

Below is the proposed itinerary for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

DAY 1

Meet in Damascus, Va; Trip Orientation and Welcome Dinner

Meet at 5PM at Mt Rogers Outfitters in Damascus, Virginia. If you are flying in, the closest airport is Tri-City airport (TRI) in Bristol, VA and a shuttle will be arranged based upon the group flight times. You may also schedule your own shuttle with Mount Rogers Outfitters if this time does not work for you. After settling in to our nearby rental house, weâ€™ll gather for a pizza dinner and begin our orientation to Lightweight Backpacking, wilderness travel and the trip! D

DAY 2

Full-Day Instruction, Hands-on Practice in Lightweight Backpacking

Today will be spent going into detail about lightweight backpacking and wilderness hiking/camping. We will spend our time listening, discussing and doing 'hands on' activities. Topics include safety in the wilderness, setting up camp, cooking, water filtration, clothing, setting up tents and tarps, the "ten essentials" and Leave No Trace philosophy. In the afternoon we begin the task of identifying those items we will take with us and those items that will be left behind, disbursement of group gear, packing and adjusting our backpacks. There will also be plenty of time for questions as well as for getting to know each other. Before the final packing of our packs we will make a trip to Mount Rogers outfitters for those items that were forgotten or maybe even those items we just have to have. After dinner, with all of our hard work done we can relax and look forward to our adventure. B, L, D

DAY 3

Start backpack, 5.2 miles to Hurricane Shelter

Today is the day â€“ weâ€™re going backpacking on the AT! After parking our cars, we are shuttled to the start of our hike. Then, after the necessary 'before' picture has been taken, we will begin our trip! We begin the hike by skirting the northern slope of Iron Mountain, passing through deep canopy, and along rolling terrain sprinkled with rocks and boulders. We cross several small streams and wetlands before reaching our first steep climb just below the crest of Iron Mountain. This final 'up' to our destination for the evening, Hurricane Shelter, is approximately 2 miles with an elevation gain of about 1,000 feet. Our shelter/camping area at Hurricane welcomes us and we will unpack (also known as pack explosion) set up camp, do our camp chores, and then enjoy a soup appetizer, and dinner!! If energy allows, we can have a campfire tonight. Total mileage 5.2 B, D

DAY 4

Backpack 5 miles to Old Orchard Shelter

We start our day with a short climb to the top of Iron Mountain where the Appalachian Trail intersects with the Iron Mountain Trail. We will continue on the AT and descend until reaching the gap on the southern side of Iron Mountain. Here we cross the beautiful mountain stream of Fox Creek Gap with its cascades and wonderful pools of cold mountain water. Crossing the paved VA. 603, we will re-enter the forest on the southern side of Fox Creek and enter the Lewis Fork Wilderness Area. We then begin a sustained but moderate climb up the northern side of Pine Mountain to our next 'home' for the night, Old Orchard Shelter. At Fox Creek we will be at 3,400 feet of elevation and will steadily climb to about 4,000 feet of elevation over 1.5 miles. Total mileage 5 B, D

DAY 5

Backpack 5.9 miles to Wise Shelter

Our hike today starts with a climb to the top of Pine Mountain where the views are magnificent on a clear day. We then descend to an area known as The Scales, originally used as a corral for cattle during roundups, when cattle were pastured in the highlands during the summer months. It is now a beautiful backcountry campsite complete with an outhouse, water source, trashcans, and a wilderness campground host. After passing through The Scales, we begin climbing again. This climb will take us up Stone Mountain with its magnificent vistas to the west and north. This will be our first opportunity to see the wild ponies that inhabit this part of the trail, known for their exceptional interest in the food we are carrying in our packs. As we near our shelter area for the night, Wise Shelter, we will cross another lovely mountain stream, Little Wilson Creek, which is not only a wonderful water source but offers great pools for cooling off on a hot day! With any luck we will also start seeing some of the amazingly large azaleas and rhododendrons that are usually blooming at this time of year. Our campsite is just shy of Wise Shelter in a lovely meadow with a great view toward the east. Our terrain today is mostly either up or down with elevation gains/losses of just under 1,000 feet in 1 - 1.5 miles. Total mileage 5.9 miles. B, D

DAY 6

Backpack 5 miles to Thomas Knob Shelter, Optional Hike up Mt Rogers

This may be one of the prettiest days of the trip! We begin this morning by traversing through beautiful old growth forest in Grayson Highlands State Park, steadily ascending a rocky ridge to one of the many beautiful vistas we will be rewarded with today - making us feel a bit like we have stepped into the Sound of Music. Below us is Massie Gap, which we next descend into and cross over, leaving Grayson Highlands and entering George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Wild ponies also frequent this area, and we often see both the adults and the colts along the way. Once across the Gap we continue climbing, steeply in a few places, until we reach the crest of the climb - Wilburn Ridge. The rest of our day will be spent on rolling terrain, above tree line on rocky and boulder covered trails. Our path will skirt Wilburn Ridge continuing to offer vista after vista, ascend stone stairs that skirt Grandview Peak with panoramic views of Pine and Stone Mountains; ascend to Fat Man's Squeeze, a short but rocky tunnel through large boulders; descend one short area of 'scrambling' down; and finally emerge onto an open field with, of course, more vistas. At this point we are in Rhododendron Gap, at an elevation of 5,440 feet, with acres of rhododendrons and magnificent views. From Rhododendron Gap our final mile will take us through meadows and traverse a small pine forest. Upon arriving at Thomas Knob Shelter, our shelter/camp area, we will set up camp and if energy allows will set off to 'bag' the highest peak in Virginia, Mount Rogers. The trip to the top will take about 1 hour and steadily climbs up with an elevation gain of about 500 feet in less than 1 mile. There are no views from the summit but the old growth forest we hike through is beautiful. Although the actual mileage today is only 5 miles (not including climbing Mt Rogers), it will feel much longer. 5 miles B, D

DAY 7

Backpack 4.2 miles to Elk Garden, Shuttle back to Damascus

Our last day of hiking on the AT - and what a way to go out! Our trail today will begin by traversing through an open area from Thomas Knob with beautiful morning views to the east, then descending from the junction of the AT and the Mount Rogers trail and into another old growth forest with huge, beautiful trees and deep canopy. We continue under canopy for a couple of miles and arrive at a meadow with one of our last views north of us. Skirting the meadow on the AT we continue under canopy, taking our time on this last day to enjoy the forest and the good company in the wilderness. As we enter an old orchard we see before us the final climb of the trip, and the trail ascends and then descends to Elk Garden where our shuttle will be waiting for us. Thoroughly steeped in the lore of the Appalachian Trail and the art of wilderness backpacking, we'll return to Damascus before heading to Abingdon for hot showers, beds, and a final farewell dinner. 4.2 miles B, D

DAY 8

Leave Any Time

The last night of the trip is spent at a local hotel in Abingdon, VA approximately 45 minutes from the Tri-City (TRI) Airport. You are free to leave anytime today, Day 8. Transportation may be arranged through Mount Rogers Outfitters or local taxi. Specific details will be sent with the Pre-departure document. B