



## Whetstone Ridge Trail – Fairfield, VA

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
12.2 mls	5	1	4	4	1
<b>Hiking Time:</b> 6.0 hours with 30 minutes of breaks <b>Elev. Gain:</b> 1,900 ft <b>Parking::</b> ▶ <b>Start:</b> Parking on the Blue Ridge Parkway. 37.86950, -79.14814 ▶ <b>Finish:</b> Parking on Irish Creek Rd. VA 603. 37.81923, -79.25397					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)



The Whetstone Ridge Trail is a tough ridgetop trail that requires a 25 minute (9.3 mile) car shuttle each way down twisty Irish Creek Road. Although the trail's first several miles are level, after five miles the trail begins a "roller coaster" section, steeply gaining elevation then losing it just as fast multiple times before taking a sharp left and steadily descending to the trail's end on Irish Creek Road. The trail rewards the hiker for this effort with multiple wonderful views of mountains to the east and the Shenandoah Valley to the west along much of the journey. There were no campsites visible along this trail, but several flat spots provide potential for Leave No Trace camping.

**Note:** The Forest Service changed the route of the southernmost section of this hike about 10 years ago. Older trail maps (including the 2007 revision of Trails Illustrated #789, current as of this writing in 2017) are incorrect and following them could mean you finish this hike nowhere near your car! For a complete set of area trails we recommend the current PATC Map #13, which is more current.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – The yellow blazed trail starts behind a brown hiker sign on the north end of a large parking area along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The building here has flush toilets.
- ▶ **Mile 0.2** – After passing a kiosk, the trail heads north for 0.2 mile paralleling the Blue Ridge Parkway before taking a sharp left onto Whetstone Ridge. Shortly after this turn is the high point on this hike, 3150 feet. After the summit, the trail leaves the ridge and travels along the side of the slope.
- ▶ **Mile 2.2** – Trail merges onto a woods road, as marked by a yellow trail sign.
- ▶ **Mile 2.5** – Trail splits right off of woods road, as marked by another yellow sign.
- ▶ **Mile 2.7** – After briefly merging again with the same woods road, the trail again splits right off of the woods road as marked by a yellow sign.
- ▶ **Mile 3.4** – The trail ascends a steep section, which is a precursor for what is to come. Along the way for the 0.7 mile, you may see "Posted No Trespassing" signs to the left. The trail travels along the boundary of the national forest but remains on public land.
- ▶ **Mile 4.5** – The trail takes a right turn as it leaves Whetstone Ridge and moves onto South Mountain.
- ▶ **Mile 6.8** – Part way up another steep climb is a nice overlook on the right, which looks out over the Shenandoah Valley.
- ▶ **Mile 8.3** – The ridge becomes very narrow and rocky, and an overlook is on the left on the rocks.
- ▶ **Mile 9.3** – A nice open overlook on the left looks out over the Irish Creek Valley towards Rocky Mountain and other summits. This is the nicest overlook on the hike - a great spot for a snack!
- ▶ **Mile 9.7** – The trail takes a sharp left at a trail sign and leaves the ridge. Older maps show the trail going straight here, but the trail is well marked at the turn. After this, the trail descends gradually to your shuttle vehicle on an exceptionally well-constructed trail section, reportedly constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps back in the Great Depression.
- ▶ **Mile 10.3** – A view opens up looking into the Irish Creek Valley.
- ▶ **Mile 12.2** – After leaving the ridge at Mile 9.7, lose 950 feet over 2.5 miles before passing a kiosk and coming out at a small parking area on Irish Creek Road. There is a brown hiker sign identifying this parking spot.