

Self-Guided Hike & Drive Fall Foliage Tour

Forbes State Forest

Situated within Pennsylvania's Laurel Highlands, Forbes State Forest spans just over 60,000 acres of forest land and is located within Westmoreland, Somerset, and Fayette Counties. Three distinct ridgelines are located within Forbes, creating varying terrain throughout much of the state forest. The ridges range in elevations from 3,213 feet at Mt. Davis, the highest point in the state of Pennsylvania, to 2,700+ feet along the Laurel Ridge. Elevation combined with ideal weather conditions throughout the year, aid in the progression of spectacular fall foliage colors in this region. Adequate precipitation and ideal seasonal temperatures during the spring and summer, in addition to sunny, warm days and cool, crisp nights during the fall, are the perfect recipe for colorful leaves. Too much rainfall can cause muted colors and a delay in the fall foliage display, whereas not enough rainfall can cause leaves to drop prematurely. It's important to remember that each year's fall foliage is unique, with no two autumn's being the same.



Why do leaves change color in the fall? As the season of summer transitions into autumn, there are many changes that begin to occur. The photoperiod changes - the length of day decreases while the length of night increases. Temperatures also begin to change with cooler night time temperatures. These changes trigger deciduous trees to go into a dormant state that allow them to survive during the harsh winter months, however, before trees 'hibernate' they provide us with one last HOO-RAH in the form of an autumnal display of colors.



How do leaves change color? Chlorophyll, or the green pigment in leaves that aids with photosynthesis begins slowing down production due to the seasonal change in photoperiod and air temperature. Once production of chlorophyll ceases, other pigments that are present in leaves throughout the growing season are revealed, unmasking different colors. Some of the more vibrant hues of reds and purples however, require warm, sunny days and cold, nights to amp up sugar production that will produce great colors.



Which trees produce the most beautiful fall colors? Pennsylvania is special in that it has one of the longest and most varied fall foliage seasons than anywhere else in the United States. This is not only due to our four-season climate, but also because of our large diversity of deciduous tree, shrub, and vine species. The most vibrant color displays in southwestern Pennsylvania are credited to the sugar maple and red maple. Sugar maples are responsible for the vibrant orange, yellows, and even pink-red leaves, while red maples produce a brilliant red foliage. A number of other trees contribute to the colorful autumnal display including black birch, black gum, sassafras, and oaks, among others.



For updated, weekly information on the status of fall color progression in PA, be sure to check out the PA Bureau of Forestry's weekly fall foliage report available online at:
<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/ForestsAndTrees/FallFoliageReports/Pages/default.aspx>

About the Tour

This self-guided driving and hiking tour is designed to take you to the scenic highlights of Forbes State Forest, where you will be able to view some of the forest's most spectacular fall colors. This tour will take you on some remote, forest roads where you will be able to experience the calm and quiet of Forbes during the autumn season.

It's important to note that the driving and hiking route destinations do not have physical addresses, rather there are coordinates to navigate to each site. It is recommended that each destination's coordinates are pre-programmed into Google Maps prior to setting out on the driving tour. Cell phone coverage and/or GPS signal can be limited at some of these locations, so it is best to pre-program these destinations into your navigation device or have a back-up method such as a paper map ready to use.

Maps of Forbes State Forest can be picked up at the district office (1291 Route 30, Laughlintown, PA 15655) or they can be accessed online at:

http://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=1743798&DocName=Forbes_public_use-map.pdf

This tour is separated into two different driving and hiking routes – the Laurel Ridge Route and the Mt. Davis Route. Each of these routes can be done individually or they could be combined for a long, one-day or a multi-day tour. Please note that both driving and hiking is required to experience the full fall foliage tour. If you do not want to hike, you can choose not to, just be aware that you will miss some of this tour's scenic highlights. Each driving and hiking route is detailed with individual stop, coordinates, and an icon denoting whether driving or a hike is required for that particular stop, or if there is a scenic vista. Please see the descriptions of these icons below.



The car icon symbolizes that the destination is easily accessed via an automobile. There is no hiking, or very limited walking involved to access the site.



The hiker icon symbolizes the destination requires hiking. The number of hiking icons listed beside the destination denotes the difficulty level of the hike. Please see the descriptions listed below.



= easy hike; easy terrain with no or limited obstacles.



= moderate hike; intermediate, some uneven terrain with increased obstacles.



= moderate to difficult; intermediate to advanced, uneven terrain with numerous obstacles.



This icon symbolizes that there is a scenic vista at this location.



This icon denotes that public restrooms are available at this location.

Prepare and Know Before You Go

Before setting out on this self-guided driving and hiking tour make sure that you are prepared. Below are some tips to prepare and what to 'know before you go':

- Know where you're going and have a plan – have directions pre-programmed into GPS or navigation device or have a map and directions printed out before setting out on the driving and hiking tour.
- Stay on roads while driving and stay on trails while hiking – use common sense and be courteous of other visitors.
- Know the rules and regulations of the state forest and be aware of any closures or hazards and/or hunting seasons that are currently in place.
 - Closures are posted to DCNR's website or Forbes State Forest's Facebook page.
 - Hunting season information can be found on the PA Game Commission's website.
- If hiking, tell someone where you're going/when you plan to return and be prepared with sturdy boots/shoes, plenty of water, snacks, map, weather-appropriate clothing, and be sure to leave no trace.
 - You can Leave No Trace by:
 - Plan ahead and prepare
 - Travel on durable surfaces – stay on trails and roads!
 - Dispose of waste properly – pack out trash and use designated restrooms (if nature calls and no restrooms are available, dig 6" hole to bury waste and either bury toilet paper or carry it out with you). For pets, carry out waste and dispose of in trash receptacle. No one wants to see used toilet paper or dog poo bags along the trail!
 - Leave what you find – take only pictures, leave only footprints!
 - Respect wildlife – do not approach wildlife, feed wildlife, or litter!
 - Be considerate of other visitors – stay to the right of trail, don't litter, don't leave behind waste (yours or your pets), and be kind to others.
- Be sure you have enough gas in your tank to get to your destination and/or know where the closest gas station is available.
- Pack a picnic lunch – there are several picnic areas along these driving routes so be sure to do your research and make a day (or several days) of this tour!
- Enjoy the tour and the beautiful season of autumn!

Laurel Ridge Route

The Laurel Ridge Route showcases the best of Forbes State Forest's Laurel Mountain, Kooser, and Blue Hole Divisions. These diverse tracts of forestland are located along the Laurel Ridge, in Westmoreland and Somerset Counties. The varying topography of the ridges and valleys, as well as the mountainous climate provides some of the best fall foliage within the southwestern region of Pennsylvania. This portion of Forbes typically presents peak foliage during the second or third week of October (*this varies year-to-year).

This tour starts at the Laurel Mountain warming hut, located on top of Laurel Mountain and winds throughout the ridge. There are several hiking options along this tour that offer some of the best scenic vistas on Forbes State Forest – these are optional.

Please refer to the table below for each stop's description and location along this route.

Stop One	Laurel Mountain Warming Hut Large overflow parking lot	N 40°9'23.902" W 79°8'58.972"			
Stop Two	Beam Rocks Hike Beam Rocks parking lot	N 40°7'58.981" W 79°9'49.727"			
Stop Three	Wolf Rocks Hike Laurel Summit State Park	N 40°7'6.036" W 79°10'34.298"			1 mile roundtrip
Stop Four	Spruce Flats Bog Hike Laurel Summit State Park	*Same as Wolf Rocks*			4.5 miles roundtrip
Stop Five	Cole Run Falls Parking lot	N 39°58'22.8" W 79°17'02.8"			100 foot walk
Stop Six	Blue Hole Small pull-off on side of road, near kiosk	N 39°58'24.7" W 79°17'55.0"			



Stop One – The Laurel Mountain Warming Hut greets visitors as they enter one of the more popular areas of Forbes State Forest. The warming hut area has a public restroom – so this a great place to stop and stretch those legs! Across from the warming hut is a kiosk with interpretive waysides that provide information about Forbes State Forest – maps are available at this kiosk as well. Feel free to enter the warming hut unless others are occupying it for trainings or educational programs. The warming hut is open 24/7, 365 days a year – no overnight camping is permitted inside or nearby the hut. This area is popular for winter recreation and Nordic Ski Patrol volunteers are stationed at the warming hut during the winter months.



Stop Two – Beam Rocks is likely the most popular hiking destination on Forbes State Forest. The easy to moderate trail offers a short, ½ mile hike (one-way) out to a beautiful scenic vista looking towards Jennerstown/Somerset. The rocky outcrop is made up of erosion resistant sandstone that formed through geologic processes over 300 million years ago. When out at the Beam Rocks, please use caution, as the drop from the top of the rocks to the ground below is a total of 80 feet! Enjoy the peace and solitude that the rocks have to offer by visiting early in the morning before large, leaf-peeping crowds arrive. Please note that Beam Rocks and the parking lot closes at sunset and that alcoholic beverages are prohibited. Visitors can also access Beam Rocks from the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail, situated beneath the rocks.



Stop Three – Wolf Rocks Trail is most easily accessed by parking at the Laurel Summit State Park parking lot. Laurel Summit State Park is NOT part of Forbes State Forest, however, it is managed by our close neighbors at Linn Run State Park. This small state park features a pavilion, picnic tables, latrine, and parking lot. The forest land that surrounds Laurel Summit State Park is Forbes State Forest. The trails to Wolf Rocks are a moderate to difficult, 4.5 mile hike. There are two main trails that visitors can connect to make a loop hike: Wolf Rocks Trail and Wolf Rocks Loop.

Hikers will begin their hike on Wolf Rocks Trail, denoted by the trailhead sign and will continue to the intersection on Wolf Rocks Trail and Wolf Rocks Loop – visitors can take any route they please, but it is recommended to make a loop for a change of scenery throughout your trek. Once out at the overlook, enjoy scenic views of the Linn Run Valley atop a large, sandstone outcrop. Use caution when out at the rocks.



Stop Four – The Spruce Flats Bog trail is one of our only ADA-accessible trails on Forbes and offers an easy ¼ mile (one-way) hike out to the bog. This trail can also be accessed from Laurel Summit State Park's parking area. Spruce Flats Bog is a unique high elevation wetland that spans a total of 28-acres. The bog features a wooden boardwalk that allows visitors to get a close-up glimpse of the unique plant communities. While at the bog visitors may see cranberries, moss, and cotton grass, as well as carnivorous plants: the sundew and pitcher plant. Interpretive waysides offer information about local history and wetland ecology. Please remain on the trail and boardwalk at all times while visiting the bog. Brochures about Spruce Flats Bog are available online at:

http://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=1743479&DocName=SpruceFlatsBog_Broch.pdf



Stop Five – Cole Run Falls is a small, 20-foot tall, natural waterfall located within the Blue Hole Division of Forbes State Forest. This waterfall requires a short walk (~100 feet) from the parking area to the falls, making it an accessible, scenic stop. *Please note that the waterfall may be reduced to a trickle if there has not been recent rainfall. Cole Run Falls offers peace and solitude, as well as a great photo opportunity, so be sure to bring along your camera!



Stop Six – For a scenic route to this next stop, follow Cole Run Road to the hairpin turn onto Blue Hole Road to reach the namesake of the Blue Hole Division, 'Blue Hole.' This large, blue hole is a popular destination for fisherman, swimmers, and site-seers. Blue Hole Creek, a pristine mountain stream, feeds into Blue Hole and beyond, eventually meandering its way into Laurel Hill Creek. There is a kiosk with information next to a pull-off parking spot. Please be advised that parking is very limited at this location and that parking in front of gates is prohibited. Blue Hole can be viewed from a vehicle, however, getting out and walking closer provides the best view of this beautiful creekside feature.

For a map of the Laurel Highlands Trail System:

<http://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=3242952&DocName=Laurel%20Highlands%20Trail%20System>

Mt. Davis Route

The Mt. Davis Route highlights some of the popular destinations within the Mt. Davis Division of Forbes State Forest. The Mt. Davis Division is located along a 30-mile mountain chain that extends from the Casselman River into Cumberland, Maryland. The rugged topography and elevation profile of this area makes this one of the first locations for beautiful fall foliage in the Laurel Highlands. To view the best fall foliage within southern Somerset County, be sure to visit a week before peak foliage on the Laurel Ridge – during the end of September or early October is usually prime for this area (*this varies year-to-year).

The namesake for the division, Mt. Davis, boasts the highest point in the state of Pennsylvania, at 3,212 feet above sea level. This tour route starts at the Mt. Davis picnic area, meandering along the ridgeline. There is one hiking option for this route, while other stops require only a short walk. Enjoy the scenic beauty of Mt. Davis!

Please refer to the table below for each stop's description and location along this route.

Stop One	Mt. Davis Picnic Area Parking lot	N 39°47'39.435" W 79°9'58.971"	  	
Stop Two	High Point Trail Mt. Davis Picnic Area Parking lot	*Same as Mt. Davis Picnic Area*		2 mile roundtrip
Stop Three	Baughman Rocks Parking lot	N 39°47'37.5" W 79°10'11.6"		100 foot walk
Stop Four	Hike Point Observation Area Large Parking lot	N 39°47'09.6" W 79°10'41.2"	  	200 foot walk
Stop Five	High Point Lake Overlook Small pull-off parking area	N 39°46'55.6" W 79°10'51.3"	 	
Stop Six	CCC cabins and Wayside Small pull-off parking area on side of road	N 39°45'59.3" W 79°08'09.8"		



Stop One – The Mt. Davis Picnic Area was originally built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s and today is still a popular stopping area for forest visitors. The picnic area is equipped with restrooms, picnic tables, and a pavilion making it a great spot to start your visit to Mt. Davis. While at the picnic area, visitors can stretch their legs and enjoy a snack or meal. Please note that this is the only location along this route that has restroom facilities. The picnic area closes at sunset.



Stop Two – The High Point Trail is a moderate, 1 mile (one-way) hike from the picnic area to the High Point observation area. The trailhead is located in the upper end of the picnic area and is marked by a sign and a well-defined path. This trail is relatively flat, however, there are some rocky spots so be sure to watch your footing. High Point Trail ends at the High Point observation area, where visitors can choose to explore the many features this location has to offer. More information on the High Point observation area is provided below.



Stop Three – Baughman Rocks is a rocky outcrop that is a short walk from the small parking area. This series of rocks offers no scenic vista, but regardless, it is a unique geologic feature worth checking out. Baughman Rocks is a popular spot for the local folklore story of Henry Baughman and his son August. According to legend, Henry became angry with his son and struck him, resulting in his death – to cover up this murder, Henry hid his son's body at the rocks, only to never be seen again. Enjoy the scenic beauty of the rocks but be sure to use caution.



Stop Four – The High Point observation area can be easily accessed by parking in the large lot and walking a short distance to the observation tower, high point rock, and interpretive waysides. Please note that this area can also be accessed via High Point Trail and Shelter Rock Trail.

When visiting the High Point area, visitors can view the high point rock – a large sandstone boulder that marks the highest point in the state of Pennsylvania at 3,213 feet above sea level. The high point rock is marked with a USGS benchmark. Visitors also have the option to climb the 50-foot observation tower to take in a panoramic view of the surrounding forestland. At the top of the observation tower there is a map that orients visitors with the surrounding landscape. Down below the tower is a series of interpretive waysides that provide information about geology, forestry, forest ecology, and local folklore. Please note that the High Point observation area and observation tower closes at sunset.



Stop Five – The High Point Lake overlook is located off of South Wolf Rocks Road and can be easily accessed from the small pull-off parking area. The overlook has a small wooden deck with a picnic table, that was built by an Eagle Scout years ago. This stop provides a scenic view of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's High Point Lake, a popular recreation destination for fisherman and boaters. During the fall, this overlook provides a beautiful scene of the surrounding countryside.

For information about High Point Lake, please check out the PA Fish and Boat Commission's website at: <https://www.fishandboat.com/Resource/Lakes/Pages/HighPointLake.aspx>



Stop Six – The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) left behind their legacy is many of Pennsylvania's state parks and state forests. The CCC was created in result of the Great Depression to employ men ages 18-25 by providing them with work, living facilities, and most importantly, a paycheck. Mt. Davis was the site of CCC Camp S-97 from 1933-1937. The men that worked in this camp constructed many of the roads within the Mt. Davis Division of Forbes, as well as the High Point picnic area and other

features. Today the only standing structures that remain of this CCC camp include two cabins – the cabin closest to the road is currently being rehabbed by forest staff. An interpretive wayside nearby the cabin features information about the CCC program that helped start many of the conservation work movements that can still be seen throughout the US today.

For a map of Mt. Davis: <http://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=3242956&DocName=Mt>