

01 LINCOLN MEMORIAL TO LINCOLN PARK



KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

LENGTH: 8.6 miles (with shorter options)

CONFIGURATION: Loop

DIFFICULTY: Easy–moderate

SCENERY: Parklands, public buildings

EXPOSURE: Mostly open

TRAFFIC: Light–moderate; heavier in tourist season, weekends, holidays

TRAIL SURFACE: Mostly pavement

HIKING TIME: 4–5 hours

SEASON: Year-round

ACCESS: Lincoln Memorial closes at midnight; no other restrictions

MAPS: USGS Washington West; ADC Metro Washington; posted map on display boards on and near Mall

FACILITIES: None at trailhead; toilets, water, phones in museums and other public buildings on or near Mall; toilets in ranger station on Independence Avenue near 17th Street; stand-alone toilets on Mall

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact National Capital Parks, (202) 619-7222 or www.nps.gov/nacc

SPECIAL COMMENTS: Mall and Capitol Hill are high-security areas; obey signs; don't trespass; be prepared to modify your route if necessary; finish hike by dusk

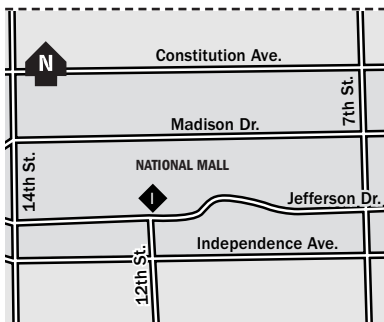
IN BRIEF

Roaming the Mall and Capitol Hill on foot serves as a wonderful introduction to hiking in the nation's capital—and to learning firsthand about the city's heritage and treasures.

DESCRIPTION

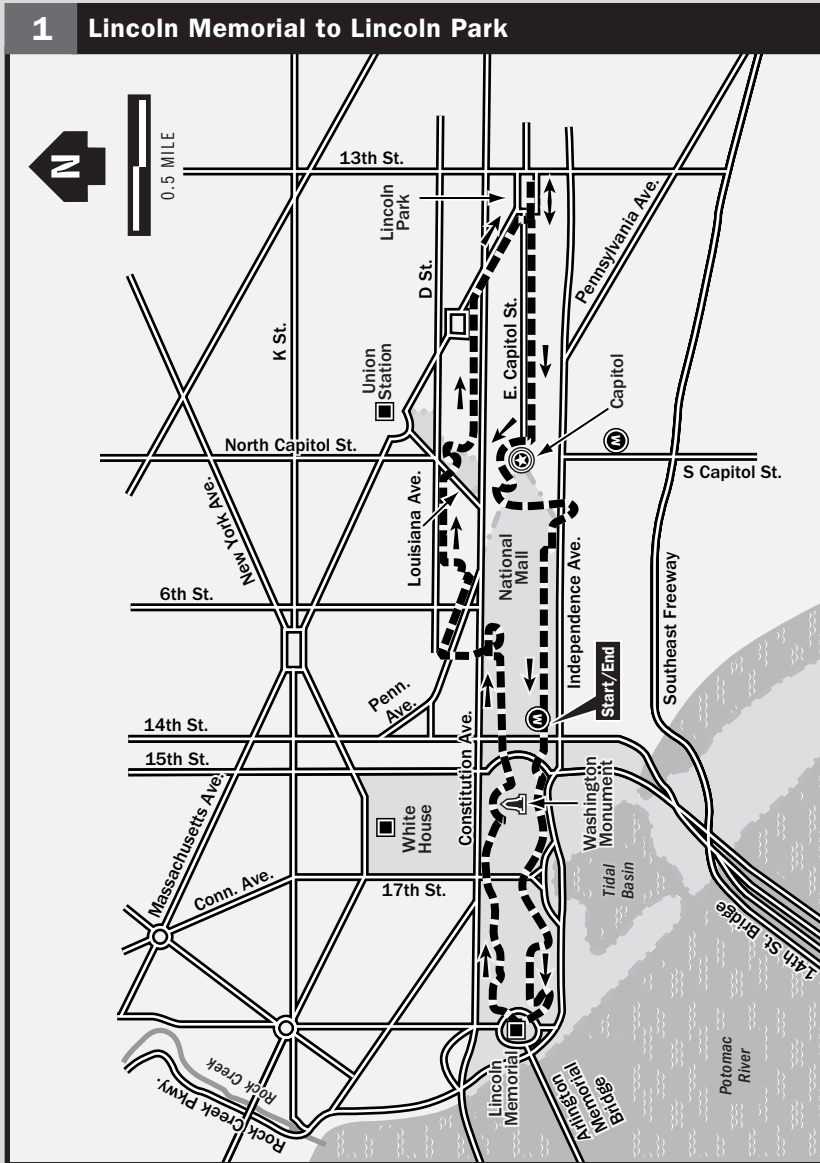
Each Fourth of July, half a million folks crowd onto Washington's Mall for a special birthday celebration. Between one Fourth and the next, they and others frequent the Mall's museums, monuments, and memorials and gather to play, picnic, stroll, jog, bike, relax, protest, march, and sightsee. The Mall, in effect, serves as the nation's front yard, town square, commons, pulpit, soapbox, park, and memorial garden. It's also a great hiking venue where one can take self-propelled voyages of discovery and rediscovery. And it's small enough to cover on foot, but large enough for a hiker to get some exercise—and avoid the crowds.

This 8.6-mile, clockwise loop ranges across the Mall and beyond to Capitol Hill, and it features sites of historic and cultural interest, with emphasis on both Abe Lincoln and, inevitably, war. But it's planned as a daytime



Directions

Head for Washington's Mall area. Park near the trailhead—the Smithsonian Metro station entrance within the Mall (near Independence Avenue and 12th Street SW). Arrive early on crowded warm-weather weekends and holidays; beware local parking regulations. Or use the Metro: Smithsonian station is on Orange, Blue lines; Metrobuses operate on nearby streets. Contact Metro, (202) 637-7000 or www.wmata.com.



and outdoor hike (except for one indoor peek at the biggest Lincoln). Detour indoors if you want to, but do maintain a good pace between stops, be careful crossing streets, and use the paths and sidewalks. And for a shorter hike, just make free use of a street map. Note that “the Mall” is usually taken to be the grand 2.2-mile stretch of open space between the Lincoln Memorial and the U.S. Capitol. Officially, though, the Mall—or National Mall—is only the part east of



This monument in Lincoln Park was the city's first to honor an African American. (FYI: those trees in back bear chestnuts.)

14th Street, and the memorial itself lies in West Potomac Park. But worry not. The entire area is under National Park Service jurisdiction.

To get started from the Smithsonian Metro station on the Mall, head south (toward Independence Avenue) for about 20 yards. Turn right onto a broad paved path alongside Jefferson Drive. Follow the path across 14th and 15th streets NW, then turn left and almost immediately turn right onto a short, narrow, paved, downhill path. At the bottom, turn left onto another paved path. Follow it west along Independence Avenue and past the Sylvan Theater and an information-equipped ranger station. At 17th Street, cross at the traffic light. Look or veer left to see the hike's first war-related memorial, on a traffic island. Erected in 1912, it depicts American Revolution naval hero (and later Russian admiral) John Paul Jones ("I have not yet begun to fight"), but supplies no details.

On the other side of 17th Street, proceed straight through the possibly grandiose National World War II Memorial, opened in 2004. Then continue westward on a paved path, but detour to the left to visit a circular bandstand, built in 1931 as Washington's World War I memorial. Then return to the paved path and proceed past some yellow-topped bollards (security structures that have proliferated on the Mall, each costing \$7,500) to a four-way intersection. There, turn left and tour the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Dedicated in 1995, it depicts soldiers in winter. Made of stainless steel, the grim figures are reflected in a polished black granite wall on which many faces are faintly etched.

Return to the intersection, head for the nearby Lincoln Memorial, and climb the 56 steps (Lincoln died at age 56). Enter the great chamber to face the seated marble figure that's four-and-a-half times life-size. Notice Lincoln's fingers, bent to form "A" and "L" in sign language (Lincoln supported education for the deaf; sculptor Daniel French had a deaf son). An inscription above Lincoln's head celebrates his having saved the Union, but ignores his role in ending slavery. As the writer later explained, the memorial—opened in 1922—was meant to help heal the North–South rift, so it was best to “avoid the rubbing of old sores.” But architect Henry Bacon had the chamber walls inscribed with the Gettysburg Address and the second inaugural address, which make clear Lincoln's views. Before leaving, look for the inscription marking the spot where Martin Luther King delivered his now-memorable “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963.

Then descend the steps, swing left, and head for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. After passing an information kiosk, stop near a flagpole to see a three-guys-with-guns sculpture. Then take the paved path along the base of a sunken black granite wall carrying the names of the Vietnam War dead and missing. When dedicated in 1982, the memorial designed by Maya Lin consisted solely of the engraved wall. As she later wrote, “I did not want to civilize war by glorifying it or by forgetting the sacrifices involved.” But her design provoked controversy. That led to *Three Servicemen* being added in 1984. The nearby Vietnam Women's Memorial, showing three nurses aiding a fallen soldier, was added in 1993.

From there, retrace your steps to the last junction and walk straight (east) on a paved path through Constitution Gardens. At a small lake, swing left and follow the paved waterside path to an elevated plaza. Cross it, staying left, and swing left onto a diagonal paved path leading to 17th Street. Circle the nearby boarded-up stone house. An 1835 lock house, it is both the Mall's oldest building and a reminder that a canal once ran along what are now Constitution Avenue and 17th Street. The canal was paved over in the 1870s, but the area west of 17th was a mosquito-infested marsh until the 1920s. Cross 17th, turn right, and proceed to the first paved path leading uphill to the left. Take it to reach the sublimely abstract Washington Monument. When finished in 1884, the shaft topped out at about 555.5 feet. It's still the city's tallest masonry structure. But it's sinking at a rate of 5.64 inches a century and will disappear by the year 118,900.

Circle to the left around the monument and take the paved path leading down to the ticket kiosk on 15th Street. Cross that street and 14th Street, and head east along Madison Drive for five blocks, past the American history and natural history museums. Then turn left to walk through a butterfly garden that's colorful in the spring and summer, but consistently butterfly-less. At Constitution Avenue, turn right to cross 9th Street. Then turn right to circle through the six-acre National Sculpture Garden. Opened in 1999, it's part of the nearby National Gallery of Art (the Mall's only non-Smithsonian museum). It features serious and whimsical modern sculptures set around what doubles as a summer fountain and winter ice-skating rink.

From there, cross Constitution and walk north on 9th Street. At Pennsylvania Avenue, turn right onto the avenue. On that corner, next to the National Archives, note the memorial to Franklin D. Roosevelt that FDR himself requested; it's desk-sized, unlike the 1997 FDR memorial at the Tidal Basin. Continue along the avenue, cross to the other side at 6th Street, turn right, pass the relocated Newseum (to open in 2007), and head for the Embassy of Canada. Walk up the steps, stand in the small rotunda, sing, and listen to the acoustic effects incorporated into the striking 1989 building. Roam the open courtyard, with its hanging garden and Bill Reid's beguiling bronze sculpture, *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*. Then cross a brick driveway to enter John Marshall Park. Cross to the far side to check on a playful 1988 chess game between two men seated on a low wall.

Head uphill through the park, past a statue of Marshall (the country's fourth chief justice, who lived in a 4th Street rooming house) and across two streets, to view a thin and austere Lincoln, at the hike's halfway point. Carved by Lot Flannery, who had known his subject, the 1868 granite statue was funded by citizen donations as the first public monument to Lincoln. Turn right to head east on D Street. Pause to inspect *Guns into Plowshares*, an arresting 1997 sculpture by Esther and Michael Augsburg. Continue for four blocks. Then cross and turn right alongside New Jersey Avenue. At the next corner, turn left onto Louisiana Avenue and then left again into the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism during World War II.

Opened in 2001, the memorial, or Mahnmal, recognizes the unjust wartime internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans. It's the only memorial I know that's an apology, as affirmed by Ronald Reagan's inscribed words: "Here we admit a wrong." It also honors the Japanese Americans who served in the armed forces. Designed by Davis Buckley, it includes powerful symbols; a sculpture of two cranes ensnared in barbed wire, a reflecting pool resembling a Zen garden, and a remarkable metal tube that, when sounded, emits a vibrant, templelike bell tone. Leaving the memorial, turn left, walk to the corner of D Street, and cross Louisiana Avenue. Then take a paved path on the right to head south past a pool and a fountain and onto Union Station Plaza, atop a huge government garage. Continue walking through the lovely parklike area toward the Capitol. At Constitution Avenue, turn left and follow the avenue eastward.

At the corner of 2nd Street NE, take a look at the Sewall-Belmont House and its historical plaques. Since 1929, it's been the Women's National Party headquarters. During the War of 1812, it was the only private building torched by the British invaders—after snipers in the house annoyed the British general by hitting his horse. After crossing 2nd Street and Maryland Avenue to stay on Constitution, you'll be in a Capitol Hill area of tree-lined streets and well-kept row houses. Proceed for about five blocks and then swing right onto Massachusetts Avenue and follow it to 11th Street. Then turn right, walk one short block to East Capitol Street, and turn left to enter Lincoln Park.

Follow a paved path to *Emancipation*, a bronze monument paid for by emancipated blacks but designed by whites that depicts a magisterial Lincoln

standing next to a crouching African American man. At the 1876 dedication, the keynote speaker, abolitionist and local resident Frederick Douglass, chided sculptor Thomas Ball for the croucher's subservient posture—but his remarks went unreported by local newspapers.

Continue along the path to see the Mary McLeod Bethune Monument and what difference a century can make. Created by Robert Berks in 1974, almost two decades after Bethune's death, the monument shows the educator, civil-rights leader, and National Council of Negro Women founder handing a young boy and girl a rolled document. Composed the year she died and as inscribed on the pedestal, the document is her 68-word "Legacy": "I leave you love. I leave you hope. I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another. I leave you a thirst for education. I leave you a respect for the use of power. I leave you faith. I leave you racial dignity. I leave you also a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow man. I leave you finally a responsibility to our young people." When the monument was finished, *Emancipation* was turned to face it. In recent years, Emancipation Day has been revived as an official Washington holiday.

Walk back through the park and head west for ten blocks on boulevard-like East Capitol Street. As the Capitol looms ahead, you'll pass such landmarks as the Folger Shakespeare Library, main Library of Congress building, and Supreme Court building. At 1st Street NE, pause to admire the Capitol and its distinctive cast-iron dome topped by Freedom, a huge bronze statue of a woman that is 19.5 feet high, weighs 7.5 tons, and was installed during the Civil War. Also, check on the Capitol's huge, much-delayed, and overbudget underground visitor center (the largest addition since Lincoln pushed wartime completion of the remodeled building), and mourn the fact that its vista-rich terrace on the west front is now permanently off-limits for post-9/11 security reasons. Then turn right, walk a block north on 1st Street, and turn left onto Constitution Avenue. Cross the well-guarded entrance road, and then swing left onto a walkway that curves downhill to reach a roofless brick structure half-hidden in a small grove. It was designed as a summer retreat for members of Congress by Frederick Law Olmsted when he landscaped the Capitol grounds in the 1870s. Pause to peer into its tiny and charming grotto.

Continuing, turn right at a fork at a nearby stumpy tower (a Capitol ventilation shaft) and follow a curving path (Olmsted didn't like straight lines) to 1st Street NW. Crossing it, note the Peace Monument, which honors the Union seamen who died in the Civil War. Head for the nearby reflecting pool, and then turn left onto a promenade between the pool and a huge memorial to Ulysses S. Grant. Finished in 1922, the memorial depicts soldiers caught up in the frenzy of war, as well as a brooding Grant on horseback. It's realistic without glorifying war. Note the fallen trooper. His face is that of sculptor Henry Merwin Shrady, who labored on the memorial for more than 21 years and died just before it was dedicated. This memorial is the most tersely labeled one I know. It bears just one word: GRANT.

Return to 1st Street and proceed southward, passing an 1887 statue of President James Garfield and then the U.S. Botanic Garden's renovated and dazzling conservatory. At Independence Avenue, cross to explore a small garden packed with assorted and labeled plants set around the large and historic Bartholdi Fountain. Recross Independence, turn left, and head west, past the conservatory and the future National Garden. Turn right onto 3rd Street, cross Maryland Avenue, and turn left onto Jefferson Drive, across from the distinctive National Museum of the American Indian, opened in 2004. Continue westward on Jefferson, past the Air and Space Museum, and across 7th Street. Abreast of the doughnutlike Hirshhorn Museum, swing right to wander through its sunken and well-filled sculpture garden. Emerging on the inner Mall, follow a broad gravel path west to the trailhead. Along the way, you'll pass the Smithsonian Castle and more museums, as well as a working antique carousel.

NEARBY/RELATED ACTIVITIES

During or after the hike, explore the museums and other buildings along the hike route. If you don't mind crowds, repeat the hike during the Mall's annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival or Fourth of July festivities—and allow yourself extra time.