

Hyde Park Trail: Part II – Men of Destiny

It is walking through history that we learn where we now stand. This section of the Hudson Park Trail from the Springwood estate to the Vanderbilt Mansion connects two men of destiny: Franklin Roosevelt and Frederick Vanderbilt.

Starting at the FDR Visitor Center (FDRlibrary.Marist.edu/library/wallace.html) where a free 15-minute movie on the Roosevelts provides perspective, the historic segment of this hike begins as you proceed past the FDR library and museum, the Roosevelt rose garden gravesites of Franklin D. and Anna E., past the riding stable, and to the Roosevelt residence named Springwood.

From here the Hyde Park Trail descends through the woods down toward the Hudson River. It is worthwhile to enjoy the side trail loops of the Clove Trail (blue), the yellow trail, and even the southernmost unmarked trail. Along the way, the ice pond and stone walls are testimony to a yesteryear farm era. It is Franklin who transformed much of these pastures to woodlands planting a half-million trees here during his life time.

As the Hyde Park Trail continues northward along the Hudson River, it is worthwhile to take the Forest Trail to enjoy the pine forest, ancient woods road, and extensive stone walls. As a birdwatcher, Franklin cataloged an extensive number of birds in these very woods – by sight and by song.

The Hyde Park Trail exits the woods at River Road. With little traffic on this dead end road, it is a pleasant shoreline walk past Riverside Park to the Hyde Park Train Station Museum (HydeParkStation.com/hps.html).

Shortly beyond is the lower entrance to the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site (www.nps.gov/vama/index.htm). The lower Bard Rock trail continues the shoreline walk, and over the Amtrak bridge, terminates at the promontory Bard Rock.

Directly across from Bard Rock is the stately Holy Cross Monastery – on the National Historic Register. It is a paragon of aesthetic architecture and a reminder of how religious institutions had preserved the pristine Hudson River shoreline for more than a century. In just the past two decades, the shoreline of Hyde Park and Rhinebeck have been ruined with clear-cut condominiums, a string of McMansions ravaging Rhinecliff, and even an ostentatious glass house jutting into the Hudson River itself. On the west bank, the ridge line is being torn up with new houses in Esopus, in Highland a monstrosity is even being garishly perched on a cliff, and the sacred grounds of Mount Saint Alphonsus are being transformed into an industrial park. The Hudson River valley is the nave of nature's sublime cathedral. On one side some developer knocks out a stained glass window and peers in exclaiming how beautiful it is from his standpoint. Then on the other side, a builder knocks out another stained glass window and peers in and extols its beauty – except for that broken window across the aisle he is forced to look at. Eventually, all the stained glass windows are broken; the beauty is gone, with homeowners simply gawking at each other mumbling, "at least the floor still looks nice."

Leaving the Hudson River and walking up the access road leads to the Vanderbilt bookshop which has bathrooms, and to the mansion itself. As striking as the mansion's exterior is, its interior



FDR Visitor Center – Hyde Park

is even more refined. There are several viewpoints at this overlook worth pausing to enjoy including a bird's eye view of Esopus Island, Mount Saint Alphonsus built as a castle-on-the-Rhine by the German founding Fathers, and on the horizon the Devil's Path of the Catskill Mountains.

On the Vanderbilt grounds, it is worthwhile to visit the grand garden, stroll along the ponds and cascades of Crumb Elbow Creek from waterfall to waterfall, and view the rarely visited Vanderbilt stables – mansion-like itself.

To complete the loop back to the FDR Visitor Center, the serene back roads of Hyde Park are a treat, especially when it includes lunch at the Eveready Diner. The definitive 12 mile trek concludes with a walk through the nostalgic Hyde Park Drive-In and walking down the same driveway that Franklin Roosevelt used as his daily exercise to steel himself against the ravages of polio.

Maps of the Hyde Park Trail are available at HydeParkNY.us/Recreation/Trails/. Any portion of these parks and trails, coupled with the many history tours offered at the Roosevelt sites and the Vanderbilt mansion, make for an ideal day trip.



FDR riding stable



Hyde Park Trail



Vanderbilt Gardens



Vanderbilt overlook – Hudson River