

Day Hike, Seneca Creek and Clopper Lake Loop Trail near Gaithersburg, MD

This loop hike was supposed to be around 6.1 miles. However, with me getting lost, it ended up being over 7 miles. It took place on Wednesday, August 2, 2023.

I got up at 4:00 AM to do this hike. It was the first time in a month that the low temperature was in the bearable range to do a hike. I wanted to go out on Monday but Julie R was sick and I had to take care of her Monday and Tuesday. I left home at 5:15 AM and was supposed to get to the trailhead on Riffle Ford RD by 6:15 AM. But because the traffic light at the intersection of VA234 and US29 in the Manassas Battlefield didn't give northbound VA234 traffic a green light for three cycles, I had to follow slow trucks and clowns and I wasted time pulling into the 7-11 at US15 and VA234 only to find out they were out of regular and plus gas, I didn't get to the trailhead until 7:30 AM.

It was 59 degrees when I started this hike. Perfect hiking weather. I parked my vehicle along the shoulder of where Seneca Creek and the Seneca Creek Greenway cross Riffle Ford RD just south of Germantown, MD. There was room for about a dozen vehicles at the trailhead. There were no other cars or people around. I started out along what looked like an old road. About fifty feet after I started there was an another old road/trail to the right. I started to take this but turned around. Please



*Selfie at trailhead.
By Mike Calabrese*



*Trailhead sign.
By Mike Calabrese*



*Seneca Creek.
By Mike Calabrese*

don't take this route. For this hike I utilized

[Google Maps](#) and the [AllTrails](#) app.

After about 500 feet I passed a sign for the Seneca Creek Greenway. The trail was blazed light blue and then turned right at what appeared to be two sets of barriers across the trail that went straight ahead. I would find out why these barriers were there on the return trip. I passed under Great Seneca HWY in about a half mile. Just after this bridge I would veer right onto the gray blazed Mink Hollow Trail. This trail would then lead me to the dark blue blazed Lake Shore Trail. This is the trail that would take me around Clopper Lake.

All of the trails in this area appeared well used and well maintained. What was interesting was that I had a tough time orienting my self on this trail. There were many inlets on this lake. By the way it was about the same size as Burke Lake in VA. At one point I thought that I had reached the eastern side of the lake. But it was just an inlet. I wouldn't reach the eastern side of the lake for another half hour or so. I saw a boat house across the lake at one point. I thought that I would reach it within 45 minutes. It took over an hour This was the 90% point in my hike around this 3.7 mile trail.

I passed a number of people on this trail. Most were senior citizens like myself. You know that you are a slow hiker when people pass by you twice when hiking a loop trail like this one. When I got to the boat house I took a break on a bench and ate some stuff. There was a lady on a grassy area close by leading a Tai chi class complete with music from a boom box. There were about 8 people in the class. It



*Seneca Creek Greenway sign.
By Mike Calabrese*



*Blue blaze.
By Mike Calabrese*



*Beginning of trail.
By Mike Calabrese*

seemed to be very relaxing and therapeutic. After my break I hiked through a few wooded areas and grassy areas. Here is where the trail got confusing.

At around the 5 mile mark you have to leave the Lake Shore Trail and get onto the Seneca Creek Greenway/Long Drought Trail to make your way back to your vehicle. This is around the 9:00 position on Clopper Lake. When you see a line of vehicles on the hill to your right break away from the Lake Shore Trail, walk through the parking lot towards the turn around circle and take the short trail from the turn around circle out to a three way intersection. The park road is to your left and right. A road that goes to some picnic pavillions goes straight ahead. There is a trailhead on the left side and a trailhead to the right side across the street from where you come out to this three way intersection. Take the trail on the left side as that is the Seneca Creek Greenway/Long Drought Trail.

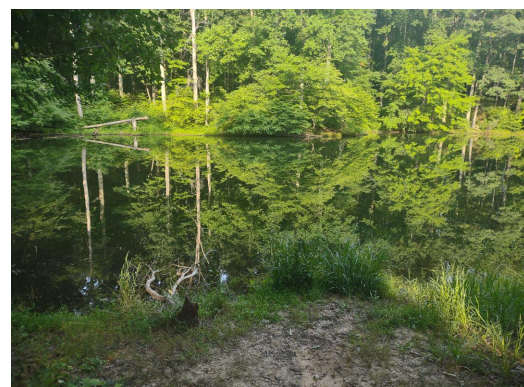
The problem I had was that the trail and signing for the Seneca Greenway/Long Drought trail was recessed from the road. The trailhead to the right of this intersection was very visible. It was the orange and green blazed Long Drought/Great Seneca Trail. This was very confusing. I took the trail to the right. I went a half mile or so and something didn't feel right. This trail didn't show up on Google Maps. So I checked my compass app and, to my horror, I was headed northbound instead of south. So I had to backtrack to the three way intersection. I tried asking some people where the Long Drought Trail was but they didn't speak English. I flagged down a passing Maryland State Trooper and told him that I was



*MORE bricks.
By Mike Calabrese*



*Graffiti, Great Seneca HWY bridge.
By Mike Calabrese*



*Reflection.
By Mike Calabrese*

lost. He checked the maps in his vehicle, then got out of his vehicle to survey the area. He saw a hiker coming out of the woods to the left of the three way intersection. He said that was the way that I needed to go. I thanked him and continued.

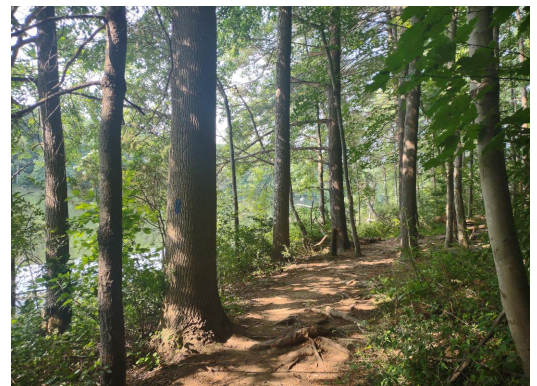
This was the final mile of the hike. I encountered a few blowdowns, then some confusing signage. I could have taken a side trail back to the Seneca Greenway Trail and my vehicle. But I wanted to follow the AllTrails map. So I went straight into what the signage called the wetlands. I'm glad that I was wearing long pants as this section of the trail was very overgrown. I passed a few informational plaques and an observation tower. Then I got to a tributary of Seneca Creek. There was the remains of an old bridge in the creek bed so this must have been a road at some point. The tributary wasn't deep water wise but the stream bed itself was. I had to climb down into it, then climb out of it to continue. I then passed those two wooden barriers that I passed on the way in, then got back to my vehicle at around 11:45 AM. It was then 83 degrees.

This was a challenging but good hike. I plan to do the remaining 12 miles of the Seneca Creek Greenway Trail between Riffle Ford RD and the Potomac River in sections in the future as time permits. It will take me six or seven trips if I do this by myself or three or four trips if I get someone else to hike it with me and have a shuttle vehicle. Anyone interested?

Mike C



Clopper Lake.
By Mike Calabrese



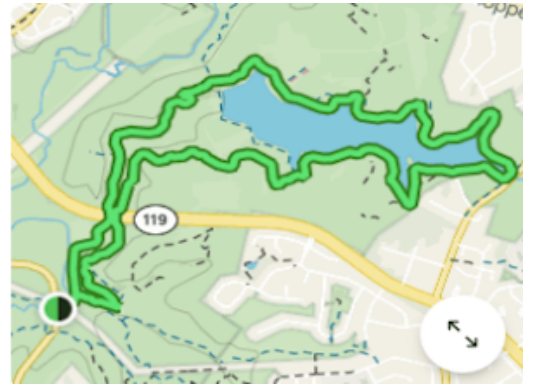
Lakeside Trail.
By Mike Calabrese



Observation Tower.
By Mike Calabrese



Final stretch.
By Mike Calabrese



Map of where I hiked.
By AllTrails