

Scenic Overlook Trails

The **Wildcat Ridge Hawkwatch** can be reached by combining a section of dirt road, about two miles of the Four Birds Trail, and the Flyway Spur Trail, for a 3.5 mile loop - and all of this loop is up on the hill. From Route 513 in **Rockaway Township**, 6.3 miles north of Interstate 80, and across from the Marcella Community Center, turn right to follow Upper Hibernia Road for 2.7 miles, and park in the gravel parking lot.

Continue down Upper Hibernia Road on foot until it ends, then pick up another dirt road on the left, continuing in the same direction. Look carefully for white trail blazes that show where the trail crosses this road, and turn left onto the trail. (If you get to where the road leaves the clearing and starts to descend more steeply, you've walked too far).

Follow the white-blazed Four Birds Trail for about two miles. There are some very nice through-the-trees views. Do not take the yellow trail to the right, unless you're up for a view of a suburban industrial district. When you come to a trail junction, where the orange-blazed Flyway Spur Trail crosses the white trail, near the large television tower, turn right to follow the orange trail a short distance to the hawkwatch observation platform. (If you come to a gravel road with a telephone line, you've gone too far.)

From the hawkwatch website: "The view provides an otherwise hard to obtain understanding of the vastness of the Highlands forest resource, and its value to hundreds of species, including humans, in northern New Jersey. No other area in north Jersey has the large unfragmented forests needed to preserve populations of endangered hawks, owls, and increasingly rare songbirds."

Volunteers count migrating hawks here from August 15th to November 15th and gain from February 15th to May 15th; these can be good times to visit if you'd like to learn about hawks. Follow the orange trail back to Upper Hibernia Road and your car.

Difficulty: *Moderate*, or *Easy* if you just take the Flyway Spur Trail out and back.

The **Beaver Brook Trail** runs north from Berkshire Valley Road in **Jefferson Township**, to Mahlon Dickerson Reservation. The entire trail is 6.5 miles including the walk on the other end to the nearest parking lot, but an out-and-back walk with two overlooks is about 3 ½ miles. Start at the small parking area on Berkshire Valley Road, two miles north of Route 15, just north of Taylor Road.

The white-blazed trail starts at the south end of the parking area, and turns up an old woods road. This is the steepest part of the trail, and taking it slowly here can make the rest of the hike more enjoyable. Watch carefully for the place where the trail turns right, and leaves the road to go up into the rocks. The first vista is about ¼ mile after this turn. That water tower on a ridge in the distance is on Watnong Mountain in Parsippany.

Part of the magic of a woodland trail is that it creates a sense of place and builds a connection with the natural world, and the Beaver Brook Trail does this really well. More than a route to an overlook, the trail itself is sometimes an extended overlook, the trail itself is sometimes an extended overlook, with views up and down the slope and to the opposite ridge. This works best in Spring or Fall, when you can see more through the trees.

The second vista is reached after going downhill, then climbing a *second* hill to where the trail is marked by stone cairns over very large rocks. What makes this place special is that, except for the top of a tower in Picatinny, all you can see are wooded ridges for many miles. Nothing about this view suggests that you are surrounded by suburbs. As a remote picnic spot it's just about perfect.

This is not an easy trail: It's hilly and rocky, and after the first overlook there is not always an easily recognizable path. Sometimes the trail is little more than white blazes to guide you over the rocks. It can be dangerous for small children, especially for those who like to dart off without warning, and it should *not* be walked when there is ice or snow on the trail.

Difficulty: *Moderate* (but quite steep) to the first overlook, or *Difficult* to the second.

A northern section of the **Four Birds Trail** in **Rockaway Township** brings you to an overlook above the Charlotteburg Reservoir, with a partial view of the Manhattan skyline on clear days. The trail entrance to route 513 is about 10 miles north of route 80, and 6/10 of a mile north of the entrance to Craigmear. Park in the unmarked and unpaved spot at the bottom of the hill on the left.

The walk from route 513 to the overlook and back is 2.4 miles. Walk across the road and back up the hill, watching carefully for white trail blazes and a kiosk set back in the woods. Turn left onto this trail and follow the white blazes up to the top of the ridge that is Cooperas Mountain. There are no really steep sections, just a steady even ascent that gets you up the hill with a minimum of effort. When you can see light through the trees ahead you are almost there.

At the top of the ridge turn right, walk 1/10 of a mile, and watch for the overlook on very large rocks to the left. The U-shaped body of water below is the Charlotteburg reservoir, created by a dam across the Pequannock River. The far side of the reservoir covers much of the land used by the Charlotteburg blast furnace of 1766.

That square-looking structure on the opposite hill was built by Francis S. Kinney, the manufacturer of Sweet Caporal cigarettes, on his estate, for use as an observation tower, and it's now part of the Smoke Rise community. The long ridge in the distance is the Palisades, and some of Manhattan may be visible to the west-southwest. On a good day you might look down on soaring Red-Tailed Hawks. Bring binoculars.

This trail is on land managed by the non-profit Newark Watershed Conservation & Development Corp, at 223 Echo Lake Road, in West Milford. A \$8 annual permit is required for use of the trail and the parking lot. Permits can be purchased weekdays from 8 to 4, or Saturday from 8 to 1. Their phone number is 973-697-2850.

Difficulty: *Moderate*

The Tourne has been described by Dan Goldfischer as “truly a people’s mountain, because almost everyone can climb it.” The main entrance is on Powerville Road in **Boonton**. From route 46 in Mountain Lakes, follow the Boulevard north to Boonton. Just after you enter Boonton, bear left onto Elcock Avenue, which becomes Powerville Road; the park entrance is on the left. A trail map is posted at the last parking lot. Walk across the park road and up the path by the rest rooms, and turn left onto the DeCap Trail.

The Park Commission guide to the Tourne describes the history of this trail: “Clarence Addington DeCap (1859-1948) inherited and acquired during his lifetime much of the land now preserved as Tourne County Park. Using hand tools and levers, Mr. DeCamp built two roads to the top of the Tourne and encouraged the citizenry to enjoy the forest and fields with him.” There are views from the top in several directions, and it’s a great place for a picnic. The NYC skyline is visible on a clear day. The trail continues down the other side, and returns to the parking lot, for a total of about 1.3 miles. Other trails can be combined for walks of 2 to 3 miles.

Difficulty: *Moderate*, but a little shorter if you walk back down on the same section of trail you walked up.

The **Pyramid Mountain** Natural Historical Area is a county park on Route 511 in **Montville Township**, four miles north of East Main Street in Boonton. Pick up a copy of the excellent trail map at the parking lot or the visitor center.

Pyramid Mountain is best known for Tripod Rock, a large glacial erratic balanced on three smaller rocks, but there are lots of other interesting places, including some very good views from the top. For a short tour of about 2 ½ miles, take the blue trail from the visitor center to the yellow trail, then the yellow trail until it reconnects with the blue trail. This section of the yellow trail is rocky and steep and it’s clear that you are climbing up a mountain. Next follow the blue trail north to the white trail, and take the white trail north to Tripod Rock.

Reverse direction and visit Lucy’s Overlook for a view to the west. Then follow the blue trail south to the NYC overlooks and down the mountain. A longer walk that covers most of the park is about four miles.

Difficulty: The rocky ascent to the yellow trail is *Difficult* in places, but the rest of this route is *Moderate*.