

Conestoga Trail Shuttle

Description: This is an 8.8 mile strenuous shuttle hike in the Holtwood Recreation Area along Lake Aldred in southeast PA. It features an easy walk along scenic Pequea Creek, the town of Pequea itself, a visit to a nineteenth century covered bridge, a tectonic cave, the beautiful Tucquan Creek Nature Conservancy and 5 overlooks. The strenuous rating is a result of 5 sets of steep ascents and descents throughout the hike. They are all relatively short but the emphasis is on the word steep. The final climb up to the Pinnacle Overlook has an elevation gain of 550 feet in about ¼ mile.

Directions from the junction of I-95 and MD RT543 in MD:

1. Travel north on MD Rt543 to MD Rt165.
2. Turn right onto Rt165. Rt165 changes to Rt74 as it crosses into PA.
3. Turn right onto Rt372
4. Cross the Susquehanna River on the Norman Wood Bridge. Turn left onto River road.
5. Watch for park sign for Pinnacle Overlook (left Turn and follow the road to its end). If the gate is locked park there. If it is open drive down to the overlook. Leave some cars there and continue to the trailhead.
6. To get to the north trailhead back track to the intersection with River Rd. Make a left onto River Road.
7. River Rd will make a hard right at it's junction with Bridge Valley Road. Turn right, staying on River Rd (May be called Martic Heights Drive at this point).
8. Turn Left at the next intersection (Hilldale Rd) to stay on River Rd
9. At a "T" intersection turn left onto Rt324. Cross bridge and park on right shoulder.

Trail Notes: The Conestoga Trail is blazed orange. A slanted double blaze denotes a change in direction. In rocky areas, the rocks themselves may be blazed.

Re-cross the bridge and turn right onto River Rd. Telephone poles carry the blazes. Near the end of a split rail fence will be double blazes directing you down to a wide trail. This used to be part of a trolley line that ran from Lancaster to Pequea. Turn left onto the trail and follow scenic Pequea Creek. At 1.34 arrive at a paved road and a covered bridge to the right. Continue straight on the road following the orange blazes.

At 0.4 miles from the covered bridge, walk through Pequea Campground. Ice Cream can be purchased at the camp store in season. The trail continues on the other side of the campground. You will walk along a gravel road with summer homes (many of them derelict and ready to come down) high up on the hill to the left.

At 1.7 miles from the campground pass Pequea Boat Club on the right. The blazes and this map direct you to turn left onto Ridge Road. I prefer to stay on the lower road and follow the lake. Pass the volunteer fire dept. on the right. The road will bear left, uphill and away from the lake. Watch for orange blazes on the right. Descend through the woods passing a spring house and crossing a woods road. The trail continues on the opposite side of the woods road. Climb steeply up a footpath to the Wind Cave (0.94 miles from the Ridge Rd intersection).

From the wind cave proceed to climb, sometimes through the rocks to the top of the ridge. In 0.42 miles you will descend through an area called Fat Pack Squeeze, cross House Rock Run and climb to House Rock Overlook.

Over the next 1.4 miles you will descend and climb through two small coves, crossing small streams as you go, and visit another overlook before descending towards Tucquan Creek. If you are prepared for a stream crossing you can cross an unmarked trail and follow the orange blazes across and down Tucquan Creek to the railroad tracks. Since I usually lead this hike in the cold months I turn right on the unmarked trail. At its crest it becomes a woods road. Follow this down towards the tracks. Towards the bottom turn left onto a footpath and follow it down to the tracks.

Turn left and cross a culvert over Tucquan Creek. On the other side of the culvert the trail resumes. To visit Tucquan Creek follow the trail through the rocks and Rhododendrons. A 0.25 miles round trip of the creek is include in the mileage as described. In this case the turn around point is a wooden bridge that traverses a blowout of the trail.

To complete the hike return to the tracks and turn left. Climb back up to the ridge. Shortly after reaching the top you will turn left onto a woods road. In a short distance you will turn right onto another footpath and slowly descend to the base of the Pinnacle (about 0.7 miles from Tucquan Creek).

Begin a steep climb up to a prominent rock out crop on the right and at 0.25 miles from the start of the climb arrive at the Pinnacle Overlook parking area.