

## Wittenberg Mountain elev. 3,780'

*Difficulty: difficult*

*Distance: 7.8 miles*

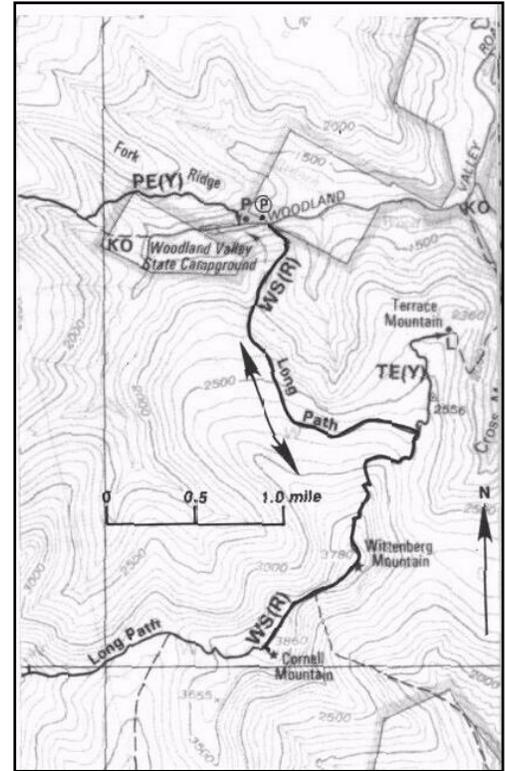
*time: 7 - 8 hrs*

*elev. gain: 2460'*

Wittenberg is the Catskills' most massive mountain. The trail up is very steep in some places and almost level in others. Panoramic views of the northern and southern Catskills, the Ashokan Reservoir and the Shawangunk Ridge can be viewed from the summit.

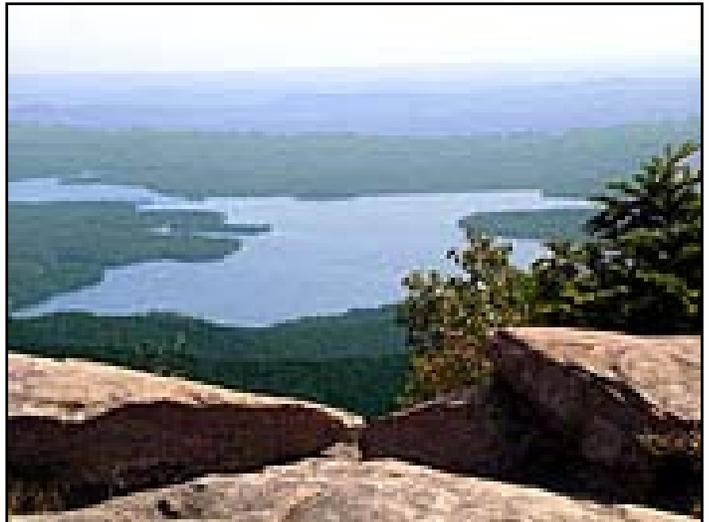
Although the trail is difficult, "The rewards upon reaching the summit, are without equal in the Catskills. Many people rate this view the Catskills' best, and among the most inspiring in the eastern US.

Wittenberg is a favorite among local hikers, who praise it as one of the Catskills' most dramatic. Although not panoramic, the view encompasses an impressive 180-degree hemisphere of mountain and valley that reaches north over the Devil's Path Range and the escarpment, east over the Hudson and Taconics, and south over an extended variety of terrain where the Gunks taper off into endless flatlands. It is in many ways similar to the escarpment view of Pine Orchard fame, the single most lauded overlook in Catskill history. It offers intimate observation of the nearby peaks stretching from Peekamoose to Friday and in its eastern lowlands the Ashokan Reservoir, which is almost entirely visible. The scene impressed John Burroughs, who visited there after a "long and desperate" attempt at Slide: "The view from the Wittenberg is in many respects more striking, as you are perched immediately above a broader and more distant sweep of country, and are only about 200 feet lower. You are here on the eastern brink of the lower Catskills, and the earth falls away at your feet and curves through an immense stretch of forest until it joins the plain of Shokan, and thence sweeps away to the Hudson and beyond." The "plain of Shokan" is now the site of the Ashokan Reservoir, which was impounded in 1913 to supply water for New York City. Ashokan is Iroquois, meaning "place of fish." Slide is not visible from where Burroughs stood, but it is included in a collection of good views on the western side, along the trail to Cornell. To reach the trailhead at Woodland Valley State Campground, take Woodland Valley Road, which you'll see on the left, 0.7 mile west of Phoenicia on NY 28. After crossing the Esopus Creek, turn right and continue along this road until you reach the state campground at 4.9 miles. Woodland Valley is one of the Catskills' deepest and most romantic valleys. A hideaway for recluse, hiker, and flyfisher, it penetrates into the park's most remote peaks. You'll enjoy the sense of rugged terrain, the intriguing architecture of valley homesteads, and the lively creeks of Panther Kill and Dougherty Brook. Do not rely on topo maps and earlier guidebooks, which place this trail a mile back to the east, where a suspended bridge led the trail to Terrace Mountain via an old bark and cross-country ski road. From the state campground parking area, step stones across Woodland Valley Creek, on the road's south side. Find the red trail, which is well-defined and marked.



## Wittenberg Mountain

Don't be disheartened by the immediate ascent involved in this 3.4 mile hike to the summit of Wittenberg; the rise eases considerably, before steepening again as the summit is approached. Proceed through a heavily forested and boulder-strewn grove of large hemlock and maple trees. The trail is well-marked here, but because of its many boulders, it is not self-guiding. So keep a close eye on the markers as you boulder-hop, or it will be easy to stray off the trail. As the forest type changes subtly into mixed hardwood, footing eases into occasional flat walks through high ledgy terrain and frequent dark stands of hemlock. After a half hour's hike the trail becomes pre-dominantly self-guiding and remains so until you encounter more rock in the upper elevations. After an hour of moderate effort, allowing for observation, refreshment, or photographing, you'll reach a trail junction, where you turn right for the 1.1-mile Wittenberg climb. The ascent is characterized by attractive (albeit steep) terraces, unusual rock formations, and penetrating vertical crevices. The forest cover will have changed notably into spruce and fir, and as Kudish in *Vegetational History of the Catskill High Peaks*, comments, "On even slopes the transition from slope to ridge forests is gradual and barely noticeable to the observer. But just as frequently, however, a high ledge will create an abrupt break in the topography, creating a likewise abrupt break in the forest. Examples of such rapid transitions from slope to ridge forest occur at the north slope of Wittenberg at 3000 feet along the trail." Within thirty minutes of diligent stalking you will have bagged the summit, which includes an intriguing array of sheltered outcroppings and open ledges facing east. There is evidence of illegal camping (above 3500 feet) in the surrounding forest, which, however, does not detract from your aesthetic appreciation of the place. Although the profusion of mosses, lichens, and various forest cover is typical of Catskill peaks, it is interesting to note the absence of alpine species. Kudish speculates that these could have been eliminated by the trampling of hikers. Below the summit ledge a short distance is a large overhang that may be convenient in the event of rain. After lunching and resting on the Wittenberg, you will want to observe some westerly views, which can be done best by hiking the short trail to Cornell via the ridge that connects them, a narrow and interesting rock path that is several feet wide. Cornell's westerly shoulder provides a good view of the slide on Slide's north side, which occurred circa 1820. To see this, proceed west on the trail as if hiking to Slide. The hike to Cornell from Wittenberg is about twenty minutes. If you have arranged for a shuttle you may choose to hike Slide. If not, you must return the way you came. This trail dates back to 1880, when John Burroughs haunted the range, relating anecdotes of the porcupines in volume six of his complete nature writings, *Riverby*.



### ***Directions to Trailhead :***

From Hunter, NY : RT 23A East to RT 214. Take Rt 214 South to RT 28. Take Rt 28 West .7 mile to Woodland Valley Rd. Turn onto woodland valley road to the trailhead at woodland valley campground.