

# Discover & Explore The **NEW** Andes Rail Trail

by Peter Senterman  
*photography by the author*





opposite page: *Brad Lamel stands at the entrance to the Andes Rail Trail.*

above: *A Delaware & Eastern train on the Andes to Shavertown branch line.*  
courtesy John M. Ham from his collection

below: *Brad and Sandy walk along the rail portion of the Andes Rail Trail.*

Located on the north side of Pepacton Reservoir in Delaware County, the Shavertown Trail and the Andes Rail Trail are separated by about 15 road miles although, actually, only about half that as the crow flies. Both are out and back trails with a short loop on the end. Both are the result of efforts by the Catskill Mountain Club. Each is uniquely different and provides access to areas previously closed to the public.



The Catskill Mountain Club (CMC) was formed in 2004, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Catskill Park. In the ensuing ten years it has grown from a small group of dedicated hikers and trail maintainers to a major force in trail building and expansion primarily in areas of the western Catskills. In addition to trail work, CMC leads guided hikes, canoe and kayak paddles, and XC ski adventures throughout the year. (See [www.catskillmountainclub.org](http://www.catskillmountainclub.org) for a list of guided activities.) You don't have to be a club member to join the activities, although membership is always welcome.

In 2013 the CMC came together with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection which was in the process of opening more



above: *Trail junction with the Pond Loop ahead.*

below: *Near the high point of the trail on Hemlock Knob.*

opposite page: *Jeff Senterman threading through the boulders above the pond.*



of its vast watershed lands for public use and looking for a partner. The Shavertown Trail is the first effort of this budding partnership. CMC volunteers cut and opened the trail to the public on August 30, 2013. This is truly a historic step for the DEP and hopefully the forerunner of more areas opened to public use within the Catskill Watershed. Please help insure the continuation of this expansion by respecting the owners' concerns with protecting the water quality and not disturbing the surroundings. As the saying goes, leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but pictures.

The Shavertown Trail is located just north of the Shavertown Bridge where Route 30 crosses Pepacton Reservoir about 10 miles west of Margaretville. There is a parking

area on the west side of the road just above the access road to one of the boat launching sites. A few tens of feet down the boat ramp access road is a kiosk with a map of the trail and general information, mostly about boating. The trail begins about 100 yards farther west along BWS Road 4 where a sign marks the trail-head. Here, one enters a "stick woods" following *red markers* where the trees are fairly even-aged and only 3 to 4 inches in diameter. The trail climbs at a moderate grade through this old pasture being reclaimed by the forest. Not quite 1/2-mile up, the trail enters and follows a wood road to the right, continuing up to a large field.

As one emerges into the field the wood road continues to gain elevation, passing some radio-operated

snow and rain gauges. Please *do not* tamper with this equipment; vandalism could result in the closing of the trail. After passing the second instrument, turn around and you will be treated to the ever-expanding view as you continue to gain elevation through the field. At the top of the climb, the wood road and trail bears left, remaining almost level to a trail junction.

Straight ahead is the side trail to the small pond visible a few hundred yards distant. The trail soon splits and circles the pond. On the far side is an expansive view down to the reservoir and the hills to the west. This and the views from the field as you ascended are the only views on the trail and the pond makes a nice destination in itself. It is about one mile to the pond. The pond is man-



made, with an earthen dam surrounding close to half its cattail-lined shore. There are frogs, tadpoles and salamanders for small children to catch. It is also a very pleasant place to have a picnic or to simply lie in the grass and soak up the sun.

If you can tear yourself away from the pond area and have the ambition, the trail continues another 1-1/2 miles to a short loop at the end in a nondescript woods. Along the way it first follows a well-defined old wood road to the top of the grade about 1/4-mile from the junction. Here, the trail leaves the road to the left, wandering through some interesting boulders split from a ledge, before returning to the old road that is now fairly level and wet in places. To the right is the hemlock-clad, steep slope leading to the top of the ridge of Perched Lake Mountain. To the left is a drop-off down to a bay of the reservoir far below. There are only very limited glimpses down to the reservoir through the fairly thick woods and only when the leaves are down.

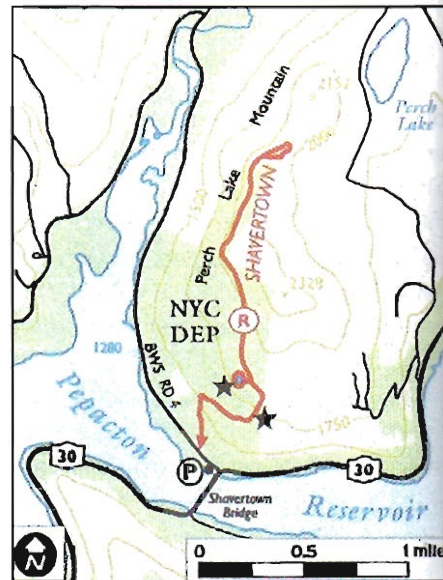
The loop begins as you emerge from a hemlock grove circling along a wooded ridge and returns a little to the east of the crest of the ridge. Retrace the way you came in once you complete the loop.

Unfortunately, the walk beyond the boulders is without views, nor are there any unique features or points of interest. Trail layout here was limited by property boundaries having to stay within DEP lands which in this area is a narrow finger of land. In autumn, the leaves along this stretch put on a spectacular show as, with the exception of the hemlock grove near the end, you are in a mixed hardwood forest making for a colorful sight. This upper portion also makes for a pleasant cross-country ski experience. Getting back down through the stick woods on skies could prove interesting because of

the closeness of the trees and steepness of the slope.

The Shavertown Trail provides a hiking experience in an area otherwise lacking in trails. A trip to the pond is very rewarding with nice views and the environment around the pond is pleasant. It makes a great destination for a short, but fairly steep hike. The round trip for the complete trail is 5.8 miles with the pond being a 2-mile round trip. The truly unique aspect of this trail is that for the first time, and hopefully not the last, DEP has consented to allow access to its holdings for other than fishing. Enjoy exploring this newly opened area.

The Andes Rail Trail is not just a rail trail. The first half (0.9 mi.) does indeed follow the roadbed of the



above: Shavertown Trail map.

below: One of the "mud detours" along the Andes Rail Trail with an old beaver meadow along the Tremper Kill.



Andes Branch of the old Delaware and Northern RR that terminated at the trailhead. The other half (1.1 mi.), opened more recently, is a foot trail that abruptly leaves the railroad bed, zigzagging moderately up the east side of Hemlock Knob and reaching the ridge before ending in a loop through a red pine plantation and hemlock grove. Including the loop, the total round trip is 3.9 miles.

If you come from the south, where Route 28 takes a right turn at a blinker light in the middle of Andes, continue straight ahead for a little over 1/4-mile to the trailhead on the left just beyond a commercial building. From the north, turn right at the blinker light and proceed as above. Parking is limited on the road's east side just uphill from the entrance.

The trail entrance, at 266 Depot



above: *An old picture of the Andes RR Station. The town of Andes is planning to restore it to its former glory.* courtesy John M. Ham from his collection

Street, is marked with a sign, pergola-topped arch and gate, a project of the Common Ground Garden Club. Just inside is an information board and the old station in a nicely landscaped area. This is the only publicly owned portion of the trail that was donated by the Decker family. The Town of Andes is planning to restore the old station to its former glory. The remainder of the trail is all on private land, thanks to the graciousness of the landowners. *Please stay on the trail.*

Continue past the station on the wide, level, grass-covered path. The Tremper Kill Creek soon becomes visible below you to the left. The rail trail's first portion is lightly wooded with numerous fields on both sides of the trail way. The rail bed's southern half is more wooded after crossing a small bridge.

The trail's character changes abruptly at a private property sign where the trail is forced off the rail-road bed and begins to climb through an overgrowing pasture with numerous old apple trees. The trail climbs gradually to the base of Hemlock Knob where there is a switchback and a more moderate grade as the trail traverses the ridge's east slope. Along the way are some

interesting boulders that have fallen from higher up. The woods is also more mature as compared to the spindly trees lower down.

Shortly before reaching the trail's high point one goes through a broken ledge and hemlock grove before descending gradually through a more open woods. You reach a beautiful high rock wall with a field on the opposite side that offers views to the surrounding hills across the Tremper Kill Valley. Cross through an opening in the wall after following it for a short while and enter a red pine plantation while still following the edge of the field to your left. Just before entering the pines, the junction with the other end of the loop comes up the hill. It is not marked and can be easily missed.

The trail's loop portion is particularly appealing as you first walk through the pines with minimal undergrowth before descending a little to an old road traversing the hillside through a dense hemlock grove with Bullet Hole Creek visible below. The trail leaves the old wood road regaining the elevation lost to the junction by the rock wall. Turn left, retracing your steps over the end of the ridge and back down to the rail

bed and the beginning of the trail.

The trail's rail trail portion is suitable for everyone. Although it is not specifically handicapped accessible, most of the length can be negotiated by a wheelchair. There are some seasonally muddy stretches beyond the bridge that can cause trouble but these are bypassed with a rough trail above the rail bed. There is enough variety along the way to satisfy anyone who enjoys a leisurely walk. There are houses and commercial buildings along the first portion but these soon thin out and you are in a more natural environment.

The second half up and around Hemlock Knob is quite nice with a variety of terrain and views through the trees as one gains elevation, especially with the leaves down. None of the climbing is overly steep and the steepest pitches are short. There is enough change in grade to be interesting without being tiring.

All in all, this is one of the nicest trails in the area, interesting in its variety, and a comfortable trail for those who like to wander in the woods. It is short enough to walk in a couple of hours and interesting enough for repeated visits. The Catskill Mountain Club did a superb job with this trail. Congratulations! 🍷

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