

Volksmarching (in the Washington, D.C., area)

Grab a map and hit the trail

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If you don't speak German you might be intimidated by the sound of volksmarch. After all, a word with "march" in it can't be fun, right? Actually, volksmarch translates to "peoples' march" and can be summed up as a noncompetitive, organized walk, usually either 5K (3.1 miles) or 10K (6.2 miles). Clubs across the country offer events nearly every weekend at locations that vary from urban to rural.

On a recent Saturday morning the sky was clear, the humidity was low and about 110 people -- most wearing wide-brimmed hats and water bottles slung around their shoulders -- showed up to volksmarch through downtown Silver Spring.

The walk, which was presented by the Seneca Valley Sugarloafers Volksmarch Club, began near a community farmers market. Participants received a map with detailed directions (have no fear of getting lost!) and a start card. There is no specific start time; walkers can begin between 8 a.m. and noon and finish by 3 p.m.

You don't have to be part of a club to volksmarch, and, though it draws a mostly older crowd, walks are open to anyone who wants to participate. Among the crowd were 15 members of the Annapolis Amblers Walking Club. Groups like the Amblers attend for the camaraderie as much as for the exercise and exploration.

"We are the club that walks between meals," explains Amblers club member Bob Schmick. The talkative group had carpooled in after breakfast and planned on staying in Silver Spring for lunch.

If you have ever driven through downtown Silver Spring you know that it can be a white-knuckle experience requiring your full attention to the road, other cars and the countless pedestrians.

"That is the thing about [volksmarching]," said Nina Dominguez of Pasadena. "You get to see things you don't see from the car."

And, oh, the things you see. There is the sculpture of a hand and birds taking flight in front of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration building, a funky acorn-shaped gazebo and the "Global

Refugee Mural" on Kefa Cafe. The directions have historical and quirky facts (did you know that the penguin is the unofficial mascot of Silver Spring?) that you would not discover by taking a stroll by yourself. But be warned, volksmarching can become addictive. Regular walkers buy pocket-size books and get stamps once they have completed a march. One of Schmick's worn books -- with its stamps of varying colors and dates -- resembles a passport, and he uses it as a reference for all the places he has walked.

"I'm working on 9,000[kilometers]," Schmick said proudly. "I have just finished eight [thousand]!"

-- **Amy Orndorff**

WHERE IS IT? The Sugarloafers next volksmarch is along the C&O Canal Towpath. The start and finish is at the parking lot at the end of Pennyfield Lock Road in Potomac.

WHEN IS IT? Saturday, start between 8 and 11 a.m., finish by 3 p.m.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION? Call 240-683-9342 or visit <http://www.sugarloafers.org>.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST? Free!

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? Be sure to wear comfortable shoes and bring plenty of water. A wide-brimmed hat is also a good idea -- and will make you look like a veteran volksmarcher.



