

Annapolis Rock – No Longer Being Loved to Death

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Chesapeake Conservancy/National Park Service (NPS)

December 17, 2019



Figure 1: View of Boonsboro from Annapolis Rock

In the Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan Area, winter solstice has about five and a half hours less daylight than summer solstice. During this time of year, many people simply choose to stay indoors, leaving outdoor activities for the warmer months. But I find this the best reason to get out and go hiking at places like Annapolis Rock in Washington County, Maryland. According to Ranger Tammy McCorkle, on a nice weekend, there may be over 100 people camping overnight in the “wilderness setting” at Annapolis Rock, while hundreds more may pay the area a visit on a day hike. If you want to avoid the crowd and appreciate the beauty of the area in peace, then I suggest visiting on a weekday or during the off-season.

One reason why this hike is so well known is because the most convenient approach to Annapolis Rock, the [Baltimore National Pike \(Route 40\) trailhead](#), is also the closest access point on the [Appalachian National Scenic Trail](#) for folks who live in the Baltimore area. From this location, it is only 2.5 miles north to Annapolis Rock and 3.2 miles south to [Washington Monument State Park](#), home of the first monument dedicated to the memory of George Washington. I suggest starting this hike shortly after dawn, heading to Annapolis Rock, then returning and continuing south to Washington Monument State Park. If you organize a shuttle with a second vehicle to end at the Park (the route I chose), then your total hike will be around 8.2 miles. Otherwise,

the round trip will be about 11.4 miles. Of course, one can always break it up into two 5 or 6.4 mile out-and-back hikes.

My friend and our dogs commenced the 816-foot climb from the Route 40 trailhead to Annapolis Rock. Despite freezing temperatures, the uphill hike warmed us up quickly. The trail was fairly clear, though I have seen it covered with a thick layer of dry leaves at this time of year, making it difficult to see uneven terrain. Less sure-footed hikers may want to bring a trekking pole, especially for the descents.

Leaving the white-blazed Appalachian Trail, we headed west on a blue-blazed spur trail to the Annapolis Rock Backpacking Campground. At a kiosk, I read about how the area had become a victim of overuse. "Until a few years ago, every flat area near the rocks was devoid of vegetation. Legions of people and tents destroyed the plant life. Remnants of past fires rendered the soil sterile. Dead and downed trees were scarce, leaving live saplings fair game for those looking for firewood. We were loving this beautiful area to death." But this all changed in 2002 when the Maryland Appalachian Trail Management Committee launched a plan to rectify the damage at Annapolis Rock while ensuring visitors could still enjoy the area.

Walking through, we witnessed some of the preservation efforts. Signs prohibited the building of campfires, while much of the area just east of the overlook was re-vegetated and closed for rehabilitation. But the most obvious improvement was the construction of two outhouses. Signs inside each read, "This is a mouldering privy, a type of composting toilet. The bin underneath contains red wiggler worms. Given the correct conditions, the material will compost aerobically and the worms will consume the waste material, leaving a clean and safe soil that may be spread safely on the forest floor."

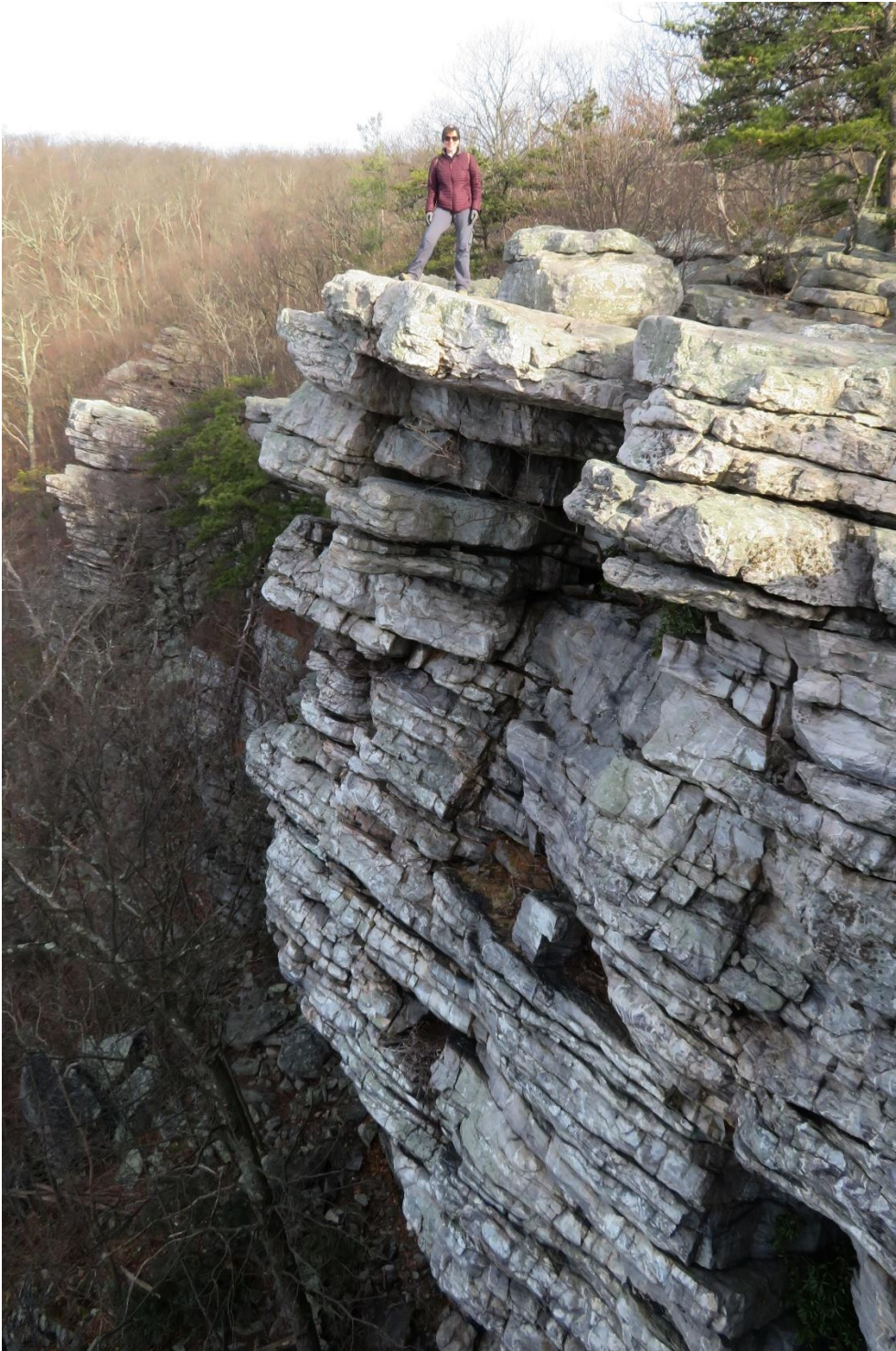




*Figure 2: Mouldering privy*

Arriving at the Annapolis Rock overlook, we enjoyed a spectacular view of Boonsboro, illuminated by the morning light. To our south lay Greenbrier Lake in [Greenbrier State Park](#). But in my opinion, the best view is Annapolis Rock itself, which can best be seen up close in the winter from the southern part of the overlook. On a clear day, one can also see Annapolis Rock from afar on the drive east on route 70 from Hagerstown. The thick layers of light gray quartzite are hard to miss.





*Figure 3: Annapolis Rock*

Returning south on the Appalachian Trail, we saw several people making their way to Annapolis Rock, making us glad to be the early birds. Continuing south past the Route 40 trailhead, we crossed over Highway 70 via a pedestrian bridge. Attached to the bridge's chain link fence were several dozen "love locks." With a history dating back to Serbia in WWI, sweethearts affix a padlock to a bridge and then throw away the key to symbolize their unbreakable love.





*Figure 4: Love locks on pedestrian bridge over Highway 70*

Although there is little wildlife to see at this time of year, I occasionally noticed evidence of activity. I found a couple holes which carpenter bees had drilled into one of the wood [waterbars](#) used to help control trail erosion. I also spotted an egg case from a Chinese mantis, the largest mantis found in Maryland. At up to six inches long, it is known to catch and eat hummingbirds!



*Figure 5: Chinese mantis egg case*

We eventually reached our southern destination, Washington Monument State Park. Here, we walked to the top of the 30-foot high Washington Monument, where we had another view looking west towards Boonsboro. The spirited residents of this town began construction of this monument on Independence Day 1827. Meeting at the public square with a fife and drum corps, they marched two miles to the monument site, worked until noon, held a dedication ceremony, and then ate lunch. Resuming work, they ended the day with a reading of the Declaration of Independence and a three-round salute fired by three Revolutionary War veterans.





*Figure 6: The first Washington Monument*

Shuttling back to the Route 40 trailhead, I was glad to have seen so much with so few distractions. The views and accessibility of this hike make it very popular, though such popularity can detract from its beauty. That's why sometimes knowing when to hike is just as important as knowing where.

For more information, see

- [Maryland Department of Natural Resources \(MD-DNR\) – Washington Monument State Park](#)
- [MD-DNR – Explore: South Mountain Recreation Area 2019 Edition](#)
- [Wikipedia – Love Lock](#)
- [Maryland Invasive Species Council – Pray for the prey of the praying mantis](#)