

Hiking: Sterling Forest State Park

THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 2013
THE RECORD

FEATURES: This hike passes the historic Southfields Furnace and climbs to the Indian Hill Loop Trail, which offers several viewpoints of the surrounding countryside and crosses numerous old stone walls.



The cascades in Mombasha Creek and stone ruins that presumably were associated with the operation of the furnace.

LENGTH: About four miles

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

TIME: About three hours

MAP: New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Sterling Forest Trails Map #100

HOW TO GET THERE: Take N.Y. Route 17 North through Sloatsburg and Tuxedo, and continue on Route 17 past the intersection with NY 17A into Southfields. About 1.3 miles beyond the intersection with NY 17A, turn left onto Orange Turnpike (County Route 19). In 0.6 miles, turn left onto Hall Drive and park in a parking area on the left side of the road at a curve.

From the parking area, proceed ahead (north) on Hall Drive, following the white blazes of the Wildcat Mountain Trail. When you reach Orange Turnpike, turn right and cross the road, climb over the guardrail, and descend to cross a footbridge over Mombasha Creek. The trail now turns right and heads east, parallel to the stream.

Just beyond, the white-blazed trail ends, and you should continue ahead on the red-blazed Furnace Loop Trail, which passes the remains of the historic Southfields Furnace, originally built in 1805, rebuilt in 1836 and last fired in 1887, on the right. Besides the furnace itself, the stone-arch charging bridge and several walls of the casting room still stand. The trail continues along an old railroad bed, then turns left and begins to climb on a woods road.

After descending a little, the Furnace Loop Trail climbs rock steps below rock outcrops on the left to reach a junction (marked by a cairn) with the white-stripe-on-yellow-blazed Indian Hill Loop Trail (as of this writing, there are also some plain yellow blazes along this trail). Turn right onto the Indian Hill Loop Trail, which crosses a stream on rocks and climbs to a panoramic south-facing viewpoint from a rock ledge. It then ascends to the ridgetop, which it follows north.

After a relatively level stretch, the trail climbs to the highest point on the ridge (1,047 feet). Just beyond, rock ledges to the right of the trail offer unobstructed views across the Ramapo Valley to Harriman State Park. Green Pond Mountain dominates the view, with the grassy Elk Pen in the foreground and the New York State Thruway below in the valley.

From the ridge, the trail descends gradually on switchbacks. Near the bottom, it briefly follows a stone wall, then turns right onto a woods road. At the base of the descent, it turns left onto a woods road between unusually wide stone walls. Soon, the trail turns right, goes through a gap in a massive stone wall, and continues on a footpath, passing a huge oak tree.

After crossing a stone wall, the Indian Hill Loop Trail reaches a junction with a blue-blazed trail that begins on the right and heads north to connect, in 0.4 miles, with the white-blazed Appalachian Trail. Here, the Indian Hill Loop Trail turns left and begins to parallel the stone wall. It soon crosses two more stone walls, as well as a woods road lined on both sides with wide stone walls.

After passing through a wide gap in yet another stone wall, the trail turns left onto a grassy woods road. At a T-intersection, it turns right onto another woods road, which it follows for about a quarter mile to a barrier gate. Here, you'll see a triple blaze that marks the official end of the Indian Hill Loop Trail. Turn left and climb to the parking area, where you will notice a kiosk on the left and a triple blaze that marks the start of the Indian Hill Loop Trail.

Turn left and reenter the woods on a footpath. The trail proceeds through a hemlock grove, bears right and climbs to the crest of a rise. After descending a little, it climbs through mountain laurel to reach an open granite ledge, with west-facing views over the hills of Sterling Forest.

A short distance beyond, you'll reach a junction with the red-blazed Furnace Loop Trail (marked by a cairn). Turn right and descend steeply on this red-blazed trail, passing lichen-covered cliffs and interesting rock outcrops along the way. At the base of the descent, you'll reach a junction with the white-blazed Wildcat Mountain Trail. Turn right, now retracing your steps, and follow the white blazes across the stream and along Hall Drive back to the parking area where the hike began.

"Hiking" is provided by Daniel Chazin of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. The Trail Conference is a volunteer organization that builds and maintains over 1,850 miles of hiking trails and publishes a library of hiking maps and books. The Trail Conference's office is at 156 Ramapo Valley Rd. (Route 202), [Mahwah](#); (201) 512-9348; [nynjtc.org](#); HikeoftheWeek@aol.com.

