

## **Trail Notes for the Frosty Gap-Cowpasture Backpack**

**Description:** The Cranberry Backcountry hosts the least utilized trail system in the entire Monongahela National Forest. A person can go there and hike up to thirty miles without encountering another living soul. Described here is a moderate 25.4 mile backpacking trip with 2900 feet of elevation gain (most of it quite gradual). It is divided here in 3 days: 8 miles of hiking the Pocahontas Trail on the first day, a bit more than 11 on the second day using some more of the Pocahontas, Frosty Gap, Kennison Mountain and South Fork Trails and an easy 6 mile circumnavigation of the famous Cranberry Glades on the Cowpasture Trail on the final day. Feel free to adjust the distances to fit your needs but note that campsites are scarce on the Frost Gap, Kennison and South Branch Trails. You'll weave in and out of deciduous and coniferous forest, Golden Rod meadows and Rhododendron Tunnels. Every time the trail touches the bogs you'll get a pleasant view of it with the surrounding mountains as a backdrop.

**This hike starts in the back of the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center parking lot.**

**Trail Notes:** The trails are blazed with blue plastic diamonds and blue paint. All trail junctions save two are signed.

**Day 1:** Follow a short asphalt trail into the woods. Turn right onto the joint, gravel Nature Trail/Pocahontas Trail. In a short distance the gravel nature trail will veer off to the right and return to the parking lot. Continue straight on the Pocahontas Trail. In 0.65 miles pass the Buffrey Reserve Trail on the right and begin a long, gradual climb on some nicely laid out switchbacks. In another 1.8 miles arrive at the unsigned but blazed junction of the Blue Knob Trail on the right (Not signed). Continue straight passing the junction with the Kennison Mountain Trail in another 0.23 miles, also on the right. Enjoy some flat walking on an old jeep road as you cross another grassy jeep road in 0.49 miles from the last junction and then pass the Fork Mountain Trail on the left in another 1.06 miles. Descend and cross Hills Creek. In 1.06 miles pass a trailhead parking lot on the right. You'll pass some possible campsites on the left prior to crossing Rt39. Climb gradually and in 0.95 miles cross Darnell Run. In another 1.30 miles cross the twin forks of Left branch on bridges and arrive at the night's campsite.

**Day 2:** Continue west on the Pocahontas Trail. In about 0.10 miles bear right to stay on the trail. To the left is the Eagles Camp Trail. In another 1.48 miles turn right onto the Frosty Gap Trail. For 0.79 miles this remains a footpath, then deposits you onto a hunter's road. In 1.25 miles the road crosses over one of the forks of Left Fork and the other in another 0.54 miles. Just before this last one is a "window view" of Fork Mountain to the south. In 2.97 more miles arrive at a gravel forest road. Turn left here but in a handful of steps turn right on a footpath (the continuation of Frost Gap Trail.) In 0.47 miles the Kennison Mountain Trail comes in on the left. Continue downhill on it for another 0.77 miles and turn left onto the South Fork Trail and switchback down the side of Kennison Mountain. The first two switches are on old railroad grades. The final one is more of a footpath and has a few gradual ups and downs. You'll cross several small streams, all bridged, along the way. Note that as of this posting the final bridge is nearly

**broken in half but the crossing should never be an issue. After hiking for 2.27 miles on the South Fork Trail arrive at FR102. Cross it and join The Cowpasture Trail as it passes through a mature Red Spruce Forest. Cross the South fork of Cranberry River for the first time in 0.16 miles. You will find a very adequate bridge at your disposal. As you walk back into another Red Spruce forest note an old campsite on the left and a small grassy area on the right. This is camp for the night.**

**Day 3: Continue on the Cowpasture trail. In 0.41 miles turn right to visit an elevated deck for a panoramic view of the Glades. There will be several more eye level view points along the way. In 2.45 miles from the viewing deck cross the South Fork again on a bridge. Shortly the trail joins a nice railroad grade. Follow it for 2.38 miles. Turn left onto an unsigned trail. I'm pretty sure this is the Charles Creek Trail. You can still see some asphalt from the old road turned trail. In 0.10 miles pass an un-named trail on the right. In another 0.35 miles the Charles Creek Trail (signed) will turn right. Stay straight and in 0.23 miles arrive at the WV Scenic Highway. To the right you can see the Nature Center. Follow the roads and driveway back to your vehicle.**