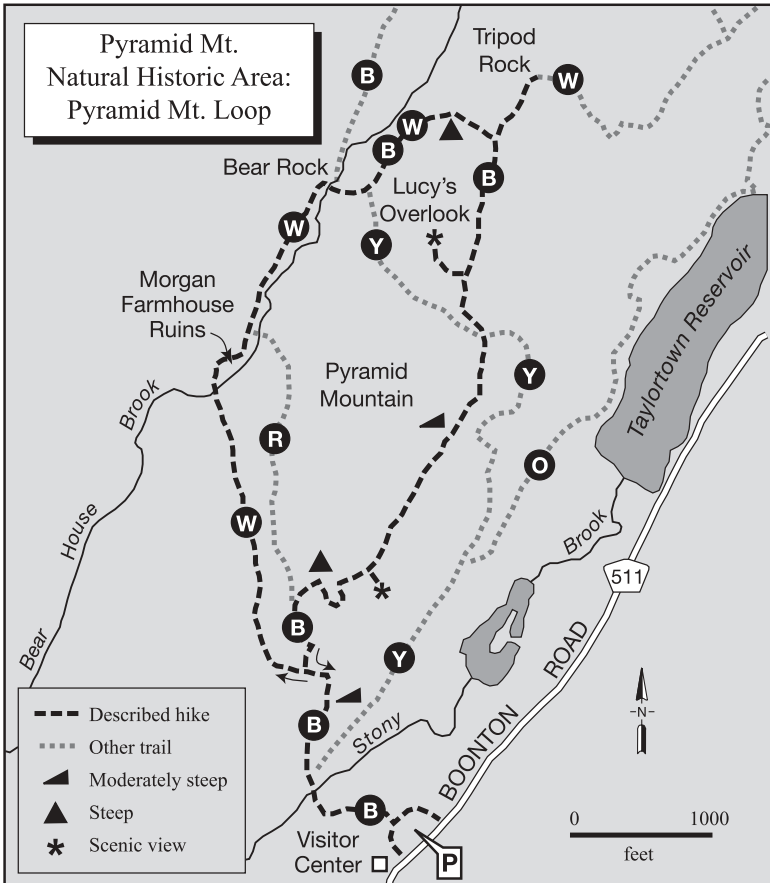


6. PYRAMID MOUNTAIN NATURAL
HISTORIC AREA

Pyramid Mountain Loop

2.8 miles • 1¼ hours



ELEVATION: Low: 610 feet; High: 934 feet.

BLAZES: Blue, white, blue again.

CLIMBING: There are two climbs: the first, about 80 feet at an easy grade, and the second, about 100 feet at a steep grade of 40%. The rest of the hike is fairly level walking, with some seasonal wet spots near Bear House Brook.

PERMITTED USES: Hiking only. Deer hunting is allowed in specific areas of the park for periods during the fall/winter season by permit only. The specific area is posted with bright orange signs at these times. Check with the Morris County Park Commission, 53 East Hanover Avenue, P.O. Box 1295, Morristown, NJ 07962-1295, (973) 326-7600, www.morrisparks.net, for exact hunting dates.

O V E R V I E W

This hike offers climbs for exercise, farmstead ruins for history, open ledges for long views, famous glacial erratic boulders for geology, and seasonal displays of birds and extraordinary wildflowers. Although shorter than Hike #5 (Ringwood State Park: The Manor Loop), this hike appears after it because of the steep climbs that make it more difficult. I have often led walks along the first mile of this hike as a wildflower guide for the New Jersey Audubon Society. Stop at the Visitor Center to see exhibits about local wildlife and plants, and to pick up a trail map, which will show you both shorter and longer hikes in this park.

ACCESS: Take Exit 44 (Boonton) from I-287 north or Exit 45 (Myrtle Avenue/Boonton) from I-287 south. Turn south from either exit toward a T-intersection with Main Street. Turn right uphill on Main Street past the post office to Boonton Avenue (County 511), where there is a traffic light. Turn right on Boonton Avenue and, at 2.4

miles, negotiate the slight jog to the right at the Taylortown Road intersection. Continue for 0.7 mile straight ahead on County 511 to arrive at the Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area Visitor Center and parking lot on your left.

D E T A I L E D D E S C R I P T I O N

Walk to the south end of the parking lot near the Directory and turn right onto a wide path, at 0.1 mile finding the blue-blazed trailhead of the Mennen Trail (formerly the Butler-Montville Trail). Follow the blue blazes straight ahead, winding slightly downhill to a wooden bridge over Stony Brook, the overflow from Taylortown Reservoir. Beside the bridge in early spring, you may see patches of woodland wildflowers, and in late summer, the white woodland aster blooms along the path. Just across the bridge at 0.2 mile, the trail arrives at a junction where the Yellow Trail leaves to the right on a footpath. You continue to follow the blue blazes, turning slightly right uphill across the contour of the ridge. At 0.5 mile, you reach an acute turn to the left, arriving shortly at a junction where the blue-blazed Mennen Trail continues ahead to the summit of Pyramid Mountain and the white trail begins to the left. You should now follow this white-blazed Kinnelon-Boonton Trail south under the power line. It soon turns right onto a wide woods road that enters the edge of the woods parallel to the power lines and then emerges into an open meadow. The power company periodically cuts back the vegetation to keep its wires clear, opening the fields to the sun and encouraging an entirely different set of summer meadow wildflowers. In May, the field is dotted with pink wild geraniums, pink gerardia blooms from July through September, a few blue monkey flowers open in August, and the spiral spikes of the white orchid called nodding lady's tresses come up in September. The power company's work also provides an edge environment for migrating and

resident birds. In spring and early summer, we have seen and heard many of the most colorful songbirds of the Highlands at one time or another along this power line.

The trail next passes through some seasonal wet spots on buried stones and old logs. At 0.9 mile, it crosses Bear House Brook on a bridge near where in late August and early September you may see brilliant scarlet cardinal flowers blossom next to low-lying, deep blue bottle gentians. The trail now turns right, goes under the power lines, and enters the woods, still on a wide woods road. On your right at 1.0 mile, you pass the foundation of the abandoned Morgan farmhouse next to the brook. The trees here are less than two feet thick, so you can guess this land was an open field 100 years ago. The trail soon passes the trailhead of a red-blazed path heading across the brook and back toward the parking lot, a way to cut your walk short if necessary. At 1.3 miles, you come to Bear Rock, a cottage-sized glacial erratic. Because of the many flint arrowheads found here, local historians believe the overhang of this rock was used by Native Americans as a hunters' campsite.

The white trail is joined here by the blue-blazed Mennen Trail coming in from the north, and together they turn right, heading east across the brook on a wooden bridge. In a short distance, the Yellow Trail begins on the right, offering an easier and shorter path up and over the ridge of Pyramid Mountain. Continuing on the blue trail, at 1.4 miles you are at the base of the ridge, facing a steep climb of about 100 feet at a 40% grade. We may not bound up this cliff the way youngsters can, but we like to choose a pace, no matter how slow, that we can maintain steadily to the top, not stopping, but talking as we go and enjoying the rich draughts of oxygen deep in the lungs, the reassuring surges of an active life still thumping the breast. At the top at 1.5 miles, the white trail turns left, and you take the Mennen Trail (blue blazes) to the right. But before you turn, you should follow the white trail to the left for 0.1 mile to see the famous Tripod Rock, a huge glacial erratic set down by a melting glacier to rest on three



Tripod Rock, a famous glacial erratic, perched on three small boulders.

small boulders. There is a position from a space between stones where you can see the sun set at the summer solstice. This suggests to some observers that the rock was a sacred place for Native Americans, perhaps even moved there by them and not by a glacier.

Back at the junction and heading south on the blue trail, you walk slightly uphill through a thick laurel grove, passing at 1.8 miles a side trail to the right marked with blue-on-white blazes. This leads west through a laurel thicket for about 80 yards, then turns right up a short open ledge to Lucy's Overlook, named for Lucy Meyer who did so much to preserve this land, and Turkey Mountain to the east, as public open spaces. Back on the main trail after Lucy's Overlook, the Yellow Trail joins from the right and soon departs to the left downhill at 1.9 miles. The blue trail you follow turns right up toward the summit of Pyramid Mountain, reaching at 2.0 miles a short spur trail to the left, which leads to an east-facing overlook. Here you have views of Taylortown Reservoir and Turkey Mountain to the east, the

Essex County suburbs and Newark to the southeast, and New York City in the distance.

The original descent from the summit became so rocky and eroded that the park closed it and instead created a new path down the hill to the right. From the viewpoint, backtrack to the clearly marked newer trail section, which turns right off the summit over smooth bedrock and descends through rocky clefts, switching back and forth until the grade moderates. At the bottom of the descent, the blue trail passes the trailhead of the red trail. Follow the blue trail and eventually head slightly downhill to a junction with the trailhead of the white trail. Here at 2.1 miles, you continue on the blue trail to retrace your first 0.5 mile. The blue trail descends gradually south across the hill, turns left at the bottom of the incline, passes by the trailhead of the Yellow Trail on your left, and crosses the wooden bridge over Stony Brook. You retrace your steps past the trailhead of the blue trail and reach the parking lot and your car at 2.8 miles.



The east-facing overlook atop Pyramid Mountain.