

Description: The Pinchot Trail is located in the heart of the 27,345 acre Lakawana State Forest. It is named after Gifford Pinchot (Pronounced Pin`-cho. French, for whatever reason, do not use the consonants at the end of names.). He was the first Chief of the United States Forest Service and the 28th governor of PA. He coined the phrase "conservation ethic" as it applies to man's use of natural resources.

The trail is a collection of 15 named trails, one un-named trail and parts of Tannery Road. The main route described here is blazed orange with connectors blazed yellow. At times the trail is perfectly straight as it follows (sometimes old) forest boundaries and then meanders a bit mostly to avoid swamps. The hiker will experience Blueberry bogs, swamps and areas of forest that had been "thin cut" as well as a more healthy hardwood forest with thick understory of Mountain Laurel and Rhododendron. Red Spruce, Hemlock and white and silver Birch provide an interesting contrast to the surroundings. Choke Creek at the southern end of the circuit is this hiker's favorite section. The valley widens out at some points and nearly becomes a gorge at other points. Elevation changes are very slight but the trail can be extremely rocky and/or wet in spots. Good boots are a must! The entire circuit is described here but the hike can be shortened as needed. Many prefer to do a North and South loop on different days.

The hike starts to the right of the kiosk in a maintained parking area off of Bear Creek Road. Another lot is about 0.7 miles east near the intersection of Tannery Road which is marked by stone columns.

Trail Notes: From the kiosk pick up the orange blazed Powder Magazine trail. In 0.5 miles the yellow blazed Pine Hill Trail comes in from the left. Continue straight and in 0.6 miles turn left on dirt Pittston Road. In a few steps turn right onto the Salamander Hill Trail and cross the rocky headwaters of Spring Run, passing a small campsite on the right as you climb. In another 1.3 miles cross Sassafras Hill Road and join the very straight North Line Trail, initially a wide grassy woods road lined with pine trees. In 0.9 miles the trail makes a left turn onto Spruce Hill Trail and descends steeply through a rock scree for 0.7 miles to eventually join another grassy woods road. Take care not to get too comfortable on this new tread as you will soon turn right onto the Hays Run Trail, a footpath. In 0.9 miles turn left onto Painters Creek Trail and finish your descent into the hollow. Arrive at the Hemlock encased creek in 0.5 miles. To the left, uphill before the crossing, is an old road that has been converted into a campsite. This is a good place to spend the night.

The trail crosses the stream and turns left, gradually climbing out of the hollow on a very oblique angle. Cross Pittston Road again in another 0.8 miles and join the Scrub Oak Trail. In 1.0 miles reach Yellow blazed Pine Hill Road/Trail. To visit the vista turn left onto it and walk for 0.8 miles to a yellow forest gate. Turn right here onto a footpath. Re-join the road in 0.2 miles, turning right to reach the viewing platform with a 360 degree view. After taking in the sights retrace your steps, passing the previously hiked Scrub Oak Trail on the right and turn left onto the White Line Trail. It is as straight as the North Line Trail you hiked earlier but considerably more rocky. A series of narrow boardwalks gets you through a section of Bear Swamp. In 0.6 miles pass the Frank Gatz Trail on the left. (This is a good bailout back to the parking area should it be needed.) In another 0.7 miles turn left onto a power line swath, cross a snowmobile trail and in a few steps turn right, following the orange blazes. In 0.5 miles cross Bear Creek Road (another bailout point) and jog to the right just a bit to pick up the Belher Swamp Trail. Pass a nice campsite under a huge Hemlock tree in 0.2 miles. Water is close by on the other side of the trail. The trail follows the western boundary of the forest for 0.7 more miles where it bears left and passes through a Red Spruce grove before reaching Tannery Road. Turn right. The trail follows the road for 0.3 miles but continues straight through the woods on an old road as Tannery curves to the left. Exit out onto Tannery Road in another 0.4 miles across from the gated Stone Tower Road (another shortcut). Turn right on Tannery Road. In 0.4 miles turn right onto a footpath at an orange blazed but not signed post. This section of trail takes you through a winding Rhododendron and Mountain Laurel Tunnel mixed with Red Spruce. It passes small dry campsites at 0.4, 0.7 and 0.2 miles, respectively. In 1.1 miles after the last dry campsite the trail descends to Choke Creek and the first of 6 campsites along its bank. Parts of the trail have been badly eroded by recent rain events but the blazes are still easy to follow. The final (and best) campsite is arrived at in 1.3 miles from first reaching the creek. It is under a grand old Hemlock, perched above the creek on a low cliff. Further investigation will find small "rooms" further back in the woods.

From this point the trail turns left, away from the creek, and follows old boundary signs for 0.7 miles. Turn right onto Butler Run trail and descend to a large grassy opening in 1.3 miles, a good place to camp a large group. Cross Butler Run and pass a small campsite on the right. Cross dirt Phelps Road and join the Kellers Swamp Trail. In 1.2 miles the trail passes through a stand of tall pine and turns left on another section of Phelps Road (I believe it forms some kind of a loop.). In a few yards turn right onto Birch Still Trail. This trail, for the most part,

follows pretty Sand Spring Creek. We were amazed to find, despite several "benches" on both sides of the creek, a lack of campsites along this stretch. We encountered a few areas where recent flooding had eroded the trail but that will probably be remedied soon. The trail briefly exits the woods at the three-way intersection of Tannery and Fireline Roads. Cross here and pick up the Sunday Trail. Initially the trail is very rocky as it passes through the headwaters of Sand Spring Creek and under some large Red Spruce. After crossing an earthen bearm the trail turns left onto an old woods road, following the northern edge of the Spruce Swamp Natural Area. In 0.8 miles from leaving Tannery Road turn right onto a wide grassy woods road, the Stone Lookout Trail. The trail turns left onto another road in 0.3 miles and climbs gradually for 0.6 miles before turning right onto a rocky footpath. In 0.3 miles reach an open area with a large pile of rocks. (I am not sure if this is the old tower or if someone simply piled the rocks up after its destruction.) The trail passes through another open area with a fire ring and Stone Tower Road on the left. Broken views of Bear Lake can be had when the leaves are off. Bear right onto a footpath and negotiate a short, steep and rocky descent. In 0.3 miles from "the stone tower" arrive at the junction with the McClintock's Gate Trail straight ahead. In about ten steps find yourself on what appears to be an old grassy road. The trail circles and then passes through Balsam Swamp with its dense Blueberry bogs, beautiful stands of white Birch and backdrop of Red Spruce. The berry feasting in July and August must be primo and the contrasting yellow leaves and white bark of the Birch with a flaming red carpet under them must be a photographer's delight. Once across the swamp the trail follows its northern border through another endless Rhododendron tunnel until it ends at Tannery Road, 1.3 miles from leaving the Stone Lookout Trail. Turn right and follow the road for 0.2 miles to Bear Creek Road. Turn right, using the left shoulder, and in 0.8 miles find yourself back at your vehicle.