

Description: This is a strenuous 7.1 mile loop (Add 1.4 miles if you start at the overflow parking lot!) in the Shenandoah National Park. It is by far the most popular hike on the Blue Ridge to the degree that a farmer's field had to be purchased for over-flow parking. I've refrained from publishing any notes on this hike for just that reason but during a recent convalescence from the bug I found photos from a 1998 trip I did with my good friend from Hillman's Happy Hikers of Annapolis, none other than Dick Hillman himself. Thinking back on it, hiking Old Rag is like a right of passage. Anytime a group of mid-Atlantic hikers in conversation want to test the metal of their peers they ask the ultimate question: "Have you ever hiked Old Rag?" I decided I should discuss the trek here after all.

I would like to mention that there are many tales of calamity on treks up Old Rag found here on the net. Some might be true. Most are due to a lack of preparedness. First, since this is a strenuous hike, it is not for beginners or folks out of shape. Also, if you have balance issues, height phobias, etc. this hike will probably worry you to death. There are places where you'll have to take your pack off to slither through cracks in the rocks, shush along on your butt around a boulder with little or nothing to hold onto, lower yourself down a crag and hip-hop across rocks. I can honestly say this is the only hike I've done where upper body strength and arm strength might be issues. I'm not trying to turn you off. I just want to make sure you're prepared. If you are then the trip will be an enjoyable one.

OK ... that was the bad side. The good side is all of this happens as you near the top. Before that is a pretty steady ascent up a switch-backed footpath. Once to the top, if you picked a clear day, you'll enjoy a 360 degree panoramic view of the Blue Ridge and will quickly forget the effort required to get to this place. The remainder of the trek is relatively easy. You'll descend on the back side of the mountain and follow a gravel fire road back to your car.

Directions From US 211 in Sperryville, heading west:

1. Turn left onto US 522 and drive through Sperryville.
2. In about 0.8 miles turn right onto SR 231.
3. In about 7.7 -8.0 miles turn right onto SR 601. There will be a sign for Old Rag
4. Cross Hughes River and turn right at the "T" intersection to remain on SR 601. There will be another sign for Old Rag.
5. Follow this road as it changes from 601 to 707 and then 600. Stop at Old Rag overflow parking lot and pay \$3.00/person. If it looks like the overflow lot is not being used, drive up to the trailhead lot and start the hike there. Otherwise, park your car here and begin your trek.

Trail Notes: Starting at the trailhead parking lot take the blue blazed Ridge Trail. At 2.2 miles you'll come to an open, rocky area. Continue to follow the blazes through, around, under and between the boulders and fissures in the

rock. Blazes will be painted on the rocks. Although this portion is difficult it's hard to get lost. Take your time!

At about 3 miles you'll reach the summit and the fantastic views that this hike is all about.

After relaxing a bit continue along the trail. Ridge Trail will become Saddle Trail at a concrete post. Follow Saddle Trail (also blue blazed) steeply down the backside of the mountain, passing Ragged Run Fire Road on the left near Byrd's Nest #1 (about 0.6 miles from the summit). Descend quickly on switchbacks. Soon pass Old Rag Shelter on the left. Turn right onto a blue blazed forest road and descend.

0.6 miles after passing the shelter arrive at the junction of 3 fire roads: Weakley Hollow, Old Rag and Berry. Turn right onto Weakley Hollow Fire Road and follow it about 2.4 miles back to the car. You'll pass Robertson Mountain trail and Corbin Hollow Trail on the left.