

## EXPLORE NORTON, VA: PICKEM MOUNTAIN LOOP (FLAG ROCK AREA TRAILS)

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**LENGTH:** About 4.7 miles round-trip.

**TRAIL MAPS:** Trail maps of the Flag Rock Area Trails system are available at Norton City Hall, 618 Virginia Avenue NW, Norton, VA; at Pathfinders Outdoor Adventures, 534 Park Avenue, Norton, VA; and online at [www.frat.bike](http://www.frat.bike).

**DIFFICULTY:** Moderate to difficult. This loop includes several gradual climbs and descents. The loop travels single-track trails that are part of the Flag Rock Area Trails system ([www.frat.bike](http://www.frat.bike)) and passes through sections of Jefferson National Forest land. **\*\*Note: This loop features some trails that are not signed or blazed. Previous hiking/navigation experience is recommended.**

**GET THERE:** This hike starts at the City of Norton's Upper Reservoir parking area, a gravelled lot located about three-tenths of a mile past the main entrance for Flag Rock Recreation Area. This city-owned recreation area spans a thousand acres. See [www.flagrock.com](http://www.flagrock.com) for more information. More detailed driving directions to the trailhead are listed below.

### If traveling from Downtown Norton (We started at the City's municipal parking lot, 815 Park Ave. SW):

- Take Park Ave. NW to 11<sup>th</sup> Street SW. Turn left onto 11<sup>th</sup> Street SW.
- At the traffic light, turn right onto 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW. Continue following 12<sup>th</sup> Street/State Route 619 for 2.5 miles. The gravel parking lot for the trailhead is located on the left, about three-tenths of a mile past the main entrance for Flag Rock Recreation Area.

### If traveling from Kingsport:

- If traveling on Interstate 81, take the U.S. 23 North exit (Gate City). Follow U.S. 23 North for approximately 45.6 miles, past the Big Stone Gap exits to Norton.
- If traveling north on Interstate 26, follow it to the end of Interstate 26, at which time the highway becomes U.S. 23 North.
- Follow U.S. 23 North for approximately 45.6 miles, past the Big Stone Gap exits, to Norton.
- Take Exit 1 for Norton. At the end of the exit ramp, turn right. Travel about 2.3 miles up 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW/State Route 619 to the gravelled parking lot for the trailhead, which is located on the left about three-tenths of a mile past the main entrance for Flag Rock Recreation Area.

### If traveling from Abingdon:

- From Interstate 81, take Exit 17-Abingdon/South Holston Dam. If traveling south on Interstate 81, turn right into Abingdon. Those traveling north should turn left.
- Go to the second traffic light (0.7 miles). This is the main street through Abingdon. Turn left onto U.S. 11 South/U.S. 58 A West. Go to the second traffic light. Turn right onto U.S. 58 A West.
- Proceed to the stop sign at the intersection of U.S. 19 North/U.S. 58 A West (1 mile). Turn right. Proceed 12.2 miles north to the intersection of where U.S. 58 A and U.S. 19 split.

- Turn left and travel 30 miles to Norton. You will pass the towns of St. Paul and Coeburn.
- Take the on-ramp for U.S. 23 South toward Big Stone Gap. Travel U.S. 23 for about 1.5 miles and take Exit 1 for Norton.
- At the end of the exit ramp, turn right. Follow this road (12<sup>th</sup> Street SW/State Route 619) approximately 2.3 miles. The graveled parking lot for the trailhead is located on the left about three tenths of a mile past the main entrance for Flag Rock Recreation Area.



**Trailhead parking lot**

**TRAIL GUIDE:** Walk back toward parking lot entrance. A paved road heading downhill will be located to the left. This road travels to a boat launch and fishing pier for Norton's Upper Reservoir. Walk a short distance down this road and veer right onto a rough graveled road, the start of the Lake Lake Show Trail. The trail will soon bear slightly left. Hop over a chain across the trail and cross a creek. Continue walking Lake Lake Show along reservoir shoreline for approximately three-tenths of a mile where you'll intersect the Grind Central Trail.



**Creek crossing at start of loop**



**Norton's Upper Reservoir from Lake Lake Show Trail**

Turn right and begin ascending Grind Central. This stout climb will take you atop the ridgeline. During the winter months, if looking back toward the reservoir, there are some good views of surrounding mountains and Norton's Lower Reservoir.



**Grind Central Trail junction**



**View of Upper Reservoir Dam from Grind Central**

After about 0.25 miles traveling on Grind Central, you'll reach another trail junction. Stay straight and continue onto the Fern Gully Trail. This trail's name is especially memorable during the warmer months when the mountainsides are brimming with large swaths of fern clusters. At the start of Fern Gully, you'll begin a gentle descent and follow the contours of the ridgeline along an old logging road.

At one mile from the start of the hike, an old roadbed will intersect the trail from the right. Fallen logs block this road. Keep straight. Another faded roadbed crosses the trail about a tenth of a mile later. Stay straight.

At about 1.24 miles, you'll ascend to a gap. At this junction, turn left and follow the more well-worn roadbed at the far end of the gap, which is Forest Service Road 2420. Another roadbed, which you'll cross first, turns sharply uphill and switchbacks up the ridge.

At 1.6 miles, an old roadbed comes into the trail from the right. Stay straight. Enjoy winter views of Black and Pine Mountains at about 1.8 miles.

At about 2.4 miles, bear left at a fork in the road to continue. Shortly after this junction, you'll pass through a grove of hemlock trees and a section of trail bordered by sandstone boulders.



**The trail follows this roadbed for about 1.5 miles**

At about 2.75 miles, you'll begin a gentle descent to your next trail junction, which is a single-track path located on the left. When we hiked the trail, this turn was marked by two rows of pink survey tape that had been tied to a tree. This section of the loop, known as Pickem Mountain, quickly climbs to the top of a ridgeline and then descends via switchbacks to Lost Creek. **\*\* Stay alert for this junction. The trail is not obvious from the roadbed, though the pink tape makes finding the turn-off easier.**

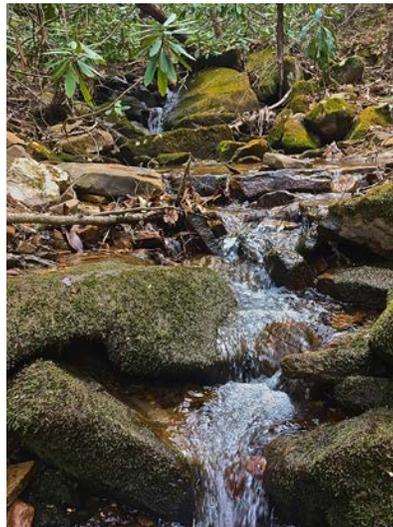


Trail junction marked with pink survey tape

At 3.25 miles, you'll pass beneath an impressive rock overhang and then cross a small stream.



Rock overhang



First creek crossing

About a tenth of a mile later, you'll cross another creek via a rock bridge. Shortly after this rock bridge, you'll intersect the Lost Creek Trail. Stay straight to continue onto the Moonshiner's Trail. At 3.9 miles, bear left at another trail junction to remain on Moonshiner's.

At about 4 miles, bear left again to continue onto an old roadbed, known as Reservoir Road. Follow this for about .35 miles where you'll reach the base of the Upper Reservoir dam. Climb the hill (it's steep!) and at the top, turn right to cross the dam.



**View of Upper Reservoir at top of hill**

Once across the dam, you'll climb another short, steep hill. At the top of this climb, turn left. Continue climbing. Stay on this gravel roadbed about two-tenths of a mile back to parking lot.



**Last stretch back to parking area**

#### **OTHER INFORMATION:**

- Visit [www.explorenortonva.com](http://www.explorenortonva.com) for other trails or outdoor adventures.
- See <https://highlonesometrails.wordpress.com/hiking-faqs/> for tips on how to prepare for a hike.
- Practice Leave No Trace ethics. Pack out your trash and follow these other Leave No Trace guidelines on your outdoor adventures: [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org). We want to keep our trails beautiful so everyone can enjoy them!