

Hibernal Hikes at King and Queen Seat, Eden Mill Park, and Kilgore Falls

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Chesapeake Conservancy/National Park Service (NPS)

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Figure 1: Winter view looking southeast from King and Queen Seat

Hiking is something I enjoy year-round. Each season brings something special, with winter providing clear, mostly leafless views and sometimes a little snow to lend magic and a welcome contrast to the otherwise drab surroundings. Unfortunately, snow in the Chesapeake Bay area is atypical and short-lived. Seeing such weather as an opportunity, I make a point to get out in it whenever possible. Three of my favorite destinations for short, scenic wintry hikes are within a two-mile radius of one another in Harford County, Maryland: Eden Mill Park, King and Queen Seat, and Kilgore Falls, with the latter two contained in discontinuous portions of [Rocks State Park](#).

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One day in early February 2021 turned out to be perfect for a winter hike, with bright sun and moderate wind. The several inches of snow that had fallen a couple days prior was mostly still around, while the high winds and cloudy skies that followed the storm had abated. After confirming with the Rocks State Park ranger station that the roads were clear, I drove to the trailhead at the [park office](#) and commenced hiking on the [White Trail](#), heading northeast on a 2.5-mile loop.



Climbing up 238 feet in the first 0.35 mile, I was glad to be wearing crampons, as they provided firm traction on the ice formed from previous hikers' footsteps compacting the melting snow which subsequently refroze overnight. Hiking poles are also a good choice for stability.

After about 0.4 mile, I arrived at the 190-foot outcrop known as King and Queen Seat. Scrambling across, I noticed various stone carvings, some dating back to the 1800s.

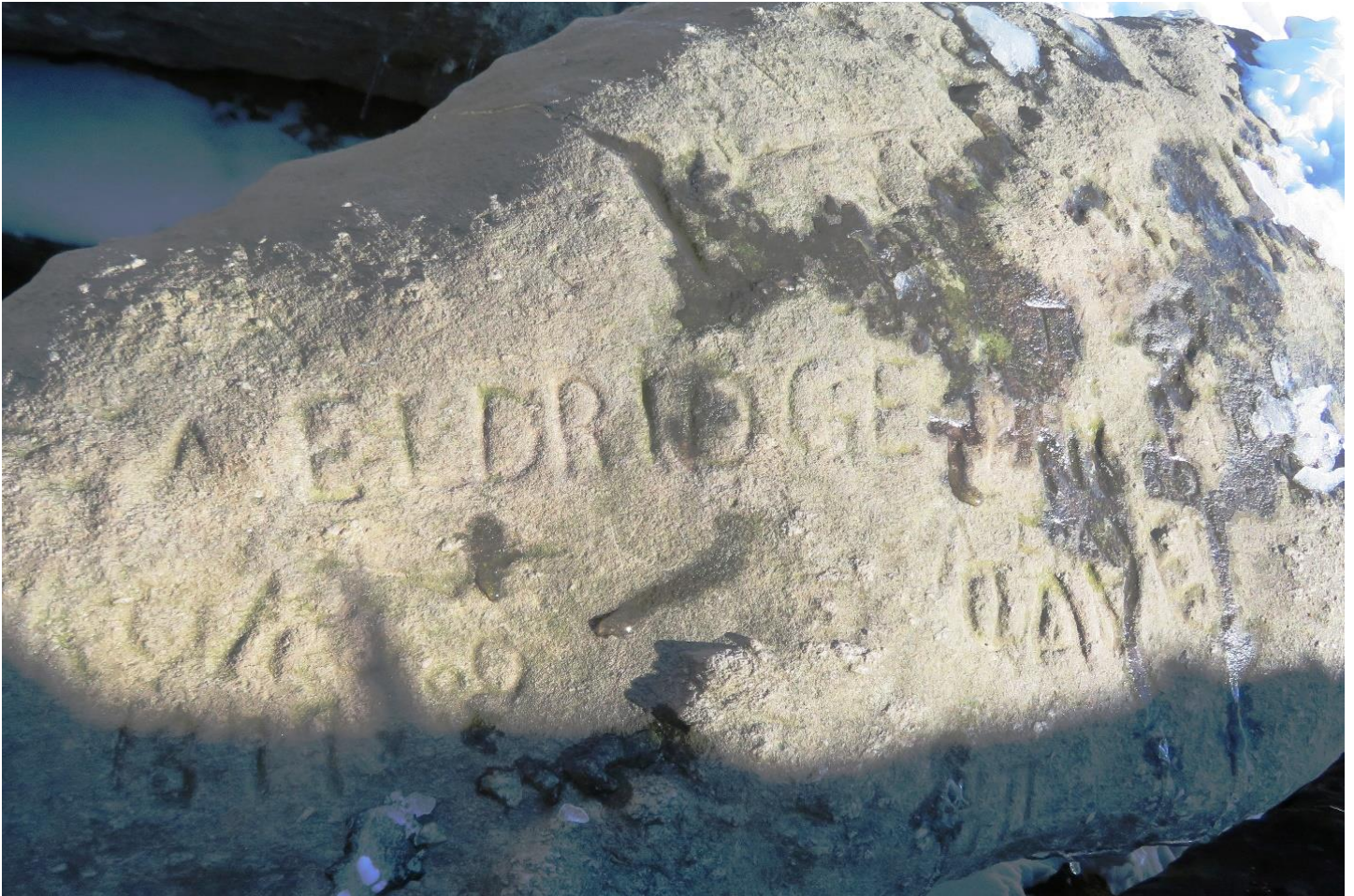


Figure 2: "ELDRIDGE 1899" etched in rock at King and Queen Seat

This rock formation is comprised of quartzite and hard quartz-pebble metaconglomerate, created millions of years ago when quartz was subjected to extreme heat and pressure. Over time, other rocks eroded away, leaving this vista overlooking Deer Creek Valley.





Figure 3: King and Queen Seat

A book written by Thomas Wysong, published in 1880 and titled “The Rocks of Deer Creek: Their Legends and History” has led some to speculate that King and Queen Seat was a ceremonial gathering place for Susquehannock Native Americans. However, no evidence has been found to support this.

In warmer months, rock climbers may be found tackling the rock face at King and Queen Seat, where climbs range from 8 to 115 feet and are suitable for skill levels 4 to 5.12. But when the rocks are icy, such steep drops are especially hazardous, so use good judgement and know your limitations.

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My next adventure was in the 117-acre Eden Mill Park that lies just northwest of [Eden Mill Nature Center](#). I parked on the south side of Eden Mill Road at [39.677459, -76.454938](#) and then walked towards Deer Creek, the same body of water that eventually flows through Deer Creek Valley near King and Queen Seat.

Much of my hike was on the [Beaver Run Trail](#) paralleling Deer Creek, which lays claim to being Maryland's cleanest stream. I saw plenty of footprints from earlier hikers, along with tracks from cross country skiers taking advantage of the flat terrain. Inland, the trails gain about 100 feet of elevation but are generally not difficult, and there are lots of options for shorter circuit hikes.



Figure 4: Daphne on Beaver Run Trail, next to the partially frozen Deer Creek

Exploring the area around the Nature Center, I saw the dam that was utilized when the mill operated as a power plant. Prior to that, the mill functioned as what some considered one of the best-equipped [gristmills](#) in the country. The Stansbury family built it in 1798, and despite having various owners, the mill wasn't named after any of them. The name likely comes from Sir Robert Eden (1741-1784), the last royal governor of Maryland, or it may have originated from Reverend Joseph Eden (no relation to Robert Eden), a Bavarian priest.





Figure 5: Eden Mill Nature Center

If I had to think of a phrase to describe Eden Mill, it would be “family-friendly outings.” During non-pandemic times, they have various activities open to children, including a junior naturalist program, canoe trips, fly fishing, paint nights, owl prowls, and summer camps. The Nature Center also has lots of hands-on exhibits, while the nearby barn has a beehive, bat boxes, and a [monarch waystation](#). This is definitely the place I would want to spend my time if I were a kid.



Figure 6: Eden Mill barn and beehive

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My final hike was to 17-foot Kilgore Falls, Maryland's second-highest vertical drop waterfall. Believed to be named after one of the early owners of the property, Joseph D. Kilgore, the falls has gone from being a local secret to so popular that [online reservations](#) must be made to visit between May 1 and Labor Day.

I commenced my one-mile out-and-back trip from the 67-acre [Falling Branch Area](#). Heading northwest, I passed a small grove of eastern hemlocks before walking downhill to Falling Branch, the stream that feeds the falls and later flows into Deer Creek. Here I could see a profile of the falls in the distance, but for the best view, one must rock hop across Falling Branch. On a cold winter day these rocks can get icy, so I prefer to save this trip for the end, in case I slip and get soaked.





Figure 7: Crossing Falling Branch, February 2017

Seeing Kilgore Falls is always a treat, but when temperatures remain below freezing for several days (as they did in January 2019), it is a truly amazing spectacle, because thick layers of ice build up around the falls, adding to its enormity. This place is crowded in the summer because people like to play in the water, but in my opinion, the coldest days of winter are the best to see the most impressive sights.





Figure 8: Kilgore Falls, January 2019



Figure 9: Kilgore Falls, January 2019





Figure 10: Kilgore Falls, January 2019



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Some people see chilly winter days as a reason to stay inside, but given the right conditions, hibernal hikes at places like King and Queen Seat, Eden Mill Park, and Kilgore Falls can be extraordinary. A little snow and ice can change a wooded trail into a winter wonderland, while a waterfall can transform into a magnificent glacial sculpture. So, the next time safe wintry precipitation falls, remember the words of football player Eddie Kennison: "When opportunity presents itself, don't be afraid to go after it."



Figure 11: Kilgore Falls, January 2019





Figure 12: Kilgore Falls, February 2016

For more information, see

[Maryland Department of Natural Resources – Rocks State Park](#)

[Eden Mill Nature Center](#)

[The Zone Magazine – Kilgore Falls](#)