

A
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GUIDE®

Best Easy Day Hikes
Shenandoah
National Park

WHERE TO HIKE SERIES



 American
Hiking
Society

BERT AND JANE GILDART

B e s t E a s y D a y H i k e s S e r i e s

Best Easy Day Hikes Shenandoah National Park

Fourth Edition

Bert and Jane Gildart

FALCON GUIDES

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Every effort has been made by the authors and editors to make this guide as accurate and useful as possible. However, many things can change after a guide is published—trails are rerouted, regulations change, facilities come under new management, etc.

We would appreciate hearing from you concerning your experiences with this guide and how you feel it could be improved and kept up to date. While we may not be able to respond to all comments and suggestions, we'll take them to heart and we'll also make certain to share them with the authors. Please send your comments and suggestions to the following address:

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Contents

[Overview Map](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Ranking the Hikes](#)

[Map Legend](#)

[North District Overview Map](#)

The Hikes

[1 Fox Hollow Trail](#)

[2 Snead Farm](#)

[3 Lands Run Falls](#)

[4 Fort Windham Rocks](#)

[5 Traces Trail](#)

[6 Byrds Nest Summit and Byrds Nest Shelter No. 4](#)

[Central District Overview Map](#)

[7 Marys Rock North](#)

[8 Marys Rock South](#)

[9 Corbin Cabin Cutoff / NicholsonHollow / AT Loop](#)

[10 Stony Man Trail](#)

[11 Millers Head](#)

[12 Limberlost](#)

[13 Hawksbill Summit](#)

[14 Whiteoak Canyon](#)

[15 Dark Hollow Falls](#)

[16 Story of the Forest Trail](#)

[17 Lewis Spring Falls](#)

[18 Rapidan Camp](#)

[19 Bearfence Mountain](#)

[20 Pocosin Trail](#)

[21 South River Falls](#)

[South District Overview Map](#)

[22 Powell Gap](#)

[23 Ivy Creek](#)

24 Loft Mountain Loop

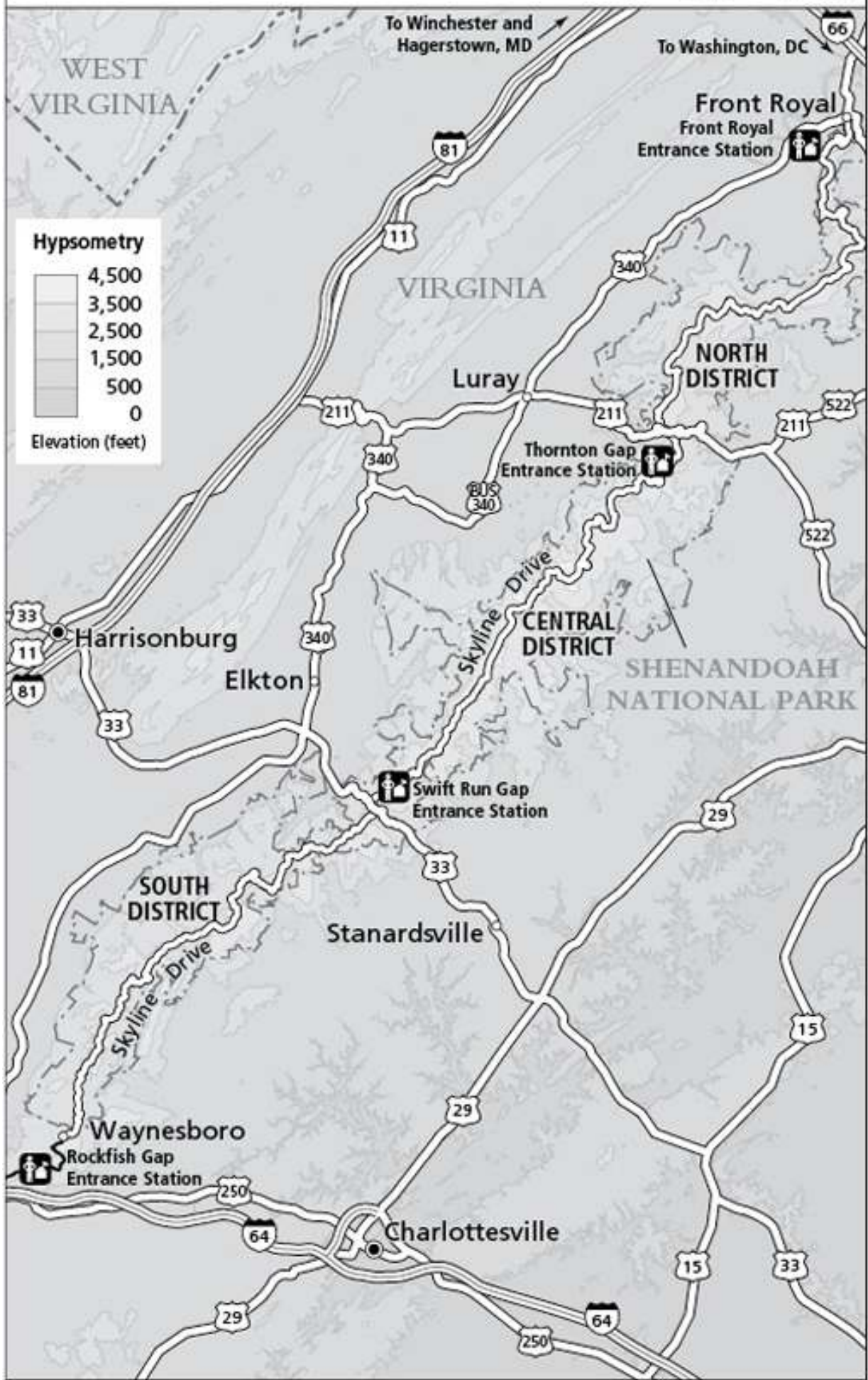
25 Blackrock Summit

26 Calvary and Chimney Rocks

27 Calf Mountain

About the Authors

Overview



Acknowledgments

No book is ever written and completed without the help of others, and this guide is no exception. First, we'd like to thank Steve Bair and Melissa Rudacille, both park rangers at Shenandoah National Park who reviewed the book and provided much valuable information. We attempted to incorporate all of their thoughts, suggestions, and ideas and hope we have interpreted their comments correctly. As well, we'd like to thank Greta Miller, director of the Shenandoah National Park Association, and Dan Hurlbert, the park's map specialist who simplified the verification of GPS coordinates with map overlays. Greta aided with initial logistics and helped us establish just what direction our work would follow.

Along the trails we met the South District Trail Crew, who offered much good trailside chat and helped explain new Shenandoah backcountry policy. Thanks as well to former ranger and adventurer Buck Hisey, now of the Shenandoah Valley, and his wife, Fran (also an adventurer extraordinaire), for their spontaneous friendship, meals, and long night of information about Shenandoah.

We want to thank Adam and Susan Maffei for companionship in 2010 as we rehiked many of the park's trails. They are special friends and quintessential hikers. We also want to thank Julie Marsh who has helped us not only with this publication but several other FalconGuides as well. She has an eagle eye and the patience of Job.

Last, our thanks to Bill Schneider, founder of Falcon Press, who got us to Shenandoah way back in 1998, and to Jessica Haberman of Globe Pequot Press who got us back more than a decade later.

Introduction

Shenandoah National Park straddles a beautiful stretch of the Blue Ridge, which forms the eastern rampart of the Appalachian Mountains. Beginning in the late 1700s, settlers began drifting into these hills and “hollers.” They cleared some of the vast forests that originally blanketed the region so that they could till the land. Shenandoah was established as a national park in 1935. For the most part, the forests reestablished naturally. As the flora returned, so did Shenandoah’s fauna. Today, some 200 species of birds occupy the park, as well as around 50 species of mammals, some of which had declined significantly in number prior to the park’s establishment.

Today, Shenandoah offers a little something for everyone with an interest in the out-of-doors. The park attracts more than a million visitors annually and, to accommodate these crowds, is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week unless the roads are closed due to ice, snow or fog. Two visitor centers, Dickey Ridge in the North District and Byrd Visitor Center at Big Meadows, are open seven days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. beginning about the first of April and usually closing in late November. For current park information call headquarters at (540) 999-3500, or write Shenandoah National Park, 3655 US Highway 211 E, Luray, VA 22835; or visit www.nps.gov/shen.

As a further means of accommodating visitors, the park has four public campgrounds with a total of 660 campsites. Big Meadow closes at the end of November, while the other three close October 31. No hookups for RVs, but water and dump stations are available as well as bathrooms. Propane and diesel fuel are not available in the park, only in surrounding towns.

In some of the campgrounds, sites are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Getting a spot can be difficult, particularly in the summer and in the fall, when autumn foliage peaks. At Big Meadows Campground, make reservations for mid-May through October. Even if you arrive during the week, and get a spot, there is some chance you might have to move as the weekend rolls around, because visitors with reservations have priority.

Dogs on a 6-foot leash are allowed on most trails throughout the park. For those few trails that do not permit dogs, see Canine compatibility for each hike.

Though Shenandoah offers many attractions, hikes to the waterfalls and highest peaks remain among the most popular. Fortunately, access to these most scenic of attractions is relatively easy.

Getting There

Shenandoah is easily accessible from a variety of different locales. In the north, you can access the park via Front Royal, Virginia, by leaving US 340 south of town and following the bold and abundant signs to the park’s entrance. From the highway, the park’s northern entrance station is less than a mile away.

From the south, you can access the park by driving from Waynesboro via US 250 to the Rockfish Gap entrance station. You can also enter at its Thornton Gap entrance, 30 miles farther north, via US

211. If you are coming through Harrisonburg to the west or Stanardsville to the east, you can enter on US 33 at the Swift Run Gap entrance. From Charlottesville and Richmond, you can take I-64 west to Rockfish Gap, the park's southernmost entrance.

Once in the park, you will drive the famous Skyline Drive. Along the west side of this 105.4-mile route, the park has conveniently placed mile markers. Because almost all trails radiate from Skyline Drive, it's very simple to find your desired trailhead. The mileposts begin just after the north entrance of the park, accessed from the town of Front Royal. The last marker, Milepost 105.4, is located at Rockfish Gap in the south. From here, the Blue Ridge Parkway continues south; the town of Waynesboro is at the base of the mountains as you leave the park.

On your road map, you may notice that Skyline Drive does not run precisely north and south. However, for purposes of this guidebook, all directions assume that as you drive from the north end of the park to the south end, east will be on your left and west will be to your right.

What Is a “Best Easy” Hike?

While researching and writing a much larger FalconGuide called *Hiking Shenandoah*, we had frequent discussions with rangers about what kind of information hikers most often requested. We also had the same type of discussion with many hikers on the trails.

It seems there are two general types of visitors—those who want to spend several days exploring Shenandoah's backcountry and those who will be in the park only a day or two and would like a choice sampling of its special features. This book is for the second group.

The more comprehensive book, *Hiking Shenandoah*, covers nearly every trail in the park, including those that are neither best nor easy. Best Easy Day Hikes includes only short, less-strenuous hikes that we consider among the nicest day hikes in the park. None have drastically long climbs.

Some of the hikes in this book might seem easy to some but not to others. To help you decide which are for you, we have ranked the hikes from easiest to hardest below. Please keep in mind that short does not always equal easy. Other factors such as elevation gain and trail conditions have to be considered.

We hope you enjoy your “best easy” hiking in Shenandoah National Park.

Ranking the Hikes

The following list ranks the hikes in this book from easiest to more challenging. The milepost numbers correspond to those displayed along Skyline Drive and indicate the hike's location on this the main route through the park.

12 Limberlost, Skyline Drive Mile 43

16 Story of the Forest Trail, Skyline Drive Mile 51

4 Fort Windham Rocks, Skyline Drive Mile 10.4

-
- 1 Fox Hollow Trail, Skyline Drive Mile 4.6
 - 2 Snead Farm, Skyline Drive Mile 5.1
 - 5 Traces Trail, Skyline Drive Mile 22.2
 - 24 Loft Mountain Loop, Skyline Drive Mile 79.5
 - 25 Blackrock Summit, Skyline Drive Mile 84.8
 - 26 Calvary and Chimney Rocks, Skyline Drive Mile 90
 - 27 Calf Mountain, Skyline Drive Mile 99.5
 - 20 Pocosin Trail, Skyline Drive Mile 59.5
 - 11 Millers Head, Skyline Drive Mile 42.5
 - 3 Lands Run Falls, Skyline Drive Mile 9.2
 - 10 Stony Man Trail, Skyline Drive Mile 41.7
 - 6 Byrds Nest 4 Loop, Skyline Drive Mile 28.5
 - 9 Corbin Cabin Cutoff/Nicholson Hollow/AT Loop, Skyline Drive Mile 37.9
 - 7 Marys Rock North, Skyline Drive Mile 31.6
 - 8 Marys Rock South, Skyline Drive Mile 33.5
 - 13 Hawksbill Summit, Skyline Drive Mile 45.6
 - 19 Bearfence Mountain, Skyline Drive Mile 56.4
 - 22 Powell Gap, Skyline Drive Mile 70
 - 18 Rapidan Camp, Skyline Drive Mile 52.8
 - 15 Dark Hollow Falls, Skyline Drive Mile 50.7
 - 21 South River Falls, Skyline Drive Mile 62.8
 - 17 Lewis Spring Falls, Skyline Drive Mile 51.2
 - 23 Ivy Creek, Skyline Drive Mile 77.5
 - 14 Whiteoak Canyon, Skyline Drive Mile 31.5

Leave No Trace

Visiting a national park such as Shenandoah is like going to a famous art museum. Obviously, you do not want to leave your mark on an art treasure in the museum. If every visitor to the museum left one

little mark, the piece of art would quickly be destroyed—and of what value is a big building full of trashed art? The same goes for a wilderness such as Shenandoah National Park, which is as magnificent and as valuable as any masterpiece by any artist. If we all left one little mark on the landscape, the wilderness would soon be despoiled.

A wilderness can accommodate plenty of human use as long as everybody behaves. But a few thoughtless or uninformed visitors can ruin it for everybody who follows. The need for good manners applies to all wilderness users, not just hikers.

Leave No Trace Principles

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors

For more detail, visit www.LNT.org.

Most of us know better than to litter—in or out of the wilderness. Be sure you leave nothing, regardless of how small it is, along the trail or at your campsite. This means that you should pack out everything, including orange peels, flip-tops, cigarette butts, and gum wrappers. In fact, you may want to pick up any obvious trash others have dropped along the way.

Follow the main trail. Avoid cutting switchbacks and walking on vegetation beside the trail. In the mountains some terrain is very fragile, so stay on the trail if possible.

Don't pick up souvenirs, such as rocks, antlers, or wildflowers. And remember, here in Shenandoah you must go even further. Should you see old bedsprings or other items discarded by the mountain people of yesteryear, leave them as you found them. Park officials regard them as historic artifacts.

Avoid making loud noises that may disturb others. Remember, sound travels easily along the ridges and through the canyons. Be courteous.

Bury human waste 6 to 8 inches deep and pack-out used toilet paper. This is a good reason to carry a lightweight trowel. Keep waste at least 300 feet away from any water source.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, strictly follow the pack-in and pack-out rule. If you carry something into the backcountry, consume it or carry it out.

About the Maps

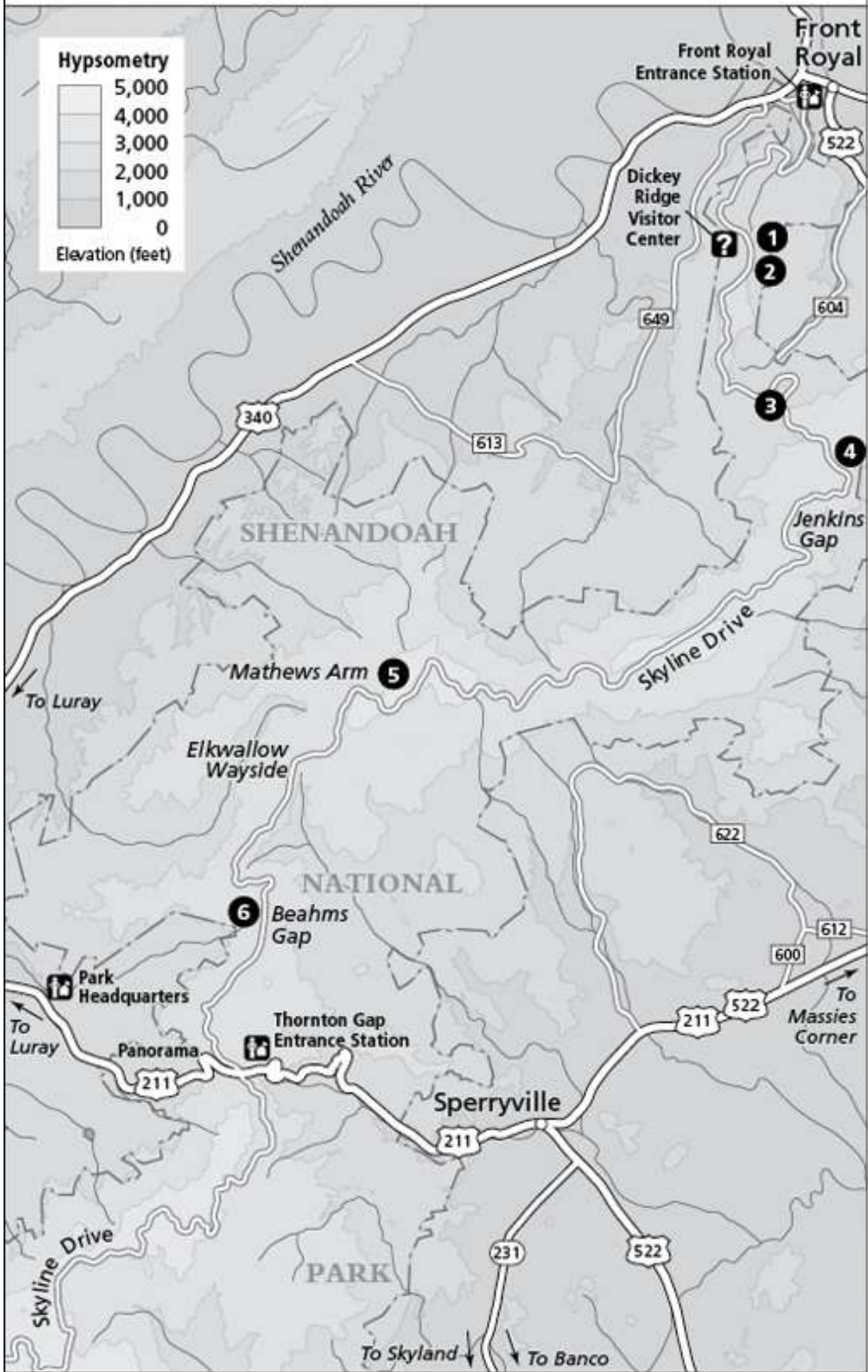
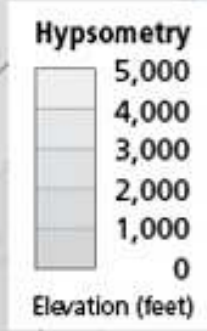
The maps in this book use elevation tints, called hypsometry, to portray relief. Each gray tone represents a range of equal elevation, as shown in the scale key with the map. The darker tones are lower elevations and the lighter grays are higher elevations. Narrow bands of different gray tones spaced closely together indicate steep terrain, whereas wider bands indicate areas of more gradual

slope.

Map Legend

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
|  | Interstate |
|  | U.S. Highway |
|  | State Highway |
|  | Local Road |
|  | Unpaved Road |
|  | Featured Trail |
|  | Trail |
|  | River/Creek |
|  | Intermittent Stream |
|  | Marsh |
|  | Spring |
|  | Waterfall |
|  | National Park |
|  | Bridge |
|  | Camping |
|  | Cliffs |
|  | Gate |
|  | Horse Trail |
|  | Mountain Peak |
|  | Parking |
|  | Picnic Area |
|  | Point of Interest |
|  | Ranger Station |
|  | Structure |
|  | Town |
|  | Trailhead |
|  | Viewpoint/Overlook |
|  | Visitor/Information Center |

North District Overview



1 Fox Hollow Trail

This short and easy loop makes a delightful history hike to an old homestead area. An interpretive pamphlet, available for a small fee at the Dickey Ridge Visitor Center, will enhance the hike. The trail is not rough and is suitable for children. Blue blazes mark the trail.

Start: Skyline Drive Mile 4.6, Dickey Ridge Visitor Center

Trailhead GPS: N38 52.307' / W78 12.221'

Type of hike: Loop

Distance: 1.2 miles

Approximate hiking time: 30 to 60 minutes

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Elevation gain and loss: 310 feet

Canine compatibility: Dogs not allowed

Maps: National Geographic Trails Illustrated Topo Map 228; Map 9, Appalachian Trail and other trails in Shenandoah National Park, North District (PATC, Inc.)

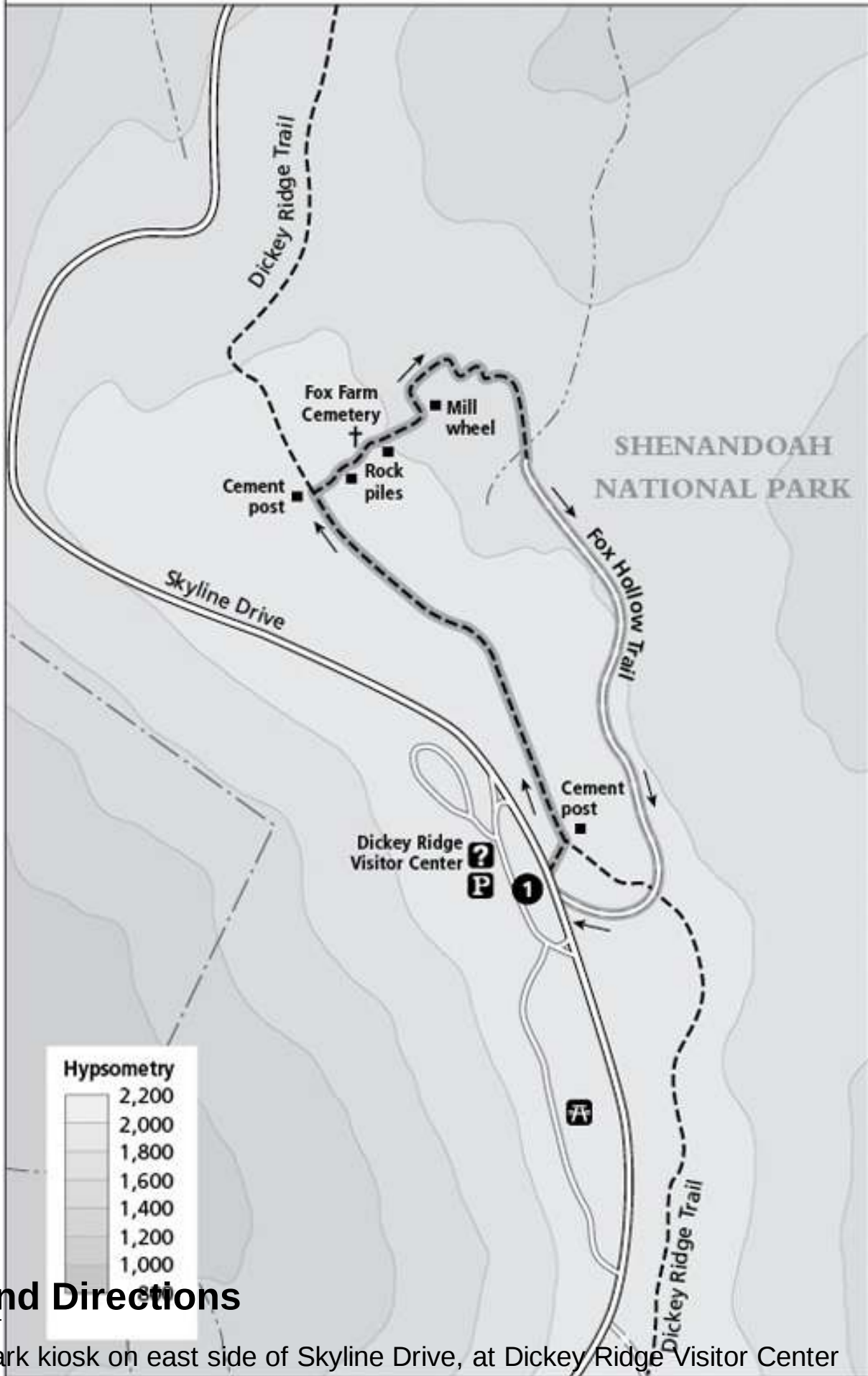
The Hike

Begin the hike on the east side of Skyline Drive, across from the Dickey Ridge Visitor Center. The kiosk provides further information about the area and serves as the trailhead. The clockwise trail begins with a slight descent and accesses Dickey Ridge Trail to the left at cement post at 0.15 mile. Turn left and follow the blue-blazed trail for 0.2 mile. At the cement post at 0.3 mile, turn right at fork onto Fox Hollow Trail, also blue-blazed past piles of rocks reflecting the work once required to clear the forest and prepare it for cultivation.

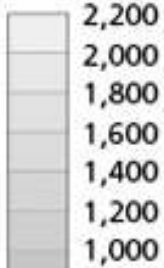
At 0.5 mile, the trail passes Fox Farm Cemetery. The largest stone memorializes Lemuel F. Fox, the son of Thomas Fox, who established the family farm here in 1856. According to the inscription, Lemuel died May 24, 1916, at the age of seventy-eight. The trail continues to descend gradually, passing a spring and a mill wheel once used for ornamental purposes. The trail continues to cross old farmland now being reclaimed by the forest. Deer have returned to the area and now abound.

Shortly after passing the cemetery, the trail begins its return to the visitor center by climbing gradually. Along the trail, rock piles and rock fences continue to proclaim that farming once dominated the area. The path is actually an old road that once linked the Fox family with the town of Front Royal. At mile 1.1, stay straight at the cement post marking DICKEY RIDGE TRAIL to return to the trailhead.

Fox Hollow Trail



Hypsometry



Miles and Directions

0.0 Park kiosk on east side of Skyline Drive, at Dickey Ridge Visitor Center

0.15 Cement post; turn left onto blue-blazed Dickey Ridge Trail

0.3 Cement post; take right fork east onto blue-blazed Fox Hollow Trail

0.35 First of many rock piles

0.5 Fox Farm Cemetery; continue south on Fox Hollow Trail

1.1 Shortly after mile 1.1, cement post marks the Dickey Ridge Trail (blue-blazed) going north/south; do not turn; stay straight

1.2 Return to trailhead

2 Snead Farm

Appropriate for families, this hike takes you to buildings used by the Snead family when it homesteaded in the area.

Start: Skyline Drive Mile 5.1. This trail can be accessed at the end of Fox Hollow Trail by turning left onto Dickey Ridge Trail; or cross Skyline Drive to the east, opposite the exit for the Dickey Ridge picnic area; you can park at either the visitor center or the south end of the picnic area

Trailhead GPS: N38 52.307' / W78 12.221'

Type of hike: Loop

Distance: 3.2 miles

Approximate hiking time: 2 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Elevation gain and loss: 500 feet

Canine compatibility: Dogs allowed

Maps: National Geographic Trails Illustrated Topo Map 228; Map 9, Appalachian Trail and other trails in Shenandoah National Park, North District (PATC, Inc.)

The Hike

The visit to Snead Farm is a trip back in time. Once, the owners worked this 200-acre piece of land as farmland and as an apple orchard. The park bought the land in 1962. The remnants here are quite visible; the barn still stands, as does the root cellar. The stone remains of an old house fill an open area. With but little imagination, you can recognize the difficulty these people had in clearing and farming this land.

After accessing Snead Farm Road, continue straight (south) at the intersection with Dickey Ridge Trail, left at the second fork, and right at the last fork. The walk to the farm is a pleasant one along an old farm road. Upon reaching the farm at 0.7 mile, take time to explore the barn. Peer into the old root cellar; examine the stone foundation of the bunkhouse. **(Option:** From Snead Farm, you can turn around and retrace your steps to the picnic area for an out-and-back hike of 1.4 miles.)

To continue on the loop hike, access the blue-blazed Snead Farm Loop Trail, which continues at a cement post near the stone foundation at mile 0.7.

Hike about 1.0 mile to another cement post at a T junction with the Dickey Ridge Trail. Go right (north). The visitor center is 1.3 miles from this point.

The trail begins a slightly strenuous ascent to the top of Dickey Hill. At the summit, take the spur trail to your right (north). For a marvelous view of Signal Knob on Massanutten Mountain and of the Shenandoah Valley, go left. A hang-glider launch area is located just before the path to the viewpoint

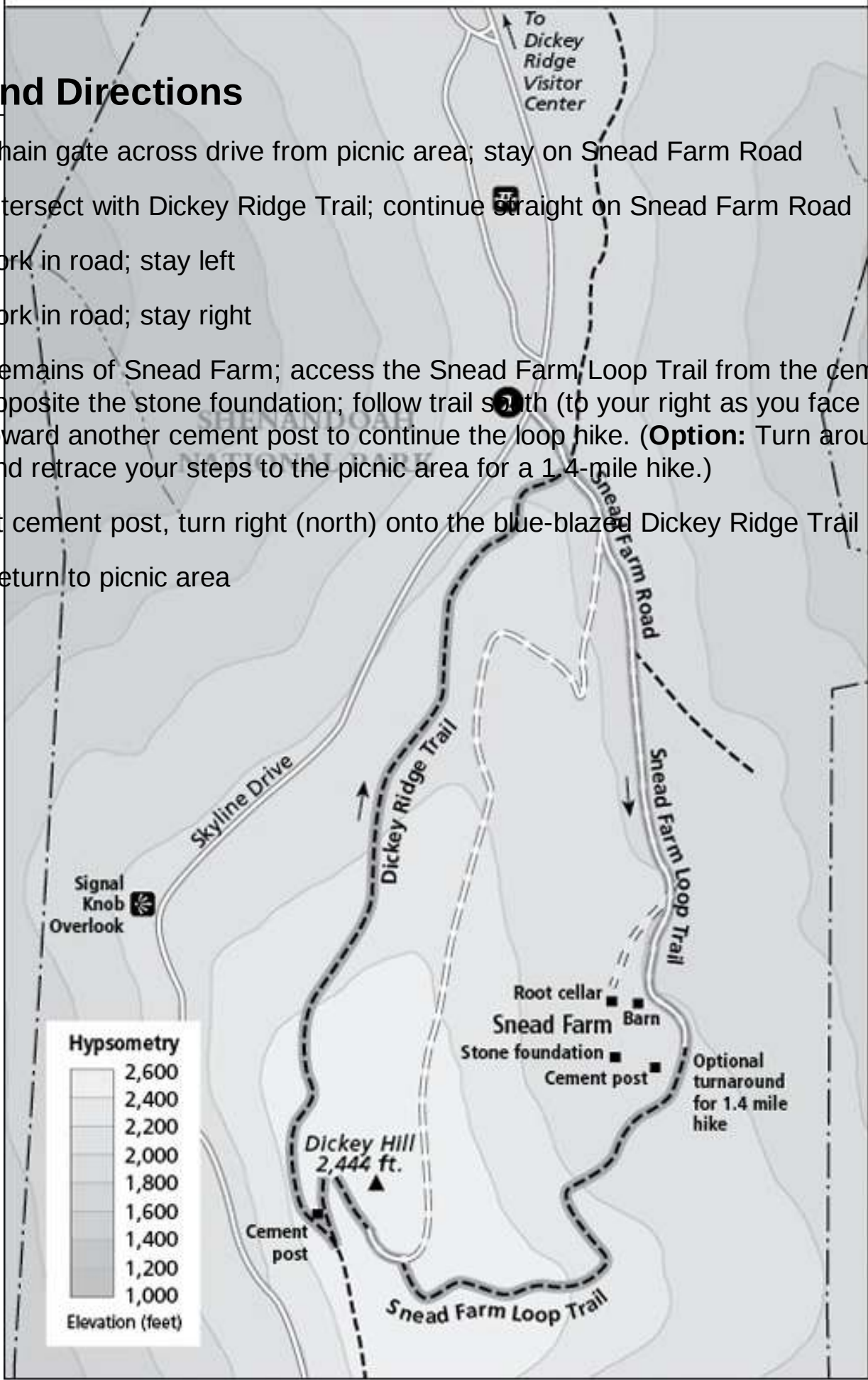
Retrace your steps to return to Dickey Ridge Trail. You will make another quick ascent. Then the trail begins to descend gradually beneath a canopy of trees. It continues through a quiet woods to an intersection with Snead Farm Road, completing the loop. A short walk to the left returns you to Skyline Drive near the picnic area.

Snead Farm



Miles and Directions

- 0.0 Chain gate across drive from picnic area; stay on Snead Farm Road
- 0.1 Intersect with Dickey Ridge Trail; continue straight on Snead Farm Road
- 0.3 Fork in road; stay left
- 0.5 Fork in road; stay right
- 0.7 Remains of Snead Farm; access the Snead Farm Loop Trail from the cement post opposite the stone foundation; follow trail south (to your right as you face the post) toward another cement post to continue the loop hike. (**Option:** Turn around here and retrace your steps to the picnic area for a 1.4-mile hike.)
- 1.9 At cement post, turn right (north) onto the blue-blazed Dickey Ridge Trail
- 3.2 Return to picnic area



3 Lands Run Falls

An enjoyable jaunt down an old road leading to views of a pretty waterfall.

Start: Skyline Drive Mile 9.2, Lands Run parking area

Trailhead GPS: N38 50.0561' / W78 11.1371'

Type of hike: Out and back

Distance: 1.2 miles

Approximate hiking time: 30 to 60 minutes

Difficulty: Easy

Elevation gain and loss: About 300 feet

Canine compatibility: Dogs allowed

Maps: National Geographic Trails Illustrated Topo Map 228; Map 9, Appalachian Trail and other trails in Shenandoah National Park, North District (PATC Inc.)

The Hike

Lands Run Falls is not especially high, nor can you see the entire falls from the trail. But the setting is lovely, and the trek provides a nice leg stretcher. Woods flanking the trail are dominated by oaks and hickories, interspersed with tulip poplars. Many of the healthiest oaks here were knocked down by Tropical Storm Fran in 1996. Those not already denuded by gypsy moths were so heavily laden with leaves that they were easily toppled by the strong winds. In addition to a lovely forest, there is a great deal of greenstone (volcanic rock) exposed by soil erosion. Look for greenstone on the uphill side of the road.

From Lands Run parking area, follow the fire road, which descends immediately and continues to do so. At 0.6 mile, a stream courses down the hill from the left and passes through a culvert under the road. The falls are on the right. By taking a short spur trail to the right, you can get some inspiring views. The slickrock and precipitous grade create a potential hazard, so use caution.

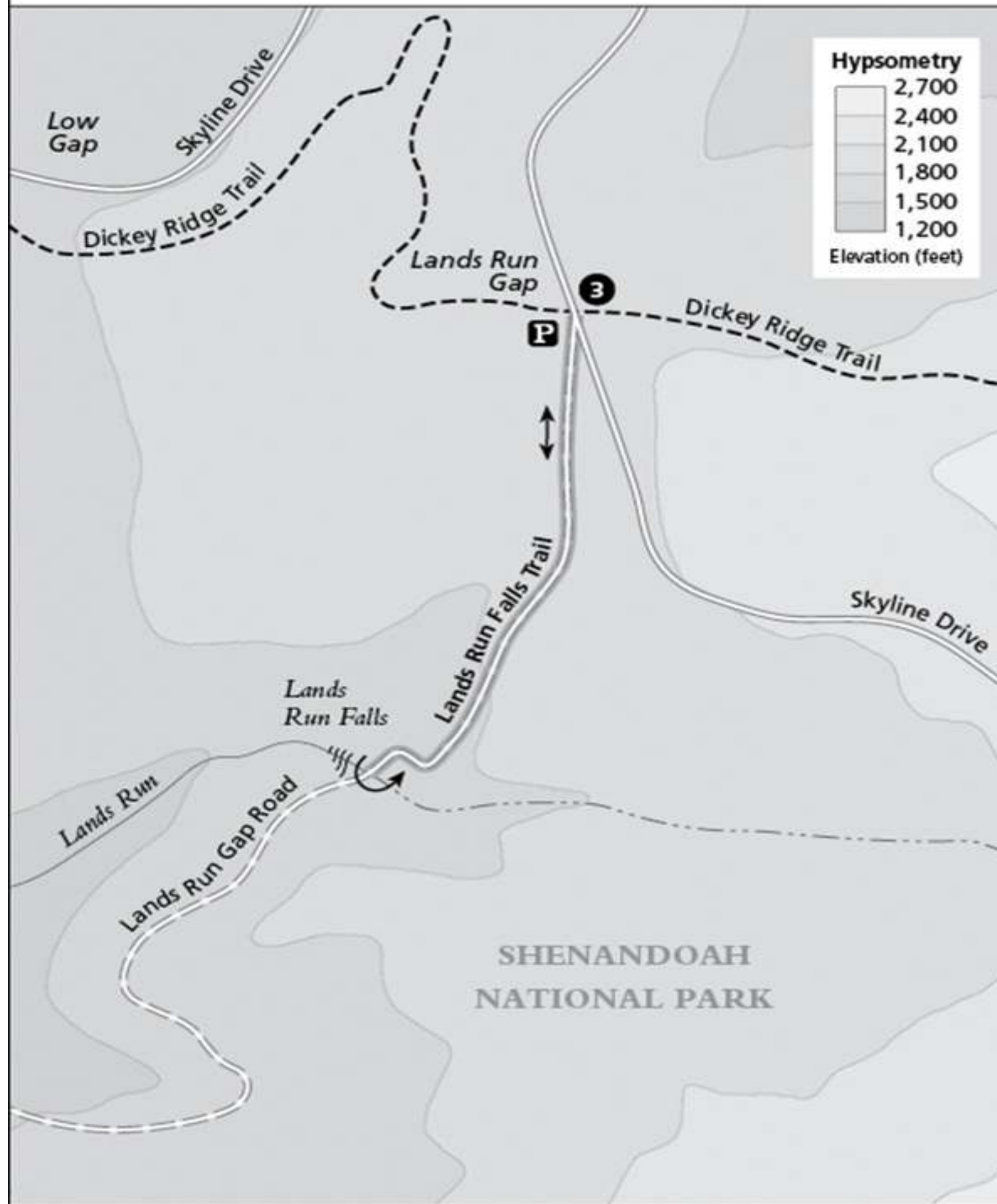
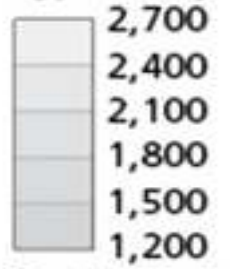
Lands Run Gap Road continues for another 1.4 miles to the park boundary. Unless you have lots of energy to burn, there is not much point in continuing; the road descends another 600 feet with no viewpoints.

From the falls, turn around and retrace your steps—uphill, of course—including one short, steep portion to return to parking area.

Lands Run Falls



Hypsometry



Miles and Directions

- 0.0** Follow fire road at south end of Lands Run parking area
- 0.6** Stream entering from left; waterfall on right; turn around to retrace your steps
- 1.2** Return to Lands Run parking area

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