



Millerton's Earth Day



The Great Outdoors by Foot

Be safe and social-distance as you walk, hike, stroll, or self-propel

Covid-19 Pandemic Update. Officially, New York is on “pause.” You are urged to stay home for now. But if you are losing your mind (or at someone’s throat), a smarter choice is one of these modest adventures. You’ll feel better and replenish your natural reserves of tolerance, endurance, and good cheer.

As you might expect, many public resources are closed, particularly those with admission fees and services. New York State campsites won’t open until May 14, as of late April. Parks and trails are nominally open but ask that users conscientiously practice social distancing until told otherwise—which could extend many months.

 *The Harlem Valley Rail Trail*, a great local resource, runs through our area. Consider it a starting point. It now consists of three sections; they will soon be combined into a single 26-mile trail from the MTA’s Wassaic Train Station to Hillsdale in Columbia County. An

eight-mile section from Millerton north will be complete by fall 2020; a bridge over Route 22 connecting the new 2.2-mile stretch south of Hillsdale with the rest of the trail will take a bit of doing, but could be finished by the following fall, virus and bureaucracies willing.

The Rail Trail is tame and civilized. As a former rail bed it is level, mostly rising barely perceptibly from south to north, asphalt-paved with guardrails along drop-offs and bridges, of which there are several. It's suited for walkers, runners, bikers, roller-bladers, skateboarders, strollers, and cross-country skiers after a snow. (Travel by motorized means of any kind is not allowed.) Compared to other trails, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail is relatively rural. You'll see a large variety of habitats. History buffs will enjoy the occasional historical display. An infamous road cut north of Coleman Station filled with dense snow in a late 19th century blizzard and derailed a train with loss of the engineer's life.

The Rail Trail serves four villages: Amenia, Millerton, Copake Falls, and Hillsdale. All have amenities for the trail user. Parking is at the trailheads and often (not always) at road crossings. The open sections as of spring 2020:

Rules to mind (this means you)

1. Take out what you bring in.
2. Announce yourself when approaching from behind, especially on a bike or roller blades.
3. Trails welcome dogs, but they must be on a leash. Don't let them relieve themselves on a trail. If they do, clean up and take it with you.
4. Help keep trails open by respecting private property.
5. Even in the woods, social-distancing must be observed. Step off the trail if others are passing. Let those ahead know you will overtake. It is worrisome, but trail users are noting that some do not practice the 6-foot rule—which, by the way, is a *minimum*.

▣ **Between Wassaic Station and Millerton**, about 10.7 miles, including Amenia. Official parking at Wassaic, Amenia, Coleman Station, and Millerton.

▣ **Between Undermountain Road and Orphan Farm Meadow**, about 5.2 miles, including Taconic State Park and Copake Falls. Official parking at Undermountain Road, Taconic State Park, and Orphan Farm Meadows.

▣ **Between Black Grocery Road and Hillsdale** at Anthony Street, about 2.2 miles. Official parking at Black Grocery Road and near the Hillsdale trailhead, across from Herrington's Lumber & Hardware store.

The trail right of way is owned by New York State, maintained by volunteers and in Dutchess County by its Parks Department, in Columbia County by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Find more info and updates about the new sections at hvrt.org, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association site. Click [here](#) for an accurate trail map (dates excepted).



 **The Taconic Range:** Forming the Harlem Valley heading north from Millerton are two small, low mountain ranges. The western range tapers out, the Taconic Hills to the east become the Berkshires in Massachusetts. A wonderful trail system called the South Taconic Trail takes hikers along this ridge, from Millerton and Salisbury to Hillsdale. Much of it is managed by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (nynjtc.org); a portion is the Appalachian Trail (known fondly as the AT, elsewhere and henceforth here).

Get an excellent map of the South Taconic Trails online at www.oblongbooks.com or nynjtc.org. A \$5. app for iOS and Android phones and tablets has the map and other stuff, too, from avenzamaps.com: South Taconic 2015 Trail Conference Map 107.

E A S Y

1. **Rudd Pond Loop**, about 4 miles and a decent workout

The rise in elevation is steady but not steep, the footing is good, and there are nice things to see when you stop to catch your breath. Start at the trailhead on Shagroy/Belgo Road, at the south end of Rudd Pond and a little parking lot. The blazed trail will take you over a small stream past Iron Mine Pond (known locally as the Ore Pit). At its north end, the trail splits three ways: left to the Rudd Pond Camping area run by the New York State Park system; the white-blazed trail continues north; the trail on your right bends around the pond and back to Shagroy/Belgo Road. Follow the white trail through a forest, up along a stream on an old woods road, passing signs of the Maltby Furnace that once made iron. As the road turns right, the trail goes left and you will soon see stone walls, a lovely forest, and a small wetland. In about a mile, a trail marker indicates where the South Taconic Trail turns north (a pretty overlook is .6 mile farther) while the Rudd Pond Loop continues straight on an old road. This winds down as Rudd Pond comes into view, through a forest of oak, birch, and maple. At the bottom follow the paved road south along the pond, past the beach and the camping area to a smaller path south that passes through woods. In a few minutes you'll find the north end of the Ore Pit and meet the trail you came on. A pleasant walk, not many people, good exercise, lovely views.

2. **Bear Mountain**, Salisbury, CT

As a destination, Bear Mountain offers a delightful, um, peak experience, with a bare summit and giant cairn to climb for an even better view. Reputedly a former lookout, this pyramidal pile of large, stable rocks is dotted with resting hikers on popular days. Bear has the distinction of being the top peak in the state at 2,316 feet. The high *point* at 2,380 feet is, rather embarrassingly, not that near the top of Mt. Frissell, which lies mainly in Massachusetts some 1.5 miles west-northwest of the Bear.

There are a few ways to get to the top, all but one in the strenuous category. We'll concentrate on easy. In Salisbury, turn north off Main Street/Route 44 at the Town Hall and drive up Factory Road/Washinee/Mount Riga Road to the ridge line at South Pond and Riga Lake where you turn right to drive the ridge. In about TK after the turn, find a dirt road on the right. (The South Taconic Trail Map 107, shows a dotted line marked Bear Mountain Road. Park discretely. Or continue driving about a third of a mile to the small parking areas for Mt. Frissell and walk back.) Simply hike this road until you see the Bear Mountain trail on the left. Through woods and ultimately an open field of low-bush blueberries, you'll reach the peak in no time. Then either retrace your steps or—far better, if you don't mind a small challenge—return the long way in a counterclockwise loop. The only hard part is right away when you must climb down a steep face of perhaps a hundred feet. Then you'll be in a cool, open forest that's quite magical. Continue around to the left, catch a small trail back up the mountain past a looming log lodge that belongs to the Appalachian Trail Club. Go left when you gain the road (or right if you parked at Mt. Frissell) and soon you'll come across your car.

A far more environmental approach is to walk the entire distance from and back to Salisbury, a full day of work and accomplishment. By the way, down to Salisbury and back by foot on this route is a recommended AT side trip.

3. **Taconic State Park**, Park Office in Copake Falls, NY

In the fold of New York, Taconic State Park is positioned along the western cuff of the Taconic Mountain Range. It includes camping, swimming, and boating at Rudd Pond and has seven nice hiking trails, view trails, dog-leash trails and more, with available trail maps and driving directions as well as detailed reviews and photos from hikers, campers, and nature lovers. The trails in Taconic State Park range from 1.5 to 10.2 miles and from 672 to 1,433 feet above sea level. Three are considered easy.

In just about any season, the easy **Bash Bish Falls** trail is rewarding. From the Park floor and parking area you walk along the shaded stream that overflows from the deep, clear pool at the base of the falls. You'll hear the roar from some distance away. Swimming is not allowed, alas, but there's Ore Pit pond with a float next to the parking lot for a refreshing dip

R I G O R O U S

4. **Lion's Head** is plenty enough for a day hike. At 1,738 feet, it offers a spectacular view. At Salisbury Town Hall go up Bunker Hill Road. Stay right it until ends at dirt parking lot labeled "Hiker Parking." You'll enter the Blue Trail system—follow the blue blazes. Near the top, the Appalachian Trail joins from the right. It uses white blazes. A few hundred yards from Lion's Head is an open plateau with a beautiful view of distant mountains and lush forest. (You may hear the faint hiss of a waterfall, but don't pursue it down the mountain into its thick growth. It's not as close as it sounds and potentially dangerous.) Near the peak will be a small clearing.

It almost looks like a campsite. From here go straight up the rocks on the AT or take a circuitous but physically less demanding route by following the blue trail for a few hundred yards then doubling back to the peak. To continue to Bear Mountain, about 3.5 miles distant, head north on the AT.

5. **Undermountain Trail** starts three miles north of Salisbury off Route 41. There's a dirt parking lot on the left and during summer it's easy to miss since it's covered by foliage. Undermountain Trail might be the most popular trail in the state since it's a jumping off point for a wide variety of hikes and is part of the Appalachian Trail. It rises straight up for two miles to meet the AT, which you join. From here it's about another mile to the top of Bear Mountain with a short, semi-steep rise the final few hundred yards. This hike is about six miles round trip.

6 & 7. These two popular options are farther north on Route 41. They start from trailheads along the Salisbury-Egremont Road, Route 41 (turn north at the White Hart Inn). You must be in decent physical condition. These are steep hikes. But if you take your time and bring plenty of water and "energy food," the whole experience will be well worth the effort.

☐ **Race Brook Falls.** You'll need to choose between the north and south sides of the stream. North will give you, in anything but a drought, a climb up to a tall, silver string of a waterfall. The south trail breaks from the brook to flatten the ascent, then cuts back to cross the brook below a second waterfall, climbs sharply another 200 feet, walks for a mile or so along the trickle of a brook and joins the Appalachian Trail. From here the daring or foolish continue on the AT to Mount Everett, at 2,602 the tallest peak in the Taconic range. Three AT lean-tos are nearby, attesting to this spot's popularity. A bit north is Guilder Pond, rimmed by its own trail.

☐ **Sages Ravine.** Parking lot to the west between Hammertown and Kelsey Roads. The trail meanders south a ways before finding the brook and ascending in parallel. About halfway up the AT joins from the south. Continue on the AT up to the road, or hang a left and a trail known as Paradise takes you to the upper base of Bear Mountain (see above). Meeting the Bear requires a good hundred feet of scrambling using all four appendages, so be careful and take your time.

Garden and Arboretum

Innisfree Garden 362 Tyrrel Road, Millbrook, NY 12545; 845-677-8000

Closed through April because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Please call first.

Innisfree is an American nonprofit public garden in an episodic eighth-century Chinese style. It's impossible to see the whole from any vantage. Its 185 acres hold streams, waterfalls, terraces,

retaining walls, rocks, and plants. Most of the plants are native, and the rocks are from the local forest. Its design evolved over more than 50 years, managed by landscape architect and gardener Lester Collins, who was also enamored of Japanese design and the arrival of modernism. At the site's center is Tyrrel Lake, 40 acres, a deep glacial pond from which water is pumped into a hillside reservoir, and thence to the garden's water features. In 2019 Innisfree was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Vassar College Arboretum, Poughkeepsie

The college grounds are graced by elms, maples, beeches, a hornbeam, Russian olive trees, and even a cucumbertree magnolia, among others. About 230 tree species now comprise the campus's vast arboretum,, with the first plantings laid out by Matthew Vassar in 1865.

Nature Preserves

 **Mary Flagler Cary Arboretum**, 2801 Sharon Turnpike, Route 44, NY;

914-714-0831; 845-677-5343

The Arboretum, on the grounds of the world-renowned Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, contains meadow, forest, swamp, hills, and trout streams, with the following walking trails:

- Cary Pines Trail (1.3 miles) through open spaces, thickets, with pine and hemlock forests.
- Fern Glen—boardwalk through habitat of more than 150 species of trees, ferns, and wildflowers.
- Sedge Meadow Trail—short boardwalk through wetland with red maples.
- Wappinger Creek Trail (1.25 miles)—follows the east branch of Wappinger Creek, a tributary of the Hudson River, through forests, marshes, and old fields.

 **Sharon Audubon Center**, 325 Cornwall Bridge Road, Sharon, CT; 860-364-0520.

The Audubon Center is closed due to the pandemic but the trails are open to the public. This wonderful community resource and research center consists of the Sharon Audubon Center and the Emily Winthrop Miles Wildlife Sanctuary, 1,200 acres. The trails offer several loops between a lower and upper pond through healthy, well-managed forest. The trails are easy, suitable for walking shoes, and the elevation change is gentle.

 **Round Top Preserve**, Carver Road, North East, NY

Several miles north of Millerton and south of Boston Corners on Route 22, go west on Carver Road. This nature area has several short color-coded trail loops stemming from a small parking area on the mountain's crown. About half the year the views east, north, and west are excellent; in full foliage the woods dominate. Take a picnic.

 **Pawling Nature Preserve**, Quaker Lake Road, Pawling/Dover, NY

This 60-year-old preserve contains 1,060 acres along the top of Hammersby Ridge and around and to the west of Quaker Lake. Ten miles of trails meander through the varied property making only small elevation changes, including the Appalachian Trail, which bisects the property north-south. Access the parking lot on Quaker Lake Road, which is east of and parallel to Route 22 in Pawling/Dover. (Take Route 55 east from 22, then turn south onto Duell Hollow Road, which becomes Quaker Lake.) It's owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy and maintained somewhat haphazardly by volunteers.