

# Shenandoah National Park

## Backcountry Camping Trip Guide



**Trip Name:** Flexible Trip in the Nicholson and Hazel Wilderness

**Description:** Waterfalls, park history, cascading streams, swimming holes

**Entry:** 34 MP - Meadow Spring Area

**Exit:** 34 MP - Meadow Spring Area

**Map(s):** PATC #10 Central District

**Level:** Experienced or Advanced

**Total Length:** 18.3 to 27 miles

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### Day One

Campsite: Nicholson Hollow Trail - backcountry

8 to 10 miles; add 1.4 roundtrip to go to Marys Rock.

Cross Skyline Drive and hike up Meadow Spring Trail 0.7 mile.

Turn left on Appalachian Trail (AT) and hike south 4.6 miles to Nicholson Hollow Trail.

Turn left onto Nicholson Hollow Trail and hike 2 to 4 miles.

Begin looking for a campsite after Corbin Cabin.

(Nicholson Hollow Trail to Hot Mt -Short Mt. Trail is 4.1 miles.)

\*\*Optional side trip to Marys Rock: Hike north on AT after Meadow Spring, then backtrack.

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### Day Two

Campsite: Catlett Mtn Trail - backcountry

7.9 to 9.9 miles (see below for shorter option)

Hike Nicholson Hollow Trail to Hot Mountain-Short Mountain Trail (0 mile to 3 miles).

Hike entire length of Hot Mt.-Short Mt.Trail , 2.1 miles.

Then either:

Longer hike – Turn right onto Pine Hill Gap Trail, hiking 2.1 miles.

Turn left onto gravel road and hike about 0.3 mile.

Turn left onto Broad Hollow Trail and hike up entire trail, 2.4 miles.

Turn left onto Hazel Mountain Trail and hike 0.5 mile.

Turn right onto Catlett Mountain Trail and camp (see note).

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### Day Three

Campsite: White Rocks Trail - backcountry

6.3 miles (see below for shorter options)

Continue hiking on Catlett Mountain Trail (total 1.2 miles).

Turn right onto Catlett Spur Trail, hiking 1.1 miles.

Turn right onto Hazel Mountain Trail and hike 0.7 mile.

Turn left onto Hazel River Trail and hike 1.6 miles.

Turn left onto White Rocks Trail and hike about 1.7 miles to Cave/Falls Trail.

Find a place to camp along White Rocks Trail, within about ½ mile of the Cave/Falls junction.

Be sure to take the side trail down to Cave/Falls for water and to take in the scenery.

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### Day Four

2.3 miles

Finish hiking White Rocks Trail, about another 0.7 mile.

Turn right onto Hazel Mountain Trail and hike 1.6 miles to vehicle.

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## Notes

Both the Hughes River, which runs through Nicholson Hollow, as well as the Hazel River can run very high in the spring or after heavy rains (knee to waist high). Each trail crosses the river several times, so be prepared. The plus side is the excellent swimming holes that exist even in drought.

Most of the camping along Nicholson Hollow is in the miles below Corbin Cabin, as the valley widens. If you are ready to camp when you are near the cabin, remember that you must camp at least 100 yards away from the cabin (try the north side of the stream if you want to camp in this area). Above the cabin, camping is limited.

Catlett Mountain has a great pine grove well off the trail to camp in near the intersection with Hazel Mountain. Hike down Catlett Mountain a few hundred yards from the intersection, then turn left leaving the trail. In a hundred yards or so you will enter a pine grove with nice soft beds for the night. It is a short distance from here to water; just return to Catlett Mountain Trail and hike down a little further to the stream. If the pine grove is occupied, there are flat places to camp off of Hazel Mountain Trail in this general area.

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## Options

Day two shorter option (2.6 to 4.6 miles):

After hiking Hot Mountain-Short Mountain Trail, turn left onto Hazel Mountain Trail and hike 0.5 mile.

Turn left onto Catlett Mountain Trail and look for a place to camp (see note).

Day three shorter options:

6-mile option– Return to Hazel Mountain Trail.

Hike down Sams Ridge Trail; hike up Hazel River Trail; turn right onto White Rocks Trail.

4-mile option – Return to Hazel Mountain Trail.

Turn right and hike down Hazel River Trail; hike up White Rocks Trail.

Reversing and flexibility – This trip is also excellent the other way around. You can have your short day at the beginning by reversing everything. The entire trip is quite flexible, with the exception of the long day on the AT (there is very limited camping on that section of the AT). Here are two examples:

Printed order:

Day one - Hike 7 to 8 miles and camp on Nicholson Hollow.

Day two - Hike 5 (or 10) miles and camp on Catlett Mountain.

Day three - Hike 6.3 miles and camp on White Rocks.

Day four - Hike out 2.3 miles.

Reverse order:

Day one - Hike 2.3 miles and camp on White Rocks.

Day two - Hike 4 miles and camp on Catlett Mountain.

Day three - Hike 5 miles and camp on Nicholson Hollow.

Day four - Hike out 7 miles (could hide packs near junction of Nicholson Hollow and Skyline Drive, then day-hike to vehicle via the AT and drive back for the packs – If you do this option, be sure to bring a daypack with necessities such as water.)

The only required information for your permit is the trail where you will camp each night. This area lends itself to flexible route planning to get to your destination. You can adapt your hike as you go along. Just be sure to have a map!