

Trail Notes for Hemlock Gorge Figure 8

Description: Moderate 6-mile figure-8 circuit hike along the headwaters of the Gunpowder River above Pretty Boy Reservoir. Includes a particularly beautiful rocky gorge full of Hemlocks and cascades. Flora: Spirea, Meadow Rue, and Scarlet Pimpernel. Fungi: Old Man of the Woods, Russula Pulchra, Chicken of the Woods, Coral Mushrooms.

Warnings: There are no blazes or signs on this outing. Follow the directions carefully and be alert. Proceed at your own risk!

A couple of the areas on either end of Hemlock Gorge proper may get overgrown with thorns, Stinging Nettle and Poison Ivy. Wear light weight long pants preferably with zip off legs in the summer.

[Google Custom Directions](#)

There will be a pull-over with two trails on the right followed by a corral for River Valley Ranch. Park on the shoulder **but do not block the corral gate.**

Trail Notes: This is the first hike that I ever scouted alone. Although it is only of moderate difficulty one has to pay attention. There are no signs or official blazes. There are just enough cross trails to confuse you if you are not prepared.

From the parking area, look into the woods alongside of the corral. There is a trail going directly up the hill on your right. There is another trail going straight into the woods paralleling the corral. Take this route. In about 40-50 yards come to a fork in the trail. The left is your return route. Turn right and climb steeply to the top of the hill.

The next leg of the hike is either flat or mostly downhill. Follow this well-worn trail on an old farm road. At approximately 0.6 and 0.8 miles, look for trails to your left. You will use these on your return.

At about 1.8 miles from the beginning come to Gunpowder Rd. Turn left and walk down the road, staying on the grass shoulder. Cross the bridge over the Gunpowder River. To the left there is a gravel bar that supports a lush growth of tall flowering weeds in the summer. Several species of butterflies and moths can be observed here.

As you continue along Gunpowder Rd look for a trail at a pull-over on the right shoulder. Take this up and around the hill. It will soon become a forest road.

At a four-way intersection (about 0.3 miles from Gunpowder Rd), come to the original Hoffman Cemetery with its historical placard and green steel fence. Buried here is the founder of the Hoffman Paper Mill established in the 1700s along with other family members and servants.

Continue straight through the intersection, down a steep hill, across a stream (Walker Run), up another steep hill and back down to another stream (Silver Run, about 0.74 miles from the cemetery). If you haven't noticed by now there is an abundance of Hemlock trees around you.

If you have a sense for history and a little imagination, cross this last stream and immediately turn right onto another woods road. Follow the stream down to its confluence with the Gunpowder. This is where the Hoffman Paper Mill was located. If you look to the left and downstream you can see a mound immediately in front of you, which is all that remains of the dam. Across the way, in winter, you can see the remains of an old out building. There used to be some old gears and other metalwork in the shallows but that has been recently removed.

Return to the last stream crossing and re-cross it. Follow the other bank downstream on a well-worn trail towards the stream juncture. The trail might get iffy when you arrive at a sandy but very weedy bench along the river. Turn right here and work your way up river until you find the trail again on the other side of the bench.

This is where Hemlock Gorge officially starts. In a few steps you will find yourself in a setting more like that found way up north than below the Piedmont Plateau. You'll be surrounded by close canyon walls, massive gray rocks, Hemlocks, and rushing white water. The trail is well defined at first but sections of it require that you find your way upstream the best you can until you regain the trail. Just don't get too high up on the wall.

In about 0.5 miles from the last stream junction you will come to the confluence of Walker Run with the Gunpowder and lunch at the Ol' Swimmin' hole. This is one of the best break spots in MD on a hot July day!

After you've had your fill of relaxation, grab your gear and continue upriver, arriving again at Gunpowder Rd in about 0.3 miles. You'll pass the Mother of all Hemlocks on the right shortly after crossing Walker Run. In 0.2 miles from the swimming hole a trail that leads up to the cemetery comes in on the right. Stay straight, following the river and in about 0.3 miles arrive back at Gunpowder Road. You'll have to walk around a concrete Jersey wall placed there to prevent the eco-vandals from parking their SUV under the bridge. Turn left and re-cross the bridge. Immediately after crossing turn right, passing an orange forest gate, and walk along a forest road. You'll pass through more Hemlocks as you go along.

Near the crest of the hill (0.53 miles) the road splits. A grassy road goes straight and the main route turns sharply to the right. Make this turn. In a short distance the trail will make a sharp left and start heading down hill. Stop and look for another trail to your left just before this turn. Make this left turn and walk uphill for 0.33 miles to the intersection of the trail you started the hike on.

Turn right here but in a short distance make another right on an old woods road that takes you back down to the river one last time. Follow the river

until you reach another small stream. Turn left on a well-worn footpath and return to your car.