

Roaring Plains Circuit Hike

Description: This is a 12.5+ mile strenuous circuit hike on the Roaring Plains, Monongahela National Forest, WV utilizing portions of the South Prong Trail, Boar's Nest Trail, the Roaring Plains Trail, the Hidden Passage and the Roaring Creek and Long Run Canyon Rim Trails. The first two trails are established, maintained forest trails. The others are either bushwhack routes shown to us by Jonathan Jessup or discovered on our own.

Caution 1: This circuit is for experienced hikers only. Knowledge and use of a topo map, compass and/or GPS units are recommended.

During this trek you will walk through a variety of mountain environs ranging from deciduous to boreal forest with heath, sphagnum and grass bogs in between. You'll cross the south prong of Red Creek four times (It may be high and dangerous at times.), traverse numerous rock fields and view some of the most breathtaking landscape in WV.

Allow a minimum of 9 hours, including lunch and breaks, for this trip.

Caution 2: The weather on the Roaring Plains can change in the wink of an eye, even in the summer months. Be prepared for temperature extremes. During parts of this outing you will be totally exposed to the elements. High winds can be a dangerous issue at times.

Directions from the intersection of US 55 South and US 33:

1. From US 55 Turn right (West) onto US 33. Travel approximately 11.7 miles.
2. Turn right onto SR 32 toward Canaan Valley resorts.
3. In approximately 3.9 miles, turn right onto CO 32 - Bonner Mountain Rd.
4. Follow Bonner Mt. Rd to its end at Rt 45 - Laneville Rd.
5. Turn right on Rt 45. Cross Red Creek on an old metal bridge.
6. Rt 54 becomes gravel FR 19. Continue on FR 19 for 1.2 miles. Turn right into South Prong/ Boar's Nest trailheads.

Trail Notes: From the parking area walk past the forest gate and follow the grassy road down to the South Prong of Red Creek. Cross the creek at 0.35 miles and turn left on an old RR grade, passing the first of many blue diamond blazes. Soon turn right, following the blazes, and climb steeply up a footpath to a higher RR grade. Turn left onto the grade and continue on. You will by-pass sections of the RR grade a couple of more times in this manner until you reach a long stretch of RR grade near the top of the mountain.

At about 2.8 miles from the first creek crossing, the trail crosses the creek again and follows another RR grade in the opposite direction. Turn right onto a footpath and arrive at FR 70 at 0.5 miles from the last stream crossing.

Cross the forest road and continue up the South Prong Trail for another 0.59 miles.

In a small meadow at the top the South Prong Trail will continue straight. There are two right hand turns here. The first leads to a nice campsite along a stream. It continues to intersect the second right turn after crossing the stream. If you take the second right turn the trail splits but comes together again in a meadow. Follow the Cairns. You are now on Jonathan Jessup's "Hidden Passage" to the Roaring Plains. This is an unofficial trail but the tread has become more obvious with more frequent use.

Continue in a southerly direction toward a Rhododendron thicket on the other side of the meadow. There you will find an obvious path through the thicket, crossing a small stream as you go. On the other side of the thicket you will find yet another meadow. Look for the faint trail and cairns. You will still maintain a southerly course but you will be favoring the right side of the meadow until you enter a woods comprised mostly of birch and black cherry. The trail will bend to the left for a short distance until you are almost to the rim and then straighten out again. At 0.85 miles from the turnoff from the South Prong Trail arrive at the base of the ever popular "Meadows". Cairns will direct you to a nice but dry and exposed campsite with partial views of the valley below.

Beyond this campsite is an obvious grassy jeep road. Follow this to the intersection with the Pipeline Swath. This is about 0.7 miles from where the "Hidden Passage" ended at the base of the "Meadow".

Turn left onto the Pipeline Swath and descend about 0.33 miles, cross a small stream and arrive at the remains of an old road that intersects the Pipeline. This is the beginning of Jonathan's Canyon Rim Trail. If you feel up to a side trip stash your packs here and proceed down the Pipeline for another 0.2 miles or so until you see a cairn on the right directly across from a Forest boundary sign on the opposite side of the swath. This marks a trail out to a pretty nice overlook.

Return to the intersection of the old road. And turn left (if going up the swath) onto the old road. There is a dead tree with a blank sign mounted high on the trunk. This is the "iffiest" part of the hike. Proceed down the road a short distance than turn right and cross a small stream. Skirt the edge of a small bog to your right. From here to the next overlook it is mostly an open woods bushwhack. Keep the rim or edge of the hill in sight and to your left and avoid any thickets to your right.

You will eventually arrive at a very large oak tree with multiple trunks near the beginning of another meadow/bog. Turn left here and head towards the rim. You will find a footpath that leads out to the canyon and another fantastic view. You'll pas another multi-trunked tree on your right. From here to the turn-off at the Tee Pee Trail the path will be more obvious with cairns marking the way through several boulder fields. Stay close to the rim and you can't get lost.

At about 0.6 miles from leaving the Pipeline you will cross Roaring Creek and pass red forest boundary blazes and a survey marker. Continue following the rim. Almost any side trail to the left is apt to lead you to a view of the surrounding area. At 0.6 miles from the creek crossing arrive at

“The Point”, the intersection of Roaring Creek and Long Run Canyons. This is just about the mid-point of the hike and a great place for lunch. A quick excursion to the rocks out on the tip leads to the best views of the day: Smith Mountain, Four Knobs, North Fork Mountain, Shenandoah Mountain, Chimney Rocks, Champe Rocks, Seneca Rocks, Spruce Mountain, Hay Stack Knob and more can be observed from one spot by simply turning your head.

From “The Point” travel north-west along the rim, crossing more boulder fields and passing through alternating Rhododendron and heath thickets and stands of Red Spruce stopping for the views along the way. If you’re backpacking, there’s a nice established campsite with a fire ring sheltered by Red Spruce about 0.3 miles from “The point” but it is dry. There is one or two sites suitable for a tent or two just before this without fire rings. In another 1.1 miles arrive at the junction with the Tee Pee Trail at another established dry campsite with a fire ring. Turn right here and search for a faint hunter’s trail. It’s not obvious at first since some unknowing hiker(s) used the markers to build the afore mentioned fire ring. Poke around in the Rhododendron until you find the trail. Proceed down the trail (North-east) until you reach a campsite with fire ring. Be wary of any side trails. Some are old deer trails while others were hacked out with machetes by lost hikers! The continuation of the trail is to the left of the campsite. Continue on until you reach a large heath thicket. The trail seems to disappear here but it is slightly to the right. As you push through the brush you can see the trail at your feet.

In about 0.54 miles from leaving the canyon rim you will arrive at a large flat rock with a cairn on top of it. In front of it is a wet sandy trail which is actually the headwaters of Roaring Creek AND an old RR bed. Turn left, walking upstream through the dense laurel, and quickly come to the intersection of the Roaring plains Trail. You are now back on official forest trails.

Turn right on the Roaring Plains Trail and travel 0.91 miles to its eastern terminus at the Pipeline Swath. FR 70 is just a little to the right. Walk down FR 70 for about 0.34 miles to the Boar’s Nest Trail. Turn left on the Boar’s Nest Trail and cross the South Prong for the third time. Climb a short distance to the top of Flat Rocks Plain and continue north on this well worn and sometimes very wet and muddy trail. Just as you start to descend there will be a rock outcrop to the left which offers fine views. On a clear day you can see Dolly Sods in the distance.

At about 1.3 miles from the last trail intersection you will descend steeply on what I like to call the Sliding Board. There have been a few switchbacks added but the going is still hard on the knees and feet. Towards the bottom the trail joins a railroad grade that follows the drainage of Camel Run to the final crossing of South Prong (about 1.2 miles from the start of your descent). Cross the creek and climb the bank on the other side. Pass through a small meadow and cross a RR grade. Climb steeply up the hill for 0.3 miles to your cars.