

HIKING: 25 miles



Sturdy footwear is recommended due to the rocky footing on most trails. Trails are marked, but taking a trail map on your hike is strongly recommended. Maps are available at trailhead parking areas and the center office.

Distances listed are one-way.

TRAIL DIFFICULTY RATINGS: Ratings are based on technical challenge, not physical exertion.

Easiest: Elevation gain or loss is minimal, less than 5% slope, maximum 20% up to 100 feet

More Difficult: Elevation gain or loss is moderate, 12% slope, maximum 30% up to 300 feet

Most Difficult: Elevation gain or loss is usually severe, less than 18% slope, maximum 30+% up to 500 feet

1. Pine Plantation Trail: 0.6 mile, orange blazes, easiest hiking
This loop trail has educational signs to explain management techniques used to thin trees within the 42-acre coniferous plantation.

2. Whispering Pines Trail: 0.3 mile, paved, easiest hiking
This ADA accessible trail loops through the interior of the pine plantation.

3. Rock Scree Trail: 1.9 miles, red blazes, more difficult hiking
This linear trail connects the Pine Plantation

and Mansion areas by crossing over the ridge and rocky outcrop where Antietam quartzite was quarried to construct the mansion.

4. Ridge Overlook Trail: 0.8 mile, orange blazes, most difficult hiking
This linear, ridge-top trail with boulder outcrops and a view of the valley below presents a more challenging hike. Rock Scree and Kings Gap Hollow trails provide access to Ridge Overlook Trail.

5. Forest Heritage Trail: 1.8 miles, yellow blazes, more difficult hiking
This loop trail passes several charcoal hearths, unused for over 100 years. Maple Hollow and Rock Scree trails provide access to Forest Heritage Trail.

6. Maple Hollow Trail: 1.3 miles, orange blazes, more difficult hiking
This trail traverses a hollow with rich soils, plentiful water, and resulting maple forest.

7. Woodland Ecology Trail: 0.6 mile, red blazes, easiest hiking
Educational signs help hikers identify forest plants and interpret the ecology of a chestnut oak forest on this quiet, mossy loop trail.

8. Scenic Vista Trail: 2.5 miles, orange blazes, more difficult hiking
This linear trail offers rolling terrain on the way to Scenic Vista Overlook. Benches are strategically placed for hikers to relax and enjoy the surrounding view of unbroken forest.

9. White Oaks Trail: 0.3 mile, paved, easiest hiking
This ADA accessible loop trail has educational signs about the ecology of a deciduous white oak forest.

10. Watershed Trail: 1.9 miles, yellow blazes, more difficult hiking
This loop trail encompasses the headwaters for Kings Gap Hollow Run, including a rocky portion beside the stream with many small pools and cascades.

11. Boundary Trail: 2.4 miles, red blazes, most difficult hiking
This linear trail travels through an oak/pitch pine forest and blueberry/huckleberry understory.

12. Kings Gap Hollow Trail: 2.8 miles, orange blazes, more difficult hiking
This linear trail winds along its namesake stream as it follows the gap through the mountain.

13. Locust Point Trail: 1 mile, yellow blazes, most difficult hiking
This trail loops off of Boundary Trail and then travels to a clearing created by fallen, dead locust trees that presents a view of Kings Gap Hollow.

14. Buck Ridge Trail: 6 miles (1.8 miles in the park), yellow blaze, most difficult hiking
This linear trail links Kings Gap to Pine Grove Furnace State Park through Michaux State Forest using a network of rocky footpaths and old logging roads. The trail begins at the mansion and parallels Scenic Vista Trail before heading into Michaux State Forest.

15. Black Gum Trail: 1 mile, red blazes, more difficult hiking
This linear trail with an abundance of black gum (tupelo) trees follows the southwestern contour of the mountainside near the Mansion Area. Kings Gap Hollow and Forest Heritage trails provide access to Black Gum Trail.

16. Nature Trail: 0.2 mile, red blazes, easiest hiking
This loop trail by the education building guides walkers through open forest on a safe and level circuit around the education building.

17. Cold Springs Trail: 0.7 miles, red blazes, easiest hiking
While following the center's eastern boundary, this trail provides great views of Cold Springs Hollow.

18. Upper Irish Gap Hollow Trail: 0.4 mile, yellow blazes, easiest hiking
This trail leads into Irish Gap Hollow and connects with Two Hollows Trail.

19. Two Hollows Trail: 0.9 mile, orange blazes, more difficult hiking
This trail connects Kings Gap and Irish Gap hollows.

20. Lower Irish Gap Hollow Trail: 0.6 mile, yellow blazes, more difficult hiking
From the Pinebrook Access Area, this trail connects to Irish Gap Hollow Run near the remains of a dam used to power Keller's Sawmill in the late 1800s.

21. Forest Pools Trail: 1.2 miles, yellow blazes, easiest hiking
This trail loops through the Forest Pools Area and by six vernal pools. Educational kiosks explain the restoration methods used to restore the pools.

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HISTORY

HUMAN IMPACTS ON SOUTH MOUNTAIN 1750-1900

The exact origin of the name "Kings Gap" is unknown, but may date back to early European settlers in this region. The relatively young forests of Kings Gap reflect the influence of the charcoaling industry from the 1700s through the late 1800s. Before it was economical to ship coal, wood charcoal fueled the iron furnaces located nearby. The forests of South Mountain were systematically clear-cut on a 20- to 25-year cycle to satisfy the thirst for charcoal by the nine iron furnaces in the Kings Gap area. A relatively young forest now exists as a result of these repeated cuttings.

To make the charcoal, wood was piled and burned slowly on hearths. These flat, 30- to 50-foot diameter circles where charcoal was made can still be found. Even more than 100 years later, few woody plants grow on the old hearths.

JAMES MCCORMICK CAMERON 1906-1951

Near the turn of the 20th century, James McCormick Cameron, a member of the politically prominent Cameron family from Harrisburg, purchased many parcels of land surrounding Kings Gap. Around 1908, Cameron erected a 32-room stone mansion as a summer home. The threat of fire was the most likely reason Mr. Cameron had the mansion constructed with the native Antietam quartzite quarried nearby and built the interior structure of reinforced concrete. During this period, forest fires on South Mountain were a constant threat due to poor forestry practices.

Still remaining from the Cameron mountain estate are the water tower, carriage house, generator building, stone walled mansion

garden, caretaker's house (currently a private residence), and ice house where ice, hauled from Pine Grove Furnace each winter, kept food cool during the summer months.

C. H. MASLAND AND SONS 1951-1973

With Mr. Cameron's passing in 1949, C. H. Masland and Son Carpet Company of Carlisle purchased the mansion and the surrounding 1,430 acres from the heirs in 1951. The remaining acreage passed into other ownership. Masland refurbished the mansion, then called the "Masland Guest House," which was used as accommodations for potential clients and as a training site for employees and sales representatives. As conference rooms and overnight facilities became more available in the Carlisle area, it was no longer necessary for the company to operate its own guest house.

FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Nature Conservancy, assisted by the commonwealth, purchased the mansion and 1,430 acres of South Mountain in 1973. Kings Gap was dedicated as the third state park environmental education center in 1977.

In 2011, the Nature Conservancy, assisted by the commonwealth, purchased 1,077 acres, designated as "Irish Gap Tract," reuniting most of the original Cameron estate.

