

Hike River Mountain Loop

The River Mountain loop is a must explore. It is approximately 1.3 miles with a mix of open fields, shale, wood chips, creeks, and grassy meadow trail. It is suitable for beginner to advanced fitness levels.

Begin at the path between the Main Lodge and Main Camp Yurt 1. Follow the signs along the trail to learn more about the history, nature, and features of River Mountain. Wherever you are on property, it is very difficult (impossible, perhaps) to get lost. If you wish to turn back or cut the loop short, you can do so at any point. Please enjoy.

Bonus! Affirmations Loop

Along the hiking loop, a bonus option! Share one of the affirmations below with the group. Ponder as you walk the trail, following the signs for the River Mountain trail. Continue sharing and pondering as you walk through nature.

Sample Affirmations:

1. Trust the journey of your life, knowing that everything happens for a reason and that you're always where you need to be.
2. Smile, breathe, and go slowly.
3. You are exactly where you need to be.
4. May beautiful things fall into place in a thousand little ways you didn't expect.
5. Here's to learning to breathe freely, right here.
6. Every single breath you breathe is proof that you are finding a way through this.
7. Make time for the wildflowers. Make time for the unexpected joys that show up in the most ordinary places.
8. Discovering who you are beneath the layers is a lifelong journey. Be kind to yourself along the way.
9. Embrace the rhythm of each season.
10. May this be one of those seasons where you encounter beautiful things even in the smallest ways.
11. May you never discredit how far you have come, even while you are still on the journey.
12. Have gratitude for the little things even while you wait for bigger things to fall in place.

Hammock Hideaway - Forest Bathing

Relax and hang from the trees in Hammock Hideaway. Relax and try a few minutes of forest bathing (and maybe nod off for a nap in the trees).

Turn off your devices to give yourself the best chance of relaxing and enjoying a sensory, forest-based experience. Let your breathing slow and deepen — you might count to four as you inhale, and to six as you exhale.

Pause to take in your surroundings — notice the temperature, the play of light, the scents in the air. Take in your surroundings, engage all of your senses.

Sight - Notice colors, shapes, and movement — from canopy leaves to tiny moss patches.

Sound - Listen for layers of sound — wind through leaves, bird calls, distant water.

Smell - Inhale deeply — resin, earth, damp leaves, wildflowers.

Touch - Run your hand along bark, feel the texture of a leaf.

Research shows benefits kick in even after 20 minutes, but an hour or more deepens the effect. If possible, linger until you feel noticeably calmer or more grounded. Before leaving, take a moment to thank the forest — silently or aloud — for the space and experience. On your way out, walk slowly and notice how your body feels compared to when you arrived.

How to Build a Campfire

1.

Grab all of your campfire kit items - the lighter, the firestarter, kindling (small wood pieces), and dry firewood.

2.

Firestarters - they look little pucks of wood chips and we've given you a few in your accommodation. You'll need one to start a fire - grab one and set aside for a moment.

3.

Build a log cabin with 4 pieces of dry firewood. Stuff the log cabin with shredded paper bag and kindling (small wood pieces). Make sure you don't "overstuff" the log cabin, oxygen and air flow are essential for a fire.

4.

Grab your firestarter and place it in the center of your log cabin with the shredded paper bag and kindling. Light your firestarter cup.

5.

Make sure the firestarter continues to burn. It should then ignite the shredded paper bag, then the kindling, and then the firewood. Once your fire is burning and strong, add another piece of dry firewood. Again, don't overload your fire - fire needs oxygen and air flow!

S'mores by the Fire

A timeless tradition! Gather around your accommodation's private campfire pit to enjoy the classic sweet treat – s'mores! S'more kits are available for purchase in our guest kitchenettes in the Main Lodge and Meadow.

Burning Questions - Campfire Conversations

Some fun questions for around the campfire together!

- If you could have any superpower for a day, what would it be and how would you use it?
- What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you on a trip or adventure?
- If you could teleport to any place in the world right now, where would you go and why?
- What's your favorite animal, and what would you do if you could talk to it for an hour?
- What's the best dream you've ever had that felt like a real adventure?
- If you could invent a new holiday, what would it be called and how would we celebrate it?
- What's your most treasured memory from a family gathering or outdoor fun?
- If you found a magic lamp with three wishes, what would they be (no wishing for more wishes!)?
- What's a hidden talent you have, or one you wish you had?

Stargazing

Stargazing at River Mountain is unlike anywhere else! One great gazing spot are the benches at the Meadow Ceremony space, right off the trail between Meadow Camp and Main Camp.

Start by Looking Up

The first step to stargazing is a simple one: look up. Take the time to gaze up at the sky. Notice the position of the sun or the moon or try to find the brightest stars or planets such as Venus, which is so bright it is occasionally visible in the daytime. You don't need any equipment, just your eyes.

Locate the Big Dipper

Most of us know how to find the Big Dipper, a bright star pattern that's easily recognizable in the Northern Hemisphere and is found within the constellation Ursa Major (Big Bear). You can find the Big Dipper in the northern sky pretty much year-round. The Big Dipper (handle and bowl) helps point you to the Little Dipper (aka Ursa Minor). Follow the two stars on the outer edge of the bowl and trace a line up to find the North Star, or Polaris.

Locate Other Bright Star Patterns

Next, try looking for Cassiopeia, a bright W-shaped star formation in the northern sky. Both the Big Dipper and the Cassiopeia circle around the North Star (on opposite sides) and you're likely to see them year-round. For Cassiopeia, trace a line from the last star in the Big Dipper's handle through and past Polaris.

Another formation to look for is the Summer Triangle-three bright stars that are almost as bright as planets and the first you'll see after sunset. Deneb, Vega and Altair are part of what's called an asterism, a group of bright stars that aren't an official constellation. You can locate the Summer Triangle most times of the year, but it is most prominent in summer. Spotting the Summer Triangle can lead you to other stars. For example, Deneb, Vega and Altair are the brightest stars in their own constellations.

Stargazing Apps

A stargazing app is also another great way to locate stars and constellations for beginner stargazers. You can hold your phone up and these apps will know where you are. Stargazing apps include: Stellarium Mobile Sky Map, [Distant Suns](#), [Star Walk](#), SkyMap and [SkySafari](#).

Foraging

With over 1,000 mushroom species in the state Pennsylvania offers prime foraging opportunities. This guide highlights a few popular mushrooms, their seasons, and identification. Do NOT touch, take, or eat any of the mushrooms - just appreciate seeing them, if you do.

Morels (*Morchella* spp.)

- Season: Mid-April to mid-May (peak by Mother's Day)
- Where: Deciduous woodlands, near elm, ash, apple, or tulip poplar trees; prefer moist, well-drained soil.
- Identification: Honeycomb-like, pitted cap; hollow inside; colors range from gray to yellow or black.

Chanterelles (*Cantharellus* spp.)

- Season: Late June to September
- Where: Hardwood forests, near oaks or conifers; moist, humid areas (e.g., Weiser State Forest).
- Identification: Golden-yellow, trumpet-shaped; false gills run down the stem; apricot-like smell.

Chicken of the Woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*)

- Season: Late spring to early fall
- Where: On dead or dying hardwood trees (e.g., oaks); never in fields.
- Identification: Bright orange-yellow, shelf-like growth; no stem, fan-like clusters.

Hen of the Woods (*Grifola frondosa*)

- Season: Late summer to November
- Where: Base of oak trees or stumps in forests (e.g., Susquehannock State Forest).
- Identification: Large, brownish-gray, petal-shaped clusters; can weigh 10–30 pounds.

Oyster Mushrooms (*Pleurotus ostreatus*)

- Season: Spring to fall, especially after rain
- Where: On deciduous trees (beech, aspen) or fallen logs.
- Identification: White to light brown, shelf-like; decurrent gills; licorice-like smell.

Trees Find + Seek

Pennsylvania's diverse forests are home to a rich variety of trees, each with unique characteristics and ecological importance. This guide highlights six iconic trees found at River Mountain. Spot these trees throughout your explorations.

Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*): Deciduous, 60–100 ft tall; broad, rounded crown; 5-lobed leaves with vibrant red/orange fall color.

- Ecological Role: Provides shade, supports wildlife (e.g., squirrels eat seeds); key for maple syrup production.
- Uses: Sap for syrup; wood for furniture, flooring; iconic in PA forests.

Tulip Poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*): Deciduous, 80–120 ft tall; straight trunk; tulip-shaped, 4-lobed leaves; yellow-green tulip-like flowers in spring.

- Ecological Role: Nectar for pollinators; seeds for birds; fast-growing, supports forest regeneration.
- Uses: Lightweight wood for furniture, pulp; ornamental tree.

White Oak (*Quercus alba*): Deciduous, 60–100 ft tall; wide-spreading crown; rounded, lobed leaves; acorns in fall.

- Ecological Role: Acorns feed deer, squirrels, and birds; long-lived, stabilizes soil.
- Uses: Durable wood for barrels, furniture; historically used for shipbuilding.

Cedar (Eastern Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*): Evergreen, 30–65 ft tall; conical shape; scale-like, blue-green needles; small blue berries (cones).

- Ecological Role: Berries feed birds; dense foliage provides wildlife cover.
- Uses: Aromatic wood for chests, fence posts; essential oil; ornamental.

Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*): Deciduous, 75–100 ft tall; massive trunk; mottled, peeling bark (white/gray); broad, lobed leaves; round seed balls.

- Ecological Role: Thrives in wet areas; seeds for birds; stabilizes riverbanks.
- Uses: Wood for furniture, boxes; ornamental for shade.

Hemlock (Eastern Hemlock, *Tsuga canadensis*): Evergreen, 40–70 ft tall; conical crown; soft, short needles; small, hanging cones.

- Ecological Role: Shades streams, supporting fish; cover for deer, birds.
- Uses: Wood for construction, pulp; ornamental in landscapes.

Birds of the Allegheny Mountains

A total of 45 breeding bird species are found at River Mountain, including the endangered great blue heron and eastern whip-poor-will. Other wildlife species include white-tailed deer, black bear, beaver, raccoon, bobcat, gray squirrel, bald eagles, golden eagles, short-eared owls, brook trout, and eastern coyote. Amphibians and reptiles include the endangered box turtle, timber rattlesnake, gray tree-frog, American toad, green frog, spring peeper, bullfrog, and the rare ornate tree frog.

Great Blue Heron - A tall, elegant wading bird often seen along Sweet Root Creek, ponds, or wetland edges. Standing up to 4 feet tall with long legs, a dagger-like bill, and gray-blue plumage, they stand motionless before striking quickly at fish, frogs, or crayfish. Their slow, deliberate flight with tucked neck is distinctive.

Guest note: Look for them in shallow water or flying overhead at dawn/dusk. They are patient hunters — perfect for quiet observation from the trails.

Eastern Whip-poor-will - A nocturnal bird famous for its loud, repetitive “whip-poor-will” call that echoes through the forests and valleys at dusk and throughout the night during spring and summer. These cryptic, mottled brown birds are masters of camouflage, blending perfectly with leaf litter on the forest floor where they nest. They hunt insects in flight during twilight hours.

Guest note: You're more likely to hear them than see them. Listen for their distinctive call near wooded areas and meadows after sunset — a true soundtrack of a peaceful evening at River Mountain.

Red-tailed Hawk - One of the most common and widespread raptors in Pennsylvania, easily recognized by its broad wings and the distinctive reddish-brown tail visible when soaring. These powerful hawks perch on tall trees or utility poles along Black Valley Road and the ridges, scanning for small mammals, birds, and reptiles. Their sharp, raspy scream is a classic sound of the Allegheny Mountains.

Guest note: Frequently seen circling overhead or perched during the day. They are excellent hunters — enjoy watching their graceful flight with binoculars from a safe distance.

Baltimore Oriole - A vibrant songbird and one of the most colorful summer residents at River Mountain. Adult males are striking with bright orange plumage, a black head, and bold white wing bars; females are more subdued with yellowish-orange tones. Their rich, whistling song is a welcome sign of spring and summer.

Guest note: Listen for their flute-like song in treetops during the day from spring through early fall.

Yoga at the Platforms

Enjoy this gentle, beginner-friendly yoga practice that softly awakens the body and mind, improves flexibility, and cultivates a calm, centered state whenever you choose to practice. These five accessible poses require no prior experience, take only 10–15 minutes, and feel especially restorative when done outdoors. Move slowly, breathe deeply, and let the fresh air and surrounding nature deepen every stretch and breath.

Beginner-friendly poses to try outdoors:

Mountain Pose (Tadasana) - Stand tall with feet together or hip-width apart, arms relaxed or hands at heart center; feel rooted like an ancient tree while reaching toward the sky.

Tree Pose (Vrksasana) – Shift weight to one leg, place the opposite foot on the inner calf or thigh (never the knee), and bring palms together at the chest or overhead; sway gently like a tree in the breeze.

Cat-Cow Flow (Marjaryasana-Bitilasana) – On all fours, alternate arching and rounding the spine with each breath, releasing the back and syncing movement with the rhythm of inhalation and exhalation.

Child's Pose (Balasana) – Kneel, fold forward with arms extended or by your sides, forehead resting toward the earth; a soothing pause that feels like curling into the embrace of the ground itself.

Seated Forward Bend (Paschimottanasana) – Sit with legs extended, inhale to lengthen the spine, then hinge at the hips to fold forward; let gravity do the work while the morning air cools your back.

Buchanan State Forest & Mid-State Hiking Trail

Running through Buchanan State Forest, and just 3/4 miles from River Mountain, is Pennsylvania's Trail of the Year — The Mid-State Trail. The trail stretches 327 miles from Maryland to the New York border, crossing through the heart of Pennsylvania with some of the most scenic views overlooking Black Valley.

The Mid-State Trail is known as Pennsylvania's wildest trail. Wild means that the trail is less maintained than what you might expect. There are areas where the trail can be overgrown, down trees, and creek crossings. While the trail is marked, it can be confusing and you need to have a map or have downloaded the Alltrails app. There is no cell service. Please read our checklist below before starting your hike.

Hike Smart Checklist

- Hikes range from moderate to difficult due to elevation change and distance.
- We highly recommend out & back hikes to not get lost and turn back anytime.
- BE ALERT - There are timber rattlesnakes in Buchanan State Forest and along the trail. Listen and look for them. Stay on the trail and out of tall grass to see them. If you encounter one, distance yourself and wait for it to pass.
- Buchanan State Forest has many trails but few are marked or maintained. You can easily get lost if you choose a trail other than Garlic/Mid-State Trail.
- The Mid-State Trail is also labeled as "Garlic Trail."

- Stay on the trail - avoid tall grass, rocks, and brush! This is to avoid timber rattlesnakes as well as ticks.
- There is no cell service on the hiking trails.
- It is best to hike with another person or group.
- Take a photo of the map and download the Alltrails map on your phone.
- Bring plenty of water and a snack.
- Wear and bring bug spray.
- Wear pants to protect your legs from scratches, snakes, bugs, ticks, and poisonous plants.
- Check for ticks as you hike and upon return.
- Leave no trace.

Garlic Trail, AKA Mid-State Trail Guide

Highlights: Closest + Easiest to Get To; Trail is Marked with Orange/Red Blazes

Distance: Out and Back, Up to You

Overview: Begins with a gradual, long uphill along the creek. Scenic as you hike along the creek up into Buchanan State Forest. Out and back means you'll enjoy a gradual downhill on your way back to the car. Since this hike is along the creek, it can be very buggy on hot and humid summer days.

Directions to Trailhead: Take a right out of the River Mountain driveway. When the road splits, stay left, to head toward Rainsburg on Hwy 326. Drive 1.12 miles and the small parking area will be on your left. There is a small trailhead sign for Garlic Trail. The parking lot can fit about 4-5 cars. Trail is marked with orange/reddish blazes.

Google Maps Directions to Trailhead Parking



Apple Maps Directions to Trailhead Parking



Guest Guide with AllTrails Map of Hiking Trail



Hot Soaking Tubs

Soak in our hot soaking tubs located just outside of the Main Lodge. Available from 7am-9pm, daily.

Please open the cover and close the cover after use.

There are hot tub towels located outside along the Main Lodge building in the alcove.

Swim at Dewey's Pond

Dewey's Pond is a great spot for swimming on a hot day (or a cold plunge in late fall and winter!). The pond has a dock with a ladder so you can jump in and out as much as you'd like.

Dewey's Pond is located just across the bridge from the main lodge and up the hill to the right! Swim at your own risk, there is no lifeguard on duty.

Cool Off at Sweet Root Creek

Cool off and chill sitting along Sweet Root Creek. Sweet Root runs along our River Mountain trail, throughout the property and at the base of Warrior Ridge.

Mountain Mornings Coffee + Tea

Enjoy morning coffee and tea with a view of the sun rising over Warrior Ridge. We have comfy sofas, chairs, and picnic tables to settle into located right behind the Old Log Cabin.

Evening Happy Hour

Join us for complimentary happy hour including draft beer and Sweet Root Sangria from 5-6pm in the Old Log Cabin.

Bean Bag Toss - Cornhole

Gather and play together! Bean bag/cornhole boards and bags are available for guests at The Terrace behind the Old Log Cabin (stored under the walkway) and under every cabin in the Meadow.

Board Games

Play games in the Old Log Cabin next to the cozy fireplace and handcrafted tables.

Snowshoe

If the snow hits, we have snowshoes available for our guests to use. They are located in the "The Coop" between the barn and the greenhouse. Please bring boots to wear with them and warm layers. They are all the same size: adult, one-size fits most.