

Michaux State Forest Backpacking Trip – Planning Tips

Mostly One-Night Hike Options

- Hosack Trail (Out and Back/Loop)
 - Total of about 6 miles
 - Park at Caledonia State Park hiker parking lot (sign in at park office)
 - Hike either up to the top or the bottom of the Hosack Trail
 - There is a site that can fit several patrols about halfway up the Hosack Trail, just before you hit the switchbacks - spring onsite through early summer
 - Alternatively, camp at the Quarry Gap Shelter – one of the nicest on the AT - spring onsite; tent pads available
 - Several smaller sites along the way – one near base of the Hosack Trail is close to water
 - Can hike the Greenwood Road Trail out to Long Pine Run Reservoir for a nice side trip or to access other parts of the trail system.
 - Cautions – steep in spots, stream crossings on the Hosack Trail require trekking poles in the spring

- Rocky Knob Trail (Out and Back/Loop)
 - Total varies depending on starting point; from the Big Flat AT parking lot is about 10 miles round-trip
 - Several options to park and hike in – Big Flat AT parking lot, Michaux Shooting Range, Rocky Knob trailhead along Ridge Road. For a longer hike, you can park in the Big Flat ATV parking lot and hike in via the trail system on the southeastern side of the reservoir. If more than one vehicle is staying overnight, the office may not want you to park at the AT lot; the Michaux Shooting Range lot is an alternative and the Rocky Knob Trail can simply be accessed from forest roads and hiked in reverse.
 - There is a nice, large campsite on Camps Trail near its intersection with the Rocky Knob Trail – will need to pack in water
 - Several smaller campsites; the ones near the reservoir are not legitimate per the State Forest rules
 - There are also places to camp along the AT as you hike south from the Rocky Knob Trail through the Big Flat area (no water sources)
 - Can hike the southern spur of the Rocky Knob Trail out to Long Pine Run Reservoir for a nice side trip or to access other parts of the trail system.
 - If hiking the loop, the hike along the eastern side is steeper

- Tom's Run Shelter (Out and Back/Loop)
 - Total of about 8 miles with the Tom's Run Shelter roughly at halfway
 - Park at Pine Grove Furnace State Park hiker parking lot (sign in at park office)
 - Hike in via the AT
 - Camp at the Tom's Run Shelter – spring onsite and tent pads available
 - Hike back via the Sunset Rocks Trail through Camp Michaux – allow some time to explore
 - Can also do in reverse
 - Cautions – can also hike the Little Rocky Ridge leg of the Sunset Rocks Trail (after Camp Michaux and out to the overlook), but this is basically a boulder scramble that is difficult with a bulky backpack – recommend more experienced backpackers only.

- Pine Grove Furnace SP to Boiling Springs (One-Way)
 - This is a much longer hike than the others; better for a second trip. The first day is just over 7 miles; second day is 12.
 - Drop off at Pine Grove Furnace State Park; pick up at Children's Lake in Boiling Springs
 - Hike AT from the park to the area near the James Fry Shelter. There are many beautiful campsites near the creek, which you will likely share with other AT hikers. The shelter itself is on a long-ish spur up the hill, but the spring there can run dry. There are also campsites that are farther along the trail, several miles past the shelter.
 - There are several water sources along the way, starting with the creek near the James Fry shelter.
 - Hike out to the Pole Steeple at the top of the AT near the park for a nice view
 - Cautions – this is a longer hike; the portion between the James Fry Shelter area and Boiling Springs has some steep spots. The stretch near Mt. Holly Springs is in a low area; watch for bugs and poison ivy near the beginning of day two.

- Two or Three Night Option - Caledonia SP to Boiling Springs (One-Way)
 - As a multi-day hike, this is beyond the scope of this guide but is a wonderful hike.
 - The Birch Run Shelter is 10 miles in; Tom's Run is 16, James Fry is 27.
 - Can go entirely on the AT, or add in side trails as desired for a longer trek/more days

Tips and Rules for Backpacking in Michaux State Forest

- You are permitted to camp along the trail in the State Forest without a camping permit, subject to certain restrictions (distance from water, etc.). Check the web site for the most recent rules, including whether fires are permitted at the time. Do not be confused by the permitting system for rustic campsites; this is for the drive-in sites designated by the forest (if you do want to camp at one of these sites, you will need to request a free permit).
- For groups of more than a few Scouts and adults, recommend contacting the State Forest to see if they want you to complete an activity form. There is not an official structure for this (we don't think they see a lot of larger group trips) so it is best to ask what they prefer.
- Regardless, recommend letting the State Forest office know of any vehicles to be parked overnight, and where. Note that the state parks have hiker lots with sign-in sheets.
- For the Hosack or Rocky Knob options, get the Flat Rock Trail System map from the office (not to be confused with the "Flat Rock" hike in Tuscarora SF). It is downloadable, but call the office and they will send nice, glossy paper copies and are very happy to do so. The Michaux State Forest map from Purple Lizard is also very good.
- Verizon cell phone service is available in many parts of the trail system, albeit not particularly strong. Still, it is a good safety consideration.
- Water sources are abundant, but some may dry up later in the season the farther upstream you go.
- The AT can get a bit crowded at times but there is still room for everybody; learn trail etiquette and have a backup campsite plan during times of heavier use.
- Michaux has a huge trail system, and most is fairly well-traveled and maintained. There are many side trails to explore to lengthen a trip, particularly in the area between Pine Grove Furnace and Caledonia State Parks. Note that in some places, viable campsites for anything but hammock camping are scarce due to rocky terrain and scrubby ground cover. Michaux is a great place to explore and jot down notes for possible camp sites on the next trip so you don't leave it up to chance. Some trails are shared-use, so watch for mountain bikes and horses.
- Bear activity seems minimal but do hang that bear bag to be safer – and know how to hang it properly. We have used the PCT method and the counterbalance method with much success.
- There are very occasional timber rattlesnakes. They will not bother you as long as you do not bother them!
- If there are a lot of scouts who don't have backpacking tents, tarp camping in the spring or fall is an option (no bugs). The large site halfway up the Hosack Trail offers adequate trees, as does the site at the intersection of the Camp's Trail and the Rocky Knob Trail. Tree/trekking pole combinations can work at other sites as well.
- If there is time, a day hike in the area is a good idea, especially for those coordinating the trip. This helps scope out water sources, camp sites, etc. and get a feel for the trail.
- Homemade alcohol stoves are fun and cheap to build, but are not permitted by the BSA and should not be used if there is a burn ban in effect anyhow.

Training - Troop Meeting Structure

- What to assign/distribute
 - Training schedule
 - Packing list
 - Assign Scouts to create their own menus
 - Trip schedule, plan, etc.
 - For a larger group, designate one of the leaders to contact the state forest office with the proposed plan
- Possible prerequisites?
 - Scouts should have a basic understanding of outdoor skills and some hiking experience – Second Class or close to it?
 - Suggest interested scouts take a day hike with a loaded backpack; this could be a Troop event
 - For longer treks of over one night, a shorter overnight is recommended first as a prerequisite
- Areas to cover over several Troop meetings
 - Why go backpacking?
 - Overview of gear needs – have an experienced Scout or adult walk through a packed backpack.
 - Clothing discussion
 - Food and cooking
 - Everyone is responsible for his or her own food, or possibly buddy up
 - Stove vs. stove-less options; also consider prep time
 - Choosing calorie-dense foods
 - If time permits, test out some stoves and meals
 - Water treatment
 - Shelter options
 - Early spring or late fall – can use a tarp instead of buying a tent
 - Assembling a good sleep system
 - Bear bag hanging
 - How to pack, fit and wear a backpack
 - Considerations of weight; lightening your load
 - Route and schedule
 - Safety/rules/LNT/outdoor ethics/sanitation (including cathole digging)
- Last meeting
 - Scouts bring a menu for review by an experienced Scout or adult leader
 - Scouts bring packed backpack and printed gear list for run-through with an experienced Scout or adult leader
 - Assign buddies
 - Final review of the plan - route, schedule, etc.

Resources

- Don't forget to go to the Michaux State Forest site for the camping rules and maps; have paper copies mailed in advance if possible.
- The BSA "Backpacking" merit badge booklet is a great little summary with many helpful hints – Michaux is a great local place to pursue this merit badge
- Check out Scott and Tom's blog for some beginner tips and some Michaux overnight treks and day hikes - <https://campingwithscottandtom.wordpress.com/scott-and-toms-blog/>