

Trail Notes for the Roaring Plains Base Camp and Day Hike

Description: This trek is similar to [Roaring Plains Circuit](#) described elsewhere on this site in that the Canyon Rim remains the focal point. It differs, however, in several ways. It allows for easier yet more scenic (Three more vistas! and interesting rock formations) access and regress to the campsite at the beginning of "The Hidden Passage". This will let you set up a base camp so you can enjoy the wonderful views and rugged terrain along the Canyon Rim without the encumbrance of a heavy pack. It also adds another 1.4 miles of exploration of the Rim with at least 2 more vistas and an additional 1.33 miles of the Roaring Plains Trail while eliminating the use of the Tee-Pee Trail. If time allows it also opens up the opportunity to make forays toward Flat Rock Plains, Mount Porte Crayon and Haystack Knob.

Caution 1: This circuit is for experienced hikers only. Knowledge and use of a topo map, compass and/or GPS units are recommended. Portions of this hike make use of "unofficial trails", animal paths and good old fashion bushwhacking. The chances of getting "off-trail" are pretty good so allow extra time.

Caution 2: The weather on the Roaring Plains can change in the wink of an eye, even in the summer months. Be prepared for temperature extremes. During parts of this outing you will be totally exposed to the elements. High winds can be a dangerous issue at times.

[Google Custom Driving Directions](#)

The start/end point is the eastern trailhead of the South Prong Tr on FR 19.

Trail Notes: From the kiosk walk south on the South Prong Trail. Sections of the trail are on boardwalks constructed to protect delicate bogs. You will pass through thick Red Spruce forests and interesting rock formations. At 1.65 miles into the hike visit a nice vista that looks across the southern ridge of Dolly Sods. Shortly after that there will be a small campsite on the right with a view of North Fork Mountain and Chimney Rocks behind it. Right after that is a footpath on the left marked by a cairn. It seems to dead end at a rock field but some scrambling w/o packs will lead to yet another good view of North Fork Mountain. In 0.47 miles after the last vista pass an obvious footpath on the left. This is the actual beginning of the Hidden Passage. Don't turn hear. In a few yards come to another trail on the left marked with a cairn. Turn here and cross a stream to arrive at your base camp.

From camp follow the trail upstream and re-cross the stream at a pretty obvious point. Turn right onto the Hidden Passage. This is an unofficial trail but the tread has become more obvious with more frequent use.

Continue in a southerly direction toward a Rhododendron thicket on the other side of the meadow. There you will find an obvious path through the thicket, crossing a small stream as you go. On the other side of the thicket

you will find yet another meadow. Look for the faint trail and cairns. You will still maintain a southerly course but you will be favoring the right side of the meadow until you enter a woods comprised mostly of birch and black cherry. The trail will bend to the left for a short distance until you are almost to the rim and then straighten out again. At 0.85 miles from the turnoff from the South Prong Trail arrive at the base of the ever popular "Meadows". Cairns will direct you to a nice but dry and exposed campsite with partial views of the valley below.

Beyond this campsite is an obvious grassy jeep road. Follow this to the intersection with the Pipeline Swath. This is about 0.7 miles from where the "Hidden Passage" ended at the base of the "Meadow" or 1.74 miles from your base camp.

Turn left onto the Pipeline Swath and descend about 0.34 miles, cross a small stream and arrive at the remains of an old road that intersects the Pipeline. This is the beginning of Jonathan's Canyon Rim Trail. If you feel up to a side trip stash your packs here and proceed down the Pipeline for another 0.24 miles or so until you see a cairn on the right directly across from a Forest boundary sign on the opposite side of the swath. This marks a trail out to a pretty nice overlook.

Return to the intersection of the old road. And turn left (if going up the swath) onto the old road. There is a dead tree with a blank sign mounted high on the trunk. This is the "iffiest" part of the hike.

Proceed down the road a short distance then turn right and cross a small stream. Skirt the edge of a small bog to your right. From here to the next overlook it is mostly an open woods bushwhack. Keep the rim or edge of the hill in sight and to your left and avoid any thickets to your right.

You will eventually arrive at a very large oak tree with multiple trunks near the beginning of another meadow/bog. Turn left here and head towards the rim. You will find a footpath that leads out to the canyon and another fantastic view. You'll pass another multi-trunked tree on your right. From here to the talus rock slope beyond the Tee Pee Trail the path will be more obvious with cairns marking the way through several boulder fields. Stay close to the rim and you can't get lost.

At about 0.6 miles from leaving the Pipeline you will cross Roaring Creek (last firm chance for water for a while) and pass red forest boundary blazes and a survey marker. Continue following the rim. Almost any side trail to the left is apt to lead you to a view of the surrounding area. At 0.6 miles from the creek crossing arrive at "The Point", the intersection of Roaring Creek and Long Run Canyons. This is a great place for lunch. A quick excursion to the rocks out on the tip leads to the best views of the day: Smith Mountain, Four Knobs, North Fork Mountain, Shenandoah Mountain, Chimney Rocks, Champe Rocks, Seneca Rocks, Spruce Mountain, Hay Stack Knob and more can be observed from one spot by simply turning your head.

From "The Point" travel north-west along the rim, crossing more boulder fields and passing through alternating Rhododendron and heath thickets

and stands of Red Spruce stopping for the views along the way. If you're backpacking, there's a nice established campsite with a fire ring sheltered by Red Spruce about 0.24 miles from "The Point" but it is dry. There is one or two sites suitable for a tent or two as well as another incredible view just before this without fire rings. (It was at this vista that Gadget Girl shot the Golden Sunset seen as the banner for all of the WV hike links on this site.) In another 1.15 miles, passing yet another vista or two along the way, arrive at the junction with the Tee Pee Trail at another established dry campsite with a fire ring. In another 0.32 miles arrive at another fine vista and the Mother of all talus slopes! Follow the cairns for about 0.2 miles. They will then seem to stop. Look downhill for more cairns. At the bottom will be a large flat rock. Head for that point the best you can. Don't be afraid to use your butt. That's why you have one! Once off of the talus slopes cairns will direct you to turn left. At first the trail is rocky but you will soon find yourself walking on a grassy jeep road that goes in and out of meadows and young woods. Near the end the trail might seem to fade away. Look for a long fern meadow open to the sun. The trail runs straight through it and connects directly to a well worn footpath that leads to a gigantic campsite and the junction with the blue blazed Roaring Plains Trail. On the way up you might cross a small seasonal stream. Look for a cliff behind a fire ring that offers a good view down the Long Run drainage.

To complete this circuit turn right onto the Roaring Plains Trail. In 1.33 miles you'll pass the junction with the Tee-Pee Trail on the right. It is hard to spot but is marked by an old, rotted erosion dam/log. In another 0.98 miles reach the Pipeline Swath. Jor right for a handful of steps and then left onto FR 70. In about 0.34 miles pass the Boars Nest Trail terminus on the left. In another 1.43 miles turn right onto the South Prong Trail. Climb steeply for about 0.16 miles. Need one more vista to top off the day? Turn right into a nice campsite. Bushwhack through the woods as if you were paralleling the trail you were just on but in the opposite direction and diverging away from it just a tad. Keep your eye out for a huge, multi-branched maple tree in a Rhododendron thicket. Just behind it is a sandstone rock outcrop. A scramble to the top of it will reward you with a fine view of the South Prong Drainage and the southern edge of Dolly Sods.

Return to the campsite and turn right up the South Prong trail, soon crossing a small stream (the stream you camped by) and climb a few steps to the plateau. From there it is an easy 0.28 mile back to the trail on the right that leads to your campsite.

The next day backpack out on the South Prong Trail the same way you came in.