

“When the chance comes to you, take it.”

1. Main attractionl: Great Falls Park

Fresh air, waterfalls, sunshine, and the calls of falcons searching for their next meal created a symphony rushing through my ears. My phone was on silent, and with my notebook in hand, I knew this was true peace. While jotting down my latest ideas, I heard someone shout, “Hello!”. I looked up to the cliffs on the other side of the river, light tan rocks jaded from years of erosion. As I squinted through the sun rays, I realized it was Maryland hikers waving to me! Shouting “Hello” back, we had a very loud conversation over the gorgeous river below. Smiling as I returned to my notebook, I realized that this experience gave me faith in my community. Peace, joy, and a friendly bunch of locals enjoying the sunshine made Great Falls Park more attractive.

Inherited by Thomas Fairfax in 1719, The park carries beauty that has been preserved through the ages. Boasting various overlooks of the roaring falls can seem like the main attraction, but it is not the only one. Whitewater boating is prevalent in this section of the Potomac River, with difficulties ranging from Class II (moderately easy) to Class IV (Extreme). Occasionally you can see bystanders cheering the brave boaters on while continuing their adventure.

When everyone is tuckered out from hiking, boating, or sunbathing on the rocks, they gather at the visitor’s center and occupy one of the many grills for lunch. The smell of burgers and hot dogs fills the clearing by the visitor’s center, and dogs run around playing in the field. Families have used this central, open park area for generations to take a much-needed break and celebrate nature, making our town thrive.

With over fifteen miles of trails, there are plenty of places to stop and listen to the mourning doves, breathe in miles of open air, and watch great blue Hhrons fly overhead. My favorite place to stop is about a mile down the River Trail leading away from the visitor’s center. You are permitted to climb on rocks along some areas of the trail. You can see Maryland on the other side of the Potomac, and even make some Maryland friends if you can shout loud enough!

2. Personal Recommendation: Riverbend Park

As a local, I must inform you of the prices to enter the parks. Great Falls Park currently charges \$10.00 per car to enter. However, there is a beautiful way around this. This enchanting walk through the woods is located deeper in our neighborhoods, about two miles north of Great Falls Park. Riverbend is considered a regional park, while Great Falls is National. Meaning there is no entrance fee.

Weekdays are the best time to venture out, as weekends are typically packed with traffic, some cars even lining the streets in nearby neighborhoods (Which is permitted). If you get there early enough on the weekend (Around 8:00 AM), it’s easy to snag a parking spot and walk a mile from Riverbend to Great Falls Park. If you can’t find one, continue driving on Jeffery Road until you see a fork. Take a right and follow the signs to the nature center-most of the time; no one knows parking is allowed there.

Along with saving money, the Potomac Heritage Trail in Riverbend will give you a quiet riverside hike filled with protected plants and beautiful forests. Among these plants are the gorgeous bluebells, which residents come to see every spring. Fields line the trail and bring a

splash of color after a dry, cold winter. Bluebells to Great Falls are like Cherry Blossoms to D.C., locals and tourists alike can't get enough of them!

If you're a dog lover, this may be the trail for you! Many locals love taking their dogs on walks through Riverbend, as there are many new smells to explore. You can also expect many families enjoying themselves and laughing as they pass you on the trails with a cheery "Hello!". Make sure to leash up your furry family member, and clean up after them.

Benches line the river, with many great places to stop for a snack as you trek to more trails. These places to stop include a dam located closer to Great Falls Park. Be careful as the roots grow above the ground here and can be hazardous if you don't watch your step. Come prepared with your best hiking shoes and excitement!

3. Hiking in History: Scott's Run Nature Preserve

Scott's Run is not only gorgeous but also carries a significant history. Edward Burling, a co-founder of a prominent local law firm in the 1900s, once owned over 100 acres of land along the Potomac. He used the land as his personal park and would spend most of his time at a cabin built in what is now Scott's Run. Unfortunately, when Burling passed in 1970, developers wanted to buy the land from his heirs; they saw over 300 lots to profit from instead of a nature preserve. During this legal battle, the Burling Defenders were born. People from all over the county were willing to tax themselves to keep the acreage. They unfortunately did not win that battle. To commemorate the efforts of our community, a portion of Mr. Burling's cabin still stands strong in Scott's Run.

Today, Scott's Run offers week-long wetlander's summer camps, birdwatching walks, a beautiful swimming hole with a small waterfall, and spring wildflower walks. This preserve is not only used for hiking but education as well. Many schools come to Scott's Run to learn about local watersheds and geology. Featuring wild cherry trees as tall as you can imagine, a grove of ancient hemlocks, and a fault zone that formed millions of years ago, there is no doubt these acres are packed with knowledge.