McCONNELLS MILL: ALPHA PASS TO KILDOO LOOP

**KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION**

LENGTH: 3.4 miles  
CONFIGURATION: Balloon  
DIFFICULTY: Moderate  
SCENERY: Slippery Rock creek and gorge, McConnells Mill, covered bridge, numerous waterfalls, boulders, moss, ferns, and evergreens  
EXPOSURE: Mostly shaded  
TRAFFIC: Busy near the mill, light farther away  
TRAIL SURFACE: Dirt, sometimes very rocky  
HIKING TIME: 2 hours  
ACCESS: Open year-round, except if too icy or washed out in winter  
MAPS: Available at the park office (see Nearby Attractions following the Description) and PDF maps are also available online via the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Web site, www.dcnr.state.pa.us; USGS Portersville

**FACILITIES:** Restrooms, picnic areas, playground, first aid  
SPECIAL COMMENTS: This hike is abundant in beauty and combines the Alpha Pass and Kildoo trails to form a 3.4-mile loop. Wear sturdy boots or trail shoes due to the rocky terrain.

**IN BRIEF**

If you want to shorten the hike, park near McConnells Mill either at the mill, which is very limited, or in the parking area above it on McConnells Mill Road. From the mill, visitors of all ages and abilities can enjoy both the Kildoo and Alpha Pass trails. The first 200 yards of the Kildoo Trail is paved and suitable for wheelchairs and strollers. Tours of the mill are conducted (see Nearby Attractions following the Description) and worth spending the time. The covered bridge is charming, and there is an overlook of the dam.

**DESCRIPTION**

McConnells Mill State Park encompasses 2,546 acres of the Slippery Rock Creek Gorge. The geology of this area formed the gorge, providing the path for the 49-mile-long Slippery Rock Creek and the environment for the formation of the many waterfalls and rock outcroppings.

For the 3.4-mile loop, park at the trailhead on McConnells Mill Road. From the trailhead, follow the dirt path down the steps and become immediately immersed in the sound of water cascading over Alpha Pass. Stop at the end of the railing and turn to the right to look behind you for a view of the falls. The path veers left at the bottom of the stairs. The Alpha Pass portion of the trail is marked with blue blazes, indicating its role as part of the North Country National Scenic Trail. The rushing water of Slippery Rock Creek is heard before it is seen but soon becomes visible. In this

**DIRECTIONS**

From Pittsburgh, take Interstate 279 North to I-79 North. Take Exit 96, Prospect-Portersville; turn left on US 488. Turn right on US 19; follow for approximately 2.7 miles. Turn left on Johnson Road and right on McConnells Mill Road. The trailhead parking area for Alpha Pass is on the left.
section, the creek is about 40 to 50 feet wide and the gorge through which this creek flows is 400 feet deep.

At approximately 0.15 miles are a parking area, restrooms, picnic area, and playground up and to the left of the trail. Even this short distance in, it is already obvious that this is a very scenic hike. Evergreens are abundant, and it seems when there isn't an evergreen there's a boulder covered in moss and sprouts of ferns instead. The weaving of the trail, to and fro from the water, allows wonderful views of the creek's flow over and around the rocks.

Directly across from what should be the second bench along the trail is a huge rapid, one that would prove challenging to most boaters (note the lifesaver hanging nearby on a post). Don't forget to look inland as well and notice the gorge's landscape, such as the enormous boulder about 100 feet beyond the bench.

As you continue, the trail and the road above it come together in a V and join in the vicinity of McConnells Mill. When the trail joins the sidewalk, there are restrooms up the hill and an information board on the left. The mill, located straight ahead, is worth a visit and tour if you have the time or have timed it well. There is an informative sign just beyond the mill depicting what the typical whitewater rapid kayaker wears. If the water is up, you may see some kayakers preparing to run the rapids.

Cross the road; the trail can be hiked beginning on either side of the bridge but this description follows the mill side. The McConnells Mill covered bridge dates to 1874 and is one of two in Lawrence County; it is a registered National Historic Landmark. Don't be concerned about missing a walk through the bridge, as you will cross it at the end of the Kildoo Trail.

To start the Kildoo Trail portion of the hike, pass the bridge and pick up the trail at the trailhead, which is marked with a sign. This trail is paved for the first 200 feet, providing access for those who may have a more difficult time on rockier sections. The Kildoo Trail runs very close to the water with open views and is quite pleasant. If you are hiking after a heavy rain or snowfall with some runoff (as I was), the water will be high and moving very fast. This portion of the trail is easy enough for small children, but handholding is recommended. You'll arrive at another bench at about 0.8 miles, across from more wildly churning rapids. Soon, stop in the center of the 15-foot wooden bridge that crosses the pretty waterfall cascading from Kildoo Run. Looking up for its source will allow you to spot the blue Kildoo Bridge above.

Beyond this point the trail winds up and down for a bit and then meanders back close to the water. It is extremely easy to follow, and as its width and height vary, so does the scenery. At about 1.2 miles, you'll come to a large flat rock overlooking the water. This makes a great spot to take a break in the sun. For lunch, though, you may wish to wait to reach the larger rock outcropping in just another 0.3 miles.

At 1.3 miles is an area that is sometimes washed out by heavy rains. Almost immediately after, look for another large waterfall. The trail’s surface here is rock, so if you've worn your sturdy trail shoes or boots you'll be happy; if not, watch your ankles. At 1.5 miles is a huge flat-rock outcropping that makes for an ideal lunch spot. The view is open across the water, and the return trail for this loop can be seen on the other side. (When I was there it was several feet underwater.) Not far beyond this, you'll come to a waterfall over a huge flat rock jutting out into the water; it is about 50 feet from where you stand on the trail.

Once past the waterfall, Eckert Bridge comes into view; on the near side of the bridge are steps that lead down to the water. Cross the bridge and turn right to pick up the trail on the other side of Slippery Rock Creek (turning left at the end of the bridge leads to Slippery Rock Gorge Trail, hike 35 in this book). At 1.8 miles is another waterfall; stepping back a little allows a better view of its tall height. Shortly thereafter, cross a small beach and look for the double blue blazes at its far end, indicating that the trail veers left, slightly away from and above the water.

In the high water during my hike, the washed out section of the trail on this side was encountered at 2 miles. After a little climbing the hillside to go around it, there is another waterfall to enjoy. Soon the trail becomes wider and there is yet another waterfall. For almost a half mile, the hiking is a slow, steady incline. But this ends briefly across from “Island Rock,” which can be seen in the middle of the creek. From this area and side of the trail, the effect of the large rocks jutting out from the other side of the creek and those in the creek becomes more apparent. Only an experienced whitewater boater would want to be out in these rapids when the water is moving fast. If you're lucky, you will be able to watch some of the kayakers make their way through them.

On the trail, you'll come to another waterfall before reaching a set of stone stairs at 2.5 miles. Notice the picturesque boulders covered with moss and fern off to the left just a tenth of a mile beyond the bottom of the steps. When the bench at 2.6 miles is reached, the red covered bridge is back in sight. Cross the bridge and turn left, passing the front of the mill to return via the Alpha Pass Trail.

**Nearby Attractions**

Guided tours of the restored gristmill are conducted daily, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., from Memorial Day through Labor Day, and off-season by appointment. Call (724) 368-8811 (McConnells Mill State Park care of Moraine State Park) for more information, or e-mail morainesp@state.pa.us. For other nearby attractions visit Moraine State Park. Other tourism opportunities can found at www.lawrencecounty.com/tourism or by calling (724) 654-8408.