

C&O Canal/Long Pond Directions and Trail Notes

Description: This is a **STRENUOUS** shuttle hike with a maximum length of 14.7 miles with the emphasis on strenuous. This is probably the hardest hike that I've undertaken. Although the maximum elevation gain is about 500 feet you get to do this about 4 times. To add to the elevation gains, there are several times when you have to quickly climb 100-300 feet without the aid of switchbacks in order to get above the cliffs and flood plains that surround Fifteen Mile Creek. Descents are also steep and slippery in places, requiring crab walking at times.

With all of the difficulties involved with this trek I highly recommend it. Along with being one of the most arduous day hikes in MD it is, perhaps, also the most beautiful. In spring the canal towpath is lined with Dutchman's Britches, Virginia Blue Bells, Spring Beauties and Wild Geraniums. Historically there is the old abandoned Western Maryland RR bridge over the Potomac and Lock 58 on the canal. The visits to Long Pond and other parts of Fifteen Mile Creek are nothing short of inspirational. Also of note is a fairly large forest of healthy Hemlock trees not yet infected with the Woolly Adelgid parasite that has devastated similar forest in VA and PA.

Should you decide to undertake this hike the following precautions should be noted:

1. Reserve this hike for after the time change in spring. Start early and have no commitments for after the hike.
2. Dress as lightly as possible.
3. If you usually carry 2 liters of water on a hike bring 3 or 4. Better yet, bring a water filter.
4. It's never safe to hike alone and this statement is especially true for this hike.

NOTE: The length and difficulty of this hike can be varied by using alternate car drop-off points along Fifteen Mile Creek Rd, Old Town Rd and/or Dug Hill Rd. Check with the ranger on road conditions first! Old Town Road to the Visitors Center is about 9.3 miles.

Directions for the entire trek from I-68 in Maryland:

1. Exit at M. V. Smith Rd. (Exit 64).
2. Turn right at end of ramp.
3. Turn right into visitor center. Move gear to extra cars.
SHUTTLE
4. To get to the other trail head get on I-68 EAST.
5. Take Exit 68. At end of ramp bear right onto Orleans Rd.
6. Travel approximately 5 miles, passing the first intersection with High Germany Rd along the way, and turn left at the second intersection with High Germany Rd.
7. Pass Bills Place, Go under train tracks. Follow the road down to the Potomac and Park.

Directions for 9.3 mile version w/o the C&O Canal portion:

1. Exit at M. V. Smith Rd. (Exit 64).
2. Turn right at end of ramp.

3. Turn right into visitor center. Move gear to extra cars.
SHUTTLE
4. To get to the other trail head get on I-68 EAST.
5. Take Exit 68. At end of ramp bear right onto Orleans Rd.
6. Follow Orleans Rd to its junction with Old Town Road. Turn right.
7. Pass a private campground on the right. The road becomes gravel. In a couple of miles look for a small Forest kiosk on the right with a trailhead stake. There is parking for about 4 cars on the left.

Trail Notes: From the Fifteen Mile Creek Campground and launch ramp area walk south on the C&O Canal, crossing the aqueduct. The trail is nearly flat along the canal and you should make good time. The canal will change directions heading northwest. At 2.5 miles from the aqueduct pass under an abandoned Western Maryland RR bridge that crosses the Potomac River. In another 0.7 miles arrive at Lock 58.

Walk across the bridge. The Long Pond Trail officially goes to the right of the kiosk, following white blazes, and quickly turns left, climbing over a hill and back down to a stream. There are enough hills to climb on this outing so I prefer to turn left from the kiosk, walking along the base of the hill (You're actually in the C&O Canal at this point.) until the stream is reached (about 150 yards). Turn right and soon cross the stream, following the white blazes.

In about ¼ mile you'll walk through the stream at a narrow point in the valley with a large rock face to your left. Immediately past this rock make a hairpin left turn and switchback up the hill. This is your first 400 foot climb.

At about 1 mile after leaving the canal reach gravel Old Town Road. Turn left and walk briefly downhill to a stake marking the trail on the right. There is a parking area directly across from it. Proceed down the hill via switchbacks. As you descend you'll pass through a pine plantation.

Reach a stream and follow it down almost to its junction with Fifteen Mile Creek. You'll cross the stream several times. As the valley broadens and after the last crossing, the trail becomes a forest road. Soon arrive at a T intersection with another grassy forest road (about 1.7 miles from Old Town Road). To the right will be a huge meadow with a couple of rows of pine trees. I'm not sure but this may be an abandoned CCC camp. The creek may be reachable from there making this a great campsite. To continue with the trip follow the white blazes to the left.

The forest road will slowly climb up and around a hill. This is the beginning of the second 500 foot elevation gain. **There was a recent reroute off of an old grassy forest road on a footpath to the right. Follow it and arrive at a recently graded lumber road. This is part of the original trail but was re-opened for a lumbering project. Turn left and follow the road up hill.** Keep an eye out for white blazes and another footpath to your left as the trail leaves the forest road and climbs more steeply to the top of a ridge. **(If you feel adventurous and don't mind a little bushwhacking and some stream**

crossings see the modification of the outing at the end of these notes.)

Ignore the blue blazes near the top on your right. They lead to a campsite. When you reach the next ridge the trail will make a sharp right and descend along its spine to an area just above Long Pond. This is a great camping/lunch spot. The water is always cool and refreshing. To visit the real Long Pond, ford the creek where the trail first comes off of the ridge. You can hike the entire length of Long Pond by a mixture of following an old, barely discernable woods road, the shore and some open woods bushwhacking downstream. Most people miss this part. The total distance between Old Town Road and Long Pond is about 4.2 miles.

As you return to the trail and continue upstream there is a log shelter a few hundred yards up the trail on top of a low hill to the left. Continue up Long Pond Trail. At another forest road turn left uphill and slowly climb up to Dug Hill Road. Reach the road at 1.2 miles from the Long Pond campsite. My map and the official forest map now has the Long Pond Trail Crossing Dug Hill Road, climbing a hill and then descending onto Dug Hill Rd again. Neither I, on multiple occasions or 2 other groups of hikers have been able to find this trail. I will be changing my map soon. The blazes and my preferences have you turning right on Dug Hill Rd immediately and following it for about 1 mile before turning off to the right into a grand stand of Hemlocks. The trail is clearly marked with a hiker sign.

Initially this section of trail will be flat and narrow with a steep hill falling off to your right. In about 0.4 miles after leaving Dug Hill Road you will temporarily descend to Fifteen Mile Creek at a sharp bend with some more great campsites and views of the creek. As you make the gradual turn upstream you will once again be forced to climb steeply up above the canyon only to again descend to yet another fantastic campsite at the junction of a small stream.

Cross the stream and climb another smaller hill before descending to the junction with Deep Run and the trail of the same name and Pine Lick Trail. Long Pond Trail ends here and the Pine Lick Trail takes you back to your car. Deep run may be a challenge to cross during high water periods. Follow Pine Lick Trail up Fifteen Mile Creek along the floodplain for a bit before the trail again climbs steeply to avoid steep banks and flooded areas. Descend again and in about 0.5 miles from the last trail junction come to a footbridge over the creek.

Cross the creek and begin a steep $\frac{1}{4}$ mile climb. You'll gain 300 feet in that short distance. The trail forks near the crest of the hill. Take the right fork, eventually walking alongside of I-68 for a bit, and in 0.75 miles from the fork reach the ranger station and your vehicles.

Modification: Instead of turning left off of the lumber road at the blaze continue up the road. The road will make a hard left turn up a steep hill. Don't turn but continue straight on an old grassy woods road. This is the continuation of Old Mountain Road. The road gradually climbs (barely noticeable) then descends on a steep grassy hill to the "appendix" of Long Pond. Your options here are to wade across the appendix, cross a peninsula and then cross Fifteen Mile Creek or follow the bank around to the other

side of the appendix and continue on. There is an "iffy" trail that zig-zags through the woods and up and over a pretty challenging rock wall to reach the other side. Once you cross Fifteen Mile Creek (You may actually have to splash hike up it a few yards, depending where you cross) Climb up onto the bank of Long Pond and follow upstream to its beginning using some open woods bushwhacking and following the bank and/or a barely discernable woods road. Re-cross the creek and continue with the above notes.