

Trail Notes for the Forest Cathedral Natural Area – Seneca Point Loop

Description: Cook Forest State Park is a National Natural Landmark. Of its 8500 acres of forest nearly 2000 are old growth or old growth in nature timber stands. Many of the white Pines and Eastern Hemlocks are over 350 years old (some nearly 450), stand 200 feet tall and have a diameter of 5 feet. It is truly one of the prettiest gems in PA's hiking crown.

Described here is a moderate 7.4 mile trek going through the middle of the Forest Cathedral Natural Area (perhaps the oldest of the old), up to Seneca Point, along the beautiful Clarion River (a national scenic waterway) and returning to the start point. You'll gain and loss 1260 feet of elevation along the way.

The hike starts at the Log Cabin Inn on Forest Road. Optional starting points are marked with parking icons.

Trail Notes: A large portion of the route follows the combined North Country Trail (NCT) and Baker Trail and is blazed with blue over yellow paint. The remainder of the River Trail is blazed white. The Ridge Trail is not blazed (as most trails that are not part of the NCT/Baker trail are not).

From the Log Cabin Inn pick up the Longfellow Trail (blue/yellow) directly behind it and soon pass a fountain memorial to the original organization that saved the forest from further destruction. In 0.27 miles pass the Ancient Forest Trail on the right (If you want to shorten the hike this reconnects later.). In another 0.26 miles the Indian Trail comes in from the left. (This eventually leads to the park office.) The Ancient Forest trail rejoins from the right in another 0.25 miles. The Red Eft trail also comes in from the right in 0.17 more miles. In 0.21 miles cross Toms Run on a bridge and climb up to the Forest Road. Cross it and pick up the Hemlock trail (still blue/yellow). The trail climbs steadily for 0.33 miles before ending at Rt 36.

Carefully cross the road and join the Deer Park Trail (blue/yellow). You'll climb a bit more before reaching the plateau. The trail will alternate between good tread and very rocky conditions. In 1.16 miles from Rt 36 the Mohawk Trail comes in on the right. In another 0.15 miles the Deer Park Trail merges with the Seneca Trail which comes in sharply from the left (still blue/yellow). Follow it for 0.66 miles to the old Fire Tower Road. Cross it and follow the un-blazed trail out to the vista.

Return to the dirt road and turn right. The Fire Tower will be straight ahead and the River Road (yellow/blue) will be on the right. Descend steeply through some dense Mountain Laurel to the Clarion River. Along the way there will be opportunities to view this beautiful river. In 1.0 miles from the Fire Tower the NCT/Baker Trail continues straight along the river. You should turn right and continue to climb the River trail (now blazed white). It goes straight up an old road bed for 0.67 miles back to the Fire Tower Road. Turn left onto it. (Watch for traffic coming up behind you. It is one way in your direction!). In 0.40 miles the Mohawk trail crossed the road. You can either stay on the road or take this ski trail to the left. The distance out to Rt 36 is nearly the same. Staying on the road, in another 0.55 miles you will approach Rt 36. The Forest Road will curve sharply to the left and end at the highway. If you look to the right there is a dead fallen pine tree blocking an old road. Use this route to end up straight across from the Ridge Campground.

Cross Rt 36, entering the campground. Bear to the right and follow the campground road. In 0.2 miles from crossing Rt 36 turn right at a sign for the Ridge Trail. Near the bottom of the hill the road splits. The un-blazed trail is signed here. Follow it for 0.72 miles to the Forest Road. If you turn left and take a few steps you should be able to see your start point.