

Hiking Snake Hill and the Historic Sites of Newburgh

There is no better vantage point of historic Newburgh and the northern entrance to the Hudson River's highlands than Snake Hill – maintained through a partnership of Scenic Hudson and the Orange County Land Trust. Ascending the only route up Snake Hill – a closed asphalt road – a rosary of erratic rocks line its right shoulder, the largest being a yacht-sized boulder and its accompanying dingy-size erratic tending it. Easy to get to and easy to ascend, the entrance is located at 398 Union Avenue (Route 69) in New Windsor (one quarter mile west of Route 32); parking is also available at San Giacomo Park – just follow the power line path 30 yards up the hill to connect with the Snake Hill asphalt access road.



George Washington monument at Newburgh

It is less than a mile walk and a mere 300 feet of elevation gain to the twin cedar summit and meager radio tower. Here, on the east side of the ridge, at a height of 700 feet, is a spectacular overlook. Looking directly across the Hudson River is Mountain Beacon and its fire tower, and the mountainous succession of Sugar Loaf North, Breakneck Ridge, and Mount Taurus. The castled Pollepel Island is prominently placed and evident, too, is Dennings Point. For a more rustic walk, a path northward continues into the Snake Hill Preserve another quarter mile.

At the end of the Scenic Hudson property, the descent is via an asphalt road. On the ridge is a second overlook – with access at utility pole 37. Here the panorama is even more extensive with views northward as well as south. Visible is the Beacon waterfront, the historic architecture of Newburgh, and the vast, curvaceous Hudson River.

After the mile-long walk down the road, the woods can be re-entered at Temple Avenue for a scenic stroll along Crystal Lake. Just past the lake is Snake Hill Cemetery: a Jewish graveyard of the latter 1800's currently in a limbo of being cordoned off with a chained link fence, but no restoration has yet begun. Another mile into the woods passing a pond, along stone walls, and across streams, the trail terminates. Alternatively, there is an unmarked trail to the left just past the cemetery which uphill connects to the road leading back to the summit.

To round out a day of exploration, Newburgh has three New York State historic sites stemming from the Revolutionary War. Foremost is Washington's Headquarters (nysparks.com/historic-sites/17/details.aspx) where George Washington slept here more nights than anywhere else. Here George Washington wrote the *circular letter* to the state governments in which he outlined his fundamental political view of the this new nation: 1) a strong federal government and indissoluble Union, 2) a willingness to subjugate local interests in favor of the good of our national Community, 3) egalitarian justice, and 4) a peaceful society. Nearby is the Cantonment (nysparks.com/historic-sites/22/details.aspx) where over 7,000 colonial troops commanded by General Horatio Gates were stationed during that tenuous period between the last major battle – Yorktown – in 1781 and

the formal cease fire agreement in 1783. As throughout the war, control of the Hudson River valley was instrumental to control of the colonies; the army was housed here to secure our new nation. The Cantonment is also home to the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor. Nearby too, is Knox Headquarters (nysparks.com/historic-sites/5/details.aspx), residence of General Henry Knox, Commander of the American artillery. The American artillery was as instrumental in the success of the Revolutionary War as the vast number of infantry that that the colonists were able to field. Besides the Knox building itself, the property includes a half-mile walking path down to Moodna Creek – a major tributary to the Hudson River.

For dining, the best are the Newburgh riverfront restaurants. For a bit of history, not to be overlooked is the Pizza Shop which is housed in the restored New York Central terminal. Nearby too, is the ferry to Beacon which offers both a shoreline perspective of Newburgh and access to Beacon's parks, museums, restaurants and shops.

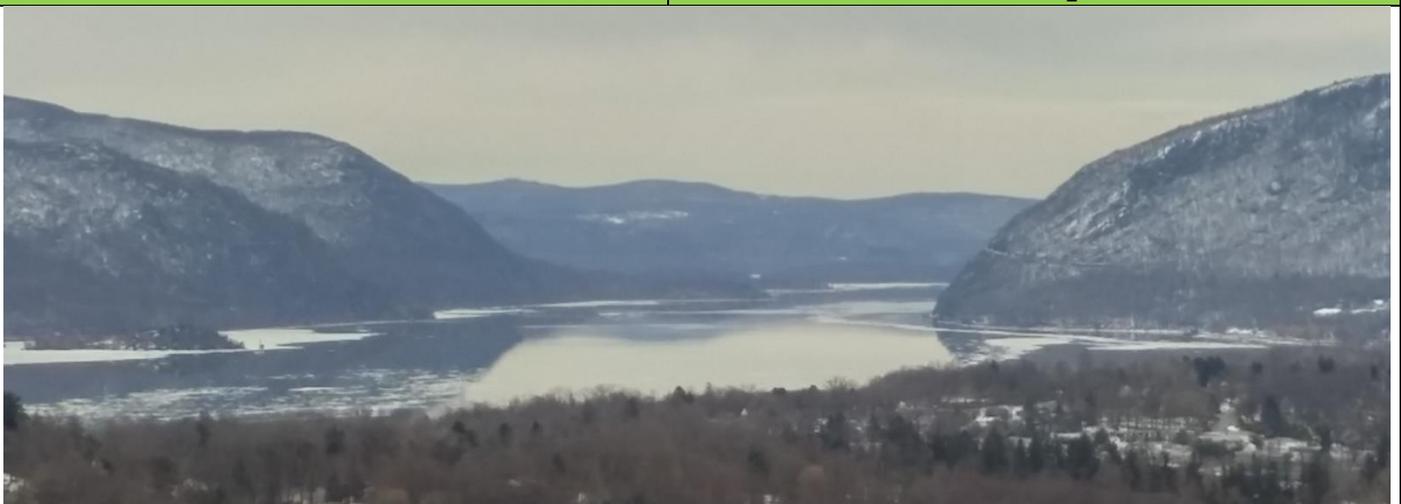
Touring these three historic sites, relaxing for a riverside respite, and ascending Snake Hill to see it all from a bird's eye view, makes for an ideal day of exploration.



Cantonment



Knox Headquarters



Hudson Highlands panorama from Snake Hill