



Introduction

SCENES FROM A HIGHLANDS MOUNTAIN TOP

It's a sultry June day on the summit of Wyanokie High Point, 960 feet high in the northeast corner of the New Jersey Highlands. People in the towns below swelter, and to the east the New York City skyline steams in the humid air, but here a steady breeze drifts in from the higher mountains to the west. Hikers come here in all seasons, under different skies; sometimes the air swirls, bursts in gusts, or tries to carry you away, but always it moves, like the tides of an invisible sea.

Those tides run back into all kinds of histories, whose consequences are part of the scenery. To the northeast on the ridge of Ramapo Mountain, you can see recent housing developments, and lines of townhouses along Skyline Drive. The great Wanaque Reservoir to the east, completed in 1930 to supply the growing cities of North Jersey with essential water, covered 70 homesteads, farms, and commercial buildings of the Wanaque River valley. Streaks of



The summit of Wyanoĳie High Point, looking to the northeast toward Windbeam Mountain.

rusty color in the rocks of High Point summit show the iron content of Highlands gneiss, which in rich veins was a source of iron ore for the rebellious colonies and the thriving nineteenth-century iron industry of New Jersey. The smooth summit of High Point was polished about 15,000 years ago by the abrasion of ice and rocks embedded in the mile-thick Wisconsin Glacier, and an examination of the summit rocks reveals small flecks of crystalline quartz and feldspar formed during a continental collision thousands of millions of years ago, just as visible life was beginning to appear on our planet. Hundreds of millions of years of erosion by water and wind have worn them down to the crystalline rock foundations you sit on now.

Although the view from the top of High Point will seem much the same next week, and even next year, the world of the Highlands is not static, but rather the product of processes of change proceeding on time scales ranging from decades to eons. Every day, grain by grain, water and wind erode the rock of High Point summit,

carrying it down to the soil below, into brooks and streams, and finally to the sea. There it is deposited on the continental shelf and pushed deep into the crust of the Earth to form new sedimentary rock, which awaits the next collision of continents to be raised into mountains again.

On this mountaintop, where you sit quietly in a soft breeze, you are part of many natural cycles that create new forests, watercourses, mountains, and civilizations out of the remains of the old. And every year, in another important cycle, new hikers, young and old, make their way to the summit of Wyanokie High Point to appreciate the beauty of the Highlands and to wonder how their generations may influence its future.

THE EXTENT OF THE JERSEY HIGHLANDS

The New Jersey Highlands are 1,250 square miles of rugged hills in a narrow triangle extending about 100 miles from the New York State border to the Delaware River. The Highlands are 23 miles wide and 1,300 feet high between Vernon and Mahwah in the north, diminishing to 8 miles wide and 500 feet high at Phillipsburg in the south. From the air, the Highlands today are a mostly forested swath of steep hills and valleys, dotted with hundreds of ponds, lakes, and reservoirs, and an increasing number of growing suburban communities.

HIGHLANDS TOPOGRAPHY

The unusual geology of the Jersey Highlands offers the hiker opportunities and challenges not found in other areas of the state. The tectonic faulting of the Highlands bedrock, ages of erosion, and recent



The first falls of Posts Brook in the Wyanoċies, where several hikes begin, is called Otter Hole.

glaciations have produced a tightly packed series of broken ridges, separated by narrow valleys with small running streams feeding into larger watercourses. Because the Highlands have been so broken and folded, the hiker can find in them both short and long hikes offering varieties of terrain and views. A short Highlands hike of an hour or two can take you through moist slopes, dry ridgetops, long views from bedrock ledges, glacial boulder fields, changes in vegetation, and startling geological surprises. Every hike in this book offers a scenic water view, perhaps of a vast reservoir, a glacial lake or pond, a

waterfall, or a substantial stream. When you have completed one of the longer hikes, you will have been up and down more times than you can remember, been physically tested, and enjoyed many beautiful and varied views along the way.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE JERSEY HIGHLANDS

The history of the Jersey Highlands records the complex interaction between the economic exploitation of its natural resources, the protection of its watersheds to supply growing cities, and the more recent desire of urban and suburban populations for homesites and recreation with access to its nearby natural beauty.

From earliest times, the topography of the Highlands has made it resistant to farming. The Native Americans of North Jersey, the Minsi, made their permanent agricultural settlements in the Upper Delaware



The Blue Mine, on the Mine Trail in the Wyanoċies (Hike #18: High Point–Iron Mines Loop), was worked continuously from 1765 to 1855 and finally abandoned in 1905.

River Valley, and used the rugged hills mostly for hunting. The colonists bypassed them in favor of level and fertile land to the south and north. During the American Revolution and for most of the nineteenth century, the Highlands forests were leveled to provide wood fuel for a thriving iron industry, and industrial settlements grew up around the forges (see the remains of the Hibernia Mines on the Wildcat Ridge Loop, Hike #2, and the Long Pond Ironworks on Hike #21). But western competition gradually forced the mines to close, allowing the depleted forests to regenerate.

The Highlands in the early twentieth century was an area of a few small rural towns, some small commercial and subsistence farms and dairy operations, and declining iron towns and abandoned forge complexes. The hills began to develop slender forests in various stages of recovery. The first edition of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference's *New York Walk Book*, published in 1923, quotes a surveyor saying of the Wyanokie Highlands that they are "too wild and too worthless to be taxed," and that "in these areas it is possible for a man to get thoroughly lost while still in sight of the Woolworth Building."

As late as 1950, an aerial photograph shows suburban growth stopping at the eastern rise of the Highlands. In spite of the incursions of agriculture and iron industry, for 200 years the rugged topography had preserved the Highlands from becoming part of cities and their suburbs.

SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT ENTERS THE HIGHLANDS

Beginning in the years after World War II, both federal and state governments invested large amounts of money in improved highways. At the same time, the need of expanding city populations for family housing put pressure on undeveloped areas of the state.



Townhouse development along Skyline Drive, on the west slope of Ramapo Mountain, seen from Wyanoĳie High Point.

Gradually, the insistent growth of the suburbs spread along the new roads, breaching the natural defenses of the Highlands. By the end of the twentieth century, Highlands forests in New York and New Jersey were being consumed by housing development at the rate of 5,000 acres every year. The conflict between developing the Jersey Highlands and preserving them had reached a crucial stage.

PRESERVING THE WILDERNESS IN YOUR BACKYARD

The New Jersey state government, in a bipartisan collaboration, began responding to this situation in 1961 by proposing a bond issue to provide funds to purchase farms and woodlands statewide to be preserved from development for their historic or recreational value.

Called the Green Acres Program, the proposal was approved by the voters, who have in the past 45 years overwhelmingly approved nine bond issues for the same purpose. The Green Acres Program has announced that the Highlands will receive special attention in its acquisitions planning: “Serving as a spectacular green belt around some of the nation’s most densely populated cities and suburbs, the majority of the Highlands’ mountains, ridges, forests, and fields are privately held and therefore are vulnerable to development. Preservation of the greenbelt is critical to ensuring the integrity of New Jersey’s water supplies and maintaining the state’s biodiversity.”

Private individuals also led opposition to unrestricted housing development in Highlands hills and forests. In a typical case, Mrs.



Ryker Lake and 2,000 acres around it was saved from development by the efforts of an organization of local residents called The Friends of Sparta Mountain, with the cooperation of the New Jersey Green Acres Program, the Victoria Foundation, and the New Jersey Audubon Society.

Lucy A. Meyer of Montville organized local opposition to the development of nearby Pyramid Mountain. She was able to gain support from local officials to delay approvals for construction, and eventually put together a coalition of state, county, municipal, and private funding sources to purchase the land for a fair price from the developer. In 1987, the area was turned over to the Morris County Park Commission to become one of the most popular hiking areas in the Highlands. Her work is commemorated in Lucy's Overlook on the Pyramid Mountain Loop (Hike #6). A similar campaign by concerned citizens helped preserve the land around Ryker Lake (Hike #10). In all such campaigns, patience and dedication is required; it took 20 years of constant effort for Lucy Meyer and her colleagues to win their battle.

In 1988, a group of conservation organizations, including the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, formed the Highlands Coalition to advocate legislation to prevent further uncontrolled development in the entire Highlands area from Connecticut to Pennsylvania. At the latest count, 110 organizations have joined the Coalition. In 2004, the Highlands Coalition efforts, with the support of then Governor James McGreevey, a Democrat, led to the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act by the New Jersey Legislature.

The demand for urban water resources made the preservation of the Jersey Highlands a public issue of the first importance. In Congress, Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen, a Republican of the 11th District, led the effort to have a federal study define the importance of the Highlands resources, and subsequently introduced legislation to authorize funds to help preserve the Highlands. This law, the federal Highlands Conservation Act, was passed in 2004, and signed into law by President George W. Bush.

As a result of these public and private efforts, the equitable long-term preservation of the Jersey Highlands is within reach. The conflicts continue, but the legal machinery for preservation is in place.

According to the Highlands Coalition, 25 million people live within a two-hour drive of the Highlands. We hope this book will encourage all of those citizens to appreciate and help preserve the resources and recreational opportunities offered by this wilderness in their back yard.

THE NEW YORK - NEW JERSEY
TRAIL CONFERENCE AND THE
HIGHLANDS

In 1920, the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC) was formed to encourage hiking and to organize the creation and maintenance of hiking trails in the metropolitan area. Today, the Trail Conference and about 100 affiliated hiking organizations have over 10,000 active members who walk the trails in New Jersey. The Trail Conference maintains more than 400 miles of Jersey Highlands trails in three maintenance districts, and publishes maps of northern Highlands trails from the New York-New Jersey border to NJ Route 23. It also has committed its resources to land acquisition, public advocacy of wilderness conservation, and education for hiking and other forms of passive recreation. The Trail Conference is a founding member of the Highlands Coalition, the advocacy group that helped promote New Jersey's Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act of 2004. The publication of *Hiking the Jersey Highlands* supports the Conference's education program by introducing the public to the outdoor recreation resources of the Highlands.

THE HIGHLANDS TRAIL

The last section of our book is devoted to a brief history and description of the Highlands Trail, which was designated New Jersey's



The Highlands Trail is blazed with painted teal diamond blazes, or with a plastic teal-on-white logo like this one.

Legacy Millennium Trail in 1999 under a nationwide program initiated by the administration of President Bill Clinton to encourage outdoor recreation. The Highlands Trail begins near Storm King Mountain in New York State. It enters New Jersey on Big Beech Mountain in Passaic County (Hike #21) and continues 110 miles toward the Delaware River near Phillipsburg.

Many of the hikes in this book have been selected because they follow parts of the Highlands Trail, and our description of the Highlands Trail will refer to those hikes. Our descriptions of sections of the trail not covered by our numbered hikes will be sufficiently detailed to direct the hiker through turns and intersections. We provide a small-scale overall map of the trail, but for more detailed maps and continuous trail directions, the hiker should go to the website of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, www.nynjtc.org, and click the “trails” button.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We intend this book to be an introduction to recreational hiking in the Highlands, both for people who think of woodland walking as a relatively new experience, and for those who have hiked elsewhere but aren't familiar with the Jersey Highlands. For most residents of metro area cities and older suburbs, the Highlands trails described here offer access to woodlands within easy driving distance. We have selected hikes from the northern Highlands close to the New York-New Jersey border, down to the southern end in Hunterdon County. Those who live in suburbs farther from city centers may find the wilderness of the Highlands almost in their back yards. In some cases, the trails are accessible by public transportation. Hikers willing to take a bicycle on a train or in the baggage compartment of a bus could reach all of the trailheads without driving a car. Of course, there would be some long uphill pedaling involved.

Because the rugged Highlands terrain cannot be described completely on a trail map, a hike book like this one is particularly useful. We have chosen and combined trails to provide long views, seasonal wildflowers, interesting history, varied terrain, and beautiful water. Our descriptions will point out the physical obstacles to be encountered on the trail, and provide careful navigation guides. The book can be studied at home to help you choose a hike appropriate for your experience and capabilities. And it is small enough to be carried on the trail to call attention to interesting features and views, to reassure you at trail junctions, and to remind you how far you've come and how far you have to go. Where possible, the hike descriptions suggest ways to cut a hike short in case heavy rain surprises, or the day grows dark. Our maps try to show these options, and they may be supplemented for many hikes by consulting the detailed and comprehensive map set of North Jersey Trails published by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference and available from its office at 156 Ramapo Valley Road, Mahwah, NJ 07430, (201) 512-9348, www.nynjtc.org.

Every step of the trails described in this book has been walked by the author and two wonderful hiking companions. All of us have gray hair, and believe in taking enough time on a hike to really see what's there. We like to stop occasionally to examine a wildflower, a mushroom or a rock, listen for a bird (we try to identify them by their song, but we aren't very good at it), to admire a view, or to take a photograph. Every photograph in the book was taken on a trail in the Highlands by one of us, or a hiking friend, because we wanted you to know that the rocks, flowers, animals, and beautiful views we write about really exist on the trails. The book is written not only to tell you how to complete a hike, but to show why you might want to walk there in the first place.

We usually stop briefly to take a drink every half hour, and we try to start our hike so we can snack or eat lunch at an interesting lookout. We walk at a reasonable pace, on level track, about 2.5 miles per hour, and on steep climbs up and down about 1 mile per hour. We are sometimes passed by younger legs scissoring along at 3 to 4 miles per hour, and we admire them, but we are convinced we come home with more of the Highlands in our memories than the speedy hikers. For this reason, the times allowed for the hikes described here may be a little long. If you beat them, we are satisfied; there are as many ways to walk in the woods as there are walkers.

We have acquired some other trail habits over the years, which hikers may find they want to adopt. We carry a backpack with a wool sweater, raingear, flashlight, small first-aid kit, compass, a multi-use trail knife, food, a quart of water for every three hours on the trail (more in hot weather), and a trail map. We all wear waterproof hiking boots to provide ankle support and good traction over rocks, and to get through the occasional seasonal wet spots without soaking our socks. However, we do know that with the improvement in athletic shoe construction, for some of the less demanding hikes a good strong pair of sneakers with wide treads will do very well. We like to carry hikers' trekking poles to provide balance on edges, and to



Hiking in winter on a bright day when the leaves are down offers vistas not available in green seasons. This overlook is on Hike #13, Wyanokie Torne.

cushion the impact of climbing down steep trails. Two of us always wear lightweight artificial fiber long pants and long-sleeved shirts to defend against insects, especially ticks. The third one opts for shorts in warm weather, and relies on a swim or shower to wash off the ticks. But he has had his brush with Lyme disease, and the others have not.

Each season in the woods has its pleasures; we walk year-round to enjoy them all. Most hikers prefer to walk in spring or fall, when the weather is mild and colors delightful. Summer hiking is attractive, too, as long as the temperature and humidity don't climb too high. We have learned to enjoy walking on a cool, dry winter day, without snow or ice on the ground. Then the leaves are down, and you can see deeper into the woods to the hills, rock outcrops, and contours that may be hidden in green seasons.

As part of our hike descriptions, we often mention wildflowers

we have seen along the trail. To help you understand these references, we provide, in the center of this book, sixteen pages of color pictures of common woodland wildflowers, and some of the more interesting uncommon ones as well. Every one of the pictures was taken on a trail described in this book. We have included enough examples so that for the first year or two you won't have to carry a book-length wildflower guide in your pack. The flowers are presented in seasonal sections, and grouped according to color. Wildflowers are very fragile; they will not survive long after being picked or removed from their habitat. We hope you will enjoy recognizing them and leaving them for the next passing hiker to see.

The hikes described in this book are graded from "Starter Hikes" to "Longer Hikes, Climbs, and Scrambles" to "Challenges." The starters are appropriate for new hikers, for families with young children, or for seniors looking for manageable outdoor exercise.



Cardinal flowers blooming in August at Otter Hole. Photo: Dan Chazin

There are some difficulties involved in the Starter Hikes, but in general, people capable of enjoying a walk from the lake in Jersey City's Lincoln Park to the corner of Bergen Avenue and Montgomery Street, or from Newark's Broad Street railroad station to Springfield Avenue and 16th Street, or across New York City's Central Park and back, should be able to enjoy these hikes. There are some differences, of course; the footing on woodland trails is not always secure, and any snacks you eat along the way you will have to carry in with you, and carry the wrappers out. Within the "Starter" category, the hikes gradually become a little longer and a little more strenuous.

If you have completed and enjoyed one of the longer Starter hikes, or one similar to them, you should be able to enjoy one of the "Longer Hikes, Climbs, and Scrambles." A climb here means an ascent of at least 100 feet in 0.1 mile horizontal distance, for an average

grade of close to 20%. A scramble is a climb over rocks requiring the use of hands and knees as well as feet. The urban equivalent of a climb is to walk up ten flights of apartment building stairs at a slow but steady pace, carrying on a conversation as you go. As for the scrambles, if you can carry a modest-sized TV set



A scramble is a climb where you might have to use your hands as well as your feet to get up and over. This one is on Hike #13, the Wyanokie Torne Loop.

from the bedroom to the living room, or hoist yourself up into the bed of a pick-up truck, you're ready.

Similarly, if you have completed and enjoyed one of the more strenuous "Longer Hikes, Climbs, and Scrambles," you should be ready to try the "Challenges." These hikes add distance, more frequent ups and downs, or more difficult climbs and scrambles. They are for fit hikers with some experience, and, because they wander farther into the woods, should not be attempted alone.

The forest provides favorable habitat for deer, turkey, and grouse, and is open to seasonal deer hunting (firearms and bow) in specified zones by permit only. Deer seasons usually are scheduled from the end of September to the end of January. Hunting seasons for turkey and other game birds usually last from the middle of April to late May. Hunting is prohibited on Sunday everywhere in New Jersey. If you are in the woods during hunting seasons, you should wear bright orange outer clothing. For specific information about New Jersey hunting regulations, areas, and dates in state Wildlife Management Areas, contact the New Jersey DEP Division of Fish



The three companions who together hiked every step of the trails in this book (from left): Bob Whitney, George Petty, and Marilyn Katz.

and Wildlife office at the Pequest Trout Hatchery Natural Resource Education Center, (908) 637-4125, or check the website: www.njfishandwildlife.com. For trails in state parks, you should call the office of the park superintendent, listed in the back of this book under “Organizations of Interest to Hikers.” For Morris County Parks, contact Morris County Park Police, (973) 326-7632.