

Black Forest Trail North Backpack – 25 mile circuit

Description: The Black Forest in PA is a small part of the Tiadaghton State Forest. It is to PA what Dolly Sods is to WV, one of the prized gems of that state's crown hiking jewels. The Black Forest Trail proper (BFT) is a 42 mile circuit that takes you through pristine valleys and along majestic ridge tops. It is interspersed with easy flat walks and rocky steep ascents and descents, some averaging 1100 feet elevation change in less than 0.7 miles. That's steep! The hiker is rewarded by his/her effort with astounding views of the surrounding peaks and valleys and an assortment of forest types ranging from pine plantations, giant Hemlocks and Red Spruce to a mixture of hardwoods and other deciduous trees. Wildlife you might encounter include, but is not limited to, turkey, grouse, deer, raccoon, porcupine, screech owls and black bear.

As this description implies, it's not necessary to hike the entire 42 mile circuit to enjoy the Black Forest. You can either setup a shuttle or use the many ski trails, forest trails and roads to form shorter loops. The following describes what I consider to be the northern section of the trail which is connected by the Pine Bog Trail, Blackberry Trail and less than 0.5 miles of forest road walking.

Directions from Williamsport, PA:

1. Take US220 west (south) to PA Rt44. Turn right onto PA Rt44. Pass the Black Forest Lodge and Campground on both sides of the road.
2. In about 2 miles look for a brown, wooden Black Forest Trail marker on the right side of the road at a gravel road.
3. There is parking on either side of Rt44. **DO NOT PARK IN FRONT OF THE WHITE HUNTING CABIN ON BIG DAM HOLLOW RD DURING HUNTING SEASON!!!** The hike begins at a set of steps between the cabin and Rt44. Look for the orange circles.

Trail notes: The Black Forest Trail (BFT) is blazed with orange circles (shown in red on the map). The cross-country ski trails and other footpaths are either blazed in blue circles or blue rectangles. The mileage breakdown for a 3 day trek is 5.6 – 6.4/ 10.1 – 10.9/8.5. The exact distance traveled for day 1 and 2 depends on where you camp. You can vary the distances but beware: There is only one unreliable water source after you climb out of the first valley until you descend again to Slate Run. This source is not near a campsite.

Day 1: Walk down the steps and follow the trail as it parallels Big Dam Hollow Rd. Pass another Hunter's cabin on the right. In 0.39 miles the Sentiero Di Shay Ski Trail comes in from the left and shares the tread for a bit. You will witness three nice views between here and the first night's camp. In another 0.98 mile the Ski trail leaves on the right.

In 1.75 miles arrive at a camp w/small stream. Continue on. In 1.56 miles you will descend to Francis Rd. Turn left on the road. In about 0.36 miles turn right onto a RR grade. Soon leave the grade and descend on a footpath to Morris Branch Rd. Turn right here, passing a kiosk on the right and crossing the Francis branch of Slate Run on a concrete bridge.

Turn right off of Morris Branch Rd onto a footpath that leads to a footbridge over Morris Run. A nice campsite is to the left, before crossing, right beside a waterfall.

If you wish to continue, cross the bridge and climb steeply for a few yards to a pretty level RR grade. In the next mile you will pass 3 nice campsites before reaching a steep rocky climb out of the valley. Before these sites there is an unmarked trail to the right that goes down to the stream. I do not know if there is a campsite there. (A recent site visitor ensures us there is.) Two campsites will be on the right and the third is right at the base of the hill on the left, across a stream. Unless you had gotten an early start and plan to reach the lower portion of Slate Run by day's end I would go no further until the next day.

Day 2: From camp climb approximately 700 feet in less than 0.7 miles to the top of the eastern ridge. Almost immediately you will be rewarded with back-to-back views of the Slate Run valley and surrounding ridges. Continue on for about 0.48 miles. The junction of blue blazed Alcinda trail will be on the left. You can use this as a short cut but you will miss another great view. Stay on the BFT and descend along a boulder field to this view. Continue on and in 0.68 miles from the last trail junction pass the Alcinda Tr on the left again.

In about 0.4 miles you will pass some unmarked trails on the right that lead to some gigantic table rocks. Continue straight on the BFT for 0.67 miles to the junction with blue blazed Algerine Tr on the left. Make a hard right to stay on the BFT. In 0.74 miles pass a small spring on the left and in another 1.22 miles arrive at a dry campsite and the remains of a quarry. From here you can enjoy a 180 degree view of the forest.

From here the tread follows the old quarry road to a smaller quarry w/view. In about 0.71 miles from the upper quarry the road will rap around the mountain to the left. Leave the road descending steeply on a footpath. Near the bottom the grade will lessen somewhat and switchback to a wide ford of Slate Run at 0.77 miles from leaving the quarry road.

Here you may find a sign leaning on a tree directing you to turn left to a footbridge during periods of high water. As of this writing that bridge is not usable, having been severely damaged by high water. Cross the run and turn right to pick up the trail which passes through a huge camping area before climbing to a RR grade. You will follow this grade through beautiful pines on the left and Hemlocks on the right.

Pass a orange blazed spur trail on the left (0.28 miles from the ford) that leads out to parking and the official 0.0/42.0 BFT trailhead. Continue straight. You will descend on a footpath to another RR grade. Turn left onto the grade. The trail will leave and then rejoin the grade before finally climbing on a footpath to Slate Run forest road 1.32 miles from passing the official trailhead spur. Turn right onto the road and then left back onto a footpath.

Switchback through High Trestle Hollow to the spine of the ridge. Climb steeply through the rocks of " The Lemon Squeezer", passing 2 great vistas before reaching yet one more just beyond the summit. In about 1.19 miles from leaving the forest road pass High Trestle Trail on the right. In 0.3 miles arrive at camp Foster Hollow hunting cabin and tonight's campsite. **DO NOT CAMP NEAR THE CABIN!!!** There are places to camp around the pond plus more sites hidden in the woods that can be reached by short spur trails. The pond water is potable after filtering/treatment.

Day 3: Follow the trail around the pond and descend along a steep rocky trail for 0.67 miles to the junction of the Foster Hollow Trail on the right. The old sign still calls it the Old Supply trail. There is a campsite at the confluence of 2 streams. I didn't show it on the map since both streams were dry as of this writing. Make a hard left turn here, continuing to follow the BFT, and climb steeply along another rocky drainage to the top of the plateau.

In 0.65 miles from the Old Supply Tr junction, cross Old Mountain Road (no sign here). The BFT will parallel this road for about 0.8 miles before arriving at the signed junction of Pine Hollow and Manor Fork roads. Turn right onto Manor Fork Road. Soon turn left onto signed Old Mountain Road. In 0.2 miles arrive at a driveway on the right that leads to a green hunting cabin. On the other side of the cabin there is an obvious footpath that crosses a stream on a split log bridge before connecting with blue blazed Pine Bog Tr (Left and right, no sign here). Either direction will get you out to Rt44. I have you turning left here. nI about 0.59 miles both sides of the Pine Bog Tr will come together. Continue straight, passing the unsigned junction of Senterio Di Shay Ski Tr on the right. In another 0.39 miles the trail joins a driveway before ending at a parking area near Rt44.

Cross Rt44 and follow the Blackberry /Sentiero Di Shay Trails west. Almost immediately the George Will Trail will join in from the left. It will soon also leave on the left. Continue straight. The Ski trail will leave on the right. **(Note: If you know in advance that the water level on County Line Branch will be high or treacherous or if you prefer a quicker route back to your car for other reasons turn right here and follow the Ski trail until it reconnects with the BFT about 0.5 miles from Rt44.)** Stay straight. In about 0.63 miles from crossing Rt44 the orange blazed BFT will come in from the left. Stay straight to continue on the BFT. The Blackberry Tr ends here.

In about 0.7 miles you will arrive at the last vista of the trip before descending through a field of huge boulders. Cross County Line Branch in another 0.6 miles. There is great camping here and further up the stream. Turn right onto a RR grade and follow it upstream. Follow the blazes carefully. There are places where the trail leaves this main grade on the west side of the stream and crosses the branch to the east side only to rejoin the main grade at other places. At some point the trail will leave the main grade for good as it (the main grade) turns more westerly and up the Dyer Branch. The trail will follow another grade due north. Follow it. Including the initial crossing you will cross the County Line Branch 20 times. This can be tricky during periods of high water.

At 2.05 miles from the first ford arrive at a forest road. Turn left here. Pass a spring on the right and then a leased hunting cabin. An orange blaze is mounted on a game trellis. Cross a small stream on a bridge. In 0.23 miles pass a campsite in the pines on the left and Dyer/North Link Tr also on the left. In another 0.28 miles pass junctions of the Ski trail on first the left and then the right. Walk around a forest gate at 0.29 miles and in another 0.28 miles reach RT44. If you parked near the hunting Cabin at the start of the trek cross the road to get back to your car.