

Huyler's Landing Trail/Closter Dock Trail Loop from Alpine Headquarters

Overview

This loop hike combines a walk along the top of the Palisades cliffs with a stroll along the river, passing several outstanding viewpoints and interesting ruins of former estates.

Details Time: 3.5 hours Difficulty: Moderate Length: 5 miles

Driving Directions

Take the Palisades Interstate Parkway to Exit 2 (Alpine) and follow signs to the Police Headquarters. Park in the parking lot for the park Administration Building just east of the underpass.

Description

Begin the hike by proceeding downhill on the Alpine Approach Road past the Administration Building and bear left onto a wide footpath at the "Path to River" sign. You'll soon reach a tunnel under the road. Turn right, proceed through the tunnel, and climb stone steps on the other side. You're now following both the aqua blazes of the Long Path and the orange blazes of the Closter Dock Trail. Continue ahead parallel to the Parkway on your right.

In about a quarter of a mile, you'll notice a tunnel under the Parkway to the right. Here, the orange blazes turn off, but you should continue ahead, parallel to the parkway, following the aqua blazes. Soon, you'll pass by old stone foundations and walls. These are the remains of large estates that once graced the Palisades cliffs. The properties on which these estates once stood was acquired by the Park for the construction of the Parkway.

About a mile south of Alpine, you'll notice the stone ruins of a large building to the left. This was the "Cliff Dale" estate of George Zabriskie, built in 1911 (the date is still visible in the stonework of the building). The building ruins that you see are actually the remnants of the garage! Use caution if you wish to explore the ruins of this once-magnificent structure.

After passing more stone ruins, you'll reach the Alpine Lookout. The trail follows an iron railing around the perimeter of the lookout and continues on the paved sidewalk. This was the site of the "Rio Vista" estate, the home of Manuel Rionda (his manor house was located just south of the lookout). After reentering the woods, the trail reaches a fenced-in parapet that juts out over the river, providing more views.

About half a mile south of the Alpine Lookout, the trail approaches the Parkway. Just ahead, three red blazes mark the start of the Huyler's Landing Trail. Turn left and follow this red-blazed trail, which descends to the river along the route of an old road (in places, the road has narrowed to a footpath). After a sharp switchback to the right, the trail emerges on the paved Henry Hudson Drive. Turn left, follow the paved road for about 300 feet, then bear right at a chain and continue to descend on a wide woods road.

You'll reach the river at an old picnic area, with an abandoned stone jetty just ahead. Turn left and follow the white-blazed Shore Trail, which follows a path between the cliffs to the left and the river to the right. In about half a mile, after passing an old beach along the river, the trail climbs stone steps and follows a path above the river level. After crossing a wooden bridge over a stream, you'll pass a plaque on a rock to the left placed in memory of John Jordan, the first Superintendent of the Park, who died here in 1915.

Just beyond, you'll reach a grassy area at the southern end of the Alpine Boat Basin area. Continue north through the parking area for the boat basin, then proceed past the historic Kearney House, a small white building to the left. This house is the oldest building in the New Jersey section of the park. The oldest part of the house - which once served as headquarters for the park - dates back to the eighteenth century.

Just beyond the Kearney House, you'll notice a sign entitled "Old Alpine Trail," which states that the trail you are about to use to climb the Palisades was used by General Cornwallis' troops in 1776 during the American Revolution. (The information on the sign is no longer considered to be historically accurate; however, the sign itself - which is over 75 years old - has historical significance!) Bear left here and climb the old stone-paved road. At the top of the rise, turn sharply left and continue uphill on the stone-paved road, now marked with the orange blazes of the Closter Dock Trail. When you reach the underpass to the left, continue ahead to the Administration Building, where the hike began.