

Bear Run Nature Reserve

Distance: 14.3 km (8.8 miles)

Time: 5¼ hours

Rise: 355 meters (1,160 feet)

Highlights: Wildflowers; mountain streams; views

Maps: USGS 7½' Mill Run; Bear Run Trail Map (frequently available at trailhead and from Western Pennsylvania Conservancy)

Normally, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy transfers acquired lands to public ownership. There is one area, however, that the Conservancy chose to keep. This is the Bear Run Nature Reserve. The Conservancy has expanded the original tract surrounding Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's famous house, to 1,400 hectares (3,500 acres). The Reserve stretches from the banks of the Youghiogheny far up the western flank of Laurel Hill and encompasses most of the watersheds of both Laurel Run and Bear Run itself. Almost 32 kilometers (20 miles) of trails lace the reserve, which is open to nonmembers for both day hiking and overnight camping. Users of the backpack campsites should register at the parking lot. Reservations are required for the one group campsite (10 or more campers).

This hike, which can be shortened in several ways, takes you on a grand tour of the trails at Bear Run, through dense woods, pine plantations, and rhododendron thickets, across fields and along mountain streams to a view of rafts and kayaks knocking the rocks out

of the lower Yough. The many rocks and wet areas call for hiking boots.

Bear Run Nature Reserve is on PA 381 about 4 miles north of Ohiopyle and 3.5 miles south of Mill Run. Drive in at the sign and park in the large lot behind the nature center. The hike begins at the far end of the parking lot.

Head into the pine plantation on the Wagon Trail. Almost immediately the Pine Trail takes off to the left, and very shortly the Arbutus Trail diverges to the right. In theory the Wagon Trail is blazed with orange rectangles, but the trail is wide and well-used and the blazing scarce. The Poetry Trail goes off to your right. The white pine along the Wagon Trail give way to red pine. After the Aspen Trail, which goes left, you come to spruce.

At 0.8 km (0.5 mile) the Wagon Trail comes to an end and you turn left on the Ridge Trail blazed with yellow spots. Rhododendron thickets and white oaks border the trail at this point. Shortly, you cross a bridge over Beaver Run, and the Arbutus Trail comes in from the right. Listen for the song of the wood

thrush. Next, the white-blazed Rhododendron Trail goes off to the left. (One way to shorten this hike and avoid over 90 meters of climbing would be to take the Rhododendron and Snowbunny trails to the junction of the Laurel Run and Tulip Tree trails.) At 1.0 km (0.6 mile) the Hemlock Trail goes off to the right. Other trees found along this section are red oak, tulip, black gum, chestnut oak, cucumber, black birch, red maple, and the much smaller striped maple. At 1.7 km (1.1 miles) bear left where the Hemlock Trail comes back in from the right, and left again at 1.9 km (1.2 miles) where the old road goes straight ahead.

Teaberry Trail comes in from the left at 2.0 km (1.3 miles). Along this section you can see sassafras and beech as well as mountain laurel. Backpack campsite 2 is found at 3.4 km (2.1 miles). At 3.8 km (2.4 miles) you reach a junction with the Rhododendron, Bear Run, and Tulip Tree Trails. Continue straight ahead on the Tulip Tree Trail, which is also blazed with yellow spots. In late May, look for the pink lady's slipper. At 4.1 km (2.6 miles) watch the blazes as the Tulip Tree makes an obscure jog to the left near some large rocks. For the most part, the Tulip Tree Trail is fairly faint and requires careful attention, particularly at junctions with other old woods roads.

Soon the trail begins descending, and at 5.6 km (3.5 miles) you reach the junction with the Snowbunny Trail. This is your last chance to return to the parking lot without going around the large inholding of private land or walking back on the highway. Continue ahead on the white-blazed Laurel Run Trail, and another 0.4 km (0.25 mile) brings you to a crossing of Laurel Run itself and you follow along it until you reach the edge of a field. Turn left and pick up a new trail

that takes you down to PA 381 at 7.0 km (4.4 miles).

Cross the highway and continue downhill. Soon you turn left, cross Laurel Run, pass through a Rhododendron tunnel, and climb into more open woods above the stream. Pass through the gates of two barbed wire fences and remember to close them behind you. The trail returns to the side of Laurel Run at the ruins of a dam. Just beyond, a spur trail leads right to a view of lower Laurel Glen before returning to the main trail. The trail then climbs away from Laurel Run, picks up an old road grade, emerges into the lower Yough gorge, and swings upstream, following the old road far above the river. At 9.5 km (5.9 miles) you reach a junction with the orange-blazed Saddle Trail which, if you take it, will shorten your hike but will also bypass the overlook on the Yough at the west end of the peninsula.

Just beyond this junction you pass campsite no. 4 to the right of the trail.

At 10.6 km (6.6 miles) the trail picks up a pole line. At times the trail follows an old quarry above the pole line. At 11.6 km (7.3 miles) however, you emerge at an overlook that makes it all worthwhile. You are 20 meters directly above the main line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. You get a good view of the river at Dimple Rapids and can watch the kayaks and rafts dodging the many rocks. You probably heard the screams and shouts from below as you hiked the Peninsula Trail, but now you can actually see what is going on.

Back on the Peninsula Trail you traverse the slope for the next 0.9 km (0.6 mile) on a new trail cut by the Keystone Trails Association Trail Care team in 1988. At 12.4 km (7.8 miles) you reach the Daniel G. Paradise Memorial Overlook at the brink of an impressive cliff. Continuing on the Peninsula Trail climb

to the edge of a field where you turn right and the Saddle Trail comes in from the left. At the far edge of the field, you can vary the walk back by turning left on the yellow-blazed Kinglet Trail or continuing on the Peninsula Trail. In either case, it is about 0.8 km (0.5 mile) back to PA 381, just across from the entrance to the Bear Run parking lot.

As this hike uses less than half the trails in Bear Run Nature Reserve, there are plenty of opportunities for further hiking. As mentioned earlier, Fallingwater, the famous house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is near at hand, and well worth a visit.

To reach Fallingwater, turn south on PA 381 for half a mile, then turn right at the sign.

