



60 Hikes Within 60 Miles:

WASHINGTON, DC

Paul Elliot

1st Edition

**Appalachian Trail:
Interstate 70
to Turners Gap**

**This eTrail Provided
in Partnership with**

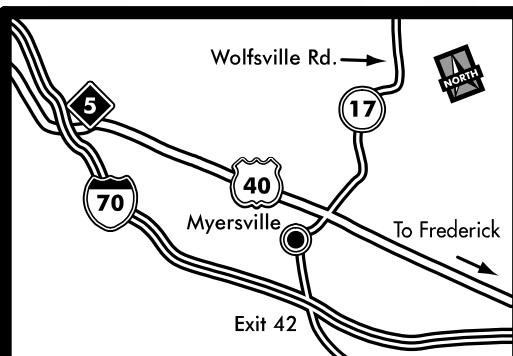


MENASHA RIDGE PRESS
Birmingham, Alabama



Trails.comTM

#5 Appalachian Trail: Interstate 70 to Turners Gap



IN BRIEF

The northernmost of the AT excursions, this hike covers the central portion of South Mountain in western Maryland. It provides a ridge-top woodland outing, a George Washington monument that doubles as an observation tower, and the chance of an indoor lunch.

DIRECTIONS

From junction of Capital Beltway (Interstate 495) and I-270, drive northwest on I-270 for about 32 miles to Frederick, Maryland. Swing onto I-70 and continue northwest for about 15 miles. At Exit 42 in Myersville, turn right onto MD 17 (Wolfsville Road). After going just over 1 mile, turn left onto US 40 and proceed for about 3 miles. Just before US 40 crosses I-70 (they don't connect there), pull into roadside parking area.

DESCRIPTION

This AT hike focuses on the part of South Mountain that lies roughly 20 miles north of the Potomac River and some 60 miles or so northwest of Washington. The hike route extends southward from where I-70 and US 40 cross the mountain. The trail winds serenely through the woods, undulating enough to accumulate about 3,200 feet of elevation change. It also passes through Washington Monument State Park, where you can stand atop the monument and practice your vista vision (take along binoculars).

KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

Length: 10.2 miles

Configuration: Out-and-back

Difficulty: Quite difficult

Scenery: Mountain woodlands, panoramic farmland vista from tower

Exposure: Mostly shady; less so in winter

Traffic: Mostly light; heavier in state park on warm-weather weekends, holidays

Trail surface: Mostly dirt, with rocky, rooty, grassy, and paved patches

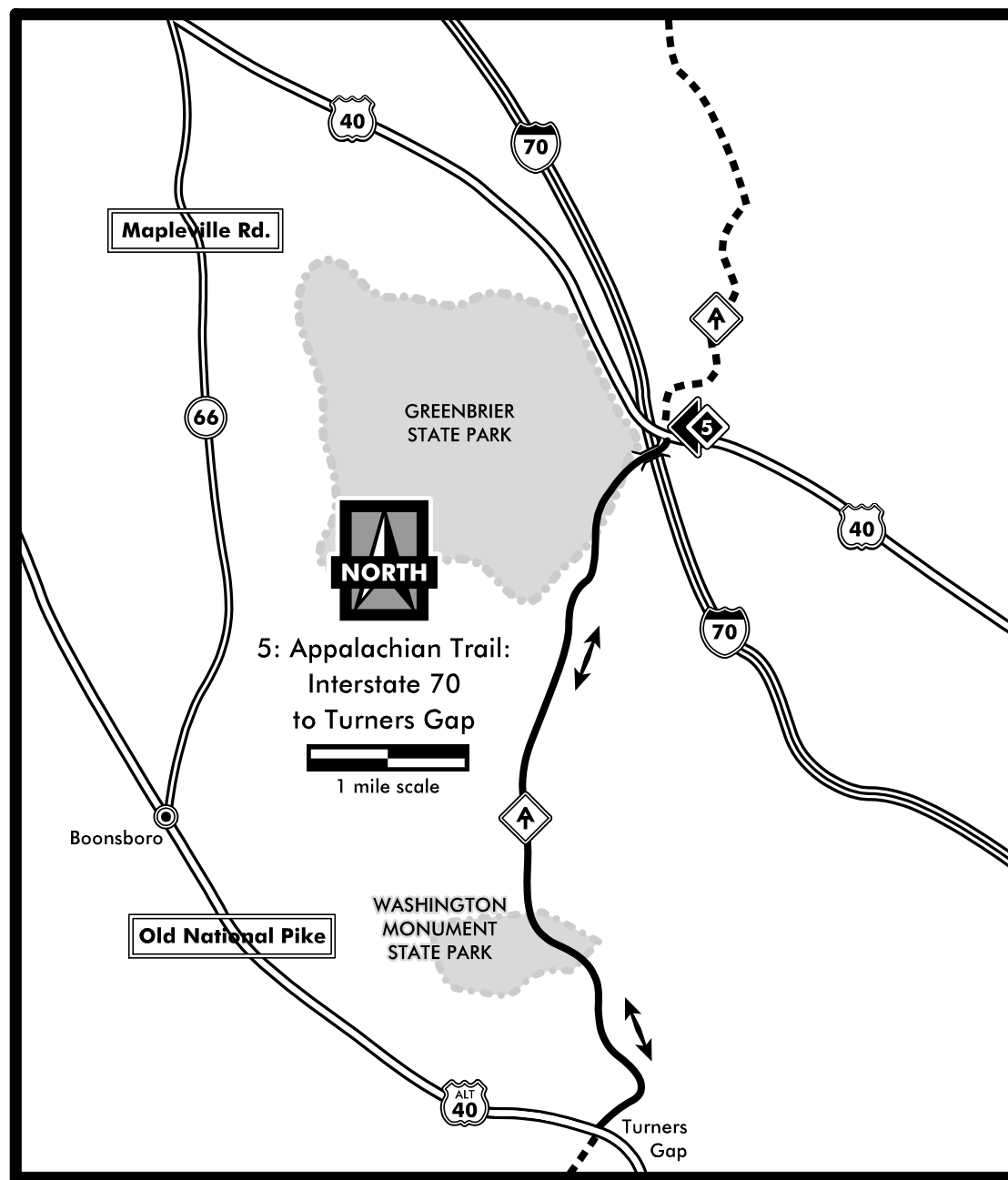
Hiking time: 5.5–6.5 hours (including tower time)

Access: No restrictions on AT itself; state park open daily, 8 a.m.–sunset

Maps: USGS Myersville, Middletown; PATC Map 5

Facilities: None at trailhead; toilets, water, phone near trail in state park

Special comments: Be careful or stay away during hunting season (see text)



What you'll see most on this 10.2-mile, out-and-back hike are deciduous trees, especially oaks and hickories, and seasonally colorful rhododendrons and mountain laurels. Also watch for wild-flower blooms, poison ivy, and wildlife. The autumnal hawk migration can be spectacular. Deer bound, abound, and are legally protected along the AT. But the trail right-of-way is narrow, so sport orange during the fall hunting season.

To get started from the roadside trail-head, head for a nearby information board and go past it to pick up an old road. After roughly 50 yards, swing left onto a blue-blazed trail and follow it for 200 yards until you reach a footbridge. The southbound AT comes in from the right to reach the bridge across I-70's traffic lanes. Walk across the bridge, turn left, ascend some steps, turn right, and proceed along the white-blazed AT.

For the next 2.5 miles, walk along a trail—consisting mostly of old dirt roads—that eases up and down quite gently. Within the first mile, you'll enter the woods, pass Greenbrier State Park, and twice cross a paved road (that's Boonsboro Mountain Road). Listen for the lovely sound of silence as you move away from thunderous I-70.

Soon after you cross a power-line right-of-way, head uphill into Washington Monument State Park (like Greenbrier, one of several state parks making up the South Mountain Recreation Area). The rocky and steep trail leads a third of a mile to the monument's base. Climb the stairs within the squat, 30-foot-high tower. At the top, on a clear day, you'll find one of the best vistas along Maryland's share of the AT. To the west, you'll see the Hagerstown Valley farmlands and ridges beyond. And if it's early fall, watch for hawks.

Below and roughly 2 miles due west, you'll see Boonsboro, whose citizens once decided to honor of the country's first president. Erected in 1827, their Washington memorial was the country's first. Later, it was used as a Civil War observation post, fell into disrepair, was restored, and then fell down again. The present structure dates from the mid-1930s.

Leaving the tower, go back downhill for about 100 yards, and turn right to return to the main trail. Continue downhill for half a mile, leave the park, and hike uphill and then downhill for 1.25 miles to reach Turners Gap. There, 5.1 miles into the hike, is the

turn-around spot, US 40A, and Old South Mountain Inn. Cross US 40A (carefully) to learn about the inn's colorful 250-year history and have lunch, but call ahead, (301) 432-6155. Or return by road for dinner—by reservation.

Returning to the trailhead, I paused next to a pointed fir tree I didn't remember passing. I realized that out-and-back hikes always provide refreshingly new views on the return trip. You might want to stop at the Washington Monument, as I did, to take a fresh look at the sky and scenery.

For more information on the hike route, trail conditions, and the AT in general, contact the Appalachian Trail Conference in Harpers Ferry, (304) 535-6331 or www.appalachiantrail.org. For more information on Washington Monument State Park, contact the South Mountain Recreation Area office in Boonsboro, (301) 791-4767.

NEARBY/RELATED ACTIVITIES

If you do this hike in summer, cool off afterwards at nearby Greenbrier State Park (hike no. 23). It has beaches, canoe rentals, and a swimming-is-allowed lake.

Explore nearby Boonsboro. It has ambience, novelty, Doug Bast's remarkable history museum, (301) 432-6969, and the Turn the Page Bookstore Cafe, (301) 432-4588, run by a novelist and her family. Or sample Boonsboro's weekend-long National Pike Festival, held each May, (301) 733-4876.

MAP LEGEND

Main Trail	Trailhead Locator Map	Trailhead for specific Maps
Alternate Trail	Lake Blue	Ranger Station/ Rest Room Facilities
Interstate Highway	Blue River	Ranger Station
U.S. Highway	Water Features Lake/Pond, Creek/River, and Waterfall	Rest Room Facilities
State Highway	CAPITOL CITY TOWN	Shelter
County Road	Mt. Maggie 3,312'	Structure or Feature
Forest Service Road	Peaks and Mountains	Monument/ Sculpture
Local Road	Footbridge/Dam, Footbridge, and Dam	Parking
Unpaved Road	Tunnel	Recreation Area
Direction of Travel	Swamp/Marsh	Metro Rail
Board Walk	35: Name of Hike Map Scale	Shuttle Dropoff
State Border	Off map or pinpoint indication arrow	Campgrounds
County Border	Caution/Warning	Picnic Area
Power Line		
NATIONAL OR STATE FOREST/PARK		
Park-Forest Boundary and Label		

Introduction

Welcome to *60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Washington, DC*. 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 six key items: a locator map, an In Brief description of the trail, an At-a-Glance Information box, directions to the trail, a trail map, and a hike narrative. Combined, the maps and information provide a clear method to assess each trail from the comfort of your favorite chair.

Locator Map

Use the locator map, along with driving directions given in the profile, to find the trailhead. At the trailhead, park only in designated areas.

In Brief

This synopsis of the trail offers a snapshot of what to expect along the trail, including mention of any historical sights, beautiful vistas, or other interesting sights you may encounter.

At-a-Glance Information

The At-a-Glance Information boxes give you a quick idea of the specifics of each hike. There are 13 basic elements covered.

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 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 (that is, along the same route), or figure eights, or any of those in modified form. Sometimes the descriptions might surprise you.

Difficulty The degree of effort an “average” hiker should expect on a given hike. In this book, the author has used a standardized range of terms—from “very easy” to “extremely difficult” that are explained in the Preface.

Scenery Summarizes the overall environs of the hike and what to expect in terms of terrain and land use.

Exposure A quick check of how much sun you can expect on your shoulders during the hike. Descriptors used are self-explanatory and include terms such as shady, exposed, and sunny.

Traffic Indicates how busy the trail might be on an average day. Trail traffic, of course, will vary from day to day and season to season.

Trail surface Indicates whether the trail is paved, rocky, smooth dirt, or a mixture of elements.

Hiking time How long it took the author to hike the trail.

Access Notes times of day when hike route is open, days on which it is officially closed, and when fees or permits needed to access the trail.

Maps Which maps are useful in the author's opinion, for this hike.

Facilities Notes any facilities such as rest rooms, phones, and water available at the trailhead or on the trail or nearby.

Special comments Provides you with those little extra details that don't fit into any of the above categories. Here you'll find reminders about such matter as park or road gate closings that could trap you or your car, trails that are susceptible to flooding, and hunting seasons that could affect your hiking.

Directions

Check here for directions to the trailhead. Used with the locator map, the directions will help you locate each trailhead.

Description

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

Nearby Activities

Not every hike will have this listing. For those that do, look here for information on nearby dining, recreational opportunities, or other activities to fill out your day.

Weather

The best time to go hiking in the Washington, DC, area is any time you can. If you make prudent decisions about which of these 60 hikes to try, what to take with you, and what the weather is likely to be, you can count on being able to get out and hike enjoyable and safely on most days of

the year.

The area has a generally temperate climate that favors year-round hiking, although deep freezes occur from time to time in the winter and the often hot and humid summers do take some getting used to. During the winter, morning temperatures are usually in the 30s, and frosts are not uncommon. If that's too cold, wait until the middle of the day and you're more likely to have temperatures warm enough to go hiking. Also, help yourself by selecting hikes in sheltered areas or, if there's no wind, hikes where you'll be out in the sunshine. Make allowances for the occasional winter storms that lash the Washington area.

On the hottest days of summer, from late July to early September, go hiking first thing in the morning and look for hikes that have heavy shade—or for trails in the mountains, where temperatures are somewhat lower. Keep in mind that even if you wait until late in the day, the temperature and humidity won't have dropped enough to be really comfortable. Also be aware of the possibility of thunderstorms; they're the area's worst weather hazard (short of hurricanes), and you need to be careful not to get caught by one when you're out on a trail.

All in all, the best hiking weather in the Washington area occurs in the fall and then again in the spring. Autumn can be glorious, especially from September to early December, during Indian summer, when the light pours down like melted butter and covers everything in a kind of golden glow just before sunset.

Even a mild Washington winter tends to be a gray winter of short days, and so the period from about mid-March to mid-May brings not only balmy weather but also the reawakening of nature as plants start to bloom, migrating songbirds start to appear, and a fresh hiking season gets underway.

Copyright © 2002 Paul Elliott
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
Published by Menasha Ridge Press
Distributed by The Globe Pequot Press
First edition, first printing

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Elliott, Paul, 1955–
60 hikes within 60 miles, Washington, D.C./by Paul Elliott.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-89732-333-5
1. Hiking—Washington Region—Guidebooks. 2. Washington Region—Guide
books. I. Title: Sixty hikes within sixty miles, Washington, D.C. II. Title.

GV199.42.W17 E44 2001
917.5304'42—dc21

00-068366

Cover and text design by Grant M. Tatum
Cover photo by Kevin Adams
Photo on page 76 by A. Glenn; photo on page 179 by M. C. Wolter
All other photos by Paul Daren Elliott
Maps by Steve Jones, Bud Zehmer, and Paul Daren Elliott

Menasha Ridge Press
PO Box 43673
Birmingham, AL 35243
www.menasharidge.com