



The Priest - Tye River, Virginia

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
8.6 mls	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Hiking Time: 6.0 hours with breaks Elev. Gain: 3,117 ft Parking: Appalachian Trail parking area on VA 56. 37.83831, -79.02328					



[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)

Many folks express great fear when thinking about hiking The Priest from VA 56. Although The Priest isn't found on the list of the 50 highest mountains in Virginia, it rises straight up from the valley floor and forms part of an impressive skyline when driving in from the Tye River Valley. This hike involves a 3000 foot elevation gain (higher than any trail in West Virginia), however the trail is seldom steep along the way, and can be better characterized as "unrelenting" rather than difficult. Once the trail starts climbing, it maintains a remarkably constant 13% grade for 3.6 miles before steepening slightly for the last 0.3 mile to the summit.

Coordinating with a second vehicle as a shuttle, you can combine this hike with a descent along the Crabtree Falls Trail to check off two great hiking destinations in less than 10 miles with less downhill stress on the knees (and more company) than hiking back down The Priest.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – The hike starts at an A.T. parking area on Virginia Route 56. The lot holds about 20 vehicles, and can be crowded on nice weekends. From this spot, southbound hikers climb The Priest and northbound hikers climb Three Ridges. Be sure to lock your vehicle and keep anything of value out of sight – stories abound of occasional break-ins here through the years. And, if climbing The Priest, go the correct way - don't cross the highway! Enter the woods to the left of the information kiosk.
- ▶ **Mile 0.1** – Enter into The Priest Wilderness after passing the wilderness boundary sign and begin climbing. Remember, federal wilderness regulations prohibit parties of more than 10 people within wilderness areas. Leave no trace!
- ▶ **Mile 0.6** – After ascending via several switchbacks, the A.T. cuts left on an old woods road.
- ▶ **Mile 1.2** – The A.T. crosses Cripple Creek. This stream crossing can be dry in late summer or more challenging during Spring runoffs. It is your last water source before the summit.
- ▶ **Mile 2.6** – After ascending via multiple switchbacks through the mixed woods of oak and rhododendron, leaf cover gives way to a wonderful overlook to the east. Stopping for a snack and water here, while admiring the view and expressing amazement at how much elevation you have gained, is pretty much mandatory at this spot. For good reason – this overlook is nearly 2000 feet above the trailhead! The view includes Three Ridges summit to the north (left) and many area apple orchards in the valley.
- ▶ **Mile 3.9** – Reach the summit after numerous false summits and switchbacks. If you hiked here in late May or early June, you may have seen the Eastern Turkeybeard flower, which grows above 3500 feet elevation along the trail, along with a few thru-hikers. Continue on the A.T. for approximately 0.4 mile, over level ground.
- ▶ **Mile 4.3** – After passing numerous smaller trails that lead to potential campsites and dead ends, follow a well worn trail right to a large set of rocks on the western edge of the summit. These rocks give an overview to the west and north, including Three Ridges and mountains in Shenandoah National Park. By looking carefully, you can see the Blue Ridge Parkway knifing through the mountains several miles away. Return the way you came if you have a single vehicle.
- ▶ **Mile 8.6** – Return to your vehicle after following the same route back down the mountain.