

Castle Point Carriageway/Lake Awosting Carriageway/Upper Awosting Carriageway Loop

Overview

This loop hike, suitable for cross-country skiing, runs along dramatic cliffs of Shawangunk conglomerate, with many fine views.

Details Time: 5 hours Difficulty: Moderate Length: 7 Plus Miles

Driving Directions

Take the New York State Thruway to Exit 18 (New Paltz). After paying the toll, turn left onto Route 299 and continue west through the Village of New Paltz. When you cross the bridge over the Walkill River at the west end of the village, continue ahead on Route 299 (do not turn right towards the Mohonk Mountain House). In another 5.6 miles (from the Walkill River bridge), Route 299 ends at a T intersection with Route 44/55. Turn right here and follow Route 44/55 as it negotiates a very sharp hairpin turn and climbs to pass under the Trapps Bridge (a steel overpass). Continue for about three miles past the Trapps Bridge to the entrance to Minnewaska State Park Preserve, on the left side of the road. A per-person trail fee is charged at the gatehouse when cross-country skiing is available; at other times, a parking fee is charged. Continue uphill for 0.4 mile to the parking area at Lake Minnewaska.

Description

From the end of the parking area, descend on the red-blazed Lake Shore Carriageway that encircles Lake Minnewaska. This descent is rather steep for cross-country skiing, but it is not typical of the grades you'll encounter the rest of the way. After a short descent, you'll reach a junction with the green-blazed Upper Awosting Carriageway (a swimming area is to the left). Bear left, continuing to follow the Lake Shore Carriageway, which now begins to climb. About 0.4 mile from the start, you'll reach a junction with the blue-blazed Castle Point Carriageway.

Turn right and follow the Castle Point Carriageway, which continues to climb gradually. Soon, you'll reach an open area, the site of a former golf course, with views of the Catskills to the north. After passing a post on the left, which marks a route leading to the Hamilton Point Carriageway, there are views to the left over the Palmaghatt Ravine. Soon, you'll reach Kempton Ledge, with excellent views across the ravine and over the Walkill Valley beyond. The large boulder visible on the other side of the ravine is known as Patterson's Pellet.

The carriageway continues generally uphill, with some short descents and one twisting curve. About two miles from the start, you'll pass under a power line. A short distance beyond, you'll reach a series of open ledges that afford broad views over Palmaghatt Ravine, with the rocky face of Gertrude's Nose - the tip of the escarpment across the ravine - clearly visible.

After some more twists and turns, the carriageway comes out at Castle Point, a steep promontory with panoramic views to the south and east. Lake Awosting is below to the west, and Sam's Point may be seen directly ahead to the south (near the communications towers visible in the distance). The aqua-blazed Long Path joins the carriageway here. The elevation of Castle Point is 2,200 feet, and you've climbed over 500 vertical feet from Lake Minnewaska. If it's not too windy, this is a good place to take a break.

The carriageway turns right and begins a steady descent, immediately passing the southern end of the Blueberry Run Trail (marked by a sign). In the next three-quarters of a mile, the carriageway makes several sharp turns (skiers should exercise care). At a hairpin turn to the left, the Long Path leaves to the right. After passing under the dramatic ledges of the overhanging Battlement Terrace, the Castle Point Carriageway arrives at a junction with the Hamilton Point Carriageway. Bear right, continuing to follow the Castle Point Carriageway.

Soon, the unmarked Slate Bank Carriageway leaves to the left, and a short distance beyond, you'll reach a junction with the Lake Awosting Carriageway. To the left, this carriageway leads in about half a mile to a swimming area on Lake Awosting, open during the summer. If you would like to take a swim, turn left at this junction; otherwise, bear right, now following black blazes instead of the blue blazes that have marked the route up to this point. You'll soon reach a beautiful viewpoint to the left over Lake Awosting - another good spot for a break.

At the next junction, the black blazes turn left, but you should continue straight ahead, now following the green blazes of the Upper Awosting Carriageway. As the carriageway bends to the right ahead, you'll see the impressive cliffs of Lichtfield Ledge. The carriageway soon begins to follow along the base of these cliffs, which often feature hanging icicles in the winter.

The carriageway crosses the aqua-blazed Long Path near the end of the cliffs, and it continues ahead, soon recrossing the power line. From here to the end of the carriageway at Lake Minnewaska, the route is less interesting, but the carriageway passes through pleasant woods and follows a gently descending grade - a good way to end a cross-country ski trip.

A little over a mile from the power line, you'll reach an open area known as the Orchard (some old fruit trees from the former orchard may still be seen). Then, after a short, gentle climb, you'll pass an excellent north-facing viewpoint to the left, with the Catskill Mountains visible in the distance. Just beyond, the Upper Awosting Carriageway ends at the Lake Shore Carriageway, near the swimming area on Lake Minnewaska. Turn sharply left and follow the Lake Shore Carriageway uphill, back to the parking area where the hike began.