemlock trees. This is the better of the two campsites marked on the map. The other is another 0.5 miles upstream on the right. Shortly after the last campsite arrive at the junction of the Big Run loop Tr. Turn left onto the blue blazed segment and climb via switchbacks, over 2.34 miles, to Skyline Drive.

Turn left onto Skyline Drive but only for a few yards before turning right into the Doyle River Tr parking lot. Follow this blue blazed trail for about 5 steps before turning left onto the white blazed AT. In 0.5 miles reach a vista of the Big Run Drainage on the left and in another 0.42 miles pass a spur trail, also on the left, that leads to the Loft Mountain Amphitheater and Camp Store. There are several spur trails on the left that lead up to the

campground and store as the AT nearly circumnavigates the area. In 0.46 miles from the second camp store spur you'll pass a sign for an "unmaintained road". It is so overgrown with thorns I can't imagine it ever being used. In another 0.69 miles you will climb steeply to the first junction with the Frazier Discovery Trail (FDT/It's a loop.) on the left. Pass it and soon arrive at a fantastic vista on the left on a rock cliff with a panoramic view of Lewis Peak, Rockytop, Brown Mountain and more. Return to the AT and continue north a few more steps then turn left at the second Frazier Discovery Trail junction. Once again you will be afforded even more great panoramic views. The FDT descends to the Campground Store Train in about 0.75 miles, passing in front of an interesting rock feature and the other leg of itself. Turn right and return to Skyline Drive in a few yards.