



## Sky Meadows State Park - Paris, Virginia

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
8.4 mls	★	★	★	★	★
<b>Hiking Time:</b> <b>Elev. Gain:</b>	4.5 hours with a half hour for lunch 1,592 ft				

With a picnic area, many interconnecting trails including the new Ambassador Whitehouse Trail that winds through the high meadows, as well as the Snowden Interpretative Trail close to Bleak House, Sky Meadows has become a popular destination for families and more experienced hikers alike.

Most of the hiking traffic is on the lower Piedmont Overlook and Snowden Interpretative Trails. The 8.4 mile circuit hike we have described here takes you over the ridge onto the infrequently used Old Trail, that once was part of the Appalachian Trail (AT), then down the Ambassador Whitehouse Trail. The meadows in this section of the circuit are similar to the high meadows found on Cold Mountain in the southwestern part of Virginia.

From the parking area start down the path that is flanked on either side by trees. The green blazed Snowden Interpretative Trail circuit starts where the path gets more narrow and starts back uphill. This is a nice loop of about 1.0 miles offering several benches and wildlife informational plaques. If you are going on a short excursion with young children, or are just looking for a nice walk after a picnic lunch, taking the Snowden Interpretive Trail is a great option.

After completing the Snowden Interpretative Trail, make a left uphill onto the Gap Run Trail. Just 40 yards after passing through the field, turn left on the yellow blazed South Ridge Trail. However, if you continue straight for another 0.3 miles on the Gap Run Trail, you arrive at a camping area, equipped with 12 pad sites for tents.

After having turned left uphill on the yellow blazed South Ridge Trail soon pass an overlook, and in another 0.1 miles pass homestead ruins where the trail becomes steeper before arriving at a clearing and another overlook. Continue uphill into a more heavily wooded area on the South Ridge Trail, and in 1.0 miles reach the intersection of the North Ridge trail.

Turn left uphill on the blue blazed North Ridge Trail for 0.3 miles to the ridge and intersection of the white blazed Appalachian Trail (AT). Turn right north for 100 yards on the AT to the intersection of the purple blazed Old Trail. Turn left on the Old Trail as it descends the ridge on the western side of the mountain. In 0.1 miles the trail will turn right joining an old forestry road and crossing a pipeline clear cut before continuing downhill. From this point the trail will wind around the western side of the ridge for 1.0 miles then turn sharply right again joining a forestry road. In 0.2 miles turn left remaining on the the purple blazed trail, then arrive at the junction of a private road in another 0.5 miles.

Turn right uphill on the purple trail and shortly reach the intersection of the white blazed AT where the purple blazed Old Trail ends. Turn right uphill on the AT shortly crossing a forestry road and in 0.1 miles the AT will enter the first of the high meadows. Continue through the meadows for 0.5 miles to the intersection of the blue blazed Ambassador Whitehouse Trail.

Turn left on to the Ambassador whitehouse Trail, now on the eastern side of the ridge, as the trail descends through the meadows then enters the forest in 0.8 miles. Pass through a wooded area, cross a pipeline clear cut where the trail turns right, then descend steeply for 0.1 miles to the intersection of the North Ridge Trail.

Turn left on the North Ridge Trail for 75 yards to the intersection of the Piedmont Overlook Trail. Turn left on the Piedmont Overlook Trail for 100 yards before crossing a fence stile into an open field with a panoramic view of the Piedmont Valley. Continue down the trail for the remaining 0.8 miles back to Mount Bleak House and the parking area.

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## Virginia State Parks, Sky Meadows State Park Guide:

In 1731, James Ball purchased from Lord Fairfax a 7,883-acre tract on the east side of the Blue Ridge, south of Ashby's Gap. Ball died in 1754, and his land was divided among his daughter and five grandsons. John Edmonds purchased James Ball's land from one of Ball's grandsons in 1780. Edmonds then built a 1 1/2 story house, which still stands. He died in 1798, and his land was divided among his five children. Sons Elias and George sold most of their inherited land to Isaac Settle, respected postmaster and tavern-keeper in the nearby village of Paris. In 1812, Isaac Settle built a large brick house and named it "Belle Grove" (located just south of the park) where he and his wife Mary raised three children. In 1842, he sold the Belle Grove farm to his son-in-law Lewis Edmonds, who, a year later, sold 148 acres to Isaac's son Abner Settle. On his new farm, Abner built the stone portion of what is now the "Mount Bleak" house. By 1850, he had added the frame portion of the house to accommodate himself, wife Mary, their six children, and his father. By 1862, five more children were born to the Settles.



In 1866, because of declining health, Abner Settle sold the Mount Bleak farm to Thomas Glascock. Glascock sold the property in 1868 to George M. Slater, who had been a member of Mosby's Rangers during the Civil War. Slater and his son owned the farm until they both died in 1923. During the following decades, the land changed hands several times. In 1966 a housing development was planned and the property was divided into 50-acre lots. This scenic area was saved through the actions of Paul Mellon. Virginia State Parks received the 1,132-acre farm as a gift from Mr. Mellon in 1975. After building facilities to accommodate the public, the Commonwealth opened Sky Meadows State Park in 1983.

A 248-acre corridor between the park and U.S. Route 50 containing three miles of the Appalachian Trail was added in 1987. In 1991, Paul Mellon presented an additional 462-acre tract of land as a gift to the park. The Virginia Outdoor Foundation was active in the acquisition process. The tract, the Lost Mountain Bridle Trail area, contains a parcel of land that was purchased from Lord Fairfax by George Washington. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the land had been farmed by several local families.

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