

Wincopin Neck: My Neck of the Woods

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Figure 1: The Falls on the Little Patuxent River

If you were to ask a local about Wincopin Neck, you'd probably get a lot of confused looks. Now archaic, this term was used in the early 1700s to denote a section of land granted to members of the Warfield family that lay between the Little and Middle Patuxent Rivers above their confluence next to what is now Savage, Howard County, Maryland. The origin of the name "Wincopin" is likely from a Nanticoke dialect of the Algonquin language, meaning "bear," while "neck" is sometimes used to denote a long, thin peninsula. As far as I know, no bears have been spotted on this peninsula in my lifetime, but after a 2023 sighting only about four miles away in Columbia, Maryland, it might just be a matter of time before they make their way here.

Much of the Wincopin Neck area was acquired through the General Park and Open Space Plan of 1963 for flood and erosion prevention, pollution control, conservation, and public recreation. As a resident of Savage who has made good use of the recreation component, these nearby trails are what I love most about my small town and a big reason I have chosen to stay. Here, I am within walking distance to little bits of heaven on Earth: Wincopin Trail, Savage Mill Trail, and River Trail.

WINCOPIN TRAIL

A significant part of the land once known as Wincopin Neck is today called [Wincopin Trail](#). It contains ~3.7 miles of color-coded (green, red, yellow, and blue) blazed dirt trails, many of which parallel the Little and

Middle Patuxent Rivers which form its boundaries. At the trailhead, you'll find a porta-john and parking for 16 vehicles which quickly fills up on a nice day.

The Green Trail is my favorite, largely because of its historical significance. The east side, which runs along the Little Patuxent River, once connected a granite quarry in the town of Guilford with Savage via the Patuxent Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad, the oldest railway in the United States. This is the same line that also passed over the [Patuxent Branch Trail](#) further north.

Slightly north of the Green Trail lies the remains of the [B.F. Pope Stone Company Quarry](#), where a steep, dramatic rocky view is carved into the hillside where gabbro, a hard intrusive igneous rock, was extracted and probably crushed for use in road construction.



Figure 2: Daphne and I at the remains of the B.F. Pope Stone Company Quarry

Ruins of the stone and earthen [Stone Crib Dam](#) built between 1802 and 1804 rest between the Little Patuxent River and the Green Trail, while just west of the trail further south, a large wall from the [W.T. Manning Company stone crusher](#) still stands. It was likely abandoned in 1919 or shortly thereafter.



Figure 3: Wall from the W.T. Manning Company stone crusher

The southernmost part of this rail trail ends at the [Gabbro Bridge Support](#) just north of the confluence where a bridge once carried trains over the Middle Patuxent. From this steep overlook, one can see support masonry on the other side of the river near the [northern terminus of the Savage Mill Trail](#).

In addition to history, the Wincopin Trail is also a great place to see flora and fauna. In early spring, a [vernal pool](#) comes to life as spotted salamanders come out at night to spawn. Since they are nocturnal and rarely seen except during breeding season, I have yet to find an adult salamander at this pond, but between March and early April, their large egg masses can be hard to miss.



Figure 4: Spotted salamander eggs in vernal pool at Wincopin Trail

The Middle Patuxent River is an ideal location to spot caddisfly larva nets. These silk structures capture small particles of leaf detritus and animal parts which the larva then consume. Generally indicative of good water quality, caddisflies, along with mayflies and stoneflies, are sometimes referred to as “canaries of the stream” because of their sensitivity to pollution.



Figure 5: Caddisfly larva nets in the Middle Patuxent River

Paw paw plants grow abundantly at Wincopin Trail, blooming in April. Their 2-inch-wide, pretty flowers are precursors to a fruit harvest in mid-September.



Figure 6: Paw paw flower

Wincopin Trail can be a little whimsical. One of our Savage residents is known for creating chainsaw-carved bears. I found one just off the Middle Patuxent River and another on one of the orienteering trails.



Figure 7: Daphne with chainsaw-carved bear

The same person who makes the bears is also a master of rock balancing. Sometimes I find his tradecraft just off the Green Trail in the Little Patuxent River. I've tried to replicate one of his most basic feats with great difficulty and quickly gave up.



Figure 8: Rocks balanced on the Little Patuxent River

SAVAGE MILL TRAIL

Recall that the Patuxent Branch of the B&O Railroad ran across the Middle Patuxent River from Wincopin Trail to the Savage Mill Trail. The latter is a ~0.7-mile-long, 10-foot-wide, flat, shaded, gravel and dirt road purchased by Howard County in 1978. At the [trailhead](#), you'll find a porta-john with parking on either side of Foundry Street.

In some areas, dirt paths lead from the Savage Mill Trail down to the Little Patuxent River where anglers can throw their lines into the trout-stocked water, or sightseers can take in spectacular views such as the last surviving Bollman Truss Bridge, built in 1852. Designed by Wendall Bollman, a self-taught Baltimore civil engineer, he invented a way to use iron to construct stronger bridges on the B&O.



Figure 9: Winter view of the last surviving Bollman Truss Bridge

On the upstream side of this bridge are the powerhouse ruins of the Savage Manufacturing Company, which functioned as a working textile mill from 1822 to 1947. Refurbished as a complex of shops and restaurants, Savage Mill, as it is now known, is one of the county's leading tourist attractions. The powerhouse supplied power to the Mill and the town until electric lines from Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE) were installed in 1931.



Figure 10: Daphne and I in front of the Savage Mill powerhouse ruins

Further upstream, a [rocky whitewater area](#), once called the Great Falls of the Little Patuxent, produces stunning views, particularly on an icy winter day. Today, it is more commonly known simply as the Falls.



Figure 11: Frozen water at the Falls

Closer to the confluence of the Little and Middle Patuxent Rivers, you'll find remnants of a vertical rising [sluice](#) gate used to control the level and flow rate of water back when the river was dammed.



Figure 12: Daphne at sluice gate just south of the Little Patuxent River

RIVER TRAIL

East of Wincopin Trail and west of Patuxent Branch Trail lies a narrow, dirt path paralleling the Little Patuxent River. Relatively unknown outside of the Savage community, it doesn't have an official name, though some refer to various sections as the River Trail, Fisherman's Trail, or Savage Mill Race Trail. The best way to access it is to park in [Savage Park](#) near the [south terminus of the Patuxent Branch Trail](#) then walk west on the paved Patuxent Branch Trail for 300 feet, but rather than head north to stay on the Patuxent Branch Trail, stay straight and continue downhill for 0.1 mile towards the water to an intersection with the River Trail. At the [split](#), you can walk north 0.4 mile back to the Patuxent Branch Trail or south for 0.4 mile to a gravel road that leads to a lot once used by the county for a sewer realignment project. One can continue downstream along the river but the trail quickly becomes more difficult to traverse.

Like the other trails, there is plenty of local history to see. Just south of the gravel road and directly across the river from the sluice gate lies the [remains of the dam support](#) used to divert water upstream of the Falls through a [mill race](#) that led to Savage Mill where it powered the textile machinery. The dam was destroyed in the early 1950s.



Figure 13: Drone view of the confluence of the Middle (left) and Little (right) Patuxent Rivers with remains of the dam support on the lower right

The River Trail is also a nice place to see wildlife along the Little Patuxent River. Just in terms of reptiles, I have spotted box turtles, a worm snake, a copperhead snake, and a northern water snake.



Figure 14: Northern water snake on the River Trail

One of my favorite finds was a hellgrammite which, like the caddisfly larva, is also an ecological indicator. As the larval form of a Dobson fly, hellgrammites only survive in relatively clean and well oxygenated water.



Figure 15: Hellgrammite on the River Trail

By far the most unusual thing I've spotted on the River Trail are beech blight aphids. Also known as the woolly beech aphid or the boogie-woogie aphid, thousands of these insects may cover a single beech tree and attract other life forms to create a micro-ecosystem.



Figure 16: Beech blight aphids

The trails near Wincopin Neck are scenic, full of history, and home to lots of wildlife, but so far, no bears. Their biggest drawback, in my opinion, is that they are not connected, with each separated from the other via a waterway. In mid-2022, the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks reported receiving funding to build a pedestrian bridge across the Middle Patuxent River connecting the Savage Mill Trail to Wincopin Trail. There is also talk of building a second bridge connecting to Savage Park which would also enable access to the River Trail and the Patuxent Branch Trail. This project is still in its infancy so it may be a while before construction actually begins, but at least the ball is rolling to connect the trails near Wincopin Neck...all the more reason for me to stay in Savage.

For more information see

[Guilford Area History, Howard County, Maryland – Early Settlements and Land Patents](#)

[Guilford Area History, Howard County, Maryland – What’s in a Name? Wincopin](#)

[Howard County Bird Club – Wincopin Trail](#)

[Howard County Recreation & Parks – Wincopin Trail Area](#)

[Facebook – Friends of the Guilford Industrial Historic District](#)

[Guilford Area History, Howard County, Maryland – Wincopin Crib Dam](#)

[Virginia Herpetological Society – Spotted Salamander](#)

[Leaf Pack Network – Ecosystem Benefits of Net-Spinning Caddisflies](#)

[Wikipedia – Savage Mill Trail](#)

[Maryland Department of Natural Resources – Trout Stocking in Maryland](#)

[The Historical Marker Database – Historic Savage Mill](#)

[National Park Service – New River Gorge – Hellgrammites](#)

[Saki’s World – Beech Blight Aphids 2022](#)