

North Point

Distance: 7 miles

Time: 4 1/2 hours

Vertical rise: 700 feet

This historic, scenic day hike begins in the heart of the North South Lake State Campground and includes some of the best scenery available from anywhere along the eastern escarpment, and maybe the entire range. To reach North Lake Campground, turn north from NY 23A onto O'Hara Road (County Route 18) in Haines Falls, and go straight ahead, 2.5 miles, to the gate house. You may begin outside the campground entrance in order to avoid the minimal day-use fee charged at the front gate, but that trail (Rock Shelter Trail, yellow) is longer and less interesting than the recommended Mary's Glen Trail (red), which begins just 0.75 mile beyond the gatehouse. Limited hikers' day-use parking is located at the Mary's Glen trailhead, which you will see on the left just



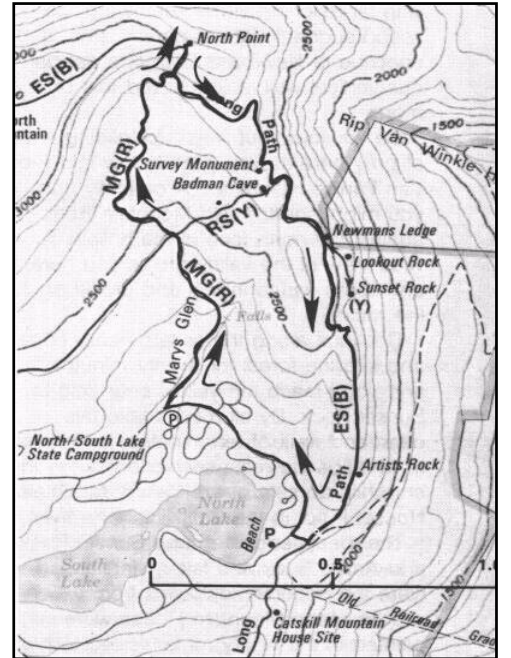
beyond the Mary's Glen trail sign. Park and walk back to the sign, which shows Mary's Glen at 0.4 mile. There is another location in the North Lake area that has the name of Mary's Glen, or Glen Mary, just above Kaaterskill Falls on Lake Creek (Kaaterskill Creek). In both instances the place name remembers Mary Scribner, wife of Ira Scribner, who operated a saw-mill on the creek. The Glen Mary Cottage was most likely where Henry David Thoreau, with William Ellery Channing, spoke of spending an evening in the early 1840s.

The Glen is a cool, sometimes wet and rocky, but easy trail that skirts a swampy area full of beaver signs. Go left when you reach the bottom of Ashley's Falls at 0.4 mile, where a spur trail continues for a short distance ahead into the stone rubble below the falls. Hike along the trail indicating North Point at 1.3 miles, and stop to enjoy the falls before continuing. The hike in from the trailhead should take only fifteen or twenty minutes. Continue on the trail toward North Point, beneath an overstory of white birch, hemlock, and maple

for another ten minutes, which will bring you to a four-way trail junction. Locate the red markers for Mary's Glen Trail, which is the continuation of the trail you are on, and follow it toward North Point (one mile). Passing a long ledge that sports a small waterfall during wet periods, climb above it through more ledgy terrain and into a flat, swampy, coniferous area. The swamp has swallowed up a piece of the trail here, where a "herd" detour is being created. You may still get your feet wet on the new, peripheral route in spring. If the foliage allows, you might at this point be able to look high to your left (northwest) and see the ledges of North Point. Within a half hour of leaving



the trail junction you will reach another, where the blue trail (Escarpment Trail) on which you will be returning leads back to Artists Rock and the campground. Turn left here, onto the only continuously steep section of the trail. After fifteen minutes of strenuous and aerobic effort, you will see a white birch stand that precedes the large flat rocks and long views from North Point summit. Investigate views from various parts of the ledge: Windham High Peak, Burnt Knob and Acra Point, Blackhead and Roundtop to the north; the Hudson Valley toward Albany, to the east through the Taconics and Berkshires; and south across the highlands and into the escarpment, where North and South Lake lie like spilled quick-silver under the shadows of Kaaterskill High Peak and Roundtop.



While North Point was widely known and visited during the hotel days of the nineteenth century, it was not as popular as the lower ledges and lookouts that have been memorialized by the painters of the Hudson River School: Thomas Cole (Catskill Mountain House), Sanford R. Gifford (Catskill Mountains), W. H. Bartlett (The Two Lakes and the Mountain House in the Catskills), and others both renowned and anonymous. A selection of prints and a detailed history of the area may be studied in Roland Van Zandt's classic, *The*



Catskill Mountain House. Van Zandt expresses his own opinion that the trails in this vicinity are "some of the most beautiful of the Atlantic Seaboard." Leave North Point on the blue trail you came up on, reaching the trail junction of the Mary's Glen and Escarpment Trails within ten minutes. Turn left on the blue trail into a flat walk through birch and hemlock woods with occasional thick spruce and laurel appearing. You will traverse large, flat rocks and blueberry patches in this arboreous, gardenlike section of trail, with views to the east as it passes in and out of pure scrub spruce stands. In ten minutes you will reach a large, flat, stony area with views of Roundtop, Kaaterskill High Peak, and the river valley to the east. Now the trail descends into forest, where large rock

overhangs will eventually bring you to Badman Cave (also a shallow overhang) and the Rock Shelter Trail Junction (yellow), alongside a small wetland. Follow left on the blue trail, over a rocky surface with far-reaching views southward, descend suddenly into a marshy area, and continue to Newmans Ledge, a dangerous vertical wall of a hundred feet or more. Be cautious, but watch for gliding birds of prey here as you gaze below into Rip Van Winkle Hollow. Look carefully and you might see the Old Mountain Road against the north face of the hollow. A wide view of the valley greets you here, and some varied initials and graffiti on the rocks. Continue along the escarpment's edge and into the forest for twenty minutes and you'll reach the yellow spur (left) to Sunset Rock. By all means take this dead-end walk of ten minutes, for it leads to perhaps the most scenic lookout in the erstwhile domain of the Catskill Mountain House, if not in the Catskills themselves. The many ledges around Sunset Rock and Artists Rock, the latter lying ahead, were the popular viewpoints from which scenes of the Mountain House were painted in the highly romanticized fashion typical of their admirers. Thomas Cole could see his home in Catskill from these points, and he would show it to friends from the area around Artists Rock. The youthful and daring may want to slide back down to the trail anywhere possible to avoid backtracking, or look around for the Bear's Den route, a cavernous tunnel that reaches the trail below. The sharp drop off the south end of Sunset Rock was once the location of Jacob's Ladder, a long wooden ladder removed by the DEC as a safety precaution. If in doubt, return the way you came. At the trail junction, turn left and continue south past the long wall of conglomerates of which Sunset Rock is made, wind around in front of the rock wall, and you will reach Artists Rock within five minutes. Another ledge follows in this fairytale forest of flat rock and pine trees that



long ago earned the area the name Pine Orchard, which extended to the ledges around the Mountain House. The trail will drop down into the campground picnic area and bathing beach at this point, where bathroom facilities and telephone are available.

Turn right and walk the half-mile back to your car at Mary's Glen.