

# TORS' THUNDER TOUR **24**

## IN BRIEF

While the struggle years ago to prevent the demolition of the Tors inspired a hit Broadway play, it's the views from their peaks that are the real showstoppers, with the Hudson River unfolding directly below and the Catskills and Shawangunks visible far to the northwest. No less enjoyable are the scramble up both summits, over wrinkly volcanic basalt, and the deep-woods flavor of their surroundings.

## DESCRIPTION

Like most hikers, we don't relish chewing the same scenery twice, and as a rule we'll opt for a good loop over an out-and-back trek any day. There are exceptions to every rule, however, and a few linear romps—Fitzgerald Falls, Sterling Ridge, and Sandy Hook come readily to mind—are quite exceptional indeed. The jaunt to High Tor and Low Tor belongs in this category of out-and-back hikes that are so memorable, and memorably rewarding, that we simply can't exclude them from this volume.

And yet if it had been left to the New York Trap Rock Company, there would be little to say about the Tors. That's because back

## Directions

Follow I-95 across the George Washington Bridge to Exit 74, and merge onto the Palisades Interstate Parkway North. Drive to Exit 10 and turn right on Germonds Road. After 0.7 mile turn left on NY 304/South Main Street. Proceed 3.8 miles and make a left on Ridge Road. Continue 0.8 mile and veer right on Haverstraw Road. Park on the left shoulder in about 250 feet, right by the trailhead. The main park entrance and office are 2 miles west from here, on the right.



### KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

**LENGTH:** 5.8 miles

**ELEVATION GAIN:** 1,751 feet

**CONFIGURATION:** Out-and-back

**DIFFICULTY:** Moderate

**SCENERY:** Woodsy ascent to two eroded, basaltic summits, with expansive views of the Hudson River and Haverstraw

**EXPOSURE:** Mostly dense canopy in summer, sun-struck on bald summits

**TRAFFIC:** Fairly light weekdays, heavy weekend visitation

**TRAIL SURFACE:** Largely rocky, some packed dirt

**HIKING TIME:** 3 hours

**DRIVING DISTANCE:** 28 miles

**SEASON:** Year-round, sunrise–sunset

**ACCESS:** Free; foot traffic only, pets on leash not exceeding 6 feet

**MAPS:** At park office; USGS *Haverstraw*

**FACILITIES:** No toilets, public phone, or water at trailhead, but all may be found, along with a swimming pool, by the park's main entrance.

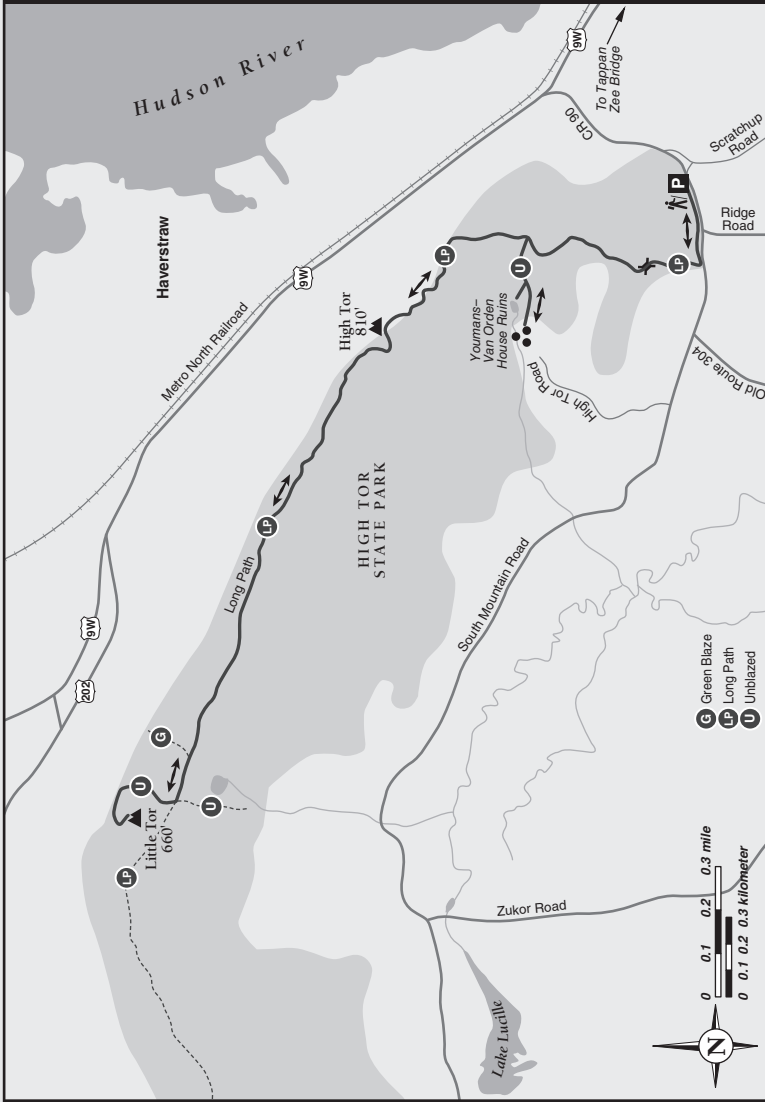
**COMMENTS:** In icy or snowy conditions, the tricky rock scramble descent off the north side of High Tor, leading to Low Tor, may be extremely hazardous. For further information, call 845-634-8074 or visit [nysparks.com/parks/78/details.aspx](http://nysparks.com/parks/78/details.aspx).



## GPS COORDINATES

N41° 10.609' W73° 57.616'

# Tors' Thunder Tour



in the 1930s, Trap Rock planned to “develop” the land into a quarry, reducing High Tor’s crest, which today towers 832 feet above the Hudson River, into gravel and sand for paving roads. That we hikers can still enjoy a 360-degree, kick-you-in-the-seat-of-the-pants panorama from that peak says a great deal about the determination of conservationists of that era, as well as Elmer Van Orden, who owned a large section of the summit and resisted New York Trap Rock’s efforts to buy it. Van Orden’s neighbor, Maxwell Anderson, memorialized that struggle in *High Tor*, a play he wrote in 1937 that was performed on Broadway and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. (It was later rewritten as a TV movie starring Bing Crosby and Julie Andrews.) After Van Orden’s death six years later, 23 acres of his property were donated to the Palisades Interstate Park, with an additional 470 acres being given by Archer Huntington, a railroad magnate, from his private estate. High Tor State Park now totals more than 600 acres, with a community pool and picnic grounds among its amenities.

On exiting your automobile, step around the abundant roadside litter and walk west, away from the Hudson River, sticking to the right shoulder of the road. After the fourth telephone pole, the aqua blazes of the Long Path (LP) jag to the right, by a large tree, into the forest. The trail, passing among myriad oaks, black birches, and beeches, as well as wild violets and garlic mustard, is rocky to start with, as it bumps over duckboard planks and begins to gain elevation. The mild ascent continues through secondary growth, including a smattering of cedars, before leveling off, in about 10 minutes (and a slight gain of 150 feet of elevation), amid a rumpled, corrugated landscape where wild turkeys often roam. An unblazed spur to the left, indicated by a large sign, leads in less than a quarter-mile to the site of the Youmans–Van Orden House and a former winery. Little more than a tiled floor area remains, but the adjacent pond is attractive and lends the short detour some extra value.

Once back on the main trail, the uphill slog resumes for another 3 to 5 minutes before you reach the shoulder of High Tor, with a filtered view of the Hudson straight ahead. The LP then lunges left, over terrain that is reminiscent of the Timp, at neighboring Bear Mountain, for the intimidating amount of rocky scree piled up at the base of the peak. As at the Timp, the LP skirts the worst of that obstacle, looping to the left of the rocks, at the same time giving you an opportunity to observe chipmunks at play in and around the chinks and crevasses of the moraine heap. After working around that rough, beautifully formed outcropping of traprock, with lichen settled over it like a blanket of oxidized copper, the LP moves on to another node, then a third, higher one, before cresting atop High Tor. This loge-level vantage point of the Shawangunk range to the north, and to the east, the Hudson River, was used by colonial troops as a signal post during the Revolutionary War to alert people to the comings and goings of the British army. Today it is favored as a local party spot, with a distressing amount of graffiti smeared across the wrinkled texture of the volcanic substrate under your feet, but we find the vultures flying by at eye level (as well as blue azures and mourning



How high *is* High Tor's bald summit? Our GPS indicates 801 feet and the topo map shows 810 feet, while other sources list it as high as 832 feet.

cloak butterflies in warm weather) a more thrilling distraction. That rock quarry far below you to the southeast, by the way, is a stark reminder of what might have happened to the ground you're hiking through if not for Van Orden and the labors of conservationists.

The trek continues on the north side of this dome, where the scramble down can be seriously challenging when there's snow or ice on the path. Once off High Tor's peak, the LP veers to the right, eastward, then to the northeast, along a former forest road. This wide and easy stretch lasts for 20 minutes, with a green-blazed spur materializing to the right about the time the surface of the lane turns to gravel. Ignore that turn, persisting on the LP until just after it dips by a swamp stream and then rises to a diagonal intersection, the latter notable for the presence of a large graffiti-marred erratic. Skim to the right there on the unblazed forest road, which curves uphill, edging gradually toward the north, culminating in an easy ascent to Low Tor. This lesser Tor, which is also scarred by graffiti and too much broken glass, abuts a similar knob, which, given its comparatively clean surface, is our preferred choice of sandwich spot. Views atop Low Tor, while marginally less pronounced than those of its big brother, are still rather breathtaking, with the Hudson Highlands beckoning from across the river. When you tire of the setting, or as sunset deepens to darkness, retrace your steps back to the trailhead.

## NEARBY ACTIVITIES

Stellar views and prime, private picnic spots don't come any easier than the short, level walk at nearby **Tallman Mountain State Park**. The breezy 2-mile loop there leads to an overlook high above the Hudson River, where birding and boat-watching are extra attractions. If you're bounding with energy, you can connect this trail with an extended campaign along a piece of the Long Path. For further information, call 845-359-0544 or visit [nysparks.com/parks/119/details.aspx](https://nysparks.com/parks/119/details.aspx).

High Tor is not the only landmark in the vicinity to play a role in the American Revolution. **Stony Point**, on the Hudson, was of strategic importance to the British, who fortified it with a garrison and used it to control the river. In a risk-all gambit, colonial troops, commanded by Brigadier General Anthony Wayne, launched a midnight raid on July 15, 1779, reportedly armed solely with bayonets. Astonishingly, it took them a mere half-hour of skirmishing to take the fort, effectively ending the Crown's presence on the Hudson. The story of this amazing victory, as well as that of the Stony Point Lighthouse (one of the few remaining such beacons still lining the river), is on full display at Little Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site, in Stony Point. For further details, call 845-786-2521 or visit [nysparks.com/historic-sites/8/details.aspx](https://nysparks.com/historic-sites/8/details.aspx).