

# Sterling Lake Loop

## Overview

This loop hike circles scenic Sterling Lake, mostly on woods roads, and passes by relics of former mining activity.

Details Time: 2.5 hours Difficulty: Easy to Moderate Length: 4.2 miles

## Driving Directions

Take the New York Thruway to Exit 15A. Turn left at the bottom of the ramp onto Route 17 and head north for 1.4 miles to the exit for Sterling Forest. Follow Sterling Mine Road (County Route 72) west for 3.0 miles, then turn right onto Long Meadow Road (County Route 84). Proceed north on Long Meadow Road for 3.5 miles, then turn left onto Old Forge Road and continue for 0.5 mile until you reach the Sterling Forest State Park Visitor Center, on the right side of the road. Stop at the visitor center to obtain a free trail map.

## Description

This hike circles Sterling Lake in a clockwise direction, following the Sterling Lake Loop, marked with dark blue plastic blazes.

Leave the park visitor center, using the front entrance, and turn right (west) on a dirt path, following the blue blazes of the Sterling Lake Loop. The trail briefly joins the paved entrance road, then bears right and goes across a grassy field, passing the stone foundations of a former church on the right. It enters the woods on a footpath and soon reaches a junction with the yellow-blazed Lakeville Ironworks Trail, which begins on the left.

Continue ahead, following the blue blazes of the Sterling Lake Loop, which crosses the outlet of Sterling Lake on a wooden bridge, with the ruins of the Sterling Furnace visible on the left. Just beyond, the trail turns left and descends to a paved road. It turns right and follows the road, soon passing ruins of concrete and brick structures on the left. These are remnants of the former mining operations in the area. Sterling Forest was once a center of mining activity, with the first mines opened in the 1700s. The last active mine in the area closed down nearly 100 years ago.

Just beyond these ruins, you'll pass the western end of the Lakeville Ironworks Trail. Continue ahead along the road, which soon begins to run alongside Sterling Lake, with views across the lake. About three-quarters of a mile from the start, a sign marks the start of the Bare Rock and Fire Tower Connector Trails, and the paving ends just beyond. Continue ahead on a woods road, which runs inland for some distance, then again parallels the lakeshore.

Near the northern end of the lake, the yellow-blazed Sterling Valley Trail joins from the left, and you now follow both yellow and blue blazes. Just beyond, you'll pass a former boat-launching ramp and then bear right at a fork. Soon afterwards, the trail crosses an earthen causeway, with broad views over the lake. A quiet, picturesque pond is on the left.

The trail now goes slightly inland and climbs over two rises. After descending through a mountain laurel thicket, it again emerges on the lakeshore at a small sandy beach, with two dead pine trees overhanging the water. It crosses another earthen causeway over an arm of the lake, with a beaver lodge on its east side. At the end of the lake, the trail bears left and heads north, running parallel to the narrow arm of the lake.

When you reach the end of this arm, follow the blue-blazed Sterling Lake Loop as it turns sharply right onto another woods road (the yellow-blazed Sterling Valley Trail continues straight ahead). The blue trail proceeds south along the road, which climbs gently, descends a little, and continues to run above the lake, with some minor ups and downs. You can catch some glimpses of the lake through the trees on the right. After about a mile of pleasant walking on this grassy road, the blue-blazed trail heads southeast along a rougher woods road, which soon begins to climb rather steeply.

Just beyond the crest of the rise, the blue-blazed trail turns right, leaving the road, and descends on a footpath. (The orange-triangle-blazed Pine Meadow Connector begins here and continues along the road.) Soon, the trail turns right on a gravel road and follows it for about 75 feet, then turns left, leaving the road, and continues to descend more gradually to paved Old Forge Road, which it crosses. Just before reaching a second paved road (County Route 84), the trail turns right and crosses a wetland on an earth-and-rock embankment of a former mining railroad. It bears left at the end of the embankment, then soon turns right and continues along a gravel road, passing several old trailers.

When the road curves to the right to end in a paved parking area, continue straight ahead, following the blue markers. Just ahead, the orange-triangle-blazed McKeags Meadow Connector begins on the left. Follow the Sterling Lake Loop, which soon emerges onto paved Old Forge Road. Turn left and follow the road a short distance, then turn right and follow the blue-blazed trail on a footpath back to the visitor center, completing the loop.