

# Castle Point Trail - Short Loop

## Overview

This loop hike runs along the shore of scenic Ramapo Lake and climbs to the ruins of an old stone castle and tower, with panoramic views.

Details Time: 2 hours Difficulty: Moderate Length: 3.2 miles

## Driving Directions

Take Interstate Route 287 to Exit 57 (Skyline Drive) and proceed north on Skyline Drive for about one mile to the upper parking area for Ramapo Mountain State Forest on the left side of the road, just beyond milepost 1.4, opposite the entrance to Camp Tamarack.

## Description

At the northwest end of the parking area, opposite the entrance to Camp Tamarack, you will see a yellow blaze of the Hoeflerin Memorial Trail, as well as a triple red/white blaze, which marks the terminus of the Skyline Connector Trail. You will be returning to the parking area on the Skyline Connector Trail, but the Hoeflerin Trail will be your route for the first part of the hike.

Head into the woods and turn left, following the yellow blazes, then bear right onto a footpath parallel to a gravel road. After passing a small pond to the right, follow the yellow blazes as they briefly turn right onto the road (this portion of the road is paved), then turn left onto another woods road. After passing an interesting rock outcrop on the right, you'll come to a Y-intersection, where the yellow-blazed trail bears right and begins to descend.

Soon, the gravel road briefly reappears to the right, but bear left to stay on the yellow-blazed trail. Eventually, the yellow blazes turn right, leaving the road, and follow a footpath over undulating terrain. After crossing a stream and once again briefly approaching the gravel road, the Hoeflerin Trail descends to a woods road – the route of the blue-blazed MacEvoy Trail. Turn right, now following both yellow and blue blazes. Soon, the trail bears left and descends a short pitch to a paved road.

Turn left along the road, and head down to Ramapo Lake. At the lakeshore, the yellow-blazed Hoeflerin Memorial Trail continues ahead, crossing the dam, but you should turn right, following the blue blazes of the MacEvoy Trail. The MacEvoy Trail follows a gravel road along the northeast shore of the lake, passing a private home on the right and then crossing a small stream on a stone-arch bridge, with an attractive cascade to the right.

A short distance beyond, you'll come to a rock ledge on the left that overlooks the lake. This is a good place to take a break. Once known as Rotten Pond, and later as Lake LeGrande, Ramapo Lake is the centerpiece of Ramapo Mountain State Forest. It was formerly surrounded by private property, but most of the land around the lake was acquired by the state in the 1970s.

Just beyond, the trail reaches the northern tip of Ramapo Lake. Bear right at the fork in the road and pass between two concrete pillars. A short distance ahead, the blue-blazed MacEvoy Trail leaves to the left, and a triple-white blaze indicates the start of the Castle Point Trail. You should continue ahead on the road, now following the white blazes of the Castle Point Trail. Just beyond, as the road curves sharply to the right, turn left, leaving the road, and follow the white-blazed trail as it climbs steadily and rather steeply.

As you approach the top of the climb, bear left onto a rock ledge that offers a spectacular view. Directly below you is Ramapo Lake, with the Wanaque Reservoir to the right (west). On a clear day, you can see the New York City skyline on the horizon to the left. You'll want to pause here to rest from the steep climb and enjoy the view.

When you're ready to continue, follow the white trail uphill. After climbing over a stone wall, you'll reach the ruins of a mansion. Known as Foxcroft, it was built around 1910 by William Porter, a stockbroker. His widow occupied it until her death in 1940, and it fell into ruin in the late 1950s. Use caution if you wish to explore the remains of this once-elegant stone structure.

The trail continues to the north, passing the remains of a concrete swimming pool. A short distance beyond, an unmarked side trail to the left leads to an unobstructed west-facing viewpoint over the Wanaque Reservoir and the Wyanokie Mountains. Continue on the white trail, which soon climbs to reach a stone tower. Contrary to what one might think at first glance, this was not a lookout tower; rather, it held a cistern that supplied water to the mansion (note the rusted pipes adjacent to the tower). Just beyond, there is another view from an open rock ledge to the left of the trail over the Wanaque Reservoir to the west. The trail now begins to descend.

Watch carefully as the Castle Point Trail turns right, just before reaching the route of a gas pipeline. It briefly joins a woods road, turns left onto a footpath before reaching a wide gravel road, then again turns left onto the woods road. It turns right and follows the gas pipeline for 350 feet, then turns right again, leaving the pipeline, and crosses a stream. The trail now climbs, first gradually, then rather steeply through mountain laurel, to a rock ledge, which provides a view of the stone tower you passed about half a mile back.

A short distance beyond, the Castle Point Trail reaches a paved road, with Skyline Drive just to the left. Here, the Castle Point Trail ends, and you turn right to continue along the Cannonball Trail (white-"C"-on-red blazes). The trail follows the road for 200 feet, then turns left onto a footpath through the woods. Soon, you'll reach a junction where the red/white-blazed Skyline Connector Trail begins on the left. Turn left and follow this red/white trail along a footpath roughly parallel to Skyline Drive until you reach the parking area where the hike began.