

Indian Head Mountain Loop

Round-trip distance: 7.0 mi

Elevation change: 1573 ft

Summit elevation: 3573 ft

Difficulty: Difficult, with two challenging near-vertical ascents up cliffs

Summary: Experience the picturesque beginning of the Devils Path, at first winding through level, shady hemlock woods, then beginning its ascent over Indian Head off the Old Overlook Road. Parts of the Indian Head profile involve steep sections, one extremely steep, as the summit is approached from the east. Of course, these are the areas with the magnificent views.



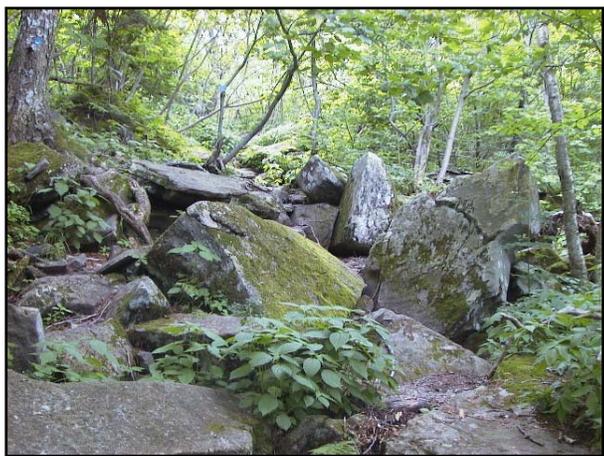
Directions to Trailhead:

From Hunter, Take NY 23A east, and turn south on Bloomer Road (County Route 16). From the junction of County Route 16 and Elka Park Road, continue left on County Route 16 (Platte Clove Road) for 3.9 mi to Prediger Road. Turn right 0.4 mi to road's end. Park along the side of the road.

The trail begins to the right of the private property, through a narrow opening in a log fence. You are beginning the eastern end of the Devils Path, one of the most challenging and rewarding areas for Catskill hiking. Historians say that the name Devils Path comes from old fears of the unexplored area above the Great Wall of Manitou, looming 1600 ft above the Hudson River Valley. Native Americans and European settlers alike avoided the Catskills, for behind that wall in the dark hemlock forests the Devil himself lived amongst wild animals! The Devils Tombstone Campground is 12 mi west over the Devils Path. Some hikers today say the name comes from the roller-coaster nature of the 23-mile Devils Path. Crossing a stream on a narrow wooden bridge without a railing, the red-marked trail proceeds southwest on an old woods road. At the junction with the Jimmy Dolan Notch Trail (which you will descend), continue left on the red-marked trail through a hemlock woods on gradual grades. After a downgrade, you reach Old Overlook Road (used in colonial days) at 1.9 mi. The Devils Path curves right, but take a moment to follow the road left a few yards past a deep pit into an old quarry where people have made a rock throne and other stonework. (On a sunny day, keep an eye out for a snake enjoying the rock.) Returning to the trail, now briefly merged with Old Overlook Road, watch for another junction soon where you turn right on the Devils Path, heading west to Indian Head. It's easy to miss this junction, which is located at a wider spot with logs, for the sign is in shady trees. For 0.8 mi, the ascent is through an attractive woods with many level stretches that allow you to catch your breath between pitches to higher terrain. Steep climbing for the next 0.5 mi brings you to Shermans Lookout at the chin of the Indian. You feel that you've earned this one! The lookout offers expansive 180-degree views of the Hudson River Valley, Kaaterskill High Peak to the north, and Plattekill Mountain near to the southeast, and the ledges of Huckleberry Point across the drop. There's a fine view of Bruderhof Community buildings, north, and of Woodstock's Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery below Overlook Mountain south, through binoculars. Above Shermans Lookout, the narrow trail circles near a sharp drop to the left and up rugged rocky ledges.



Then the trail changes character completely, leveling out on soft evergreen needles to a second excellent overlook south, with expansive views as far as the Burroughs Range, Peekamoose, and Table Mountains. The trek continues on the level through cool balsam and hemlock woods and even loses ascent. Suddenly you come to a 50-foot scramble up a cut in the cliff to a third marvelous rock ledge, 0.5 mi from Shennans Lookout. At the bottom, look up; the ledge hangs over the forest like an enormous high diving board. Climbing one section of this cliff can be challenging, a real stretch for shorter legs. Otherwise, the layered rock and many tree roots assist the ascent. From this large ledge, the section of Indian Head you just traversed is directly across, with Overlook Mountain on the right. The Ashokan Reservoir is prominent to the south. In 0.2 mi, the grade levels to another dramatic cliff. A path left takes you closer to the vertical rock wall, perhaps 50 ft high. Here, too, one area is difficult to scale without long, strong legs—or assistance. The trail goes along the cliff top for a few feet, frightening in winter! For another 0.3 mi, the trail continues, over mostly level terrain, across the wooded summit, elevation 3573 ft. As you descend 475 ft to the col between Indian Head and Twin Mountains in 0.5 mi, consider that this is the easiest of the Devils Path descents between here and Hunter Mountain. (The descent off Twin is 830 ft in 0.8 mi; off Sugarloaf, 1200 ft in 1 mi; and from Plateau's Orchard Point to the MY 214 trailhead, 1600 ft in 1.3 mi. A path deserving of its name!) Partway down, an opening through trees from a ledge nicely frames the Black Dome Range. Twin Mountain is near to the west. When you reach the blue- marked Jimmy Dolan Notch Trail in the col, turn right to descend to the trail-head. (Or take advantage of being at this 3100-foot col, and climb only 0.4 mi and 400+ ft to Twin Mountain's spectacular south summit ledges)



The descent from the col is steady and rocky, and requires careful attention. After 0.8 mi, your descent moderates as you climb out of the notch, and becomes a pleasant walk through a shady hemlock forest. After crossing a stream, you reach the original junction and turn left, following red markers back to the trailhead. In winter, the very steep sections on the eastern approach to Indian Head should be avoided unless you have considerable experience with winter mountain hiking and full crampons. Over this terrain, it is essential that snow texture be packable to create stable footing. The area should be avoided when snow is light and ice prevails.