

Scenic Hudson – Parks & Preserves: Sleightsburgh Park – Gateway to Rondout Creek

		
<p>Rondout Creek viewed from Sleightsburgh Park</p>	<p>Fishermen off Sleightsburgh Park</p>	<p>Kingston Lighthouse and original Rondout Creek Lighthouse foundation</p>

The calm of little Sleightsburgh Park belies the frenetic Rondout Creek during its robust century of 1829 to 1929. On the northern side of the creek is the Rondout enclave of Kingston – a village distinct from Kingston until merging in 1872. With the opening of the Delaware & Hudson Canal in 1828, the Rondout became a key Hudson River port servicing not only canal boats, but was also home to the Cornell tugboat company, and was the port-of-call for the massive steamboats Mary Powell, Washington Irving, and Alexander Hamilton. Today, the north bank of the creek is Kingston’s historic district with vintage tugboats, trolleys, the Hudson River Maritime Museum, and the public cruise boat Rip Van Winkle.

Sleightsburgh Park, in the tiny hamlet of Sleightsburgh in the town of Esopus, is more a preserve than a park. A mere half-mile long, the terrain is mostly marsh – frozen in winter, boggy in summer. In the midst Sleightsburgh Park is its gem: a boat ramp for small motorized craft, a low dock ideal for kayak launching, and one lone picnic table from which anglers lazily fish all summer long. The wrecks of old barges barely offshore provide a haven for fish, and are a favorite area for trolling. It is a quarter-mile asphalt drive from the park entrance to the boating and fishing area, and another quarter-mile woods walk to the end of the preserve. At the edge of the preserve is a small, inaccessible island, separated from the mainland by a narrow strait. Here, like the swift current between Bar Harbor and Porcupine Island, and the dangerous shallows leading out to Orient Point Lighthouse, the powerful changing tide makes this strait treacherous.

To eat, besides the nearby restaurants of Rondout, are the Frozen Rainbow Diner in Port Ewen and Ophira’s in Connelly. The Frozen Rainbow Diner originated as one of the earliest Carvel franchises. Ophira’s, located at the Rondout Yacht Basin, offers a quality menu at a reason price with a dining patio right on the Rondout Creek.

This small 80-acre park, was originally preserved by Scenic Hudson, and is now owned and maintained by the Town of Esopus. Information about Sleightsburgh Park is available on the Scenic Hudson website ScenicHudson.org.