

Bearfort Ridge/Quail Trail Loop from Warwick Turnpike

Length: 6.0 miles **Difficulty:** Moderate to Strenuous **Time:** 4.5 hours

Directions to trailhead

Take I-287 to Exit 57 and continue on Skyline Drive to its western end at Greenwood Lake Turnpike in Ringwood. Turn right and proceed for 8.4 miles to a Y intersection with Union Valley Road. Take the right fork and continue ahead for 0.3 mile on Warwick Turnpike. Just past a short concrete bridge, there is a turnout on the right side of the road. Park here. (This turnout is a short distance east of the intersection of Warwick Turnpike with White Road.)

Hike Description

From the parking turnout, walk east on Warwick Turnpike, going back over the concrete road bridge. Just east of the bridge, you'll see three white blazes that mark the start of the Bearfort Ridge Trail. This will be your route for the first half of the hike. Follow the white blazes uphill through rhododendrons and hemlocks. In about 500 feet, the trail joins a woods road that comes in from the right. Just beyond, follow the white blazes as the trail turns left, leaving the road. (The orange-blazed Quail Trail, which continues ahead along the road, will be your return route.) The white-blazed trail continues to ascend on a wide footpath. After crossing a stream, it levels off through mountain laurel. A little over half a mile from the start, the trail descends briefly to cross a wider stream and continues through a rhododendron grove. At the end of the rhododendrons, a blue-blazed trail which leads to Warwick Turnpike goes off to the left. Continue ahead on the white-blazed trail.

The Bearfort Ridge Trail now begins a steady, rather steep climb. About a mile from the start, it passes a large, lichen-covered outcrop to the right. It continues to climb until it reaches the crest of the ridge, marked by pitch pines. Here, a large conglomerate rock outcrop to the left offers an expansive view to the south.

After taking in the view and resting from the steep climb, continue ahead, following the Bearfort Ridge Trail north along the puddingstone conglomerate ridge, through pitch pines. You'll make a brief but steep climb, and -- after crossing an open rock outcrop with several glacial erratics -- the vegetation will change to hemlocks and laurels. The trail continues at an elevation of about 1,300 feet, having climbed about 600 feet from the trailhead. After about half a mile of walking along the ridge, the trail crosses another open rock outcrop with a row of large glacial erratics, passes more pitch pines, and descends to cross a wet area.

The trail continues to wind through a hemlock forest, passing a limited viewpoint through the trees to the right. About two miles from the start, it comes out on a rock ledge overlooking a swamp to the west. Here, a narrow wedge of the bedrock has split away from the main ledge, forming a deep crevice. This is a good place to take a break.

When you're ready to continue, proceed north along the trail, which climbs to a rock outcrop with a huge boulder. It continues along a whaleback rock, through pitch pines, and reaches a limited viewpoint to the east. The trail now descends steadily, through hemlocks and laurels. After crossing a stream amid jumbled rocks at the base of the descent, the trail climbs to a rock outcrop studded with pitch pines, which offers a limited east-facing view when there are no leaves on the trees.

The trail continues across more rock outcrops, with limited views both to the west and to the east. It then descends gently and levels off. Finally, it climbs to another outcrop -- marked by several cedar trees -- with a panoramic view. Sterling Forest and the Wyanokies can be seen to the east, and if there are no leaves on the trees, you may be able to see Surprise Lake to the north. An arm of the Monksville Reservoir is visible ahead, and on a clear day you can see the tops of New York City skyscrapers in the distance. You've now gone three miles from the start of the hike.

The white-blazed Bearfort Ridge Trail ends here, at a junction with the yellow-blazed Ernest Walter Trail. Turn right and follow the yellow-blazed trail as it heads downhill through a rocky area and soon crosses a stream. The trail continues through a dense rhododendron grove, with the thick rhododendrons forming a canopy over the trail in places. About half a mile from the end of the Bearfort Ridge Trail, you'll notice an orange-blazed trail coming in from the right. Continue ahead on the yellow trail for about 100 feet to an open area which overlooks Surprise Pond - a pristine, spring-fed lake. This is another good spot to take a break.

Now retrace your steps along the yellow trail, but when you come to the junction of the orange trail, bear left and follow the orange blazes. You're now on the Quail Trail, a woods road that will lead you back to the start of the hike. Follow the orange blazes as they climb gently for a short distance and then begin a steady descent. In three-quarters of a mile, you'll cross a stream on rocks. This crossing can be a little tricky if the water is high. After a short level stretch, the trail crosses another stream and then climbs briefly, soon resuming its descent.

In another mile, the trail crosses a third stream, after which the descent steepens. A third of a mile beyond, be sure to bear right, as another woods road goes off to the left. A short distance ahead, the orange-blazed trail ends at a junction with the white-blazed trail. Continue ahead along the road and then bear right, following the white blazes downhill and back to the trailhead.