

HIKE APPALACHIAN TRAIL TO NUCLEAR LAKE

Much of this information is from the excellent web site hikehudsonvalley.com

<http://hiketehudsonvalley.com/nuclear-lake/>

DIFFICULTY: 5 out of 10 (relatively flat, and rocky, uneven trail with poor footing in places)
2 of 10 on the dirt road from Old State Road 55 (see trailhead directions)

HIGHLIGHTS: Gorgeous lake, Appalachian Trail sections

DISTANCE: 1.5 miles to the lake, 3 mile hike
4.1 mile hike if you circumnavigate via the yellow trail, or
about 9 miles with optional hike to Cat Rocks

APPROXIMATE ROUND TRIP TIME: 3 hours, about 5 hours to Cat Rocks and back

TOTAL ASCENT: 627 ft

MAX ELEVATION: 839 ft above sea level

This hike is for you if: You'd like to stroll around a beautiful lake and visit a nice stretch of Appalachian Trail. Lovely view from Cat Rocks.

TRAILHEAD – To reach the AT from State Road 55, there is a dirt parking area at the top of the hill between SR 216 and SR 292, 1.4 miles east from SR 216, and about 0.25 miles west of 292/old 55. There is a bait shop across the highway. Follow the short blue trail to the intersection with the AT. It will be on the right coming from Pawling.

Alternatively, there is an easier hike to the lake on an unpaved access road. Turn onto Old SR 55 to the east of the 292/old SR 55 intersection, a right turn if you are coming from Pawling. The lot is immediately off of SR 55. Walk past the dam keeper's house and through the gate to the dirt road for an easy hike to the lake.

THE HIKE Take the blue trail from the parking lot. The trail will pass a kiosk with a trail map and then intersects the AT just after crossing underneath the power lines. Turn left onto the white blazed AT. Remember this spot, since you'll have to recognize it on your return trip. About five minutes after turning onto the AT, you'll come to a junction with another Blue Trail – the Beekman Uplands Loop Trail — this one heading off to the left. Keep right to stay on the white-blazed AT. The trail wanders through pleasant forest and rock formations. After about a mile, you will cross the second of two foot bridges. The yellow blazed Nuclear Lake Loop Trail intersects here to the right, but it can also be accessed from its other terminus at the north end of Nuclear Lake. If you take the yellow trail at this point, you will shortly cross the access road and go around the lake to your right side. When you reach the AT at the far side of the lake, turn to the left to stay along the lake shore. As you return to the south end of the lake, it is easy to miss the AT. If you are walking on the unpaved road and are leaving the lake behind, you missed the trail! The AT leaves the lake at the SE corner of the lake. Look for a white blaze.

If you continue on the white blazed AT, you will reach the lake in under 15 minutes. At the lake, you will find a grassy road which is the end of the access road from the dam keeper's house. The AT continues to the left (remember this spot if you are returning this way).

There are plenty of spots to sit on a rock and view this lovely lake, and many people fish from

the dam area to the right. You will reach the north end of the lake in about a half mile, 1.8 miles from the parking lot. At this point you have a choice: stay and enjoy the lake and retrace your steps to the parking lot, loop around the lake on the yellow trail which branches from the AT to the right, or, if you are feeling up for a long hike, you can stay on the AT to Cat Rocks for a 9 mile round trip. The yellow trail branching to the right is a pleasant walk around the far side of the lake with a few short steep sections. As the yellow trail returns to the south side of the lake, the trail crosses the dirt access road and goes back into the woods. The trail rejoins the AT in about 1/3 mile at the footbridge you crossed earlier. Take the AT to the left and continue to the blue trail to the parking lot. If you miss the short blue trail to the parking area you will run into SR 55 in about a 1/2 mile. You can either backtrack, or walk up the hill on the roadway.

“If you want to check out the overlook at Cat Rocks, which will add 4 up-and-back miles and 400 vertical feet to your day, you’d make a right turn here to continue uphill along the white-blazed Appalachian Trail. Cat Rocks will be on your left at the top of West Mountain, down a very short, well-trod (though unmarked) side trail – if you come to the Telephone Pioneers shelter, you’ve overshot Cat Rocks by about 10 minutes (though it’s unlikely you’d go that far past Cat Rocks, since the AT heads steeply downhill immediately after you pass Cat Rocks). If you decide to tackle West Mountain, that’d be a lot of hiking for one day, but the view is definitely worth a visit. (And remember, you can always visit Cat Rocks via the shorter approach from the other side of the mountain some other time.)” (hikethehudsonvalley.com)

View from Cat Rocks

