

Circumnavigation of Trout Run Valley

Description: This is a fairly strenuous 27 mile backpack on the Great North Mountain in GWNF, WV. The distance may be more if the need to deviate from the course to camp near water arises. There are many ridge-top springs and streams but these may be dry during the hotter months. Be prepared to take alternative actions. In all you will gain and lose over 3400 feet of elevation through the course of the trip. Your reward, weather permitting, is a chance to visit up to eight grand vistas, six of which view Trout Run Valley from different perspectives.

Directions from the junction of I-81 South and RT42 at Woodstock, VA:

1. Return to I-81 South. At Woodstock, exit onto Rt. 42 West.
2. Come to Columbia Furnace in 5.8 miles. Turn right onto Rt675. Cross creek and turn left to stay on Rt675.
3. Bear right at junction with Rt717, staying on Rt675 (Wolf Gap Rd).
4. In 2 miles FR92 on the right.
5. In 1.4 miles turn right into Wolf Gap Campground. Leave cars in day use area behind Kiosk.

Trail Notes:

Day 1: From the day use area walk around the campground loop. Either direction will get you there but turning left out of the day use area is the shortest. If you go that way turn left onto the orange blazed Mill Mountain Trail.

Climb, steeply at times, for about one mile before reaching a saddle in the ridge. Pass 2 vistas on the right with views of Little Sluice Mt and the Massanutten Mt further east. In 1.83 miles from the beginning come to the junction of the Big Schloss Spur Trail (White blazed). A 0.5 mile round trip will take you to a 270 degree view.

Return to the Mill Mt Trail and continue north. In another 0.83 miles pass the blue blazed Big Schloss Connector Trail. In another 0.91 miles arrive at another vista overlooking Trout Run Valley. From there it is another 0.93 miles to Sandstone Spring where there is good camping and reliable water. More camping w/o water can be found 0.87 miles further and yet another dry site about 0.35 miles further.

In about 0.29 miles from the last campsite arrive at the junction with the Tuscarora/3 Pond Trail (blue blazed). If you wish you can turn right and find camping at about 0.5 miles either on the Tuscarora or Little Stony Run Tr. There is a spring just beyond Sugar Knob Cabin on the latter. This hike has you going straight ahead onto the Tuscarora and in 1.34 miles arriving at a campsite above Pond Run, the junction of yellow blazed Halfmoon Tr and a short white blazed trail that leads to a vista. Water can be found about 1 mile down on the Pond Run/Tuscarora Trail from the campsite.

Day 2: From camp turn left onto the yellow blazed Halfmoon Tr. In 0.57 miles arrive at the junction of the white blazed Halfmoon Lookout Spur. You may wish to stash your packs here since you'll be returning this way.

Take the Halfmoon Spur Trail all the way to the end, passing purple blazed German Wilson Trail (no sign) along the way. There is also a cliff view below the main summit. Check them both out.

Return to the junction with Halfmoon Trail, recover your gear, and descend about 1 mile to Halfmoon Run, water, camping and the junction with pink blazed Bucktail Connector Tr.

Follow Bucktail Connector Trail through mature forest, second growth thickets and grassy meadows for 2.58 miles and the junction of orange blazed Bucktail Trail. Turn left onto it and follow it to a forest loop road. Turn left, cross Trout Run Road and pickup yellow blazed Long Mountain Trail.

Follow Long Mt Trail north for a few hundred yards and then turn sharply left (south) onto an old woods road. The trail will leave the road and pass through a grassy area near a campsite. Cross Trout Run on a recently constructed bridge. Climb steeply up a footpath. The trail eventually becomes a woods road and switchbacks up Cherry Ridge. At about 1.87 miles from the trailhead pass a grassy clearing on the right and an old woods road on the left (the old Crack Whip Furnace trail, I believe) before arriving at yet another large grassy clearing. The continuation of the trail is a grassy woods road on the right side of the clearing.

In about another 1.2 miles the fun begins as you reach a 200 yard long rock field. There is no trail but the trees are blazed rather frequently. Take your time! Once across you'll return to a relatively smooth footpath. In another 0.3 miles come to yet another grassy clearing. A woods road goes right and downhill. You want to turn left and follow the blazes. You'll cross a couple of streams (not always flowing) with a grassy area in between suitable for camping (There is no fire ring.).

In 0.64 miles from the last stream there will be another grassy opening to the right of the trail. This is a great campsite under the shadow of Ben's Ridge complete with a fire ring. There is a small spring in the woods behind the clearing (walking towards the ridge) that some one has damned up. A better water source is a stream that crosses the trail less than 100 yards south of the campsite. This stream is not shown on any maps I've found but it does exist although it can dry up in the hot summer months.

Day 3: As you travel south from the campsite you will pass one more woods road on the right and begin to ascend Devil's Hole Mt. at 0.62 miles from the campsite come to the intersection of purple blazed Trout Pond Trail. Turn left staying on Long Mt Trail. As you climb you will be following a narrow footpath. As you reach the crest of the mountain the trail will once again become a woods road. Pass several grassy clearings on the left and in 2.32 miles from Trout Pond Trail reach FR 691.

Turn left on FR 691 and walk 2.44 miles to a parking area on the left with a campsite and fire ring. Look for yellow blazes marking the beginning of Tibbet Knob Trail. Follow the blazes (some will be on rocks) along the spine of the ridge until you reach the overlook in 0.91 miles. Long Mt will be to your left, Halfmoon Lookout straight ahead and Mill Mt with Big Schloss on your right.

Follow the yellow blazes and scramble/slide/sush-on-your-butt your way down the steep face of the knob. In a hundred yards or so you will regain a more normal trail that descends to the Wolf Gap Campground and your awaiting vehicles (1.50 miles from the top). On the way down you will cross over a small summit which affords nice views of Big Schloss and Little Sluice.