

Great Hikes on the Rivanna Trail Recommended for Young Children and Their Families

1 Woolen Mills (*Distance less than 0.2 mile round trip. Footing difficult at start but great for children who are good scramblers and explorers.*)

To get there: Park at the end of East Market St. before the “no parking” signs. Walk the final length of Market St. past old brick mill houses. Look for a trailhead on the left beyond the Private Garden but before the gated entrance to Allied Storage.

Description: Carefully make your way down a steep hillside toward the Woolen Mills dam. The footing here can be tricky, but at the bottom there’s plenty of history and wild land to explore. Note the huge stones that were used to build the dam. Turn right to hike along a sandy rocky path. Go under the tall railroad bridge. Make your way down to what looks like a sandy beach. You are now near the mouth of Moore’s Creek where it empties its water into the Rivanna River. The sandbar has been formed by sand and silt that the creek waters carried downstream. Above you are the historic Woolen Mills buildings. The original mill buildings were built in the 1830s. People worked in the mills producing such things as cloth for soldiers’ uniforms until the 1960s. On your return trip if you are feeling adventurous, rock hop over a tiny stream to the right to Sand Bar Island. There are no trails marked here, but it’s fun to bushwhack to the other side of the island to the Rivanna River. If you look carefully, you might find animal footprints or signs that beaver live here. From the most southern tip of the island (downriver) you get a good view of the elaborate brick smoke stack of the old Rivanna River Power Plant.

2 Riverview Park past Free Bridge to VFW (*Distance about 4 miles for full out and back, 1 mile for shorter loop. Footing easy. Hard-surfaced trail suitable for strollers.*)

To get there: Park in Riverview Park at the end of Chesapeake St.

Description: As you start down the meadow path at the far end of the parking lot, be alert for small animals hiding in the thick brambles. In about half a mile you’ll reach a trail junction overlooking the Rivanna River. The trail to the right will return you to the start, making a one-mile loop. Follow the trail to the left through a buffer of lush vegetation that protects the water quality of the river and is home to both visiting and resident birds. If you peek down to the river you might see geese, ducks, or (in summer) turtles sunning themselves on logs. Along the trail you might see tree stumps, clues that beaver live here. You will also find huge exposed rocky cliffs, a place to get down to the river for cooling your toes, picnic tables for snacks, and views of Darden Towle Park. On your return to the parking lot, you may stay along the river the whole distance for a change of scenery.

3 Holmes Ave. to Park St. (*Distance about 1 mile for out and back. Footing moderate, simple dirt footpath with exposed roots.*)

To get there: Park on Holmes Ave. just beyond the guardrails near the Rivanna Trail sign. Start your hike to the west (to the left if your back is to city center).

Description: This forest trail takes you to places where you can hear squirrels, birds, wind in the trees, and Meadow Creek tumbling over rocks. Cross a tiny stream on rocks. Follow the trail through spicebush, ferns, sycamores, and thick grapevines. Turn around just before the Park St. bridge. On your way back you can stop to explore in the shallow creek waters. Many small aquatic animals hide under rocks. Please leave them in their stream homes when you are finished investigating.

4 Melbourne Road Loop (*Distance 1.5 mile loop. Footing moderate, simple dirt footpath, one steep hill at the start.*)

To get there: Park on Melbourne Rd. 0.2 mile uphill from its intersection with Park St., near the trailhead sign next to the playing fields.

Description: From the trailhead sign, follow the switch-back trail down to the Rivanna Trail. Turn left. After a short open stretch under power lines and past commercial buildings, the trail leads into forest far away from the sounds of people. The trail is lined with thick shrubby vegetation that provides great hiding places for animals. Bird activity is very high at almost any time of the year. Walk quietly and listen for the rustling of wings or leaves. The trail follows Meadow Creek. Views through the bushes provide excellent examples of stream bank erosion. During heavy rain storms, water sheets off parking lots, roads, driveways, and roofs, increasing the flow rate of the creek dramatically. The forest helps prevent erosion by softening the fall of rain drops, by slowing downhill movement of surface water, and by holding onto soil with roots. Near the railroad underpass turn left off the Rivanna Trail onto a trail that will return you to the trailhead. Be sure to look for the magnificent old trees growing along the right side of this old road bed.

5 Department of Forestry Nature Trail (*Distance 1 mile loop. Footing moderate, several long hills.*)

To get there: Enter Fontaine Research Park from Fontaine Ave. At the top of the hill turn right onto Ray C. Hunt Dr., which becomes Natural Resources Dr. Follow the road to the Department of Forestry. Turn left before the visitors’ parking lot, and follow the road around to behind the brick

headquarters building. Look for the Nature Trail welcome sign at far side of parking lot. Follow numbered sign posts.

Description: A detailed interpretive trail guide can be found at Forestry’s headquarters or online at www.rivannatrails.org. Follow links to “Our Trails” and “Forestry’s Nature Trail.”

This nature trail contains a wealth of natural resources for learning about the ever-changing nature of Virginia forests: old farm fences and huge pines and hardwood trees from the days when a Forestry tree nursery stood here. Investigate different pine needles and cones that soften the forest floor. Pines can be identified by the number of needles in each needle bundle (count them!) and by the type of prickles on the cones (be careful!). Walk quietly when you reach the incredibly thick vegetation on the banks of Maury Creek. Animal life can be very active here. The many species and sizes of plants here provide a variety of food and homes. Look for signs of beaver. This section of trail along the creek shares the footpath with the Rivanna Trail. Follow numbered posts away from the Rivanna Trail to return to the trailhead.

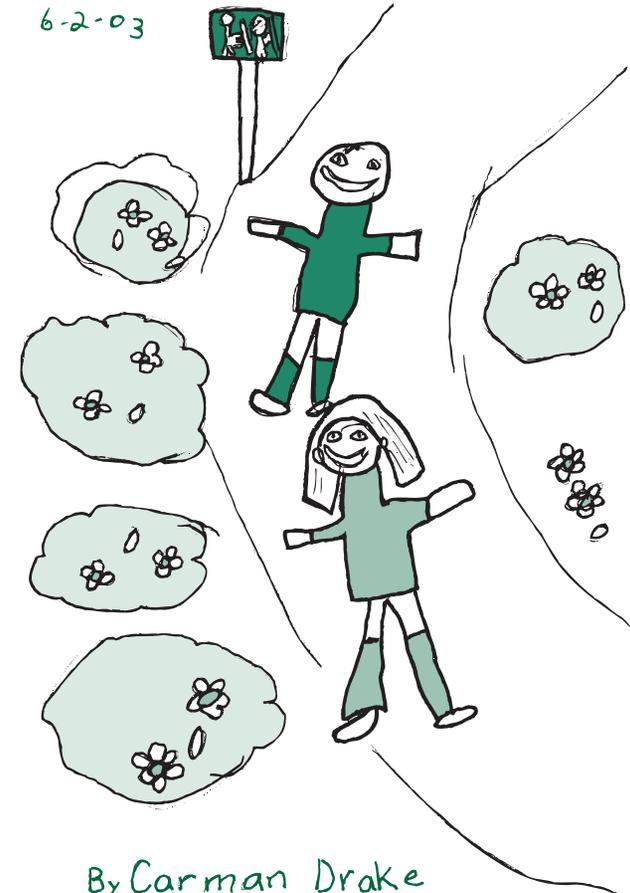
6 Jordan Park (*Distance about 1.5 miles out and back. Footing moderate, some exposed roots.*)

To get there: Park in Jordan Park at the end of 6th St. Walk all the way across the park, keeping the creek on your left and the play equipment on your right. Cross a tiny stream, climb a short hill, and turn left.

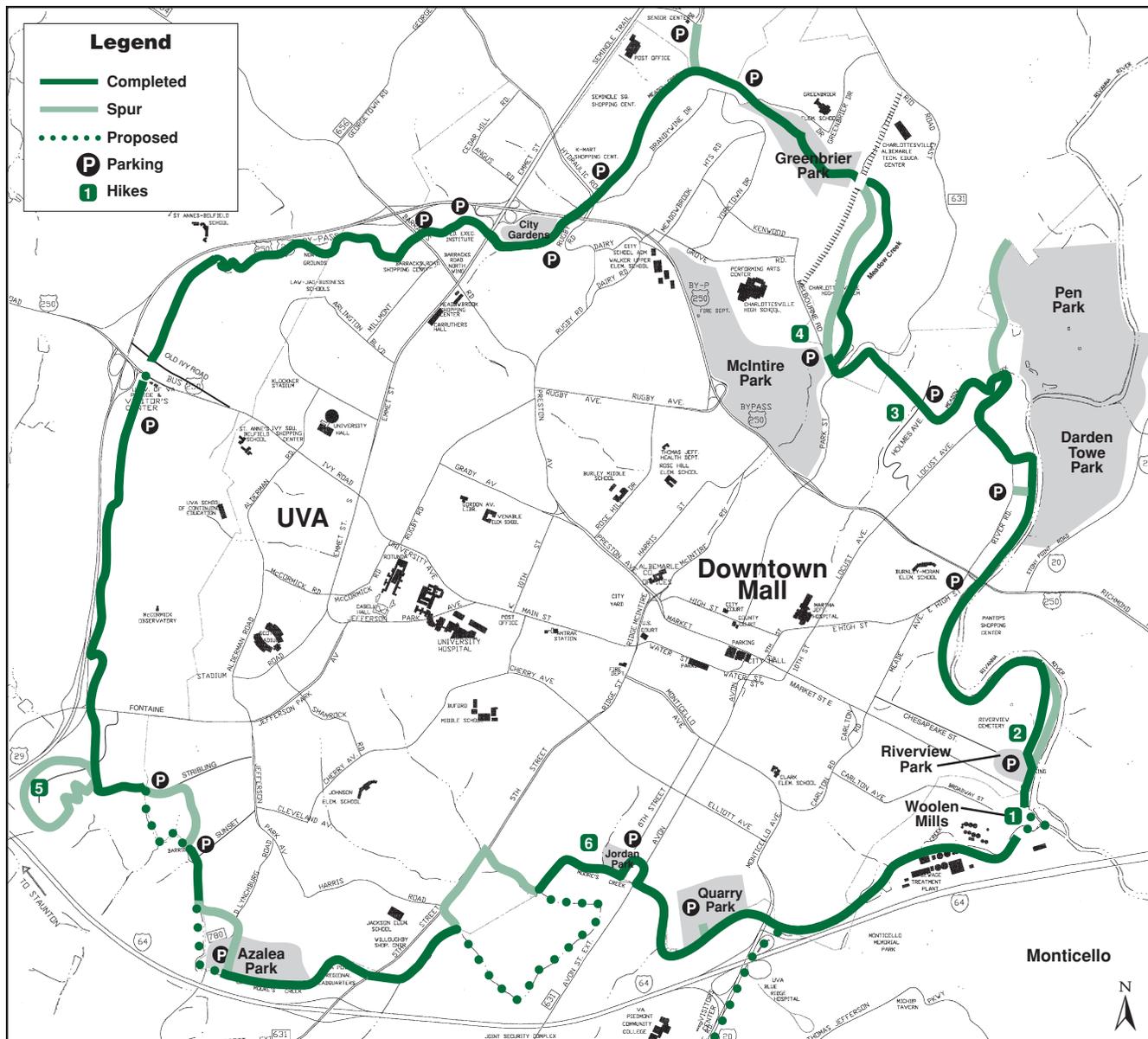
Description: Twist and turn through the forest that protects Moore’s Creek. Peer through the trees to look for wildlife near the water. After a small footbridge and a short clearing, walk through a forest dense with ferns, spicebush, and big old trees. Because of the relatively large area of forest between the stream and any houses, birds seem to love this area. At one point the trail crosses an old road that goes to the left down to Rock Creek. This is a fun place for stopping and exploring the shallow creek. The Rivanna Trail continues along Rock Creek through huge beech trees (the bark of beeches looks a little bit like elephant skin). The trail now follows an old sewer road with Rock Creek on your left and a beautiful forested hill on your right. Turn around at 5th St. On your return look for the huge beech that marks the turn in the trail to the right, away from the old road. Just before you get back to Jordan Park, there is a side trail that goes off to the left to a wet area filled with cattails. These wetlands are an unusual habitat in Charlottesville and are definitely worth a visit.

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6-2-03



By Carman Drake



Rivanna Trails Foundation (RTF) is a nonprofit organization that creates and maintains the Rivanna Trail completely through the efforts of volunteers. We welcome families with young children to join us on our trail building work parties.

For more information about RTF visit our website at www.rivannatrails.org or call our voicemail at 434-923-9022.



Hiking tips:

- Hike with a buddy.
- Keep the trails clean. Pack out all trash.
- Stay on the trails. Most of our trails are on private property. Landowners have generously allowed the public to hike on the trails. We want to respect their privacy. We also want to protect wildlife habitat. Dogs must be kept on leashes at all times.
- If you want to see more wildlife, hike in the early morning or late afternoon.

The Rivanna Trail is a rustic footpath that winds through the natural greenbelt that encircles Charlottesville, Virginia.

The Trail provides children and their families a safe setting in which to relax, exercise, and experience the urban wilderness that exists right outside our doorsteps. Hikers can walk along streams that empty their waters into the Rivanna River, observe plants and animals in their native habitats, watch the changes of seasons, and discover new things on every visit. We hope you have fun.