

Halifax/Red-Silver/Schuber Trail Loop to Bear Swamp Lake

Overview

This loop hike climbs to Hawk Rock, a panoramic overlook, and circles Bear Swamp Lake.

Details Time: 4 hours Difficulty: Moderate Length: 7.4 miles

Driving Directions

Take N.J. Route 17 to U.S. Route 202 in Mahwah. Proceed south on Route 202 for two miles, then turn right into the Ramapo Valley County Reservation parking area.

Description

The hike begins at a kiosk in the southwest corner of the parking area. Just ahead, you'll notice three orange blazes and three silver-on-white blazes on a tree, which mark the start of the Schuber Trail and the Silver Trail, respectively. Follow the silver-on-white and orange blazes as they descend a slope to join a paved park road. The paved road bears left, but the trails continue ahead and cross the Ramapo River on a steel truss bridge. In another 250 feet, the orange-blazed Schuber Trail leaves to the left, but you should continue ahead on the wide dirt road, following the Silver Trail along the southern shore of Scarlet Oak Pond.

Just beyond the end of the pond, as the Silver Trail starts to climb, turn right onto the green-on-white-blazed Halifax Trail. The trail follows a road along the western shore of the pond for about 500 feet, then turns left and crosses a wooden footbridge. Continue along the green-on-white-blazed trail as it begins to climb on a moderately steep grade. After a short level stretch, followed by a brief climb over a rock outcrop, it arrives at Hawk Rock. This east-facing ledge offers an expansive view over much of Bergen County, with Ramapo College in the foreground to the left. On clear days, the Manhattan skyline is visible in the distance.

The Halifax Trail now bends to the left and continues to ascend. After reaching the crest of the ridge, the trail crosses the route of a gas pipeline and begins to descend. It turns right, briefly joining an eroded woods road, and then turns left on a footpath, finally reaching a woods road which traverses Havemeyer Hollow. Turn left here and follow the Halifax Trail along this relatively level road that goes up the valley, with Havemeyer Brook to the right.

Soon, you'll reach a junction with the blue-on-white Havemeyer Trail, which leaves to the left. Continue ahead on the green-and-white blazed Halifax Trail, which crosses Havemeyer Brook on rocks and continues along the woods road, with the brook to the left. (The brook crossing may be a little difficult after heavy rains.)

About a third of a mile beyond the brook crossing, the Halifax Trail turns left, leaving the woods road, and passes through a rocky area. It once again crosses the brook on rocks and turns right on a narrower woods road, continuing to ascend. The trail crosses a wide pipeline route in about half a mile. Then, in another third of a mile, after passing two woods roads which depart together to the right and once more crossing a gas pipeline, the Halifax Trail briefly joins Bear Swamp Road, which comes in from the left. Almost immediately, it turns right, leaves the road, and descends into the woods on a

footpath. In about half a mile, after crossing a woods road, the trail bears slightly right to cross Bear Swamp Brook on a wooden bridge.

Just beyond the brook, you'll reach a fork. Here, the Halifax Trail heads to the right, but you should take the left fork, now following the yellow-blazed Hoeflerin Memorial Trail, which begins here. In 500 feet, you'll join the blue-blazed Shore Trail, which comes in from the left. The two trails run jointly for a short distance. When the yellow blazes depart to the right, stay to the left and continue to follow the blue blazes.

The blue-blazed Shore Trail heads south, soon crossing the main inlet stream of Bear Swamp Lake and continuing parallel to its western shore. You'll pass through a rocky area with highbush blueberry bushes along the trail. After following the blue-blazed trail for about half a mile, you'll cross another inlet stream and pass some evergreen trees. This area was once the site of the Bear Lake Club, a private summer-home community. All of the summer cottages were demolished when the state acquired the property in the 1970s, but many traces of these buildings remain, including two intact stone chimneys in former lakeside homesites to the left of the trail. You've now hiked for over four miles, and you might want to take a break at a rock ledge that overlooks the lake.

Just beyond, you'll reach another fork in the trail. The Cannonball Trail (white C on red) begins here and takes the right fork, but you should bear left and continue to follow the blue-blazed Shore Trail, which crosses a footbridge over the outlet of the lake. The dam which formerly regulated the level of the lake has been breached, and the lake has dropped several feet as a result. This has led to the growth of water lilies and other vegetation, which now covers most of the lake.

On the opposite side of the bridge, the blue-blazed trail turns left onto the wide Bear Swamp Road, of which portions are paved. Follow the road along the eastern shore of the lake for about half a mile, passing more remnants of old homesites. At the next fork in the road, turn right, leaving the Shore Trail, and begin to follow the Red-Silver Trail. This trail, marked by red/silver blazes, immediately crosses a gas pipeline. About 300 feet beyond, follow the Red-Silver Trail as it bears right, leaving the woods road. Soon, the trail begins to descend on a rocky footpath, first rather steeply, then more gradually.

After crossing a stream, the Red-Silver Trail ends at a junction with the orange-blazed Schuber Trail. Bear left and follow the Schuber Trail along a woods road, soon passing the western end of the blue-blazed Ridge Trail to the left. After the red-blazed Marsh Loop Trail leaves to the right, the Schuber Trail begins to descend. It passes the end of the Yellow-Silver Trail to the right and soon reaches the dam at the eastern end of the MacMillan Reservoir, to the left of the Schuber Trail.

About a quarter of a mile beyond the dam, the Schuber Trail turns right, leaving the road. You should continue ahead on the road, now following the route of the Silver Trail. Ahead, as the road bends to the right, three blue blazes mark the start of the Ridge Trail to the left. Continue downhill on the Silver Trail. As the road bends to the left ahead, you'll notice a beautiful waterfall on the stream in the valley to the right. The Silver Trail bears right at the base of the descent and reaches a junction with the green-and-white-blazed Halifax Trail. This was your route at the start of the hike, but you should now continue ahead on the Silver Trail. You pass to the right of Scarlet Oak Pond and continue across the bridge over the Ramapo River to end at the parking area where you started the hike.