

THE NYS POWER AUTHORITY MINE KILL STATE PARK BLUEBIRD TRAIL

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There are about 2.5 miles of trails at the Power Authority dedicated to bluebirds. Placed along these trails are about 30 wooden nesting boxes to attract bluebirds. The eastern bluebird population has declined over the past century due, at least in part, to a decline in natural nesting sites. Members of the Schoharie County Bluebird Society, students from SUNY at Cobleskill and the NYS Power Authority teamed up to encourage the reproduction of bluebirds by putting up the nesting boxes. It was an ideal location for the boxes because of the open fields and scattered trees, the preferred habitat of bluebirds. The program has been successful. It is now common to see bluebirds on the trails. The flash of blue is most noticeable when they are flying. Hikers might also want to keep an eye to the sky looking for soaring eagles. They are nesting in the area and are sometimes seen near the reservoir.

This article describes a 1.7 mile loop trail starting at the Power Authority Visitor's Center parking lot. The loop trail is grass covered, mowed and covers part of the Bluebird Trail. The trail starts at the south end of parking lot at the trail map box. There is a map inside the box which shows the Mine Kill and Power Authority Trails. The first part of the loop follows the aqua Long Path blazes south toward Mine Kill State Park. It is about 0.75 miles to the parking lot by the Mine Kill swimming pool.

Leaving the mowed area at the end of the Visitor's Center parking lot, the trail enters an area of fenced in white cedars. The cedars were planted by the Power Authority to provide winter food for deer. White cedar is a favored winter browse. The cedars were fenced to prevent the deer from killing them by over browsing. The deer can only feed on the new growth that comes through the fencing.

At about 0.2 miles there is some old fencing to the right of the trail. The fencing was to keep deer out of this small area to demonstrate how trees will grow when not damaged by deer browsing. There are several white cedars within the fencing. At about 0.3 miles there is a mowed trail to the left that loops back onto the main trail. This loop will soon be a tree identification and nature trail. The trail then starts down a gentle grade, with some native red cedars to the right. These trees show the effects of deer browsing. They are all missing lower branches to a height of about four feet. The trail starts up a gentle grade and at about 0.4 miles to the left there are two large white oaks. One is almost 17 feet in circumference and is among the largest white oaks in the state.



At about 0.5 miles a yellow marked trail comes in from the left. This trail goes to the Mine Kill boat launch parking lot. This will also be the other end of the future tree identification trail. There are mowed lanes on each side of the trail, at about 0.6 miles. This marks the boundary of the area where deer hunting is allowed. At about 0.7 miles is another trail map box. Straight ahead is the swimming pool and parking lot. If hikers do not wish to continue on the loop trail they can turn around here, or have a car waiting at the parking lot. The loop back has some hills and there can be wet areas.

The loop trail turns and follows the Long Path across the end of the soccer field and uphill along a hedgerow. At about 0.9 miles the Long Path turns left toward the Mine Kill office. At this point the loop trail turns right and follows the blue trail back to the Power Authority Parking Lot. At about 1.0 miles there are seasonal views up the Schoharie Valley and across the reservoir to the Power Plant. There are no white cedars in this area. It is an old field that is seeding back in with native species. At 1.2 miles there is an area of red cedars and the next few hundred feet can be wet. This area sometimes cannot be mowed if there has been a lot of rain. At 1.3 miles the blue trail enters an open area with the planted cedars. The visitor's center

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Bluebird Trail, continued from page 10 is visible ahead. The blue trail follows the mowed path back to the parking lot at about 1.7 miles.

Nearby Trails

There is a short loop trail through a wetland constructed by the Power Authority that is located adjacent to the Visitor's Center parking lot. There are several signs along the trail explaining the importance of wetlands. Mine Kill State Park has nature trails and other trails which are shown on the maps at the map boxes. The Long Path Trail also goes through Mine Kill State Park and the Power Authority on its way from Nickerson's Campground to North Blenheim.



Clarence Putman retired from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation in 2002 after 35 years managing Schoharie County State Forests. He continues an involvement with the Long Path Hiking

Trail that started while working at DEC. The club address is the Long Path North Hiking Club, P.O. Box 855, Schoharie, NY 12157, and his email address is clput@wildblue.net.