

Trail Notes for the Berma Road/Towpath Circuit

Description: The C&O Canal National Park draws hordes of visitors, the Great Falls area more so than the rest. By noon on a beautiful spring or summer day the Towpath will be clogged with sightseers, hikers, runners, baby strollers, fishermen and bicyclists. (Some of the latter can be quite uncourteous). Still, this is a worthwhile place to visit. We recommend that you get there early and avoid some of the crowds.

Described here is a pretty easy 4 to 5 mile hike using a wide gravel road, some boardwalk and the towpath. It makes for an excellent family hike with tons of history and some very awesome views. (Note: Dogs are allowed on this entire hike except Olmsted Island.) To make the hike more challenging add the Billy Goat Trail – Section A. You’ll need good hiking boots for this part! (Again, dogs are not allowed on Billy Goat – A.) If you want something a little harder but a lot longer (12+ miles) add the Billy Goat Trail C and B Circuit. (Dogs allowed.)

Trail Notes: From the Angler Inn begin to descend toward the canal but turn right and walk around a wide gated road. This is the Berma Rd. You’ll walk past an old substation of some sort enclosed in black fence and then an old Aqueduct used by Washington D.C. many years ago. In 1.17 miles from the parking lot reach the junction of the Lock 16 Spur Trail on the right. There is no sign but the trail is blazed and marked “closed to bikes” with an international symbol. Continue straight passing the back of a white Lock House. You’ll pass it again on the return leg. In another 0.24 miles turn left and cross the canal on the wooden Stop Gate Bridge. If you want to do the 4 mile loop and bypass all the cool sights and history you can turn left and follow the towpath down the canal for 1.48 miles to another bridge. You’ll pass a couple of trailheads for the Billy Goat Trail – section A along the way. Cross the bridge and return to your vehicles.

We highly recommend that you turn right at the bridge and walk up the towpath to check out the locks, canal boat, museum, the views from Olmsted Island and Washington Aqueduct. It’s well worth the extra mile.