

Favorite Shakedown hikes for Philmont

By: Tom Wills

I prefer the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) for shakedown hikes because it offers a variety of locations and challenges. Another huge plus is that there are numerous camping options along the trail and there is no charge for hikers. Here are a few favorites along the A.T. plus others.

Sunfish Pond - A.T.

This is a great hike for your first shakedown. Because it is a loop hike, transportation to/from the overnight parking area is easy to arrange. This hike can easily be used as a day hike when time does not permit an overnight stay.

Take Rt. 80 west to the Del Water Gap Recreation Area. Be sure to exit RT. 80 at the ramp marked "Rest Area". It is easy to find because you can see the river on your left and the Rt. 80 is just beginning to level out from a downhill slope. If you come to the bridge to Pennsylvania, you have gone too far. The A.T. is accessible at two parking areas. As you make your exit, there is a rest area on the right. Drive past it and at the bottom of the ramp you can continue straight and the A.T. Hikers lot is just before you re-enter Rt.80, OR you can turn left under the underpass and then bear to the right and go about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to the Welcome Center and park. I have used both but prefer the Welcome Center parking area for overnight hikes. I think the security is better here.

If you park at the Welcome Center, hike back under the overpass and up to the Hikers Parking Lot. From the Hikers lot, follow the stream over a small footbridge and the trail with white blazes will lead you to Campsite #2 and Sunfish Pond.

The hike is mostly up hill and is approximately 4.5 miles to the pond (about 9 miles round trip). Campsite #2 is along the trail about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the pond. Numerous campsites are available with latrines. Water can be taken from a small seasonal spring or from the pond if necessary. Be aware that the water has a high acid content and while safe to drink after being treated, some may object to the taste. Another option is to carry safe water from pump located in the hikers parking lot.

High Point to Culver Lake - A.T.

You can hike this trail north to south or south to north but my favorite is north to south. Perhaps the best way to do this trail is to leave vehicles at Park Service parking area parking lot at Culver Gap. It is located approximately 3.4 miles northwest of Branchville, NJ off Rt. 206 and has other drives drop hikers at High

Point. Start your hike on the A.T. at the High Point park headquarters located on Rt. 23 just as you enter the park area. A parking lot for hikers is located next to the park HQ building.

While this trail can be hiked in a day, it is most enjoyable as an overnight event and approximately 13.9 miles. There are three shelters conveniently scattered along the trail for hikers with water available at two. Follow the blue blazes to reach shelter. The Rutherford shelter is approximately 2.5 miles from the northern parking lot. The Mashipacong shelter is located approximately 5.5 miles from the northern parking lot near the Deckertown Turnpike (Mashipacong Road) and has no water. The Gren Anderson shelter is approximately 2.5 miles from the southern parking area and has a spring about 200 feet away.

Other Notable A.T. Hikes

1. Rt. 206 at Culvers Gap to Millbrook-Blairstown Road, which is approximately 14.6 miles long. There is one shelter along this section approximately 3.7 miles from the northern starting point. There are restrictions for camping along the northern section of trail so use the shelter. This is approximately 10.8 miles from the northern end of the trail and 3.8 miles from the southern end. BSA Camp No-Be-Bo-SCO is located near the southern end of this trail and may be utilized as part of a hike. For short term and summer camping information, directions and applications, contact the NNJC Camping Division at the Council Office at (201) 677-1000.

2. Millbrook-Blairstown Road to Del Water Gap is approximately 13.6 miles long. There are no shelters along this trail but camping is permitted only at Campsite #2 located just south of Sunfish Pond approximately 4.6 miles from the Del Water Gap visitor. Water is available out of several streams crossing the trail or at Sunfish Pond. See the notes on the Sunfish Pond hike above.

Day Hikes

1. Patriots Path Council has two very fine camps in New Jersey with numerous trails available for creating your own day hike. Camp Allamuchy and Camp Winnebago offer easy access to all. Contact the Camping Department at Patriots Path Council at 973-765-9322 for information. Maps of trails for both camps are included on the Watchu Companion CD.

2. Schooley's Mountain Park in Long Valley is one of my local favorites. From the main parking area, you can follow Patriots Path trail down the mountain and return by the horse/bicycle trail that forms a loop for your hike of about 3 miles. At the bottom of the mountain where the two trails meet, you can continue to follow the

old railroad bed or Patriots Path trail to add additional distance to your hike.

Driving directions can be found at

<http://www.morrisparks.net/parks/directions/schooleysdir.htm> . A map of Patriots Path trails can be found at <http://www.morrisparks.net/parks/trails/patpathtr.htm>

3. Jockey Hollow National Park near Morristown has a great day hike called the Grand Loop Trail. There is a nominal fee of \$4.00 for persons over the age of 14 but the history and beauty are well worth the small fee. Download a copy of the trails at

<http://data2.itc.nps.gov/parks/morr/ppMaps/Trail%20map%20Jockey%20Hollow%20EPDF> . You will find there is more than the Grand Loop trail available so make up one of your own if you want.