

60 Hikes *within* 60 MILES

BALTIMORE

INCLUDING ANNE ARUNDEL, CARROLL, CECIL,
HARFORD, AND HOWARD COUNTIES

Evan Balkan

Patuxent Branch Trail

In Partnership with



MENASHA RIDGE PRESS
Birmingham, Alabama

Trails.comTM

PATUXENT BRANCH TRAIL



KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

LENGTH: 10.4 miles

CONFIGURATION: Out-and-back with an added lake loop

DIFFICULTY: Moderate due to length

SCENERY: Patuxent River, Lake Elkhorn, historic bridge

EXPOSURE: More shade than sun

TRAFFIC: Moderate on trail; heavy at lake

TRAIL SURFACE: Asphalt, packed dirt, crushed rock

HIKING TIME: 3–3.5 hours

ACCESS: Dawn to dusk daily; Lake Elkhorn open 6 a.m.–10 p.m. daily

MAPS: USGS Savage; trail maps available at the parking areas along the route

FACILITIES: Restrooms and water at Lake Elkhorn and Savage Park

SPECIAL COMMENTS: You can shorten your hike by parking at any of the three areas along the route, and you can make the hike one way by setting up shuttles at Savage Park and Lake Elkhorn.

▶ IN BRIEF

Hike a scenic forested river valley along the Patuxent River through a portion of an old B&O rail bed from Savage Park in Savage north to Lake Elkhorn in Columbia.

▶ DESCRIPTION

Inaugurated by a ribbon-cutting ceremony on November 2, 2002, Patuxent Branch Trail connects many sections of Columbia's extensive pathway network. From the asphalt trailhead, you will go immediately into a stand of mature trees—mostly oaks and tulip poplars. Be on the lookout for white-tailed deer, which congregate in this area. At 250 feet, the trail splits; follow the sign pointing to the right that give the mileage to Vollmerhausen Road, the Pratt Railroad Bridge, and Lake Elkhorn.

At 0.2 miles, you will cross over a wooden bridge marked “B1.” You will see the Panther Branch of the Patuxent on the left and lots of beautiful beech trees in this section. After 0.5 miles, the trail opens up and runs behind Patuxent Middle School and Bollman Bridge Elementary. You'll reach Vollmerhausen Road at 0.7

▶ DIRECTIONS

Take I-695 to Exit 11, I-95 south toward Washington, D.C. Take MD 32 east toward Fort Meade (Exit 38) and a quick exit onto MD 1 south toward Savage. Stay in the right lane and take an immediate right onto Howard Road, which soon turns into Baltimore Road. Follow Baltimore straight until you see Savage Mill Manor; then turn right into the park and go as far as you can to the left. The trail starts at that farthest left point at the edge of the parking lot across from the baseball and soccer fields; you'll see a map of the Patuxent Branch Trail on a bulletin board there.

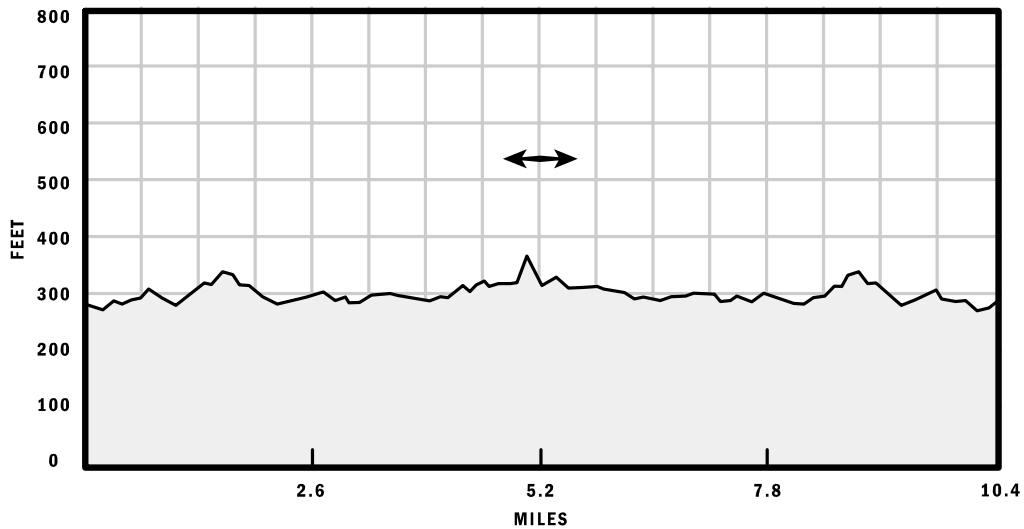
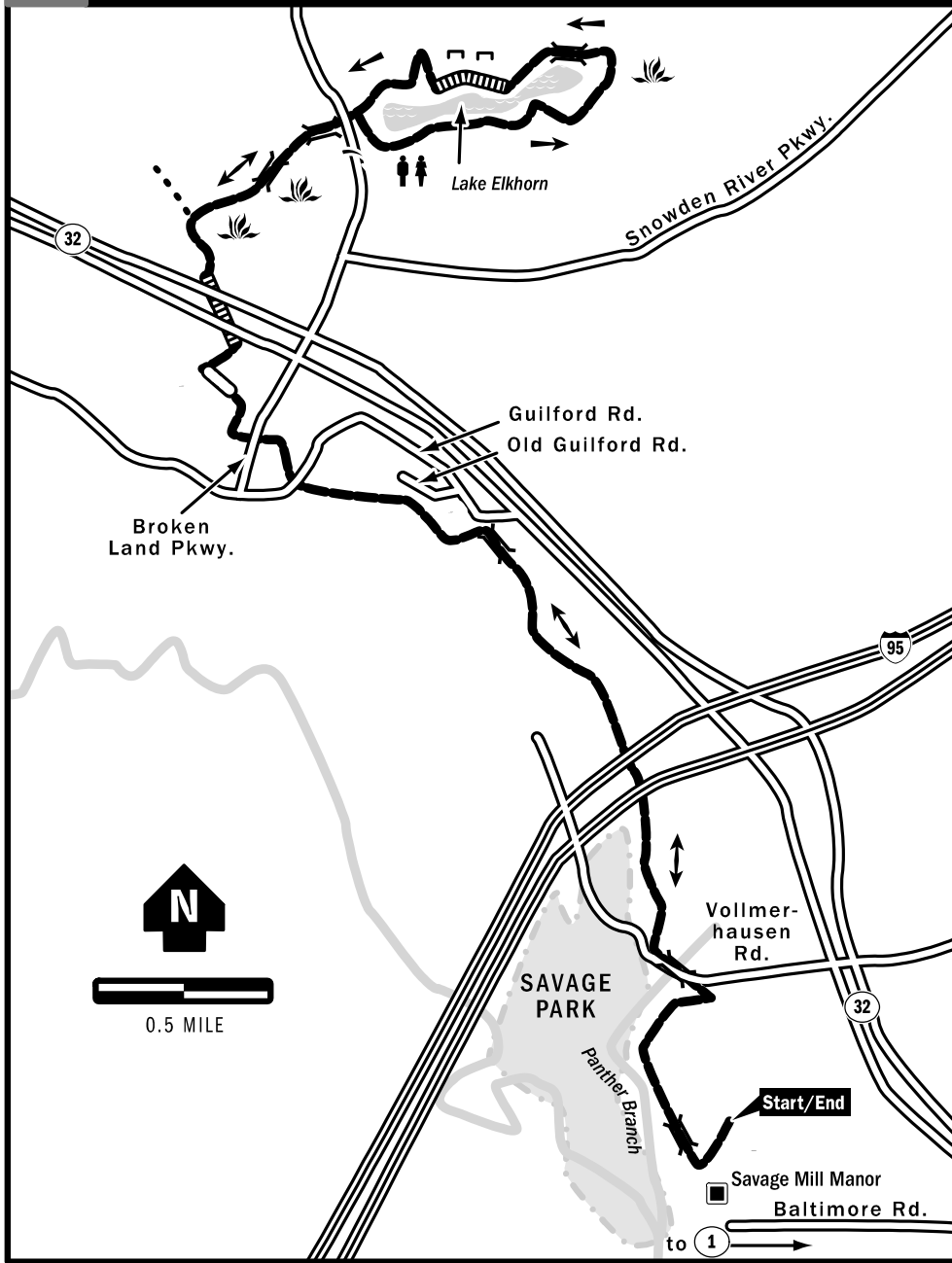
Patuxent Branch Trail

UTM Zone (WGS84) 18S

Easting 341887

Northing 4334106

58 Patuxent Branch Trail





Patuxent River

miles; turn left and walk along the sidewalk. Admittedly, walking along the road isn't very nice, but you'll soon be back in the woods; cross Panther Branch on the bridge at just under 0.9 miles and take a right across Vollmerhausen Road. Go 200 feet to the left and then turn right at the trail map sign and head into the woods.

You'll no longer be on asphalt, but rather crushed rock and dirt. Patuxent River runs on the right as you walk upstream; mature walnut, sumac, sassafras, oak, and tulip poplar trees flank this section of the trail, which runs along the rail bed of the main line of the B&O railroad. The B&O, the nation's first passenger line, ran between Baltimore and Ellicott City beginning in 1830; this particular spur of the B&O's Washington Branch served the textile mills and quarries between Savage and Guilford until 1928.

This may not be the best hike for solitude, but it gives you the chance to marvel at the existence of a long stretch of thick woods running through a heavily populated suburban center. In addition, the scenery is often very lovely; for instance, you will see lots of ferns along the trail at 1 mile. On the downside, it's almost impossible not to hear cars along the route even though you will rarely ever see them; the traffic noise grows especially loud at 1.2 miles when you walk under the two I-95 bridges soaring several hundred feet above your head. This area also provides an interesting perspective for people on I-95; while they're driving along at more than 70 mph, they see a nice ribbon of thick woods stretching away from the interstate. On the trail under the interstate, you can see the river, the mature trees, and the occasional deer, all up close.

The woods grow especially thick along the trail away from the I-95 bridges. You will see lots of cut paths to the river; head down to the river to see for yourself why it was named "Patuxent," the Algonquian word for "rapids." The big rocks in the river create eddies and pools that make enough babbling noise to drown out the traffic above.

At 1.7 miles, the trail leads uphill and comes out to an open area, providing good opportunities on the right to see birds; from the high angle here you can look

into the tops of the trees and see finches, cardinals, blue jays, red-winged blackbirds, and bluebirds flit around the branches.

At just before 1.9 miles, the trail splits at another mileage marker indicating 2 miles to Lake Elkhorn; follow the trail in that direction, and you'll soon come to and cross over the Pratt Through-Truss Railroad Bridge, built in 1901. The second parking area option for this hike is just beyond this bridge on the left. (To begin your hike here, from MD 32, turn south off Guilford Road onto Old Guilford Road and then turn left into the parking lot.)

You will follow Old Guilford Road, which is now closed to westward traffic, for a while before it reverts to a narrower asphalt path. This section of the trail will remind you that you're walking through suburban Columbia; every so often a building or house will pop into view, but just as often, thick stands of woods will crowd both sides of the trail. The result is a strange battle between the sounds of moving cars and birdcalls. You will cross a power-line cut at 2.4 miles and then walk under Guilford Road Bridge. Lots of deer live in this area; if you don't see any of them, you'll at least see thousands of their hoofprints in the mud along the trail. At 2.7 miles, you will pass under Broken Land Parkway as the trail winds through an area with a little creek. A 3,000-foot wooden boardwalk takes you across the boggy, marshy, very thickly wooded land. You will come to another wooden boardwalk at 2.9 miles; go straight here, following the sign to Lake Elkhorn, where a big stand of beech and tulip poplar decorate both sides of the trail.

Another wooden boardwalk at 3.1 miles will take you across a marshy area and under MD 32. Despite the highway above, you will enjoy this spot, which is full of cattails and aquatic life; in addition, the white wildflowers here attract a multitude of butterflies. When the trail splits at 3.5 miles, head right toward the lake through thick woods and underbrush. Another wooden bridge carries you past a little creek bed on the right. You will come to a steel bridge at 3.8 miles, just before you reach the Broken Land Parkway underpass; Lake Elkhorn is on the other side. (To begin your hike here, take Broken Land Parkway south from MD 29 and turn left onto Cradlerock Way and then turn right onto Dockside Lane).

The man-made 37-acre Lake Elkhorn, created in 1974, averages only 8 feet in depth, but its watershed stretches some 2,500 acres. Since the lake trail is a loop, you can head in either direction; to follow the mileage in the hike described here, go to the right. One of the first things you'll see is a warning sign about the northern copperhead snake; the sign tells of two dogs that died after being bitten. Generally speaking, the chances of being bitten by a northern copperhead are slim to none, but take proper caution; if you see a snake and it has an hour glassed-shaped head, give it a wide berth.

At 4.2 miles, you will see a pavilion, which has restrooms, on the right. A fishing pier juts into the lake, which is stocked each spring with trout and bass. Waterfowl that live on and around the lake include trumpeter and mute swans, Canada geese, white Chinese geese, mallards, and great blue herons. As you continue around the lake, you'll see many path offshoots; these head into the residential areas surrounding the lake. Sometimes these houses sit right next to the lake; other times you will barely be able to see them through the thick buffer of red oak, tulip poplar, and maple trees.

You'll reach the farthest edge of the lake at 4.8 miles. You will cross a small footbridge here on the right at the lake's edge, and you will see lots of lily pads and other aquatic plants. Generally speaking, the majority of the waterfowl live at this end of the lake. Houses get closer to the trail here, but so does the lake itself; in a few places the trail has only 5 feet of open space on either side. At 5.4 miles, the trail turns to a wooden waterfront promenade; a platform with benches makes this a convenient place to sit. You will see lots of reeds and rushes on the left, a favorite haunt for red-winged blackbirds. You will come to Lake Elkhorn Dam at 5.7 miles and the lake's entry point from the Patuxent Branch Trail at 6.3 miles, completing your hike.

▶ NEARBY ACTIVITIES

Savage Park, the hike's starting point, includes historic Savage Mill, a 19th-century textile mill that has been restored and adapted for use as an arts and crafts retail center. Antiques shops, home furnishings stores, craft galleries, artist studios, specialty shops, restaurants, and an authentic French bakery fill its more than 175,000 square feet. For more information, visit **www.savagemill.com** or call (800) 788-6455.

MAP LEGEND

White WolfCampground name
and locationIndividual tent and
RV campsites within
campground area**Table Rock**Other nearby
campgrounds**NATIONAL
FOREST****STATE
PARK**

Preserve or other public land

Off map or pinpoint
indication arrow

Direction of travel



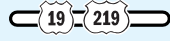
Trailhead



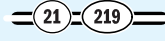
Trailhead locator



Interstate highways



U.S. highways



State roads



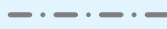
Other roads



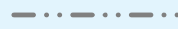
Unpaved or gravel roads



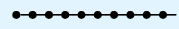
Boardwalk or stairs



State border



County border



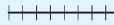
Power line



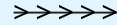
Featured trail

Hiking, biking,
or horse trail

Cliffs



Railroads



Ditch



River or stream

Duluth

City or town



Indicates north

CAPITAL

Capital

Ward Lake

Ocean, lake, or bay



Antenna or tower radio



Bench



Boulders



Bridge or tunnel



Caution/warning



Cemetery



Church



Dam



Falls or rapids



Electric power tower



Food



Gate



Hospital/first aid



Information kiosk



Monument/sculpture



No swimming



Picnic area



Playground



Parking



Ranger station



Rest room



Shelter



Sheltered picnic area



Spring/well



Structure or feature



Summit or lookout



Wetlands



Swimming



Telephone



Water access

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Baltimore*. If you're new to hiking or even if you're a seasoned trail-smith, take a few minutes to read the following introduction. We explain how this book is organized and how to use it.

▶ HIKE DESCRIPTIONS

Each hike contains eight key items: a locator map, an “In Brief” description of the trail, a “Key At-a-Glance Information” box, directions to the trail, a trail map, an elevation profile, a trail description, and a description of any notable nearby activities. Combined, the maps and information provide a clear method to assess each trail from the comfort of your favorite reading chair.

IN BRIEF

A “taste of the trail.” Think of this section as a snapshot focused on the historical landmarks, beautiful vistas, and other sights you may encounter on the trail.

KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

The information in the Key At-a-Glance boxes gives you a quick idea of the specifics of each hike. The information covers the following basic elements.

LENGTH The length of the trail from start to finish. There may be options to shorten or extend the hikes, but the mileage corresponds to the described hike. Consult the hike description to help you decide how to customize the hike for your ability or time constraints.

CONFIGURATION A description of what the trail might look like from overhead. Trails can be loops, out-and-backs (trails on which you enter and leave along the same path), figure eights, or balloons.

DIFFICULTY The degree of effort an “average” hiker should expect on a given hike. For simplicity, difficulty is described as “easy,” “moderate,” or “difficult.”

SCENERY A rating of the overall environs of the hike and what to expect in terms of plant life, wildlife, streams, and historic buildings.

EXPOSURE A quick check of how much sun you can expect on your shoulders during the hike. Descriptors used include terms such as “shady,” “exposed,” and “sunny.”

TRAFFIC Indicators of how busy the trail might be on an average day, and if you might be able to find solitude here. Trail traffic, of course, varies from day to day and season to season.

TRAIL SURFACE A description of the trail surface, be it paved, rocky, dirt, or a mixture of elements.

HIKING TIME The length of time it takes to hike the trail. A slow but steady hiker will

INTRODUCTION

average 2 to 3 miles an hour, depending on the terrain. Most of the estimates in this book reflect a speed of about 2.3 miles per hour.

ACCESS A notation of any fees or permits needed to access the trail (if any) and whether pets and other forms of trail use are permitted.

FACILITIES What to expect in terms of restrooms, phones, water, and other amenities available at the trailhead or nearby.

MAPS Which maps are the best, or easiest, for this hike and where to get them.

SPECIAL COMMENTS These comments cover little extra details that don't fit into any of the above categories. Here you'll find information on trail-hiking options and facts, or tips on how to get the most out of your hike.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAIL

The detailed directions will lead you to each trailhead. If you use GPS (Global Positioning System) technology, the provided UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator) coordinates allow you to navigate directly to the trailhead.

TRAIL DESCRIPTIONS

The trail description is the heart of each hike. Here, the author provides a summary of the trail's essence and highlights any special traits the hike offers. Ultimately, the hike description will help you choose which hikes are best for you.

NEARBY ACTIVITIES

Look here for information on nearby activities or points of interest.

INTRODUCTION

▶ MAPS

The maps in this book have been produced with great care and, used with the hiking directions, will direct you to the trail and help you stay on course. However, you will find superior detail and valuable information in the United States Geological Survey's 7.5-minute series topographic maps. Topo maps are available online in many locations. The easiest single Web resource is located at **terraserer.microsoft.com**. You can view and print topos of the entire United States there and view aerial photographs of the same area. The downside to topos is that most of them are outdated, having been created 20 to 30 years ago, but they still provide excellent topographic detail.

If you're new to hiking, you might be wondering, "What's a topographic map?" In short, a topo indicates not only linear distance but elevation as well, using contour lines. Contour lines spread across the map like dozens of intricate spiderwebs. Each line represents a particular elevation, and at the base of each topo, a contour's interval designation is given. If the contour interval is 200 feet, then the distance between each contour line is 200 feet. Follow five contour lines up on the same map, and the elevation has increased by 1,000 feet.

Let's assume that the 7.5-minute series topo reads "Contour Interval 40 feet," that the short trail we'll be hiking is 2 inches in length on the map, and that it crosses five contour lines from beginning to end. What do we know? Well, because the linear scale

INTRODUCTION

of this series is 2,000 feet to the inch (roughly 2-3/4 inches representing 1 mile), we know our trail is approximately four-fifths of a mile long (2 inches represent 2,000 feet), but we also know we'll be climbing or descending 200 vertical feet (five contour lines represent 40 feet each) over that distance. And the elevation designations written on occasional contour lines will tell us if we're heading up or down.

In addition to outdoor shops and bike shops, you'll find topos at major universities and some public libraries, where you might try photocopying the ones you need to avoid the cost of buying them. But if you want your own and can't find them locally, visit the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Web site at **topomaps.usgs.gov**. I also recommend **topozone.com** as a resource for topographic maps and software.

GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES

To collect accurate map data, each trail was hiked with a handheld GPS unit (Garmin Etrex Venture and/or Garmin Etrex Legend). Data collected was then downloaded and plotted onto a digital USGS topo map. In addition to rendering a highly specific trail outline, this book also includes the GPS coordinates for each trailhead. More accurately known as UTM coordinates, the numbers index a specific point using a grid method. The survey datum used to arrive at the coordinates is NAD27. For readers who own a GPS unit, whether handheld or onboard a vehicle, the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates provided on the first page of each hike may be entered into the GPS unit. Just make sure your GPS unit is set to navigate using the UTM system in conjunction with NAD27 datum. Now you can navigate directly to the trailhead.

Most trailheads, which begin in parking areas, can be reached by car, but some hikes still require a short walk to reach the trailhead from a parking area. In those cases a handheld unit would be necessary to continue the GPS navigation process. That said, however, readers can easily access all trailheads in this book by using the directions given, the overview map, and the trail map, which shows at least one major road leading into the area. But for those who enjoy using the latest GPS technology to navigate, the necessary data has been provided. A brief explanation of the UTM coordinates follows.

UTM COORDINATES—ZONE, EASTING, AND NORTHING

Within the UTM coordinates box on the first page of each hike, there are three numbers labeled zone, easting, and northing. Here is an example from Lake Montebello–Herring Run Park:

UTM Zone (WSG84) 18S

Easting 363869

Northing 4354855

The zone number (18) refers to one of the 60 longitudinal zones (vertical) of a

map using the UTM projection. Each zone is 6° wide. The zone letter (S) refers to one of the 20 latitudinal zones (horizontal) that span from 80° South to 84° North.

The easting number (363869) references in meters how far east the point is from the zero value for eastings, which runs north-south through Greenwich, England. Increasing easting coordinates on a topo map or on your GPS screen indicate you are moving east; decreasing easting coordinates indicate you are moving west. Since lines of longitude converge at the poles, they are not parallel as lines of latitude are. This means that the distance between Full Easting Coordinates is 1,000 meters near the equator but becomes smaller as you travel farther north or south; the difference is small enough to be ignored, but only until you reach the polar regions.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the northing number (4354855) references in meters how far you are from the equator. Above the equator, northing coordinates increase by 1,000 meters between each parallel line of latitude (east-west lines). On a topo map or GPS receiver, increasing northing numbers indicate you are traveling north.

In the Southern Hemisphere, the northing number references how far you are from a latitude line that is 10 million meters south of the equator. Below the equator, northing coordinates decrease by 1,000 meters between each line of latitude. On a topo map, decreasing northing coordinates indicate you are traveling south.

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