



Half-Day Hikes in Rock Creek Park



Rock Creek and Rapids Bridge footbridge.

Boulder Bridge Hike 3.5 Miles

Overview: This 3.5 mile loop hike travels through forest and creek-side ecosystems, and visits an area of the park that President Theodore Roosevelt frequented over one hundred years ago.

Directions: To access this hike from the Nature Center, walk south toward the Horse Center. Take a sharp left into the horse center and, keeping left, head past the small parking lot towards the corral. The dirt trail begins behind and to the left of the corral, and takes you ½ mile gradually downhill to Rock Creek.

Heading southbound, notice and hear the many rapids. You are at the fall zone of Rock Creek, a geologic transition zone where the harder rock of the Piedmont Plateau meets the softer, sedimentary rock of the Atlantic Coastal Plain.

After hiking along the creek for ½ mile, walk across the unmarked Rapids Bridge footbridge (enjoy the view upstream and downstream!). Then cross Beach Drive, and take a right onto the Valley Trail, marked by blue blazes. Hike south for ½ mile until Boulder Bridge.

Constructed in 1902, Boulder Bridge is one of the oldest bridges in the park. It's an example of rustic architecture, or 'parkitecture,' which is architecture designed to blend in with the natural landscape. Keep an eye out for Theodore Roosevelt's ring, which he lost at Boulder Bridge during one of his many hikes in Rock Creek Park over one hundred years ago.

Beware of traffic when crossing the bridge. One hundred feet after Boulder Bridge, take the small, unmarked trail on the right uphill.

After ¼ mile, stay straight at the four way trail intersection. Soon you cross Ridge Road and arrive at the Equitation Field. Walk around this horse field and then head north. Follow the green blazes of the Western Ridge Trail northward, following the "foot traffic only" signs when it veers off of the wider horse trail.

After three quarters of a mile, the trail seemingly ends as you come upon Picnic Grove 13 and a grassy field. Cross the field and the two roadways, and then continue just up the hill to the Nature Center.

How to have a safe hike in the park...

1. Study and refer to this map and guide (**don't rely on trail signs**, as there are not many out there).
2. Stay hydrated—bring and drink water (water is available at the Nature Center).
3. Stay on the trail (poison ivy, a native plant, is widespread throughout the park).
4. Keep your dog leashed at all times (many hikers and park users are afraid of dogs; please be respectful of them).



Milkhouse Ford Hike (Fort DeRussy)

1.75 Miles

Overview: This 1.75 mile hike offers you a glimpse into Washington, DC's diverse past. You'll hike past a Civil War fortress, poet's cabin, and historic creek ford.

Directions: To begin, walk straight out the Nature Center doors for 300 feet, and then turn right onto the Western Ridge Trail towards Boundary Bridge. Cross Military Road after 100 meters, and then continue straight for 250 feet. At the wayside exhibit explaining Fort DeRussy, turn right. In one hundred feet, take a slight left onto the dirt trail. The earthen walls of Fort DeRussy will soon be on your left.

After the fort, continue down the trail to a "T" intersection near Rock Creek, and turn left. Hiking along the creek for ¼ mile, notice the unmarked, humble, two-room log Cabin across Rock Creek. Joaquin Miller was an eccentric poet that lived in this cabin on Meridian Hill in the 1880s.

Continuing along, just north of the cabin, a roadway travels straight into the creek. This is Milkhouse Ford. First paved in 1904, fording the creek at this location was the only way to cross it up until the 1950s.

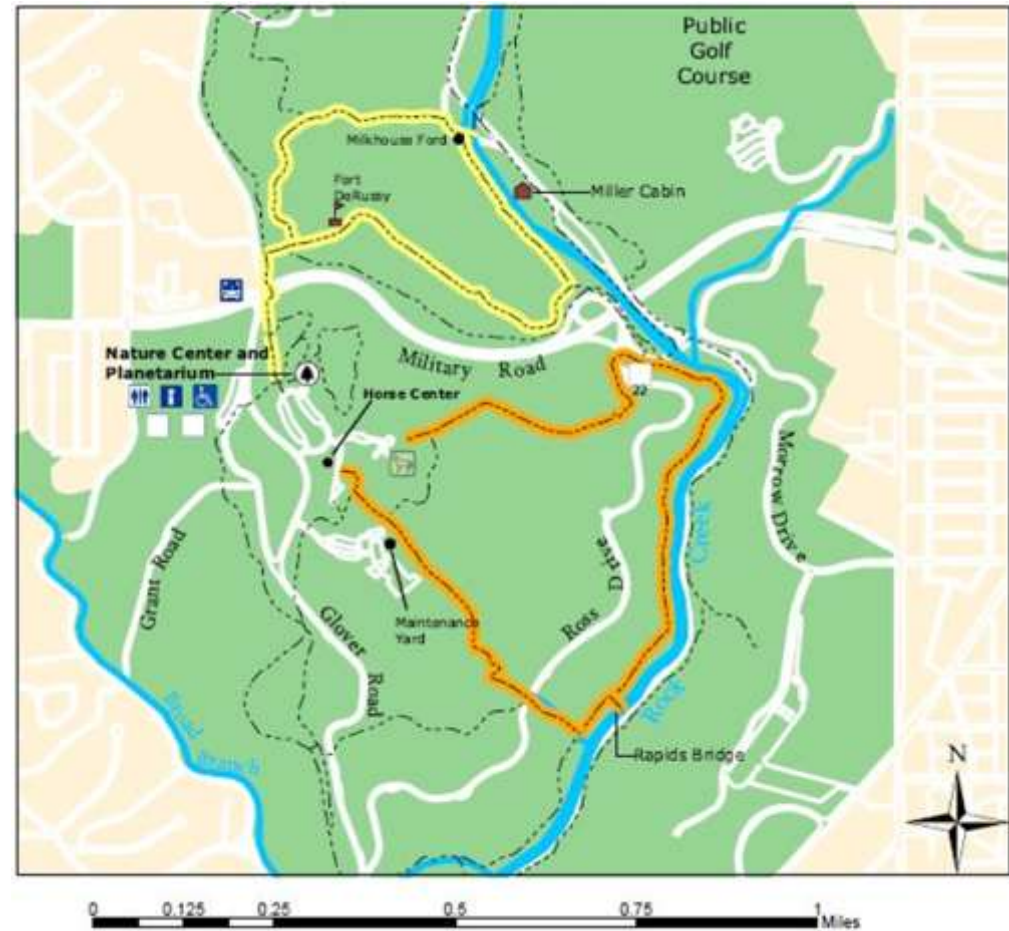
At this point, walking away from the ford, take the trail that leads west up the hill. Turn left on the Western Ridge Trail, marked by green blazes. Follow the trail back across Military Road and up to the Nature Center.

Rapids Bridge Hike 2 Miles

Overview: This 2 mile loop hike takes you through the forest and then parallels the scenic whitewater section of Rock Creek before heading back uphill. It is identified by orange tape on wooden posts.

Directions: To access this hike from the Nature Center, walk south toward the Horse Center. Take a sharp left into the horse center and then head straight towards the corral. The dirt trail begins behind and to the left of the corral.

Along the path, you descend gradually and in ½ mile arrive at Rock Creek. Follow the creek south, noticing the many rapids. This is the fall zone, the geologic transition zone where the harder rock of the Piedmont Plateau meets the softer, sedimentary rock of the Atlantic Coastal Plain.



After six-tenths of a mile, you arrive at Rapids Bridge footbridge. Be sure and enjoy the view upstream and downstream from the middle of the footbridge, but do not cross it. Although Rock Creek is 33 miles in length, natural rapids only occur in this one-mile section around Rapids Bridge.

When ready, continue hiking briefly south. Just 50 meters south of the bridge, take the unmarked trail to the right uphill. In ¼ mile, at the trail fork, keep right and head under the Ross Drive road bridge. Continue uphill.

In another 1/3 of a mile, you near the back of the park's maintenance facility, where there is a small, grassy opening to your left. The stacked cement pieces near the fence are actually part of the U.S. Capitol building, stored here since the east portico was replaced in 1960!

In another quarter mile, the dirt trail ends at the horse center. Turn right on the access road and head out to the Nature Center parking lot.