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Zaleski State Forest Backpack Trail

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Zaleski State Forest Backpack Trail

****This sample contains text and a map for the middle loop of the Zaleski Backpack Trail only****

County: Vinton, Athens, Hocking

Nearest town: Nelsonville

Total distance: 23.9-mile main trail; 10.25-mile south loop using day hike cutoff, 10.2-mile middle loop including visit to camp at Point H, 6.7-mile north loop

Hiking time: Approximately 4 to 6 hours each for the south and middle loops, 3 to 4 hours for the north loop, or up to 3 days for all loops in one trip

Trail conditions: Well established

Blazes: Main trail blazed orange, camp side trails and day hike cutoff blazed white

Water: Available at all backpack camping areas (Points C, D & H on the map)

Highlights: Secluded backcountry camps, Hewett Fork overlook, magnificent pine plantation, 19 interpretive stops

Maps: USGS 7.5': Mineral & Union Furnace; ODNR Div. of Forestry Zaleski State Forest Backpack Trail map; BackpackOhio.com eTrailsOhio

Contact Info: Zaleski State Forest, P.O. Box 330, S.R. 278, Zaleski, Ohio 45698-0330, phone: 740-596-5781; Lake Hope State Park, 27331 State Route 278, McArthur, OH 45651, phone: 740-596-5253

Internet: www.ohiodnr.com & www.lakehopestatepark.com

Getting There: From Nelsonville, Ohio take State Route 278 south for 12.5 miles, crossing State Route 56 in approximately 8 miles, to the trailhead parking lot on the left, across from the Hope Furnace. Alternately, from US 33 heading southeast past Logan, turn right onto Laurel Run Road 2.5 miles past the interchange of US 33 and State Route 595. Follow Laurel Run Road for 4.75 miles until it dead ends into State Route 56. Turn left, and follow State Route 56 for just over 2 miles and turn right onto State Route 278 heading south. Follow State Route 278 for 4.8 miles to the trailhead.

Trailhead coordinates: 39.3315°N, 82.3399°W (WGS84); UTM 17 384503E, 4354206N (NAD27); UTM 17 384517E, 4354423N (NAD83)

Background

Covering almost 27,000 acres, Zaleski State Forest is Ohio's second largest state forest. Along with Lake Hope State Park located at the center of the forest, the region is rich in nature, outdoor recreation and history. The 120-acre "C" shaped Lake Hope lies at the center of the state park and provides fishing, swimming and paddling recreation. Rental cottages are located on a ridge above the middle of the arcing lake and a 187 site crowd-free campground is located on scenic Furnace Ridge, just to the north. In February 2006, a fire destroyed the rustic stone and wood Hope Dining Lodge, which overlooked the lake and sat near the cottages. Over 20 miles of top rated mountain bike trails twist and turn along the ridges throughout the park.

If not for remnants of the Hope Furnace across State Route 278 from the backpack trailhead, you wouldn't know the Zaleski area was once at the heart of a very important iron-producing region known as the Hanging Rock Iron Region. The Hope Furnace, starting in 1854, along with others in the area, blasted 24 hours a day for nearly twenty years and produced high-quality iron, some of which was made into ammunition and weaponry for the Union Army during the Civil War. Charcoal required for the smelting process came from mighty trees gracing the surrounding hillsides. By the time the furnaces shutdown, thousands of acres of real estate were almost completely stripped of their timber. Coal mining also had a period of prosperity in the region and many tangible remnants of this activity can be found throughout the area.

The path to development of the forest followed one similar to that which led to the development of Tar Hollow State Forest. In the 1930s, federal funds were used to purchase neglected lands for conservation and reforestation. A Civilian Conservation Corps camp was installed in the forest and became a temporary home for relief workers brought in to build roads, trails, structures and other improvements.

Hiking or driving through Zaleski State Forest is a unique experience. The forest is big and solitude is not hard to find (except on the south backpack loop in October). Wildlife and birds are plentiful and beaver activity abounds in many valleys. Rock cliffs can be found on steep hillsides and overhang caves at the heads of many ravines. The human history of the Zaleski area adds to its intrigue. Old roads, abandoned homesteads and towns, old cemeteries, mining ruins and even the abandoned and allegedly haunted Moonville train tunnel are reasons for you to stop, explore and ponder the past. In the future, the Moonville Rail-Trail will utilize the old railroad grade running through the forest--and the tunnel—on a route between Red Diamond and Athens.

A wonderful oak-hickory dominant second-growth forest covers Zaleski's hills. Native pines grow near dry rocky outcrops. Unfortunately, a questionable forest management plan, with a history of igniting newsmaking protests, has brought large timber harvests close to trails and sensitive areas. These areas create localized eyesores but are not noticeably widespread throughout the forest. The ridges on which Zaleski's trees are firmly rooted reach an average elevation relief of 300 feet, topping out at 1000 feet above sea level or slightly higher. Ridgetops are narrow and slopes are steep. Raccoon Creek is the largest drainage feature in the forest and its lowest point, exiting the southeast corner of the forest at an elevation of 690 feet above sea level.

The Trail

The Zaleski Backpack Trail is one of the state's most—if not the most—popular overnight hiking destinations. Many Ohio backpackers and group outings make the Zaleski Trail an annual stop on their backpacking schedule. It's no wonder so many return so often, Zaleski has a lot to offer. This scenic trail passes by many points of biological, geological and historical interest, several of which are highlighted in text (included in this document) and marked in the field by 19 numbered Carsonite signs, making this the only self-guided interpretive backpack trail in the state.

The main trail's 23.9 miles are laid out in a long contorted loop, with a cutoff side trail at the southern end and a one-mile section of two-way trail connecting a smaller northern loop. Most hikers refer to the sections of the Zaleski Trail in terms of its *south loop*, *middle loop* and *north loop*. The configuration of the trail offers many trip options to day hikers and single night backpackers. Plan on a double-overnighter to hike all three loops in one trip, or to hike the 18.1 miles of a combined south and middle loop trip.

The trailhead is located on State Route 278 across from the historic Hope Furnace, at a point on the trail where you'll have the option to start on the middle or south loop. There is paved parking for a dozen or so vehicles. A wooden kiosk stands on the south side of the lot. Overnight backpackers are required to self-register here before starting. Registration forms, along with the Division of Forestry's version of the trail map, are available in a wooden box at the kiosk. Be sure to look for any postings regarding recent trail changes or temporary reroutes at the kiosk as well. No fee is required for hiking or camping.

The main trail is very well blazed with orange paint for travel in either direction. Side trails to camping areas and the cutoff trail are blazed with white paint. Carsonite and wooden signs are often used as additional navigational aids where sudden turns, junctions or road crossings may present confusion. In addition to navigational signage and the 19 Carsonite signs marking interpretive points of interest, you'll also see lettered Carsonite signs (A – Q, but no I). These lettered signs are distance references relating back to a chart on the Division of Forestry's map. Both the lettered reference signs and the numbered interpretive signs are laid out for a counterclockwise direction of travel.

Backcountry camping is permitted at designated camps only. There are a total of three designated camping areas along the trail, two along the south loop and one at the north end of the two-way section of trail between the middle and north loops. At each of the camping areas, you will find several established campsites, most with small metal fire rings. Individual campsites range in size from small to large, with a few large enough for several tents. In the vicinity of each of the three camping areas, you'll also find pit latrines and supplied potable water. Having potable water waiting at camp gives you the option to carry only enough water for the hike in, thus lowering your pack weight considerably. If you choose this option, be certain to check on water status with forest headquarters before heading out.

Middle Loop

Zaleski's middle loop features scenic sections of ridge and hollow walking, but lacks other points of interest to break the monotony of trees. The trail stays within a few hundred feet of roads for nearly one-third of its distance, limiting your sense of solitude. The east side of the loop, as you approach Point G, contains a mile long section of nice ridgetop walking through mature oaks. Conversely, the west side of the loop possesses a nearly two-mile section of very nice hollow walking through Stony Hollow. This is the middle loop's most scenic section and features many interesting rock formations.

Completing an overnight trip on the middle loop would require a stay at the picturesque ridgetop camp at Point H on the map. The total distance for this trip is 10.2 miles. Day hikers would not have to hike the out-and-back section of trail to Point H, lowering the day hike distance to approximately 8.3 miles. The distance to the camp at Point H from the trailhead is 4.6 miles, which would leave 5.6 miles for a second day's hike. An early arrival to camp would give you enough time to hike all or a portion of the must-do north loop.

The first 0.7 mile of a middle loop hike is shared with the south loop. Upon arrival to the junction with the cutoff trail, you'll go straight. South loop hikers will take a right here. For the next 0.6 mile you'll hike the cutoff trail, crossing a gravel road, to Point F and a junction where the middle loop breaks away from the south loop and the cutoff trail. From Point F, it's a 2.4-mile walk to Point G over a section of trail closely paralleling State Route 278 to the left. The first mile of this section passes through a 2006 timber harvest, but finishes nicely with a beautiful section of ridge before dropping to Point G in Morgan Hollow. Interpretive signs 10 and 11 are passed along the way.



Point G

trail coming into camp from the west.

There are four established campsites along the camp side trail here. The first one is quite large, with room for a small tent city. The white blazes of the side trail stop after 300 yards, but you will find at least two other smaller campsites a little farther down the trail.

When returning to Point G from camp, care must be taken to find the correct trail or you may end up unknowingly heading west on the north loop. Be certain to walk back to the pit latrine to pick up the two-way section of trail heading down to Point G. As mentioned, the north loop comes into camp from the west, closer to camp than the trail from Point G. Many hikers will jump on the first trail they see when making the return trip, only having to backtrack when they realize their error.

Back in Morgan Hollow and Point G, the middle loop heads west and soon crosses Sandy Run and emerges onto State Route 278, Point M on the map. Turn left and walk SR 278 for just under 0.1 mile, past interpretive sign 17 along the way, and turn right on the first gravel road. This is Point N on the map. After a few paces on the gravel road, the trail leaves the left side of the road and climbs Starrett Ridge via one of the only switchbacks you'll encounter on the entire length of the Zaleski Trail. Halfway up the hill in winter, you can look north to the opposite hillside and see a gated old mine entrance. On Starrett Ridge, you'll be walking on an old road and past interpretive signs 18 and 19. There are several trail splits and forks along the section of trail on Starrett Ridge. The trail is well marked with blazes here, but care must be taken to stay on course.

Starrett Ridge gives into Long Ridge about 1.5 miles after Point N. Near this juncture, the trail will begin to parallel Twomile Road, and does so for nearly the next mile. Private property can be seen off to the right and several unofficial trails coming off the road will cross the main trail. At the end of this section, the trail will cross Irish Ridge Road, Point O on the map, and start a drop into Stony Hollow. The next 1.7 miles of trail travel along the floor of scenic Stony Hollow or just above it at the base of the east hillside. The trail passes by many vibrant green moss covered boulders and rock faces. The trail also passes under a large rock shelter. Expect to cross the stream in Stony Hollow a minimum of ten times; but they are easy and will not pose a problem except in bad weather.

The mouth of Stony Hollow is very wet and marshy. The trail is not well blazed or easy to follow for a short section through this area. You'll most likely end up leaving the trail momentarily to take a detour on the base of the left hillside around some of the wetter spots. After the marsh, the trail will emerge onto a large sweeping curve of Furnace Ridge Road, the road leading to the state park campground. This intersection of trail and road is Point P on the map. Hike a short distance straight ahead to State Route 278 and turn right to return to the trailhead.



Stony Hollow

Middle Loop Trail Notes and Mileage

- 0.0** Start from the trailhead parking lot on State Route 278. Walk 100 yards south on the left side of the road to a metal footbridge. This is Point A on the map.
- 0.15** Arrive at a marked junction where the Olds Hollow Trail forks right. Take this trail as an alternate to see an old cemetery and rock shelter.
- 0.5** Arrive at a junction where the Olds Hollow Trail rejoins the main trail.
- 0.7** Come to a junction with the cutoff trail. Go straight.
- 0.8** Arrive at the road crossing of T-4.
- 1.25** Arrive at the junction with south loop trail and where the middle loop breaks away. Turn left. This is Point F on the map. Nearby is interpretive stop 9. If you look at the rock outcropping on the south side of the trail, you will notice vertical grooves cut into the face of the sandstone. These are drilling marks left when this site was used as a stone quarry. The sandstone from this site could have been used to build one of the local iron furnaces, railroad abutments or local structures.
- 2.25** Pass interpretive sign 10. How well do you know your native Ohio hardwood trees? There are 14 numbered trees in the immediate vicinity of this post. Can you identify them all? The answers are located on the Division of Forestry's map.
- 3.1** Pass interpretive sign 11. The trail makes a 90 degree left turn. The 20 acres to your north were regenerated in 1987. In this area, foresters have enhanced the natural cycle of the forest by creating an opening in the canopy allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor. This encourages certain tree species, such as the oaks and hickories, to thrive naturally. Wildlife also benefits from variation in the height of cover resulting from this practice. Similar areas are found throughout this forest.
- 3.7** Arrive at an intersection (Point G on the map) with a two-way section of trail leading to the camping area at Point H. Turn right if camping. Turn left if day hiking.
- 4.0** The trail joins an old road coming uphill from the left.
- 4.2** Pass interpretive sign 16. The road that you are now walking on was used during the 1860's to haul charcoal to the Hope Furnace.
- 4.35** The trail makes an abrupt left turn from the old road.
- 4.6** Arrive at the Point H camping area. A pit latrine is located on the right as you approach. Follow the trail to a gravel road and turn left. A water hydrant is located to the right and a short white-blazed side trail to several campsites forks to the left. Take note of the north loop trail entering camp from the west. Do not take this trail when leaving camp. Go back to the latrine to find the trail back to Point G.
- 5.5** Arrive back at Point G. Go straight. In a short distance you will cross Sandy Run and emerge onto State Route 278 (Point M on the map). Turn left and follow SR 278.
- 5.55** Pass interpretive sign 17 on SR 278. The structure you see is a metering station, used in the Lake Hope mine sealing demonstration project. The building contained instruments that monitored water quality and flow.
- 5.6** Turn right onto Big Four Road. This is Point N on the map. Follow the road for a few paces and watch for the trail to leave the left side of the road and head uphill.
- 6.1** An old road joins faintly from left. Stay straight.
- 6.3** Pass interpretive sign 18. You are on an old township road, used until around 1920. It was during this period that the last of the farms on what is now Zaleski State Forest were being abandoned. The trail splits for 100 yards and then rejoins just past the interpretive sign.
- 6.5** Watch for a fork in the trail. The old road continues on the left fork and the trail takes the right fork.
- 6.6** Pass interpretive sign 19. This is the site of a former farm. Be careful not to fall into old wells and cellars. Some additional clues to indicate that this was a former farmstead are foundation stones, old fencerows and ornamental, shade, and fruit trees. Approximately 100 yards past interpretive sign 19, the trail forks and comes back together, both forks are blazed. In another 50 yards, the trail will fork to the left in two places, rejoining a few yards down the trail. Going straight here will take you onto Twomile Rd. just ahead and near private property.
- 7.1** The trail crosses and old road and is offset 30 feet to the right on the opposite side.
- 7.4** The trail crisscrosses an unofficial path.
- 7.8** Emerge onto Irish Ridge Road. The trail continues straight across the road. This is Point O on the map. The trail descends into Stony Hollow a short distance ahead.
- 8.7** The first of ten stream crossings in Stony Hollow.
- 9.1** Walk under an interesting rock shelter.
- 9.9** Emerge onto sweeping curve of Furnace Ridge Road. Go straight to State Route 278 and turn right for a short walk back to the trailhead.
- 10.2** Arrive back at the trailhead.

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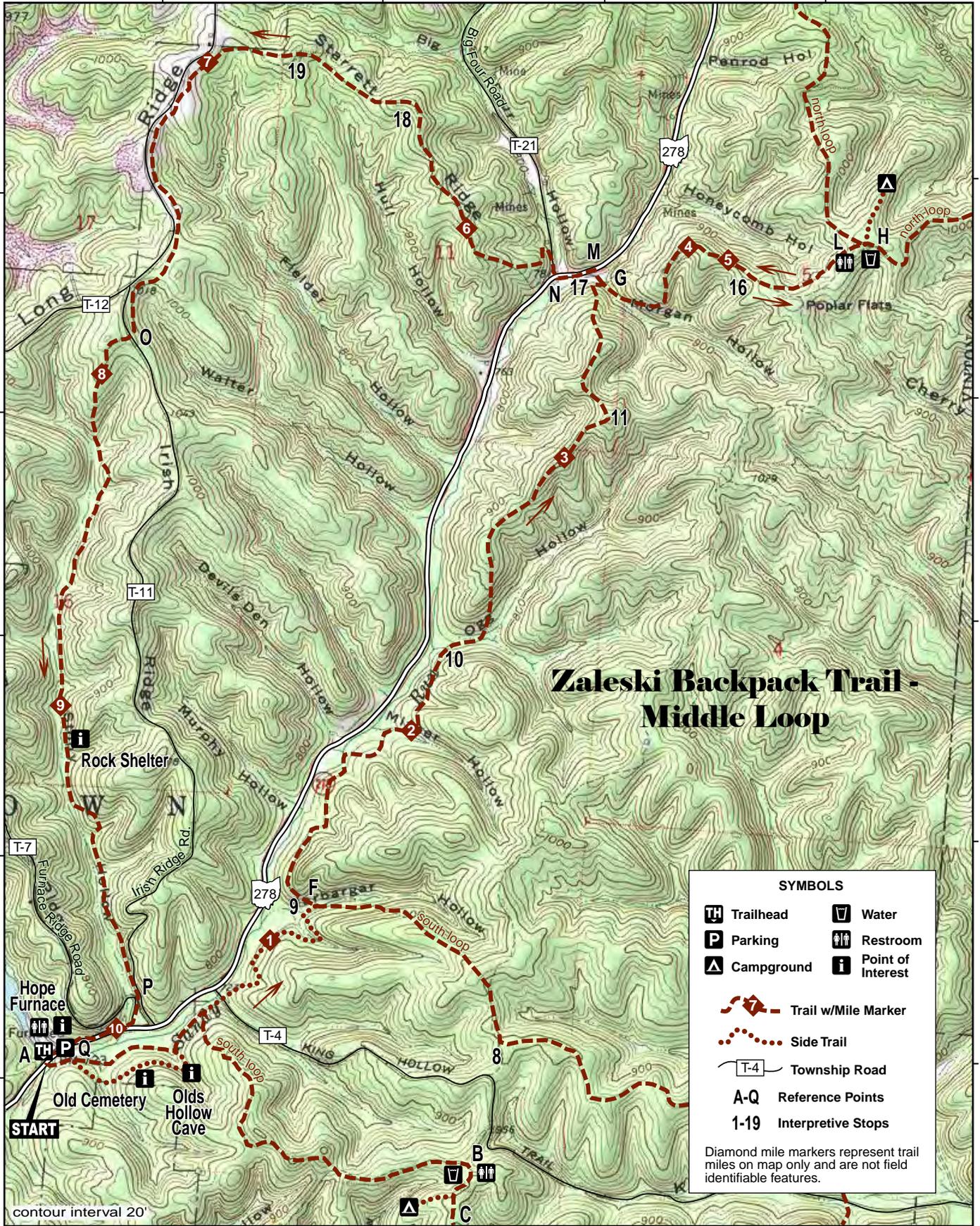
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Zaleski Backpack Trail - Middle Loop

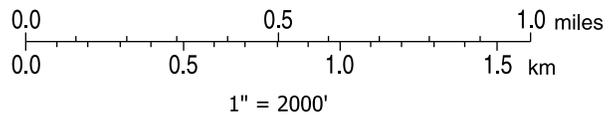
SYMBOLS

Trailhead	Water
Parking	Restroom
Campground	Point of Interest
Trail w/Mile Marker	
Side Trail	
Township Road	
A-Q Reference Points	
1-19 Interpretive Stops	

Diamond mile markers represent trail miles on map only and are not field identifiable features.



Base map created with TOPO!
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1000-Meter UTM 17 Grid
NAD 27

