

Stop 3

Mountain Laurel

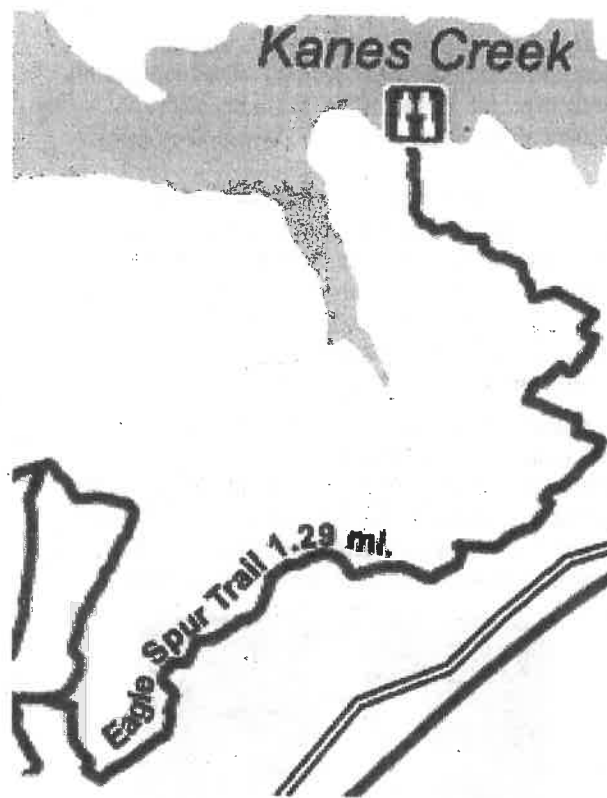
Stop and take a look at this large shrub. The Mountain Laurel is a native plant related to Rhododendrons. This evergreen is found all over the east coast, and blooms in May and June. Be careful not to eat any of it, since all parts of this plant (even the honey) are toxic to most animals. However, some Native Americans used it externally for rheumatism and killing insects. People also carved spoons from the wood, giving this shrub the nickname, Spoonwood. Today many people plant it as an ornamental for its beautiful flowers.



Stop 4

The Creek

The last stop, and the end of the trail, is the Observation Blind overlooking Kane's Creek. This creek is one of our visitors' favorite kayaking spots. Kane's Creek is a good place to see Bald Eagles all year, since many of them roost near here. Bald Eagles eat mostly fish, so they tend to hang out over bodies of water. The park has at least 40-50 Bald Eagles year round. September to October is the winter migration time for these birds, and over 100 have been seen here during this time! The Bald Eagles come here from the north since the bay rarely freezes completely. They start building nests in November and mate in December. One to three eggs are usually laid in February, with the chicks hatching by the end of April. By the end of June, the young eagles leave the nest, & all the eagles head to roosting areas, not returning to the nests until next year. River Otters are occasionally seen here when people kayak or canoe in the creek. So keep your eyes open when looking around!



Trail Information

The Eagle Spur Trail is a 1.29 mile easy hiking trail that consists of earth and gravel. It runs from the Kane's Creek Trail, through the woods and ends at a bird blind overlooking Kane's creek.

Eagle Spur Trail Self Guided Tour

Tour stops 1 through 4 are marked by numbers along the trail.



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Virginia State Parks

Mason Neck State Park

Eagle Spur Trail Self Guided Tour



www.virginiastateparks.gov

Mason Neck State Park

EAGLE SPUR TRAIL SELF GUIDED TOUR



History of Mason Neck

Mason Neck State Park is steeped in natural and cultural history, encompassing 1,825 acres. The park shares 'The Neck' with Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Pohick Bay Regional Park, Gunston Hall and BLM's Meadowood Special Recreation Area. Combined, these areas provide over 6,400 acres dedicated to recreation, preservation and wildlife management.

The first recorded history of Mason Neck was by Captain John Smith in 1608. He wrote of his meeting with the Dogue Indians and charted the chief's village of Tauxenent on his map of Virginia. The area was referred to as Doggs Island and Doeg Neck originally. Later, this peninsula received its current name from the Mason family.



During the 1800's and early 1900's, logging was the area's primary industry. The removal of mature pine, hardwood and the use of the pesticide DDT, led to the decline of the American Bald Eagle in the region.

In 1965 the Conservation Committee for Mason Neck formed to preserve the area from increasing development pressures. In July 1967, the Nature Conservancy made its first purchase of land to protect areas of Mason Neck. Later, funds were appropriated to federal, state and local agencies to begin buying land parcels from private land owners and the Nature Conservancy.

The park is now managed for passive recreation, environmental education and the protection and preservation of habitat for the American Bald Eagle and other animals in the area. Animals that frequent Mason Neck include: bald eagles, hawks, white-tailed deer, fox, beavers and over 200 species of birds.



Stop 1

Ferns

While the Eagle Spur Trail is a good place to look for eagles, this trail was actually named after the Eagle Scouts who built it. While standing on the bridge, see if you can find any ferns. These plants are some of the first true vascular (able to conduct water) plants. They don't have any flowers or seeds, but if you look closely, you may see their spores on the underside of the leaves. In the spring, many ferns grow by uncurling "fiddleheads" that turn into the leaves. Ferns are usually found in moist forests, where the trees prevent too much sunlight from reaching the forest floor. Some ferns can be eaten by humans and a few can even remove heavy metals or tapeworms!



Stop 2

Bumps on a Tree

Take a moment to look at this tree. One of the first things you'll notice is that it's covered in bumps. These are called galls or burls. The term varies from place to place. Many hardwood trees can have them. They can be caused by bacteria, fungi or insects. These are essentially tumors in the trees. However, unlike human tumors, these rarely hurt the tree unless they are in large numbers. Burls are prized by woodworkers for their grain pattern & shape. Unlike normal wood grain, burls don't have a single grain direction. This makes the wood form interesting patterns. Burls have been used for centuries for sculptures, furniture and wood veneer. This can be an issue as some places with trees like Redwoods, have had to deal with burl poachers. It is much better to let the burl grow and only harvest it after the tree has died naturally. When you walk in the woods, look at the trees & see how many you can find.