

GREEN GRASS AND HIGH TIDE

Exploring the Parks of the Mid-Hudson

BY LINDSAY PIETROLUONGO

Here you go: Winter hikers will argue that the best time to lace up your boots and hit a trail is once the leaves have fallen. If you're like me, though, you prefer blooms to blizzards and do your best to stay in until the weather thaws. Now that the spring has rolled in again, so has my appetite for taking to the great outdoors. The Hudson Valley is not in short supply of leisurely strolls and ruthless treks.

HOME OF FDR AND THE VANDERBILT MANSION

The Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt is a national historic site. Ramble around 300 acres of grounds, gardens and trails. Book a guided tour of Springwood, FDR's lifelong home. Easy paths near the Vanderbilt Mansion lead to the Italian Gardens, the perfect spot for photo ops when the flowers blossom. For a more ambitious walk, there's a trail that wraps around the property, through the woods and ends with one serious uphill battle. The 10-mile Hyde Park Trail connects the Home of FDR with the Vanderbilt Mansion. It's the first section of the Hudson Valley Greenway Trail.

Home of FDR, 4097 Albany Post Road, Hyde Park. Open daily from sunrise to sunset. Visit online at www.nps.gov/hofr.

Vanderbilt Mansion, 81 Vanderbilt Park Road, Hyde Park. Open daily from sunrise to sunset. Visit online at www.nps.gov/vama.

MINNEWASKA STATE PARK PRESERVE

Minnewaska State Park Preserve, along with **Mohonk Preserve** and **Sam's Point Preserve**, is part of the Shawangunk Mountains in South-

ern Ulster County. The Gunks Mountain Ridge at Minnewaska is 2,000 feet above sea level and surrounded by rugged terrain. Wander across stream crossings, peer over cliffs and ledges, trample through hardwood forests and view waterfalls and clear lakes as you make your way across 25 miles of hiking footpaths.

Route 44/55, Kerhonkson. Opens daily at 9 a.m. Closing times vary. Visit online at nysparks.com/parks/127/details.aspx.

MOHONK PRESERVE

Mohonk Preserve protects more than 7,000 acres of mountain ridges, forests, fields, streams and ponds. Traipse along one of several carriage roads or trails and access extra routes along the Shawangunk Mountain Ridge. Hikers of all levels will find a pathway they can handle at the Mohonk Preserve. The easiest loop is the 15-minute Shawngunk Sensory Trail.

3197 Route 44/55, Gardiner. Open daily from sunrise to one hour after sunset. Visit online at www.mohonkpreserve.org.

SAM'S POINT PRESERVE

Sam's Point Preserve is set on 5,400 acres atop the Gunks' highest—and wildest—point. Naturalists will get a kick out of the 40 rare plant and animal species that can be detected in the area. From the parking lot, start on the three-mile Loop Road that circles Lake Maratanza. Hike through the mini forest of evergreen heaths, pitch pines and blueberries. Trails lead to Verkeerderkill Falls, High Point and Indian Rock. To access the more challenging routes, you'll need a permit.

Sam's Point Road, Cragmoor. Visit online at nynjtc.org/park/sams-point-dwarf-pine-ridge-preserve.



Opposite: Lake Mohonk. Above (left to right): Walkway Over the Hudson, Vanderbilt Mansion, climbing in the Gunks.

SCENIC HUDSON

Scenic Hudson oversees and enhances several parks in the Mid Hudson region to preserve them for the public. “Scenic Hudson pursues its campaign to Save the Land that Matters Most, realizing that preserving land provides the cornerstone of a sustainable Hudson Valley economy,” Jay Burgess, Director of Communications, told me. “Public parks are important to communities and the Hudson Valley region as a whole. The natural beauty of these places lifts people’s spirits and helps relieve stress. Trees and wetland areas in parks help clean our air and water, and the land sustains habitats that are crucial for wildlife.” All parks associated with Scenic Hudson are free to access and open year-round. Locations stretching across Greene, Columbia, Ulster, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties include Franny Reese State Park, Shaupeneak Ridge, the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park, Poet’s Walk and the Esopus Meadow’s Preserve.

FRANNY REESE STATE PARK AND THE ESOPUS MEADOWS PRESERVE

Franny Reese State Park takes up 250 acres and offers uncommon views of the Mid Hudson Bridge from rare vantage points. The Esopus Meadows Preserve, set on 93 acres, rises above Klyne Esopus Kill, stretches for two miles of woodland trails and has glimpses of the 1871 Esopus Lighthouse.

Franny Reese State Park, Haviland Road, Highland. Open daily from dawn to dusk. Visit online at www.scenichudson.org/parks/frannyreese.

Esopus Meadows Preserve, River Road, Esopus. Open daily from dawn to dusk. Visit online at www.scenichudson.org/parks/esopusmeadows.

POET’S WALK

If you’re a writer or artist, you may get more work than play done when you visit Poet’s Walk. Created in the 1940s, the landscape is made up of several outdoor “rooms,” all of which are intended to evoke a different emotion. If you’re feeling blue,

head to the elation “room”; if you need inspiration for your horror novel, visit the foreboding “room”; and so on. Washington Irving came up with the idea for “Rip Van Winkle” while roaming around Poet’s Walk, so don’t ignore the muses.

The Catskill Mountains are within view and guests can spend their time at the Overlook Pavilion or on the meadow trail. Ramble along the byway that leads through the woods, around a ravine and over the stone bridge. There are two miles of trails, all of which are either gravel or hard packed dirt. Settle into the benches at the Summer House to catch your breath or take in the vista.

Don’t forget to pack your binoculars since the woods and fields are chock full of wildlife. Poet’s Walk is on a rotational mowing regime that’s intended to increase the diversity of birds, butterflies, bees and beetles.

River Road, Red Hook. Open daily at 9 a.m. until 7:30 or 8:30 p.m., depending on the month. Visit online at www.scenichudson.org/parks/poetswalk.

SHAUPENEAK RIDGE

Shaupeneak Ridge’s 790 acres are part of the Marlboro Mountains in Ulster County. This is the ideal destination for avid hikers and nature lovers thanks to the coarse turf, wildflower grasslands and animal sightings. There are six miles of trails of differing difficulties and lengths. If you’re hiking with the family, make your way around water lily-adorned Louisa Pond. The adjacent wetland is full of birds and dragonflies. Beaver, deer, coyotes and turkeys wander around the grounds of Shaupeneak Ridge and visitors can enjoy panoramas of the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains. There’s also a waterfall, pond, forest and interesting rock formations to observe. The farmland at the base of the ridge is protected so that the scenery will remain unspoiled. Visit the Department of Environmental Conservation’s website for turkey hunting schedules. ■

Poppletown Road, Esopus. Open daily from dawn to dusk. Visit online at www.scenichudson.org/parks/shaupeneakridge