

Trail Notes for GWNF - Laurel Fork

Description: The Laurel Fork trail system is a Special Management Area of the George Washington National Forest located on the VA/WV border. With elevations up to 4000 feet the forest supports vegetation more commonly found in our Northeastern states and Canada than in a central Appalachian forest. Beautiful stands of Red Spruce and Red Pine as well as different birch species can be found scattered among the more common Oak, Beech, Hemlock and Maple. The upper portions of all of the stream valleys support large meadows formed by beaver dams, past and present. Laurel Fork, a tributary of the Potomac River, is the focal point of the area. The trail along it is in rough shape but can still be followed by the experienced hiker with the proper map. The solitude and beauty that it offers is well worth the effort.

This venue contains 28 miles of hiking trails, most of which are either old logging railroad grades or footpaths leading to them. For the most part any elevation change is usually pretty gradual except in a couple of cases.

The hike described here is a moderate 14 mile backpack. Two miles are along a forest road but good time can be made along that segment. Several campsites are shown which will allow you to adjust the mileage covered each day to suit your needs.

WARNING: Laurel Fork is wide and deep in places. During periods of high water it may be dangerous or impossible to ford!!!

More information about Laurel fork can be found at this [Warm Springs Ranger District](#) link.

Directions from the junction of US33 and WV28 at Judy Gap:

1. Take WV28 south.
2. In 14.5 miles turn left onto FR106 (Locust Spring Picnic Area).
3. In about 0.5 miles bear left onto FR60 following another sign for Locust Spring Picnic Area.
4. In another 0.3 miles the road forks. Bear right onto FR142.
5. Arrive at the Locust Spring Picnic area in 0.4 miles.

Trail Notes: All trail junctions are signed. All blazes are blue but are faded and infrequent.

As you face the picnic area the Locust Spring Run trailhead is to the right. It begins as a grassy woods road. Descend through a mixed Hemlock and Red Spruce forest. In 1.20 miles pass the junction with the Buck Run Connector on the left. Continue downstream.

Cross Locust Spring Run and then a tributary that comes in from the right in another 0.36 miles. There will be an old sign strapped to the post for Locust Spring Run Tr. Continue downstream and merge onto a railroad grade. In about 200 yards arrive at the junction of the Locust Spring Run Spur trail on the right. Turn here and climb steeply to another railroad grade. From here the grade is pretty gradual.

Follow the grade for about 1.1 miles. Towards the end you will be able to see an old beaver pond down in the valley. Keep a sharp eye out for a footpath on the left. It is blazed and has a small arrow sign. Take it to the junction of Slabcamp Run Tr and Fr106.

Turn left onto FR106. (This forest road is open to public access so walk single file on the side facing traffic.) In 1.97 miles pass the intersection with FR57 and FR58 on the right. Soon turn left onto signed and gated Bearwallow Run Tr.

Initially the trail switchbacks gradually through a hardwood forest but soon finds itself tracing the edge of beaver meadows and ponds surrounded by Red Spruce. The trail will weave in and out of a couple of small side coves, one with two small bridges, before it begins to parallel the run. It will eventually connect to a railroad grade. Watch out! After about one mile the tread leaves the grade to the left and descends to the stream on a footpath to yet another RR grade. Follow this a short distance to the junction of the grassy Laurel Fork Tr and a small campsite. At this point you have hiked 7 miles.

Turn left (downstream) and cross Bearwallow Run where you will find yet another small site. Immediately turn left as if you were going to follow the run and walk up through the remnants of a grassy road and watch out for a footpath on the right. It is buried in a thicket but it is there and marked by a very faint blaze on a tree. Turn here and again find yourself on a wide trail that parallels a Rhododendron thicket along the Fork. There are a couple of small campsites nestled in it.

Continue downstream. In about 0.6 miles pass a huge campsite on the left. This is the last established campsite for the next 3 miles and there is some rough going and a ford of the Fork to negotiate before reaching the next one. There is a couple of grassy areas along the next mile of the trail that might do in a pinch but plan on getting a good workout before the next established site.

After this last campsite the condition of the trail degrades rapidly. It will alternate from nice and grassy, to weedy and boggy, to hiking through Rhododendron tunnels and then holding on to the side of the bank where the Fork has washed away the old jeep road. At times You may think that the trail has crossed over to the other side and that you have missed the ford but you haven't.

At 2.2 miles from leaving the Bearwallow Run Tr the trail stops. If you look downstream you'll notice that the valley on your side becomes almost a shear drop off. Look across the Fork. You'll see what appears to be a small beaver slide tucked under the Rhodos. That's the continuation of the trail! Switch to your stream crossing footwear and ford the Fork.

Once on the other side walk through another Rhododendron tunnel. In 0.24 miles cross pretty little Christian Run and pass the junction with the trail of the same name on the right. This portion of the Fork is very scenic with flat rocks jutting out into it. Follow the rocks around the bank to pick up the trail on the other side. In 0.52 miles from Christian Run arrive at the junction of Slabcamp Run Tr. There is an old sign in a weedy clearing. (The ford for this trail has actually been relocated. It is now a few yards behind you. There is a new USFS sign on the opposite bank at that location.) Continue through this weedy area to arrive at a very large and grassy campsite surrounded by Rhodos and shaded by large trees. At this point you've covered about 10.5 miles.

The next ford of Laurel Run is another 100 yards further downstream. Once across the Fork the rest of the trails you'll be using are in pretty good shape.

In another 0.26 miles cross Locust Spring Run. There are a couple of nice campsites here. The tread picks up an old railroad grade and begins climbing gradually above the Fork. In a couple of hundred yards the Laurel Fork Trail turns right on a footpath. There are other campsites on the other side of this ford. You don't want to turn here but stay straight on the railroad grade which becomes the Buck Run Tr at this point.

The grade will soon bend away from the fork and begin to follow picturesque Buck Run with its small falls and chutes. The grade is pretty gradual and requires little exertion. At about one mile cross a small stream and climb steeply for a short distance. In another 0.5 miles you'll come to what appears to be a fork in the run. Cross the first fork, turn left and follow the blazes upstream. Soon come to a crossing made obvious by the placement of 3 logs to form a crude bridge (really not needed most of the time) and a rock cairn on the other side. Re-cross the fork here and turn left at the cairn.

In a few yards the trail will veer hard right and begin climbing high above the run via several well-placed switchbacks until it reaches another railroad grade. Follow the railroad grade. The next mile is nearly flat. At the end of the grade you'll walk through a towering Red Pine plantation which borders a beaver pond on the right. As the trail curves around the pond it will climb slightly to give you a grand view of the pond from above.

Soon reach the junction of an old woods road. To the left is the Buck Run Connector. Turn right and in 0.33 miles arrive at the end of FR142. Turn left and in a few footsteps arrive back at your car.