

Reach Sunrise Mountain’s summit by daybreak and you’ll know why it got its name.

WEEKENDS

10

1 of 3

third of this 15.1-mile route traces Kittatinny Ridge, which thousands of birds of prey use as a guideline when they migrate south. I look up and see a flock of red-tailed hawks floating on thermals. I still have a few miles to make before my lakeside camp, and for a moment, I’m jealous.



Movement for Migration

Stokes State Forest, New Jersey

Amber maple leaves flit around me as I trek northeast on the Appalachian Trail along Kittatinny Ridge. A screech overhead reminds me that this blushing forest signals more than just fall’s arrival—it marks the arrival of thousands of guests. The first

Turn-by-turn
From Culver’s Gap

- 1 Take the **Appalachian Trail** 5.6 miles northeast along Kittatinny Ridge to a junction. (Cross the 1,653-foot summit of Sunrise Mountain at mile 5.3.)
- 2 In order to do the trip as an overnight, from here you need to connect roads (some gravel, some paved) to land at the closest designated campsite, so veer west off the ridge and link the **Cartwright, Swenson, and Tinsley Trails** 3.4 miles to **Skellenger Road** at mile 9.2.
- 3 Follow the gravel road .6 mile west and north to 6-acre **Lake Ocquittunk**.
- 4 Retrace your steps .4 mile down the road.
- 5 Pick up the **Blue Mountain Trail** and take it 1.9 miles

- southwest.
- 6 Connect **Kittle and Coursen Roads** 1.1 miles south.
 - 7 Pick up the **Coursen Trail** and go 1.4 miles southwest to **Sunrise Mountain Road**.
 - 8 Walk .7 mile back to the parking lot on the narrow, gravel road.

Campsite
Lake Ocquittunk (mile 9.6)

If you’re not thru-hiking, then you’re limited to designated frontcountry campgrounds in Stokes State Forest. Luckily, hardwood-rimmed Lake Ocquittunk can feel pretty backcountry if you grab one of the tent sites on the northeast shore. The lake is stocked with rainbow and brown trout, so cast a line for dinner. Reserve

a space online ahead of time (\$20 to \$25 per night; reserveamerica.com).

Raptor revival

In autumn, see thousands of golden eagles, Coopers and sharp-shinned hawks, turkey vultures, and American kestrels stream over the summit of Sunrise Mountain, one of the highest points on 28-mile Kittatinny Ridge. The raptors (and more than 150 species of songbirds) follow the ridgeline south en route to the Bahamas. Hawks typically fly closer to the ridge than the others, so scan for them at dawn when the air currents are lowest. (They fly by throughout the day, but the updrafts carry them higher in the sky as the day progresses.)

Foliage

Perfectly situated in a transition area between the hickory and oak woods of the central Eastern states and the maple, birch, beech, and hemlock trees of the more northern forests, Stokes State Forest delivers kaleidoscopic color every fall. Get the best of it in mid-October.

Fire tower

Climb to the top of 47-foot-tall Culvers Lookout Fire Tower near mile 1.7. Spot the winding Delaware River to the west and the wooded Kittatinny Valley and rolling Highlands to the east.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 41.180555, -74.787657; 4 miles northwest of Branchville on Sunrise Mountain Rd. **SEASON** Year-round; spring and fall for temps in the 60s **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapKittatinnyRidge (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/stokes-sf **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/kittatinnyridge

Trip stats

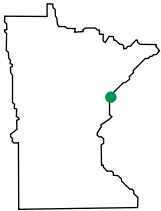
Distance: 15.1 miles (loop)
Time: 2 days
Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

PHOTOS BY(CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) ABP IMAGES / 500PX; APPALACHIAN TRAIL CAFE; DAVID AKERS / 500PX

Without a Paddle

Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Minnesota

The black water is so calm that I skip a stone across its surface to remind myself it’s not a sheet of obsidian. I watch the ripples propagate out toward the opposite shore, where the aspens and tamaracks are just starting to turn. It’d be a nice place to camp,



but I know there’s a better spot just a few miles farther: at a tiny tarn shrouded in maples and pines that’s only accessible by foot. Without paddlers and, this time of year, mosquitoes, I’m happy to share with just loons and beavers.

Turn-by-turn
From the Angleworm Lake trailhead

- 1 Take the **Angleworm Lake Trail** 1.9 miles northeast to a fork near the lake.
- 2 For a longer first day (7.9 miles), do the loop clockwise, splitting around the western shore of the lake through boreal forest to tiny **Whiskey Jack Lake**.
- 3 Continue 3.3 miles south on the main trail to the junction of the lollipop-loop.
- 4 Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

Campsite
Whiskey Jack Lake (mile 7.9)

Whiskey Jack Lake has no portage connections to surrounding lakes—meaning you won’t find any canoe campers here. In fact, there’s just one site: an established spot nestled amid the pines on the eastern shore (marked with a fire ring). Only two permits are issued for this area each day, so you won’t have company. If this spot is taken, select any of the sites along Angleworm Lake (best ones are near the middle).

Foliage

By mid-September, the hardwoods should begin lighting up golden yellow

and crimson. Color typically peaks the last week of September through the first week of October.

Wildlife

Massive glaciers created the scene around you, and the beavers are continuing their work. Many of the beaver projects—like the one on Angleworm’s eastern bank—are staggering in scope, stretching hundreds of feet across. Loons begin to migrate south in September, but you’re likely to hear them laughing through summer evenings and into fall. Also, listen for moose bellowing: They begin mating in early fall.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 48.063396, -91.929560; 17 miles north of Ely on MN 116 (Echo Trail) **SEASON** June to November, but aim for late summer and fall when the bugs abate. **PERMIT** Required (\$16 plus \$6 reservation fee); obtain at the Kawishiwi Station in Ely. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapAnglewormLake (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/boundary-waters **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/anglewormlake

Trip stats

Distance: 13.1 miles (lollipop-loop)
Time: 2 days
Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

No. 12 | Return to the desert.

Sure, it may be a bit warm in the South this month, but by holing up inside, you’re missing some of the Lone Star State’s best flora. Thanks to El Niño, Maximilian sunflowers should be exploding with yellow blooms—which will look lovely against a backdrop of golden cottonwoods. Find both in Caprock Canyons State Park, just south of Amarillo, when you link the Upper Canyon and Canyon Loop Trails into a 6-mile circuit. Wildlife bonus: Aoudads, a type of curvy-horned sheep, live in the red-rock canyon. **Contact** bit.do/caprock-canyons



13 | Party like you’re a thru-hiker.

Most north-bound Appalachian Trail hikers will be cruising up Katahdin this month. If they’re smart, they’ll partake in the 14-scoop Summit Sundae (complete with donut), which even you can get in on when you soak in the vibe of the most social long path at the Trails End Festival in Millinocket, Maine (September 16 to 18). After a weekend celebrating, we’re pretty confident you’ll be one of the 2,500 hopefuls at Springer Mountain next March. Learn more at **trailsendfestival.org**.

THE GOOD FIGHT CENTRAL COAST, CALIFORNIA

Take a walk on the 11-mile Vicente Flat Trail and you’ll know why Big Sur is sacred among hikers. Its juxtaposition of plants (tiny lupines abutting towering redwoods) and views (ocean waves crashing against the 2,000-foot Santa Lucias) attract people from all over the country. But parts of this Central Coast area are under threat from oil developers. The California Wilderness Coalition’s plan to preserve more than 245,500 acres has gained traction with the Senate—Google the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act—and it needs support. Find out how you can help at **calwild.org**.

play list

WEEKENDS

15

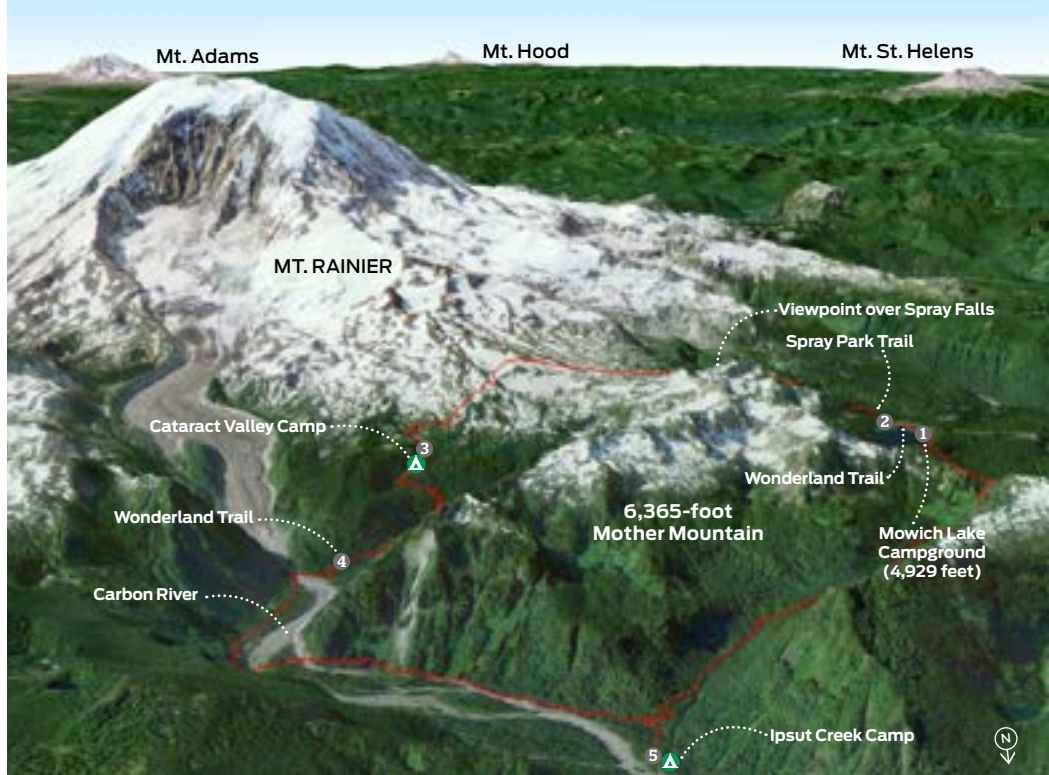
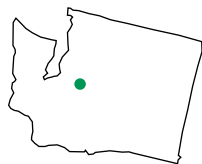
3 of 3

Wildflowers & Waterfalls

Mt. Rainier National Park, Washington

Call it the face that launched a thousand trips: The view of Mt. Rainier's northwestern façade from Spray Park, where overflowing lupine and paintbrush blooms jostle each other to get into the frame, may just make for the most memorable photo op in the park. There's just one problem on my trip here—I can't actually see the peak. On this summer morning, chilled mist swirls among the wildflowers, blotting out the postcard view. But I don't mind: The fog lends an otherworldly vibe to the scene and keeps fairweather hikers away, giving me a rare chance to savor the colorful meadow in solitude. Besides, as I'll be reminded over and over again on this 17-mile loop through high-altitude scree fields and lush temperate rainforest, you don't have to see the mountain to feel its power.

BY ELISABETH KWAK-HEFFERAN



Turn-by-turn From Mowich Lake Campground

- ① Take the **Wonderland Trail** .2 mile.
- ② Pick up the **Spray Park Trail** and take it 5.4 miles through subalpine meadows to **Cataract Valley Camp** 🏕️. (Don't miss the view of 350-foot Spray Falls near mile 2.)
- ③ Continue north to a fork at mile 7.7.
- ④ Follow the rerouted **Wonderland Trail** (a 2006 flood washed out the original) to **Ipsut Creek Camp** 🏕️ at mile 11.4.
- ⑤ Go 5.1 miles over 5,100-foot Ipsut Pass to the trailhead.



Campsite 1 Cataract Valley Camp (mile 5.6)

Bed down in an electric-green understory at this seven-site

camp. Despite its name, you won't get waterfall views, but nearby salmonberries fruit in July and a stream makes water duty easy.



Campsite 2 Ipsut Creek Camp (mile 11.4)

This site on the ice-blue Carbon River was a car campground before a monster storm washed out the 5-mile access road. Without traffic, it's now a mellower destination for backpackers looking to linger another night on this loop.



Berries

Prepare for stained fingertips: Thickets of the Northwest's tastiest berries line this route. Harvest salmonberries and blueberries near Cataract Valley Camp; huckleberries on the climb to Ipsut Pass; and thimbleberries and raspberries near the Carbon River. Park guidelines limit you to what you can snarf on the spot.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 46.932865, -121.863121; 6 miles east of Mowich Entrance on Mowich Lake Rd. **SEASON** July through October; August is prime berry season. **PERMIT** Required (free for walk-ins) **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapMotherMountain (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/mora **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/mothermountain

Trip stats

Distance: 16.6 miles (loop)
Time: 3 days
Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

Get unobstructed views of Rainier on the Spray Park Trail.

