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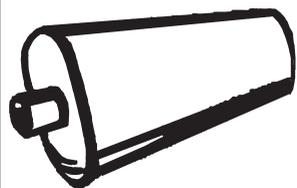
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PHOTO BY MARK NIEDHAMMER

The Walkway Over the Hudson, which is 212 feet high and spans 1.28 miles from Dutchess County to Ulster County in New York, is the longest elevated pedestrian bridge in the world.

Enjoying the Views on The Road Less Traveled

By Dana Gavin

Perhaps on the hottest of hot days or the snowiest day of the year, it might seem a challenge to remember that we live in a place of tremendous natural beauty that is available for everyone's enjoyment. As a native Southerner, born and raised in New Orleans, I had little experience with opportunities to hike or even find groomed nature walks close to where I lived. Having arrived in New York 10 years ago, I continue to marvel at the landscape and, particularly, the way conservation groups have done outstanding work creating easily traversed rail trails that often open up to showcase beautiful vistas. The best part of choosing a rail trail for exercise and entertainment? It's free!

Here are four local rail trails that offer unique and

compelling views, especially as the weather turns cooler and the leaves change.

WALKWAY

OVER THE HUDSON

The Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park is a relatively recent addition to the collection of rail trails, opening in October 2009. The neglected Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge was a sad eyesore, and yet organizers of the nonprofit group Walkway Over the Hudson, with other public and private partners, saw something very special underneath.

Years of work transformed the dilapidated structure into a solid concrete walkway with sturdy beams and comfortably robust side rails; travelers can walk between the New York towns of Poughkeepsie in Dutchess County and Lloyd in Ulster

County. Rising up into the air 212 feet and spanning 1.28 miles, the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park is the longest elevated pedestrian bridge in the world.

Normally, I am a bit afraid of heights — make that pretty terrified — but I have no issues enjoying the Walkway. The path is actually wider than it may seem, so you can drift more centrally if you wish to avoid being too close to the railing. And there are strategically located benches to stop and rest. The height of the bridge is actually the key to its charm: I adore visits during the fall and winter, to first watch the leaves turn fiery colors and then to watch the Hudson River turn icy. Be sure to bundle up, though, as the wind gets wild at that height.

You may park on either side of the trail. The Walkway East entrance is located at 61 Parker Ave. in Poughkeepsie, while the Walkway West entrance is located at 87 Haviland Road in Highland. There is a \$5 fee to park in the official lots. The park is open and staffed 7 a.m. to sunset, and closes in cases of inclement weather. For more information, contact the Walkway State Park Office at 845-834-2867 or go to www.walkway.org.

HOUSATONIC RIVER WALK

To get much, much closer to a river, take a ramble down the Housatonic River Walk in Great Barrington, Mass., along the west bank of the Housatonic River between Cottage Street and Bridge Street. There are two completed sections: The upstream section, which runs from the River Walk bulletin board at 195 Main St. to the William Stanley Overlook, and the downstream section, which begins adjacent to the Berkshire Corporation parking lot on River Street and ends at Bridge Street. These two sections are

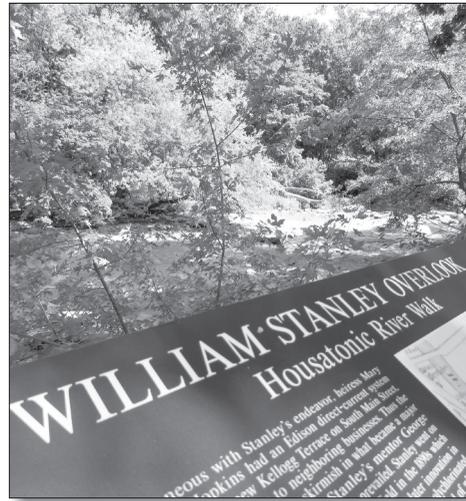


PHOTO BY DANA GAVIN

The Housatonic River Walk in Great Barrington, Mass., is full of history lessons, including a spot that honors inventor William Stanley Overlook.

conveniently linked by Dresser Avenue and River Street.

Work began to clear the upstream entrance in 1988 — to date, more than 2,800 volunteers have labored to create a beautiful rail trail that offers visitors a chance to not only view the sublime Housatonic River, but also learn more about the history of the area and the conservation efforts to restore the natural habitat of flora and fauna.

Near the end of this first section of trail, you can visit the William Stanley Overlook, which honors inventor William Stanley (1858-1916), who created his alternating-current transformer that would impact the entire country. Dedicated on June 3, 2006, this spot also commemorates Great Barrington's own industrial heritage.

A second commemorative park is located in the downstream section of the River Walk, with an entrance dedicated to Great Barrington native Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, the lauded civil rights leader and champion of the Housatonic River's restoration. This entrance is

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PHOTO BY DARRYL GANGLOFF

The Railroad Ramble, which runs from Lakeville to Salisbury, Conn., features a serene pond — a perfect spot to relax and enjoy nature.

... enjoying the views

Continued from page 5

located approximately 200 feet from Du Bois' birthplace, and details can be found on attractive information boards. Just beyond this installation stands a dramatic marker commemorating a Native American wigwam site and an incident between those people and European settlers. For more information, go to www.gbriverwalk.org.

RAILROAD RAMBLE

Novice explorers, or those looking for a quick excursion into nature, should visit the Railroad Ramble, which runs from Salisbury to Lakeville, Conn. This nature walk was designed by the Land Trust Committee of the Salisbury Association to preserve the area and allow visitors to learn more about nature and the

environment.

The trailheads are a bit obscure. In Lakeville, you can climb up an ascending embankment to get to the clearer path behind the recreation park, just off Farnam Road. The other entrance is off Library Street in Salisbury.

At under 2 miles, you can view residential neighborhoods, woodland areas, a bridge, a pond and open fields. Scattered benches allow you to sit and enjoy the view. The trail is less manicured than others, but still very navigable. And you might even spy a rabbit or two!

A brochure that outlines noteworthy locations on the Railroad Ramble is available at the Academy Building in Salisbury. The building is open

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HARLEM VALLEY RAIL TRAIL

If you are ready for a lengthy rail trail experience with a wide variety of sights, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail is a must-do. I have never walked the entire trail, which is comprised of two paved sections spanning 16 miles. It extends from the southern trailhead at the Metro-North Station in Wassaic, N.Y., up to Copake, N.Y. The stretch from Millerton Station to Under Mountain Road is currently unfinished, but you could easily ride a bicycle between those two points on some beautiful country roads.

The Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association hopes to create a continuous 46-mile trail that spans from Wassaic to Chatham, N.Y.

New York & Harlem Railroad served a critical service in the

19th and 20th centuries as a dependable way to transport goods and travelers from New York City to what would come to be known as the Harlem Valley. The rail trail today serves as a poignant reminder of how important trail travel was to the development of communities and industries, where the woods open up to spectacular views of farms, fields and wetlands. The scope and the natural beauty are truly extraordinary.

On the day I visited recently, I traveled to different sections by car, just to attempt to take in as many parts of the trail as possible. One of my absolute favorite sections, Coleman Station To Millerton, is 3.6 miles of paved and open trails. First, the Coleman Station Historic District, located in the town of North East, N.Y., is intriguing in its own right. A quick jaunt

off the trail offers spectacular views of the Hiddenhurst Farm and the surrounding fields. In the same respect, you finish the first leg of your sojourn in the charming village of Millerton, N.Y.

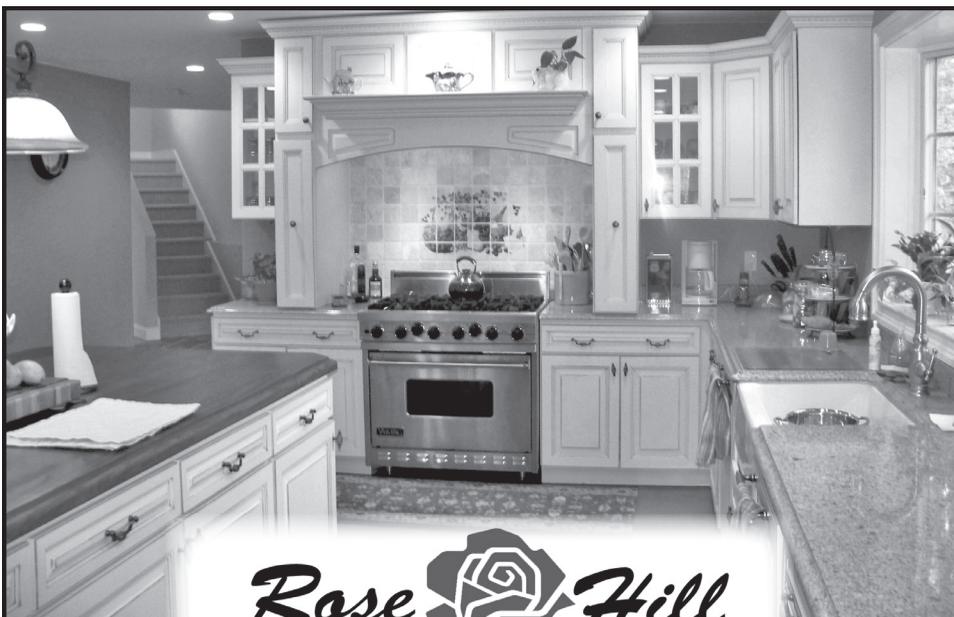
As I strolled, I took in beautiful fields, boarded by pretty little wildflowers. I spied iconic red barns and bleating sheep on farms. The trail is sometimes wide with sparsely wooded areas on either side, and then at times more narrow with tall natural rock structures as the trees nearly close out the sunlight. The contrast is dramatic and compelling. People can be found walking, running and biking at all manner of paces. I was happy to take it rather slowly, to have more time to savor the sights.

For more information about the Harlem Valley Rail Trail, go to www.hvrt.org.



PHOTO BY DANA GAVIN

The Harlem Valley Rail Trail is a popular destination for cyclists.



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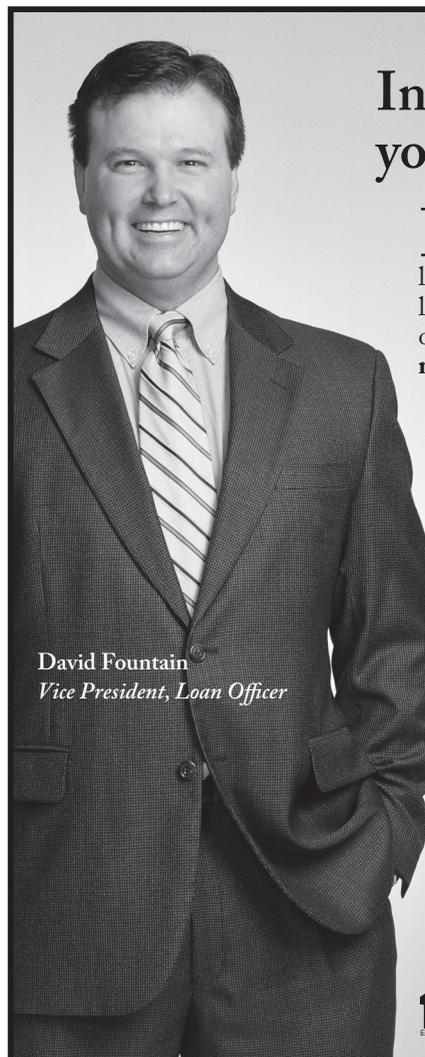
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