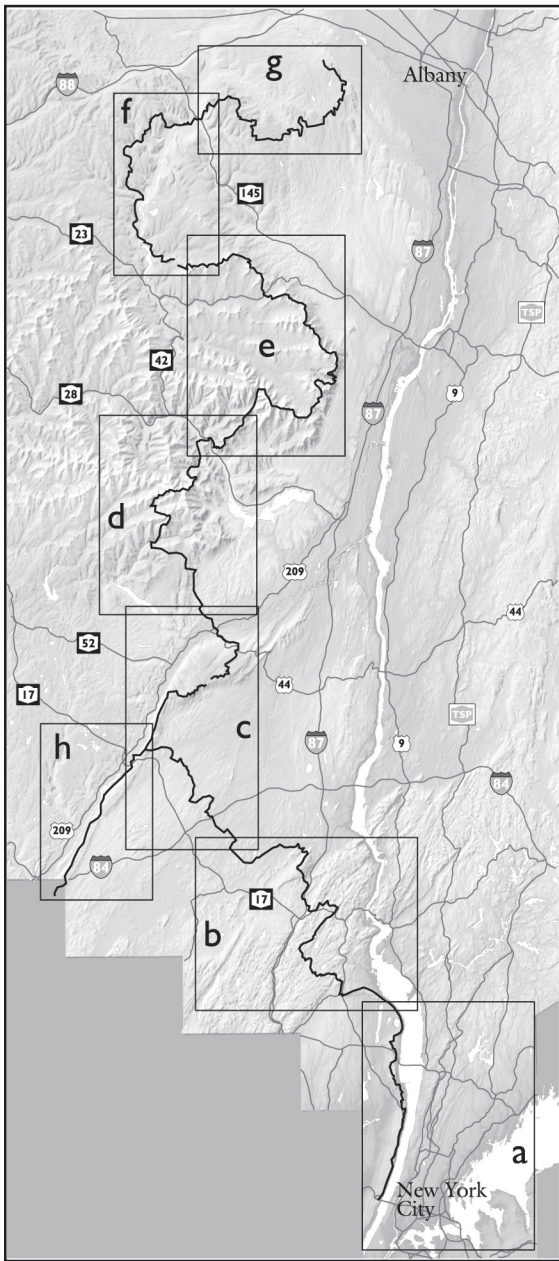

THE LONG PATH



Overview

The Long Path begins in Fort Lee, New Jersey, on the west side of the George Washington Bridge. For the first 12 miles of trail north to the New York State line, it follows the Palisades Escarpment through the lands of Palisades Interstate Park. There are many spectacular views of the Hudson River, New York City and Yonkers.

After crossing into New York, the Long Path turns away from the Hudson River to follow the ridge of the Palisades Escarpment to its end in Mt. Ivy. Much of this route passes through units of the Palisades Interstate Park system in addition to county and town parks. However, some of the vital links take the trail through private property, and there is some road walking through the towns of Piermont and Nyack. The route has extensive views of the lower Hudson River valley with the most dramatic views from Hook Mountain and High Tor.

Leaving the Palisades, the Long Path enters Harriman State Park, traversing nearly the entire length of the park in a northwesterly direction. Since Harriman is only 30 miles from New York City, many hikers from the city frequent it. An abundance of trails and old woods roads crisscross the park, giving many opportunities for circular hikes where the Long Path forms part of the route.

The Harriman part of the trail has intersections with several other important hiking trails passing through the same area. One meets through-hikers on the Appalachian Trail near Island Pond Mountain as they traverse the park from its western edge to the northeastern corner, making their way from Georgia to Maine. More information on the Appalachian Trail can be obtained from the Appalachian Trail Conference at 799 Washington Street, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, or <http://www.appalachiantrail.org>. Those who want to treat themselves to some Trail Conference history can trace parts of the Ramapo-Dunderberg Trail¹, the first hiking trail constructed by the Trail Conference (between 1920 and 1921), from the junction at Times Square.

At the northern end of the park, the Long Path goes over Long Mountain, the site of the Raymond H. Torrey Memorial, commemorating one of the founders of the Trail Conference and an early supporter of the Long Path. Torrey served as President of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference from 1931 until his unexpected death in 1938. When Vincent Schaefer of the Mohawk Valley Hiking Club originated the Long Path idea in the 1930s as New York's version of Vermont's Long Trail, Torrey's weekly column in the *New York Post*, "The Long Brown Path," helped popularize the idea and spotlighted the hiking community.

North of Harriman, the trail goes over Schunemunk Mountain and descends

¹The original name of this trail was the Tuxedo-Jones Point Trail.

to the Wallkill Valley in Orange County, NY. For the next 50 miles, the Long Path largely follows roads. Once consisting primarily of farms, this area rapidly developed into a bedroom community for New York City. The trail follows less busy rural roads where possible. Only in two sections of Orange County, Schunemunk Mountain State Park, and Highland Lakes State Park, does the Long Path travel off-road.

Schunemunk Mountain, the core of the State Park named after it, is the dramatic long ridge of the westernmost mountain in this vicinity. A distinct conglomerate rock forms the upper parts of the mountain. Its flattened top has many spectacular views both east to the Hudson River and north to the Shawangunks and the Catskills.

Beyond Schunemunk Mountain State Park, the Long Path follows rural roads until it reaches Highland Lakes State Park. It passes through the latter park on footpaths and woods roads before returning to rural roads. Not until it intersects the Shawangunk Ridge Trail (SRT) along the Wurtsboro Ridge does the Long Path resume its course on footpaths. The Trail Conference is in continuous negotiation with landowners to move the trail in Orange County off of roads but no major changes are expected in the foreseeable future.

From the Wallkill River valley, the Long Path climbs the southern part of the Shawangunk Mountains escarpment. Characterized by beautiful white cliffs and spectacular waterfalls, the Shawangunks, with five mountaintop lakes distributed on its flattened tops, are among the gems of the eastern United States. The Long Path passes near two of the Shawangunks' lakes, Mud Pond and Lake Awosting. The trail climbs up and over many of the cliffs and passes Verkeerder Kill Falls. It affords many spectacular views of the Wallkill Valley and the Catskills, sometimes with Lake Awosting in the foreground. Unfortunately, a critical section of the Long Path near Mud Pond crosses private property that has been closed by the owner, forcing a long detour on an already long section of the trail.

Beyond the Shawangunks, the Long Path crosses the Rondout Valley entirely on roads. To date, this rural area has avoided the development pressures that have hit the Wallkill Valley.

North of the Rondout Valley, the Long Path enters Catskill Park. The Catskills were once thought to be the highest mountains in New York as they rise abruptly from the Hudson River valley. The Long Path continues through the Catskill Forest Preserve for more than ninety miles, going over eleven of the thirty-five peaks whose summits are higher than 3,500 feet. There are many views along the way, and one gets a true sense of wilderness here. The Catskill Forest Preserve permits camping throughout the park while on state land except within 150 feet of a trail or stream and in areas above 3,500 feet. The Long Path passes near several lean-tos for those who intend to backpack portions of the trail. There are road-walking sections, but these generally go through undeveloped areas. Just south of Slide Mountain, near Denning, the Long Path meets the eastern end of the Finger Lakes Trail, another long distance hiking trail that heads west, connecting with other trails that lead all the way to North Dakota. There is also a connector to head north into Canada to join the Bruce

Trail. For more information on the Finger Lakes Trail, contact the Finger Lakes Trail Conference at 6111 Visitor Center Road, Mount Morris, NY 14510 or <http://www.fingerlakes.net/trailsystem>.

North of Catskill Park, the trail follows a series of mountains that form the northernmost edge of the Catskill Mountains. While noticeably lower than the main peaks, these mountains and ridges still offer a beautiful hiking experience. About eight miles north of the Catskill Forest Preserve, the Long Path enters several State Reforestation areas, working forests where logging is permitted (as opposed to the Catskill Park, which must be kept “forever wild”). At the western edge of Huntersfield Ridge, the last mountain encountered while traveling northwards with a summit over 3,000 feet, the trail makes a gradual descent to the Schoharie Reservoir.

Once reaching the Schoharie Reservoir, the northern-most outpost of the New York City water system, the Long Path heads north for 30 miles through the beautiful Schoharie Valley. This area was once a major Native American travel route and became home to many early European settlements. As the trail passes through the valley and the highlands to the west, it encounters many remnants of that early period. At the northern end of the valley, the trail goes over the sentinel of Vroman’s Nose, a rocky crag with magnificent views, before descending to Middleburgh.

In Middleburgh the Long Path turns east and traverses a region known as the “Endless Mountains,” largely through State Reforestation areas. Farming is still viable in this region and the trail passes along the edge of many open fields. In the east, the Endless Mountains end abruptly at the Helderberg Escarpment. After the trail meets the upper edge of the escarpment, it turns north to follow the escarpment into John Boyd Thacher State Park. From there, it continues to near Altamont and further on rural roads, to reach Adirondack State Park. Once in Adirondack Park, it is possible to reach Whiteface Mountain via existing trails.

History

Vincent J. Schaefer of the Mohawk Valley Hiking Club originally conceived the Long Path. He proposed that New York establish its own “Long Path” similar to the Long Trail in Vermont. The Long Trail was America’s first long distance hiking trail and was often described as a footpath in the wilderness. The Long Path was intended to be an alternative route from Bear Mountain for the Appalachian Trail hiker. Unlike other trails, the Long Path was to be an unmarked route connecting scenic or historic points of interest. These points of interest themselves would be described in a guidebook. Schaefer wanted hikers to “enjoy the sense of uncertainty, exploration, and achievement that reaches its highest level when the individual is dependent on the use of compass, marked map, and wood knowledge to reach an objective.” The challenge for hikers was to use topographic maps and compass to connect these points in any way they could, using whatever they found along the way.

The Long Path started receiving much public support from Raymond Torrey in 1933. W. W. Cady² took on the assignment of scouting the route from the George Washington Bridge through the Catskills. From Gilboa north, Vincent Schaefer and his brother Paul worked out a route through the Adirondacks to Whiteface Mountain. Every week, Torrey would write a description of the newly scouted section of the route in his column “The Long Brown Path” in the *New York Post*. However, Schaefer’s concept of an unmarked route being called a path proved to be difficult for the general hiking public to grasp.

In 1935, the Palisades Park Commission began to acquire property for the construction of the Palisades Interstate Parkway, greatly increasing access to the cliffs of the Palisades Escarpment. This revived interest in the Long Path project. By 1943, Alexander Jessup had marked the trail as far as Peekamoose Mountain in the Catskills, but World War II distracted people’s minds. The project languished for nearly twenty years after that.

In 1960 Robert Jessen of the Ramapo Ramblers and Michael Warren of New York City urged revival of the project. By now the post-war boom and the growth of suburbia had changed the original concept of the Long Path from an unmarked path in the wilderness into a blazed and cleared trail. There was now too much civilization to pass through. Many of the back roads and woodlands that Schaefer had planned to use for the trail corridor were now in private hands, either subdivided into homes, or otherwise unusable as backcountry hiking.

During the 1980s, construction of the trail proceeded as far north as the Catskills. In the Catskill Forest Preserve the Long Path followed existing trails

² Cady was born in Kansas, lived in Colorado, and moved to the NYC area in the 1920s. Currently, nothing more is known about him.

as much as possible. However, new trail construction was needed over Peekamoose and Table Mountains. The last part of new trail construction in the Catskills of this era was completed when the “missing link” section around Kaaterskill High Peak opened in 1987. It became possible to continuously hike the then-225 miles of the Long Path from the George Washington Bridge to East Windham at the northern end of the Catskill Park, although there were still road walking sections even in the Park.

The 1990s became another great period of trail building. With assistance from the National Park Service’s River and Trail Conservation Assistance Program, the Long Path North Hiking Club was formed. Members of this organization have built and maintained over 75 miles of the Long Path through Schoharie and Albany Counties. Additionally the Shawangunk Ridge Trail (SRT) was built connecting High Point, New Jersey with Minnewaska State Park in New York. The SRT provides an alternative route for the Long Path from Harriman State Park northwards. One can hike the Appalachian Trail from Harriman west to High Point State Park in New Jersey before heading north on the SRT to rejoin the main Long Path near Bear Hill Nature Preserve.

As of January, 2002, the main section of the Long Path is a near-continuous 349-mile hiking trail that extends from the George Washington Bridge to the village of Altamont, about 15 miles west of Albany. While plans go ahead to extend the trail to the Mohawk River and the Adirondacks, the existing trail route constantly changes to adapt to private land changes. The alternate section of the Shawangunk Ridge Trail adds another 28 miles to the total.



In the late 1970s and in the 1980s, the northward movement of suburbia began to have a major impact on the Long Path’s trail system. Where it was once possible to get permission to build a trail with just a knock on a door and a handshake, formal agreements were now required. The ridge tops where the trail passed were no longer immune to development. In some areas, the trail had to be moved from the woods to public roadways. In other places, bucolic country roads followed by the trail became suburban thoroughfares.

About 90 miles of the Long Path currently follow public roadways. The Trail Conference is working on several plans to reduce the amount of road walking. Particularly difficult is the Orange County section between Schunemunk Mountain State Park and the Shawangunks. Because of the lack of public lands and much suburban development, finding a suitable trail route is a challenge. Two strategies have developed to address the Orange County “problem.”

In 1989, the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, in cooperation with the National Park Service, initiated a study to determine the feasibility of relocating the Long Path from the roads of Orange County to the Shawangunk Ridge. The proposed route would follow the Appalachian Trail from Harriman State Park to High Point State Park in the northwest corner of New Jersey

and then continue along the Kittatinny-Shawangunk Ridge to Minnewaska State Park. After two years of study, a report was issued that demonstrated the feasibility of this route. The Trail Conference quickly negotiated agreements with landowners, and 30 of the 36 miles of the trail were constructed during 1992 and 1993³. Today, there are two Long Path routes from Harriman State Park to Minnewaska State Park: the traditional Orange County lowland route and the Shawangunk Ridge Trail with its breathtaking views.

At the same time another study began to look for an alternative lowland route. With the creation of Highland Lakes State Park, the Long Path in Orange County was rerouted through the park and onto a series of less busy roadways. However, with the large number of private landowners needing to be convinced to allow a hiking trail to pass along or through their properties, the dream of a completely off-road footpath is unlikely for now.

In Rockland County, the Long Path passes through a series of state, county, and town parks before entering Harriman State Park. While most of the trail in Rockland County is on public land, there are vital links across private property. Only 30 miles from New York City, this section is the most threatened. Together with the Rockland County Planning Board, the Trail Conference prepared a report in 1989 entitled "The Long Path in Rockland County". This report, which views the Long Path as "the spine of a Rockland County Greenway," provides guidelines to local planning boards for long-term protection strategies for the trail. The Long Path has received greater protection as it was put on the official county map.⁴

In Catskill Park, the Long Path follows some public roadways in the central Catskills area, primarily near Phoenicia. This road walking exists because there are no pre-existing trails for the Long Path to follow, because of the lack of public land. Because Article 14 of the New York State Constitution protects the Catskill Forest Preserve, mandating that it be kept "forever wild," the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) strictly regulates new trail construction in the park.

In the summer of 2000, a major relocation was completed eliminating 3 miles of road walking and the use of the Mink Hollow Trail. Plateau Mountain was added. In the summer of 2001, the Long Path was rerouted over Indian Head Mountain and north through the Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve, eliminating another mile of road walking and the Jimmy Dolan Notch Trail. Camping is not permitted in the Platte Clove Preserve.

Relocation has been approved which will move the Long Path from Woodland Valley Road to the ridgeline from Terrace Mountain over Mt. Pleasant and Romer Mountain to Lane Street in Phoenicia. Another relocation will happen in the area near Vernooey Falls as the trail is moved to recently acquired land.

The Trail Conference has also begun a concerted effort to extend the Long

³The remaining 6 miles were finished in 1997.

⁴Interested people can obtain a copy of the report by pointing their web browser to <http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/bull/osmap.htm>.

Path to the Mohawk River and the Adirondack Park, thus enabling the Long Path to achieve its original goal of a long-distance trail from New York City to the northern Adirondacks. After a two-year study conducted by the Trail Conference and the National Park Service, the trail is being built along the original route as envisioned by Vincent Schaefer in the 1930s.

Navigation

The Long Path is marked with a 2" x 4" paint blaze for most of the route. The blaze color is Long Path Aqua, a trade name of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. It is a light blue-green that many people term turquoise. Turns are marked with two blazes, one over the other, with the top blaze offset in the direction of the turn. For important locations, the Long Path uses plastic marker disks (often abbreviated to “markers”) that approximate the paint blaze color.

The only major exceptions to the blazing described above are in Catskill Park and on the Wurtsboro Ridge DEC parcels near Wurtsboro on the Shawangunk Ridge. These are areas where the Trail Conference maintains the trails on be-

half of the DEC. In the both areas, the Long Path follows existing Forest Preserve trails

marked in red, blue or yellow plastic disks, depending upon the trail. In certain sections of private land inside the park, the Long Path blazes revert to aqua paint blazes. In the oldest parts of the park, some of these markers are made of painted

metal. Be sure to read the descriptions carefully, as the disk colors often change in the middle of a section.

Three main sources of maps cover the areas traversed by the Long Path: ones produced by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, ones produced by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), and by Jimapco, a commercial map vendor. The Trail Conference’s maps are specialized for hiking. They contain all of the officially maintained trails in their areas of coverage with markings for features of special interest to hikers. The maps are printed on Tyvek, a waterproof and tear resistant material, to enable their use in all weather conditions. However, only about half of the Long Path crosses areas covered by these maps. The USGS 7.5' 1:24,000 series of topographic map quads cover all areas crossed by the Long Path but are printed on paper and thus need protection from wet and windy weather. Also, the vast majority of these maps were produced in the 1950s or 60s and are sometimes well out of date, even when taking into account special “photo-revised” updates produced in the early 1980s. The third source is Jimapco, a company specialized in making road maps of the northern part of the Hudson Valley and surrounding areas. They produce the best road maps available for navigating to and from the trailheads for each of the sections of the Long Path. Jimapco maps are available at many small stores from Orange County northwards or on the web at <http://www.jimapco.com>.

The maps in this book are a combination of USGS data with some corrections to areas important for navigating the Long Path. They are designed to



be a supplement to the Trail Conference's hiking maps and the USGS topographic maps. As such, they are neither as detailed nor as complete in coverage. However, they do contain enough detail so that hikers will not need to continually reference other maps in order to navigate the trail as they follow the descriptions in this guide.



Modern technology has become a useful accessory to hikers with small, hand-held Global Positioning System (GPS) units now being quite inexpensive and reliable. The trail section descriptions contain GPS coordinates to aid in navigating the Long Path and allow hikers to reliably place themselves relative to the important points on the trail. This includes all of the major named features and all of the official parking areas.

Each GPS coordinate in this book is given in Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM), a worldwide standard for specifying a location on the Earth. UTM has become popular among GPS users because the coordinates are north and east specifications in meters. Knowing the UTM coordinates for two positions allows one to easily estimate the distance between the positions.

One caveat of using a GPS for navigation is that there are many different references for specifying a position. Nearly all United States Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps are referenced to NAD27 while all GPS units in this country come from the factory set to NAD83/WGS84 (the later two standards are identical for practical use in North America). All of the coordinates in this book are given using the NAD83/WGS84 standards. In the area covered by the Long Path, the difference in position using a given coordinate amounts to several hundred feet when switching between NAD27 and NAD83/WGS84.

The second caveat for using a GPS for navigation is that there is an inherent error in GPS positions that depend on the satellite configuration and signal reception conditions at the time of measurement. Although under ideal conditions, a consumer GPS unit can be as accurate as ten feet, more typically twenty to fifty feet is the norm. The GPS positions in the descriptions in this book specify location information to more precision than the accuracy allows. This means that using a GPS unit to move to the position exactly as stated in the trail descriptions in this book will place one very close to the intended point, but not necessarily closer than one hundred feet, depending on conditions.

A third caveat for GPS users is that USGS topographic maps can contain systematic positional errors. Some of the older maps were completed from aerial photographs taken during World War II. These include many of the quads required to obtain coverage of the Long Path, and can have average horizontal errors of as much as 200 feet compared to a GPS or recent aerial photographs of the same area.

Thus, although a GPS unit can be very precise for navigation, it may not correspond to topographic or any other map sources based only on USGS data.

End-to-End

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference offers a certificate and an End-to-End “rocker” to anyone who hikes the entire length of the Long Path. Hikers have the option of using the traditional Orange County route or the more scenic Shawangunk Ridge route. The trip can be completed in one continuous trip or in a number of hikes over many years. As of November 2001, there are 69 Long Path End-to-Enders. The certificate is free to members of the Trail Conference, but there is a \$5.00 handling charge for nonmembers.



Since the Long Path is continually expanding, the requirements for completing the trail are constantly changing. For details on current requirements, a tally sheet, or more information, contact The Long Path End-to-End Committee, c/o Ed Walsh, 11 Kwiecinski Street, West Haverstraw, NY 10993.

