Spotlight on Frederick County: Sugarloaf Mountain

by Katherine O. Rizzo

Sugarloaf Mountain in Frederick County is a privately owned property that is open to the public for hiking, mountain biking and trail riding. The property is owned by Stronghold, Inc., which is a non-profit corporation founded in 1946 by the late Gordon Strong. The 1,282-foot mountain is designated a Registered Natural Landmark in 1969 because of its geological interest and natural beauty.

The park is open from 8am until sunset year-round; however, the front gate closes at 6pm in the spring and summer and 4pm in the fall and winter.

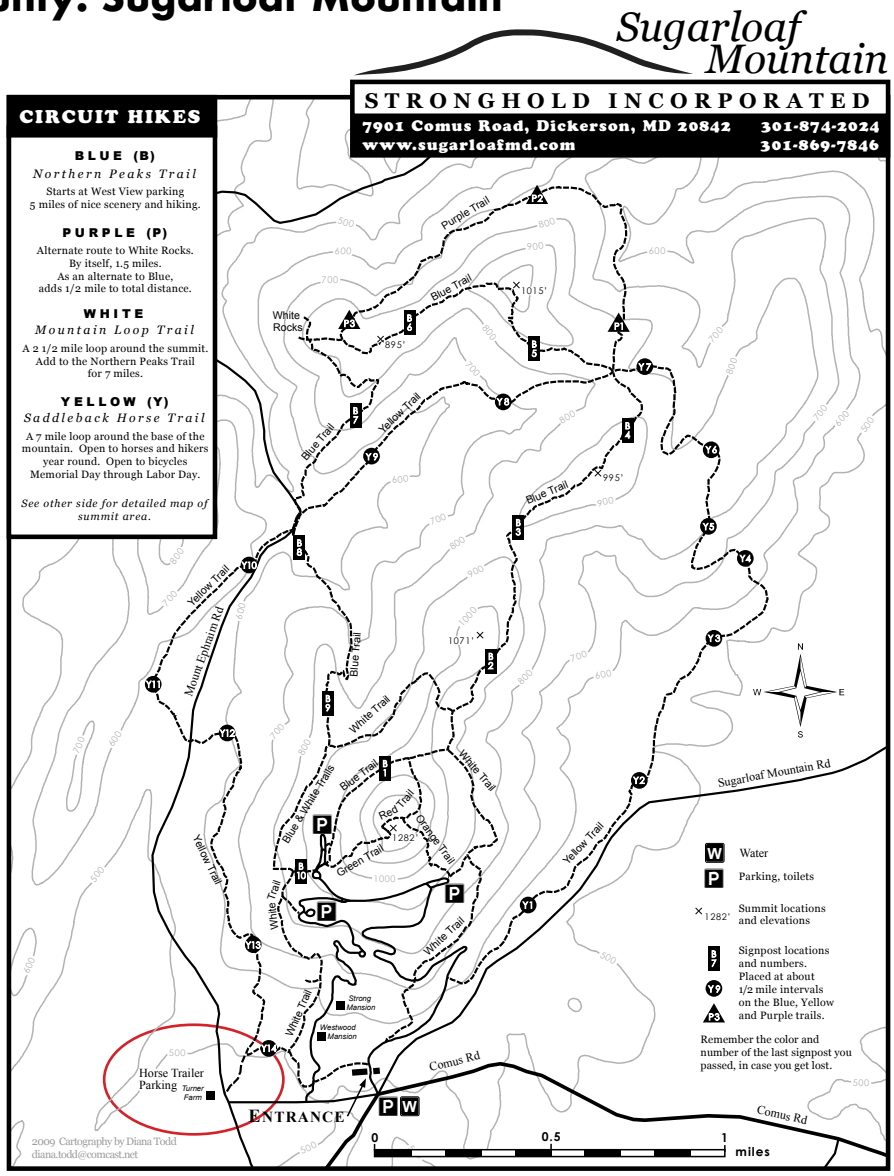
Sugarloaf was named by a Swiss explorer in 1707 who sketched the earliest known map of the mountain. It is named due to its shape resembling sugar loaves, which were common in those days. The mountain was used as a look out point for the Union Army during the Civil War and a hospital was located at the log cabin that still stands near the entrance to the park.

During the 1930s, Gordon and Louise Strong purchased several properties on the mountain and its base to ensure the mountain would continue to be a natural location open to the public.

Geologically, Sugarloaf is a monadnock, which is a mountain that remains after the erosion of the surrounding land. It is estimated that the mountain was formed over a 14-million-year period. The majority of the mountain is oak forest but also includes black gum, tulip poplar, black birch and eastern hemlock species.

White-tailed deer roam the mountain along with squirrels, foxes, rabbits and racoons. Songbirds and other migratory birds visit the mountain at different points in the year. Please note that both timber rattlesnakes and copperheads live on the mountain too!

Horseback riding is restricted to the Yellow Trail (Saddleback Horse Trial), which goes around the base of the mountain. It is a seven-mile loop that is open to horseback riders and hikers year-round. The trail is also open to bicycles from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Trailer parking is at the Turner Farm located at the intersection of Comus Road and Mount Ephraim Road.

The park is funded by a private trust and park donations.