



# ENCOUNTER GOD IN HIS CREATION

The Bull Run-Occoquan Trail, which cuts through northern Virginia, offers an extraordinarily beautiful retreat from what is typically known as a densely congested area. The trail runs approximately 18 miles along Bull Run (river) from Bull Run Regional Park south to Fountainhead Regional Park. This trail and many other beautiful hiking locations throughout our Diocese offer opportunities to draw closer to Jesus Christ among the beauty of God's creation.

This document provides a general overview of this experience, however, please go to [www.tinyurl.com/hiscreation](http://www.tinyurl.com/hiscreation) on your portable device (or scan the QR code below) for links to the full experience.



DIocese of ARLINGTON  
YOUTH, CAMPUS, &  
YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES



# ABOUT THE BULL RUN-OCOQUAN TRAIL

The Bull Run-Occoquan Trail runs approximately 18 miles along Bull Run from Bull Run Regional Park south to Fountainhead Regional Park. The trail rises over steep wooded hillsides, through deep ravines, and crosses several streams. Some of the trail is also used by equestrian riders and mountain bikers (which are restricted to certain segments east of the Bull Run Marina). Some of the hiking may be considered moderately strenuous.



During the early years of the American Civil War, the Bull Run/Occoquan River formed the boundary of the "Alexandria Line", which Confederate forces established to protect their capitol from Union advances before the First Battle of Bull Run. The 1st Battle of Bull Run was the first major battle of the American Civil War, taking place on July 21, 1861. The railroad bridge near Popes Head Creek was destroyed several times to prevent an enemy control of the rails between Richmond and Washington. Evidence of the bridge and other fortifications may be seen along or near the Bull Run Occoquan Trail.



Many of God's creatures may be found along the trail and throughout our Diocese. God instructed Adam to name the wild animals. How many animals can you name? How many animals have you seen on your journey?

## Genesis 2:19

"So the Lord God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature was then its name."



Plenty of parking may be found at 5 locations along the trail (see the Encounter website.) These are great places to begin your hike and you can decide which sections (or part of sections) you want to complete. The trail is marked by light blue blazes on trees and posts making it easy to stay on the path. While the path is not considered extremely difficult, there are areas that are rocky and a few steep hills. When the weather is wet, some areas will be muddy and slippery.



## BEFORE YOU GO

1. Plan your journey by viewing the trail website and selecting a starting point.
  - Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority website:- [www.novaparks.com/parks/bull-run-occoquan-trail](http://www.novaparks.com/parks/bull-run-occoquan-trail)
2. Remember, don't just hike, retreat! See discussion questions designed to help you turn this hike into a prayerful retreat for your family or group.
3. Be prepared! Check the weather and be sure to review the suggested packing list on the Encounters website. *(be sure to check for ticks when you get home!)*





## LAUDATO SI'

In 2015, Pope Francis published the Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si' On Care for our Common Home*.

“Laudato Si'” means “Praise be to you” and comes from St. Francis of Assisi’s song about creation.

The full text of *Laudato Si'* may be found online at:  
[www.tinyurl.com/o6sowft](http://www.tinyurl.com/o6sowft)  
 (en Español) [www.tinyurl.com/hcnkttm](http://www.tinyurl.com/hcnkttm)

If you want to discuss this topic more fully during your hike, consider reviewing or bringing a copy of this discussion guide. It is filled with questions and ideas on ways that we can each care for God’s creation.  
[www.tinyurl.com/laudatosiguide](http://www.tinyurl.com/laudatosiguide)

You might also consider watching this video before you go hiking as it provides questions to ponder and discuss during your hike.  
[www.tinyurl.com/laudatosivideos](http://www.tinyurl.com/laudatosivideos)



## A HIKING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Help me to be straightforward like the sky-seeking redwood tree. May my generosity be like the sap which ascends and nourishes. May my soul be clear like the spring water at its origin. May my will be like the faultless granite. May you be always throughout my life a constant companion. May the cross which rises at the crossroads be for me like the meeting of a friend. —Amen.



# DISCUSSION TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE TRAIL AND FOR THE RIDE HOME

As you hike, the goal would be to keep the conversation focused on our relationship with God and his creation. Perhaps take frequent breaks to ask questions or when you see opportunities to discuss topics below:

**Lightness/Darkness:** Read John 1: 1-18 “All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (See our website for an excellent Bible study on John 1:1-18.)

1. Take a moment to consider how difficult and dangerous it might be to hike this trail in the darkness without flashlights or moonlight or a guide. In life, the Trinity is our light. How has God been a light in your own life?

2. What is one action I can take to be a light of Christ to others?

**Walking on a journey.** The Church says that while we are on Earth we are “pilgrims in a strange land” (LG 7). What does it mean to be a pilgrim? What does this say about the meaning of life?

**Rooted:** Read Psalm 1:1-6 “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.... Rather, the law of the Lord is his joy; and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; Its leaves never wither; whatever he does prospers.”

1. What contrast is the psalmist making between walking and being rooted?

2. It is far too easy for us to hang out with people who are not helping us to grow in holiness or are mean and disrespectful of other people. Are there certain people in my own life that I need to try to help grow and change their ways—or failing that, distance myself from them?

**Litter:** “The heavens declare the Glory of God; the firmament (skies) proclaims the works of his hands.” (Psalm 19:2) All around us we can see the work of his hands, however we can also see the damage that we have made.

1. Are there ways that you have helped to restore nature? Do you believe there are ways in which our society has done harm to the work of his hands? That you have done harm?

2. Look around you now and consider how there is nothing around you that you could do without. Everything is tied together. What specifically can you do to preserve his work?

**Tranquility and beauty:** Read Psalm 23: 1-6 “The Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I lack. In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul...”

1. When surrounded by nature we can consider so many things around us that came to be through God's power. When we are in a relationship with Christ, we can find peace in knowing that he only wants the best for us. Take a moment while you're sitting or resting to close your eyes and rest in the peace of his creation and the goodness that he provided us. Make a list in your mind of the blessings of that moment spent with Jesus.

## Photo Credit information:

Bull Run-Occoquan trail map: Northern Virginia Park Authority. [www.novaparks.com/parks/bull-run-occoquan-trail](http://www.novaparks.com/parks/bull-run-occoquan-trail)

Blue Heron photo: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great\\_Blue\\_Heron\\_at\\_Sunnyvale\\_California.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Blue_Heron_at_Sunnyvale_California.jpg)

Trail photographs: Edward Gloninger

