

Description: This loop can be done as a 7.4, 8.6 or 11.0 mile moderate circuit hike. There is a 850 ft elevation gain over 1.5 miles. The rest of the trek is either flat or downhill with a few short rolling hills to break up the monotony. Some sections the Catoctin Trail are pretty rocky, especially the downhill sections. It includes hiking along Hunting Creek on an unofficial fisherman's trail, fantastic views from Cat Rock and Bob's Hill and the ever popular Cunningham Falls. There are 2 stream crossings of note. The last, Hunting Creek below Cunningham Falls may prove problematic during periods of high water.

Cunningham SP/Catoctin NP is a very popular venue for many Marylanders seeking some time in the great outdoors. Most hiking is done on the Catoctin side of the mountain with great views from several vistas. On the Cunningham Falls side the focal point is the falls itself. This leaves a large section of trails in between left virtually un-used. I like to hike this route in the fall and winter to avoid the crowds in the rest of the area.

Directions from US15 North at the junction of MD77:

1. Take the MD77 exit.
2. At the end of the ramp bear right onto MD77 west.
3. In 2.6 miles turn right into the Catoctin NP Visitor Center.

Trail Notes: There are some important things to remember about this venue. First, Catoctin NP uses no blazes on the trails. There are sign posts at all trail intersections. Cunningham Falls SP uses signs and blazes. Old painted rectangular blazes are being replaced by small metal triangles painted the same color. You'll probably see both. Secondly, a word about pets. Catoctin NP allows dogs if they are on a leash at all times. Cunningham Falls SP allows dogs on leads only south of Catoctin Hollow Road. The section north of it, which includes the campground and waterfalls is off limits for Fido. Since this loop goes right through that area, he/she will have to sit this one out.

From the visitor Center cross MD 77 and walk over to Hunting Creek. Turn left and follow the creek downstream, soon walking in the shade of Hemlock trees as you go. Keep an eye out for trout in the stream. Eventually you will pick up an obvious footpath used by fishermen. Follow it east. At two points the hill on the left will force you up onto the road but you should be able to descend to the creek in only a handful of steps. As you near the Cat Rock Trail parking lot the bank will become just too steep and rocky. Climb up to the road and walk downstream a short distance to the parking lot for this trailhead (1.0 miles from the visitor Center).

Begin a steep climb up yellow blazed Cat Rock/Bob's Hill Tr. At about 0.93 miles pass the junction of Old Misery Trail on the right. Soon pass through a power line swath. In 0.35 miles reach the spur trail to the left that takes you to Cat Rock. This is a great break spot. Be prepared to scramble up some rocks before taking in the view. In the summer watch where you place your hands and feet. Both Rattlesnakes and Copper Heads can be found amongst the rocks.

Return to the main trail and turn left. As you climb to the top of the ridge look to your right for a view of Chimney Rocks to the north-east. The best

chance of a full view is in the winter. At about 1 mile from the Cat Rock spur trail there is a short-cut that comes in sharply from the right. I believe it to be an old intersection of Catoctin Trail and Cat Rock/Bob's Hill Trail. There is a short log and two very old sign posts blocking the trail. It is further marked by a pile of rocks. Turn right here. In a few hundred yards you will join the blue blazed Catoctin Tr. Pick up the directions later in these notes to do the 7.4 mile version.

To do the full trek continue on Cat Rock/Bob's Hill Trail. At 1.50 miles from Cat Rock or 0.57 miles from the short-cut arrive at the junction of blue blazed Catoctin Trail. If you want more views turn left and hike 1.2 mile to Bob's Hill. This section of trail is blazed with blue rectangles and yellow triangles. The spur to the left is short and takes you to a partially overgrown view to the west and north. The right spur is longer and gives wide open views to the east as well as south. If you opt not to visit Bob's Hill turn right at the Bob's Hill Tr/Catoctin Tr junction and follow the rest of the directions. This shortens the hike by 1.4 miles (8.6 miles).

If you visit Bob's Hill return to the last trail junction and continue up blue blazed Catoctin Trail. Initially this is an old woods road. In about two hundred yards the trail makes a right turn onto a rather sketchy footpath. If you miss this turn-off and continue down the woods road you'll arrive at a grassy field with a barn in the middle of it. If you come to this point retrace your steps and look for the correct turn-off. Initially the footpath traverses a rock scree. The way is well blazed though. The trail condition soon improves. At about 0.57 miles from the last trail junction Catoctin Trail will make a hard left onto another woods road. At this point look to the right. Note some logs blocking the old road. This is the other end of the short-cut described earlier. (If you are doing the shortest version of the hike your options at the end of the short-cut is to either turn left or go straight on blue blazed Catoctin Tr. Go straight.) Make the left following the woods road. It will soon peter out. The trail resumes on a footpath to the right. As it descends through a couple of long switchbacks you'll walk on some pretty rocky trail.

At 1.24 miles from the last trail junction arrive at and cross Catoctin Hollow Rd and continue along the blue blazed Catoctin Trail. You'll come to the campground entrance road at 0.52 miles from Catoctin Hollow Road. The continuation of the trail is to the right on the other side of the waste dumping station.

In another 0.48 miles the yellow blazed Cliff Trail will come in from the right and share the tread for a bit. In another 0.13 miles turn right onto the continuation of yellow blazed Cliff Trail, passing orange blazed Campground Tr and then the continuation of the Catoctin Tr on the left, and follow it down to the Falls. This falls used to be a wide open area to explore but is now isolated by a boardwalk and viewing platforms. After taking in the falls back off a bit from the boardwalk and rock hop across the creek to the boardwalk/gravel path on the other side.

Follow the gravel trail out to MD77. Cross it, turn left for a short distance and then right into the woods again. Follow this trail a short distance to the

**Falls Nature Trail on the right and follow it back to the cars (1.14 miles).
The Falls Nature Trail is in Catoctin NP.**