

Ridge Loop Trail

Length: 4.1 miles **Difficulty:** Moderate **Time:** 3.0 hours

Directions to trailhead

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.

Hike Description

The hike begins at a kiosk in the southwest corner of the parking area. Just ahead, you'll notice a triple-yellow blaze on a tree, which marks the start of the Vista Loop Trail. Follow the yellow blazes as they descend wooden steps, join a wide dirt road, and continue ahead to cross the Ramapo River on a steel truss bridge.

In another 200 feet, the green-dot-on-orange-blazed River Trail begins on the left. Turn left, leaving the wide gravel road, and follow the River Trail along a narrower footpath.

Soon, the River Trail begins to run along the shore of the Ramapo River. Since the footpath is in the floodplain of the river, it may be muddy or even flooded in places when the water is high. After passing a small cascade, the trail bears right, away from the river, and soon ends at a junction with the yellow-blazed Vista Loop Trail. Turn left onto the Vista Loop Trail and cross a stream on a wooden footbridge.

On the other side of the stream, you'll notice a large pile of rubble. This is all that remains of a stone cabin, built by a camp that once operated on this property (the stone walls of the cabin were demolished in 2015). Here, the Vista Loop Trail turns right and begins a rocky climb along the stream. The trail briefly levels off, passing attractive cascades and pools in the stream on the right. After curving to the right, the Vista Loop Trail reaches a junction with the wide park road leading to the MacMillan Reservoir.

Follow the Vista Loop Trail as it turns left, joining the blue-blazed Ridge Loop Trail, and continues along a paved section of the park road. A short distance ahead, the two trails diverge. The Vista Loop Trail continues ahead, but you should bear left to stay on the Ridge Loop Trail. Soon, the trail passes to the left of the stone dam of the MacMillan Reservoir. You've gone a little over a mile from the start, and this is a good place to take a break.

Continue heading uphill along the blue-blazed Ridge Loop Trail. You'll notice triple-red and triple-pink blazes on the sides of the trail, but stay on the blue-blazed Ridge Loop Trail. In a third of a mile, the red-blazed Marsh Loop Trail crosses. Continue ahead on the blue-blazed Ridge Loop Trail, which crosses a stream, descends a little, and levels off. In 750 feet, you'll reach a fork in the road. Here, the Red-Silver Trail begins on the left, but you should take the right fork, continuing to follow the blue-blazed Ridge Loop Trail.

The Ridge Loop Trail continues to descend. After crossing a stream and its tributary, it ascends gradually, levels off, and descends a rocky section of the road to cross another small stream. The trail now begins a steady climb, which is gradual at first, but soon steepens. As it nears the crest of the rise, the trail bends sharply to the right and levels off, continuing along the ridge. Rocky Mountain and Drag Hill are visible through the trees to the right (when there are no leaves on the trees).

After another short climb, you'll reach a junction where the Ridge Loop Trail turns right, leaving the road. Follow the blue blazes, which continue on a footpath. (Straight ahead, the road is marked with the purple blazes of the Havemeyer Trail). Soon, the trail reaches an exposed rock ledge, where it bears left and continues over undulating terrain.

In about half a mile, at the top of a short climb, you'll begin to parallel a stone wall to the left. The trail then descends to reach another woods road, the route of the yellow-blazed Vista Loop Trail. Turn right, now following both blue and yellow blazes, and follow the road downhill. In another 500 feet, the yellow blazes turn right. Turn right and follow the yellow blazes for about 200 feet. When the yellow blazes turn sharply right, continue ahead for another 200 feet, following green-dot-on-yellow blazes to a viewpoint over the Ramapo Valley, with Campgaw Mountain visible in the foreground to the right. On a clear day, the Manhattan skyline is visible in the distance. After taking in the view, return to the junction of the yellow and blue trails, turn right onto the blue-blazed Ridge Loop Trail, and descend on a wide, rocky path.

When you reach a fork, follow the blue blazes, which bear right and continue to descend to the main park road. Here, you should turn left and follow the Ridge Loop Trail downhill along the park road. Near the base of the descent, the Ridge Loop Trail curves to the right, and it soon ends at a junction with the yellow-blazed Vista Loop Trail. Proceed straight ahead on the Vista Loop Trail, which passes to the right of Scarlet Oak Pond, continues across the bridge over the Ramapo River, and ends at the parking area where the hike began.