

Jeff Mitchell's Waterfall Wonderland Hike

Description: This will probably be the prettiest, most serene 8 mile PA day hike you will ever undertake. It will probably also be the most dangerous .. dangerous enough that I need you to read the [Terms of Use](#) of this website now, if you haven't read them yet, before trying to take this one on.

Before I go any further I have to admit that I cannot take any credit for this hike. I wish I could but this one belongs to Jeff alone. I'm just here to tell you about it in the broadest of brush strokes possible.

The hiker needs to understand some things before venturing out on this one:

1. You will spend about 60% of your time either walking on rocks in the stream or in the stream itself.
2. Except for the plateau walk there are no trails and the plateau walk itself is not an official trail.
3. You need to wear sturdy hiking boots and you **WILL** get them wet.
4. If you are the type of hiker that has to walk fast this is not your hike. Except for the above mentioned plateau walk you will only average about 1 mph. Build this "lack of speed" into your plans. It took 4 experienced hikers 7 hours to complete including a 20 minute lunch break.
5. If you have water phobias this is not your hike. Besides walking in the streams over your boot tops you will have to cross them above, below and, yes, in the middle of waterfalls.
6. Expect several steep, slippery climbs up and descents down the cliffs that define the falls.
7. If the water is too high or too swift to continue at a given point you may have to backtrack significantly to abort the hike.
8. Do not do this hike alone.

If you are OK with all of that then be prepared for one amazing hiking day!

The hike starts at the second parking area on Sullivan/Jamison City Road. **The road in from PA Rt487 near Ricketts Glen SP is closed as of this writing due to heavy flood damage.**

Trail Notes: As mentioned in the description most of this hike is without trail ... and this starts at the parking lot. Bushwhack through the woods toward the sound of flowing water. Ford the East Branch of Fishing Creek just below the confluence of Sullivan Branch and Heberly Run. Turn right and follow the Heberly Run upstream. This entire section up to leaving the stream at an old haul road is 1.96 miles. Note that the ground is soft here, a sign of frequent flooding. It's hard to tell you when you should be in the woods and when you should be in the stream and where the stream should be crossed because a change of just a couple of inches in the stream depth can effect your course greatly. This is why the hiking is so slow. Eventually you will be compelled to walk in the stream. Look for rock hops or the shallowest places to walk. Remember, wider crossings usually have less forceful, shallower flowing water and is safer than a deep, narrow crossing. You will arrive at Big Falls first. After taking it in retrace your steps a bit and begin a diagonal climb up the left bank (as you look at the falls). You will see the cliffs above you. Follow the diagonal until you are well past them then switchback and climb above them. This is the steepest and trickiest climb on this leg of the hike. You will visit approximately five

more falls before leaving the run. By-pass them much the same way as the first falls but on the opposite bank as previously described. (This strategy is subject to changes in water levels and weather conditions.)

Shortly after visiting the last falls (Lewis) on the run leave it to the right on an obvious old haul road. This climbs gradually to the top of the plateau. In 0.54 miles look for a small cairn on the left side of the road. If you bushwhack down from here on a slight upstream diagonal you should soon see/hear moving water. This the confluence of Quinn and Shanty Runs, one of the most beautiful lunch spots in the Mid-Atlantic and each with their own waterfall.

After listening to moving water in stereo for a while scamper back up to the haul road as best you can and complete the climb to the top. Here the trail degrades into a serpentine footpath. For the most part it is easy to follow but keep your head on a swivel as you approach the second of three clearings (1.09 miles from the lunch spot above.). The trail will make an abrupt left to avoid an area of dense blowdowns. The trail will cross a small feeder stream and immediately make a 90 degree turn in another 0.95 miles, once again becoming a haul road. Keep an eye to the left for a hidden waterfall you can bushwhack partly to for a better look. As you drop to the same level as Sullivan Branch you'll have to step into the stream to work around some large blowdowns. Shortly after that cross the stream to rejoin the continuation of the haul road on the other side. The haul road crosses Orr Run in 0.64 miles from leaving the plateau. (Remember this as it serves as probably the only easy bailout route of the hike. You will join it again near the end.) Leave the road here and waterwhack down the run to it's confluence with Sullivan Branch. Turn left down the Branch and soon reach a nice 10 foot waterfall. A cool walk down a mini-chasm follows shortly after. If your feet weren't wet before they will be now. After the chasm walk reach a fern field on the right. Just below this is probably the hardest falls to negotiate on the hike. Begin by walking down the right side of it on nature's own stone steps until they run out or go under water. This is where you will turn to face all of that power. There is a nice flat stone shelf under the frothing water that possesses amazingly good traction and reaches the other side. Carefully side step across, paying attention not to pick your feet up too high. Once on the other side use the natural rock steps and ladders to get to the bottom. Treat the remaining falls with the same approach. After negotiating about seven waterfalls look to the left bank for a relatively flat area of the bank. This marks the confluence of Pigeon Run and a nice side waterfall worth visiting. The waterwhacking continues for another a little further beyond Pigeon Run. Currently there is a yellow rope marking its end but I wouldn't rely on it always being there (and it kind of detracts from the whole "being out in the middle of nowhere by yourself" thing.) What one needs to do is look for the return of that old haul road you were walking along earlier to the left (or the GPS Waypoint). Once it comes into view bushwhack up to it and turn right. In another 0.28 miles you'll find yourself Back on Sullivan Road. Although the adventure part of the hike is over the waterfalls part is not. Turn right onto the road and in a handful of steps arrive at a parking area. Switchback down a real trail to the ever impressive Sullivan Falls, making sure to visit the top of the falls and the dramatic chute above it. When finished return to the road and walk 0.79 miles back to your vehicle.