

ORAK Ruins, Jackie Jones Fire Tower and Big Hill Shelter

Overview Details Time: 3.5 hours Difficulty: Moderate Length: 4.5 miles

Driving Directions

Take the Palisades Interstate Parkway north to Exit 14 and turn left onto Willow Grove Road (County Route 98). In about two miles, the road joins County Route 106, which comes in from the right. Continue for another 0.2 mile, and park in a parking area on the left, just before crossing a bridge over a stream.

Alternatively, you can take N.J. Route 17 north to the New York State Thruway and take the first exit, Exit 15A (Sloatsburg). Turn left at the bottom of the ramp onto N.Y. Route 17 north and continue through the Village of Sloatsburg. Just beyond the village, turn right at the next traffic light, following the signs for Seven Lakes Drive and Harriman State Park. Continue to follow Seven Lakes Drive for about seven miles to the Kanawauke Circle. At the circle, turn right onto County Route 106 and follow it for 3.2 miles to a parking area on the right, just beyond a bridge over a stream.

Description

From the parking area, walk west along Route 106 for 300 feet, crossing over Minisceongo Creek. Turn left at the gated paved road and proceed uphill, following the yellow blazes of the Suffern-Bear Mountain (S-BM) Trail. You will be following the S-BM Trail for the next two miles – all the way to the Big Hill Shelter.

In a quarter of a mile, the S-BM Trail bears left onto a woods road and soon reaches the stone ruins of a large estate. Known as ORAK, the mansion was built in 1923 by George Briggs Buchanan, a vice president of the Corn Products Refining Company, which manufactured Karo syrup (Orak is Karo spelled backwards). After Buchanan died in 1939, his heirs sold the mansion to the park, and it was demolished in 1973.

Soon, you'll reach a fork in the trail. The unmarked woods road that comes in from the left will be your return route, but for now, bear right to continue on the S-BM Trail. The trail soon bears left, leaving the woods road, and climbs to a limited southeast-facing viewpoint. A short distance beyond, it passes communications towers to the right and soon arrives at the 1,276-foot summit of Jackie Jones Mountain, marked by a steel fire tower. Built in 1928, the 60-foot-high tower offers a panoramic view over Lake Welch to the north and the Hudson River to the southeast. (Use extreme caution if the steps of the tower are covered with snow or ice!)

The S-BM Trail now descends, steeply in places. After crossing a stream, it climbs a little and then resumes its steep descent. At the base of the descent, it crosses another stream and then the Old Turnpike – a wide woods road, which is now the route of a gas pipeline. After ascending slightly, it reaches a junction with the aqua-blazed Long Path, which comes in from the left.

Continue ahead on the joint S-BM/Long Path, which turns right onto a woods road. A short distance ahead, the joint trails turn left and climb to the Big Hill Shelter. Built in 1927, this stone shelter offers a panoramic view to the south, with the New York City skyline visible in the distance on a clear day. This is a good place to take a break.

When you're ready to continue, go back and descend on the S-BM/Long Path, following the same route you took up to the shelter. When you reach the fork where the two trails diverge, bear right and continue on the Long Path. The Long Path climbs a little and then begins a steady descent, passing a vernal pond along the way. After crossing a stream, you'll reach the wide Old Turnpike, with posts marking its use as a gas pipeline.

Leave the Long Path route here and turn left onto the Old Turnpike, which heads uphill for about 500 feet. At the crest of the rise – just before reaching a post with the number 712 – turn right onto an unmarked woods road, which heads north, uphill. In about 0.3 mile, you'll reach a junction with the yellow-blazed S-BM Trail. The yellow blazes head both right and straight ahead, but you should turn right, now retracing your steps along the S-BM Trail. Follow the trail downhill past the ruins of ORAK and back to Route 106, then turn right on Route 106 to reach the parking area where the hike began.