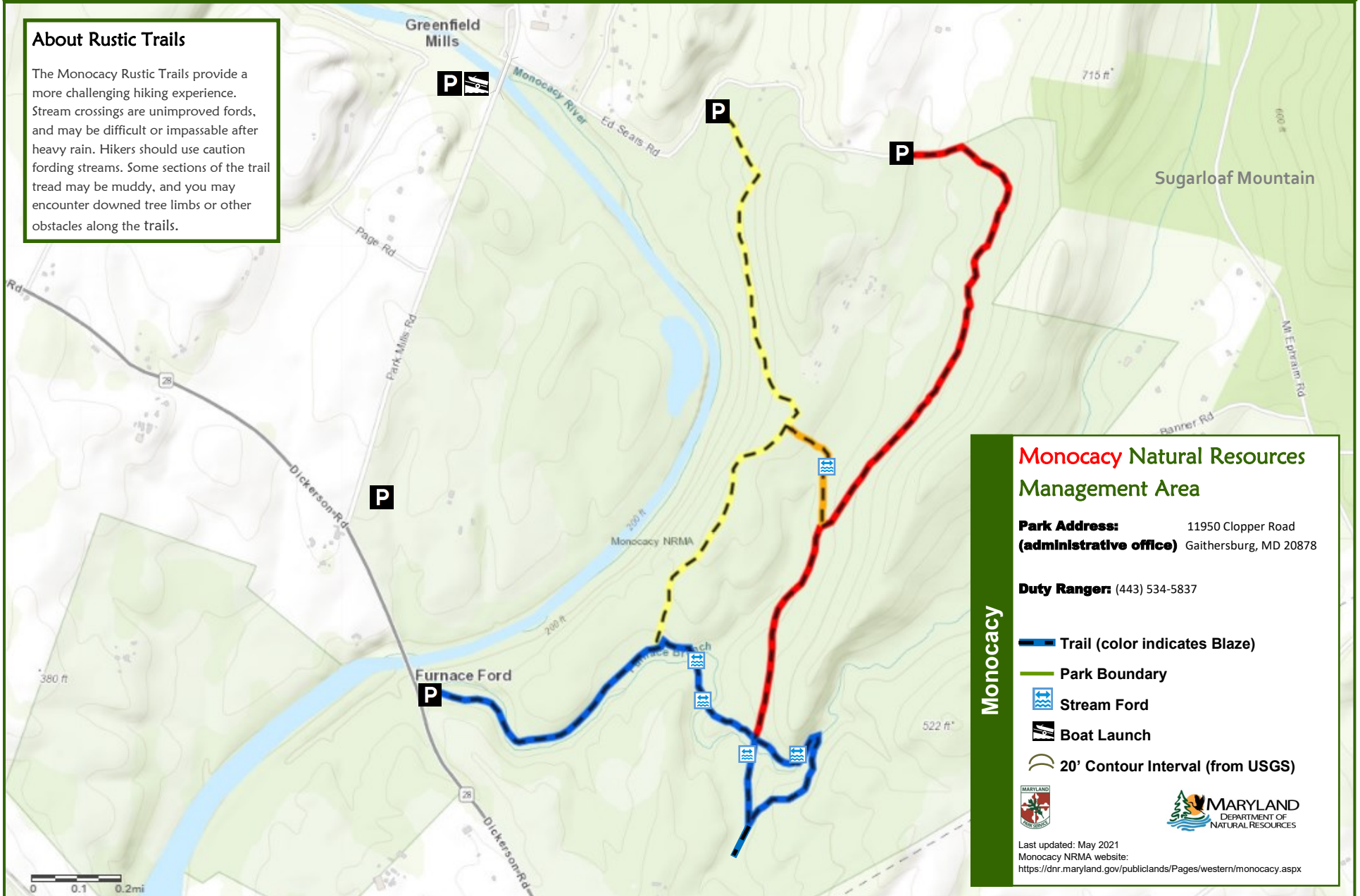


Monocacy Natural Resources Management Area Rustic Trails

About Rustic Trails

The Monocacy Rustic Trails provide a more challenging hiking experience. Stream crossings are unimproved fords, and may be difficult or impassable after heavy rain. Hikers should use caution fording streams. Some sections of the trail tread may be muddy, and you may encounter downed tree limbs or other obstacles along the trails.



Monocacy Natural Resources Management Area Rustic Trails

Furnace Branch Trail

Blue blaze

1.75 miles – four unimproved stream fords

Trailhead: Route 28 at Monocacy Bridge

This trail follows an old wagon road along Furnace Branch. The stream and the trail are named for the Johnson Iron Furnace, a pioneering ironworks which was located alongside the creek about 1/4 mile along the trail, just beyond a large plank deck bridge.

Thomas, Baker, James and Roger Johnson, members of a prominent Frederick County family, constructed the iron furnace here sometime before 1787. Iron ore was brought from an outcropping along the banks of the Potomac at Point of Rocks in boats on the Potomac and by wagons. The furnace was fired using charcoal from trees harvested from miles around. Weekly output was said to be from twelve to fifteen tons of good grade pig iron.

The Johnson Iron Works ceased operations around 1820 and was disassembled long ago. Sharp-eyed observers may notice a small remnant of stone work beside the creek downstream from the plank bridge. Just beyond the plank bridge you will find many pieces of sharp-edged, glassy stone in and around the trail. This glass-like stone is slag, a byproduct of iron smelting in the furnace.

After 1/2 mile the Ridgeline Trail branches off to the left. The main stem of Furnace Branch Trail fords two creeks and then ends at a 4-way junction. To the left, the red-blazed Dr. Belt Trail leads to the Ed Sears Trailhead. To the right and straight, Furnace Branch Trail continues as a 3/4 mile loop.

Going clockwise around the loop, the trail passes through a grove of mature Hemlock trees, fords Furnace Branch, and then turns right and uphill. Along the cliffs above the trail are quarry faces where massive blocks of stone were carved out to build the Monocacy Aqueduct of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. You can still see drill marks on some of the cliffs, and many blocks of discarded stone on either side of the trail.

After passing the quarries the Furnace Branch loop turns right and downhill. At the foot of the hill the Lime Kiln Spur branches off the left. This spur trail leads to the remnants of a 19th century lime kiln, another of the many Johnson Brothers enterprises. This lime kiln was used to transform limestone into quicklime which could be spread on fields as a soil amendment to improve crops.

Returning to the Lime Kiln Spur junction, the Furnace Branch Loop continues straight. After fording Furnace Branch again, the loop ends back at the 4-way junction.

Dr. Belt Trail

Red blaze

1.75 miles

Trailhead: end of Ed Sears Road

Dr. Belt Trail begins at the trailhead at the end of Ed Sears Road. Look for the brown post marking the start of the trail to the left of the private driveway.

For the first 250 yards, Dr. Belt trail follows an old roadbed downhill, crossing a small stream on a stone culvert.

Beyond the culvert the trail follows a fence bordering a tree plantation. This planting is a Maryland Forest Service demonstration project. The trees here help prevent erosion and heal water quality in the Furnace Branch watershed. Some of the trees were hand-planted by volunteers on Earth Day in 1990; the volunteers included local Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops as well as students from Hood College in Frederick, Maryland.

On the other side of the tree plantation the trail enters a beautiful mature forest of mixed oak, beech, and tulip poplar. For the next mile the trail follows the old roadbed of Dr. Belt Road, named for Dr. E. Oliver Belt. In the late 1800s Dr. Belt and his brother, McGill Belt, owned a vast estate, including the great house "Rock Hall," which they purchased from the Johnsons in the early 19th century.

After about 1 1/4 miles the trail passes a junction with the Connector Trail, blazed orange. The Connector Trail offers a quick route to the Ridgeline Trail.

At mile 1 3/4 Dr. Belt Trail ends at a 4-way junction with the Furnace Branch Trail. To the left and straight ahead is the Furnace Branch Loop; to the right, the main stem of Furnace Branch Trail leads to the Route 28 trailhead.

Connector Trail

Orange blaze

.5 miles – one unimproved stream ford

The Connector Trail offers a quick connection between Dr. Belt Trail and the Ridgeline Trail, creating several possibilities for loop and figure-8 hikes. The Connector Trail crosses a tributary of Furnace Branch at an unimproved ford.

Ridgeline Trail

Yellow blaze

1.6 miles – moderate to difficult

Trailhead: Ed Sears Rd., 6/10 mile on right

ADVISORY: *Compact cars may not have sufficient ground clearance to use this unimproved trailhead parking area. You can also access Ridgeline Trail from Furnace Branch Trail or from the Connector Trail.*

Ridgeline Trail begins at a small, unimproved gravel trailhead parking area on the right side of Ed Sears Road, 6/10 of a mile from Park Mills Road. The trail heads uphill for .5 miles along an old fire road grade, narrowing as it goes until it becomes a single-track foot trail. Near the top of the hill you will get glimpses of the open pastures of Jehovah-Jireh Farm through the trees to the left.

At the crest of the hill Ridgeline Trail turns to the right. For the next 1/3 of a mile the trail runs along the crest of an unnamed ridge which separates the Monocacy River to the right from Furnace Branch and its tributaries to the left.

The Connector Trail, blazed orange, branches to the left. The Connector offers a quick route to the Dr. Belt Trail.

The Ridgeline Trail continues south beyond this junction through an oak and ash forest. Look for remnants of old stone walls near the trail; these are the boundaries of old farm fields. In the 19th century, all this land was clear-cut to provide charcoal to fuel the Johnsons' iron furnace and lime kiln. Later, the open land was used as pasture and fields. Since then, the land has been allowed to heal and reforest.

At 1 1/4 miles the trail veers left and descends. The Ridgeline Trail ends at a T intersection with the Furnace Branch Trail, blazed blue. Turning left will take you to the Furnace Branch Loop and the Dr. Belt Trail, turning right will take you to the Route 28 trailhead.

The Monocacy Rustic Trails are maintained by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club under a cooperative agreement with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Volunteers are welcome. Visit www.patc.net to learn more.

For emergency assistance or to report a trail issue, call 443-534-5837 to speak to the Park Ranger on duty.