

ON THE TRAIL

Standing Stone makes for a great thru-hike for locals

By Helena Kotala

For the CDT

The Standing Stone Trail, formerly known as the Link Trail because it connects the Mid State Trail with the Tuscarora Trail, runs from Cowans Gap State Park to Greenwood Furnace State Park.

It follows ridgelines for 68 miles through several State Forests, Natural Areas, and Game Lands, and offers a scenic look at the mountains of south-central Pennsylvania. It also is part of the Great Eastern Trail, which runs from Alabama to New York.

It makes for a great thru-hike, but for those of us with time constraints, the easiest way to see all of the trail is to hike it in sections. The northernmost section, from Greenwood Furnace to Allensville Road, is approximately 9 miles, and is characterized by stunning vistas and large rock outcroppings. The entire section is best done as a shuttle hike. Recently, when I did this hike, I began at the Allensville Road end. Parking is available at the top of the mountain, where the trail and an informational kiosk is readily visible. The SST is marked with orange blazes.

Stone Mountain Hawkwatch is located about a quarter mile down the trail, and in the raptor migration

season, there will almost always be aviary enthusiasts with binoculars and spotting scopes camped out on the platform amidst the rocks. Local birders organize volunteers to be stationed at the hawk watch every day from September 1 through November.

Beyond the hawk watch, there are several large vistas, including Sausser's Pile and Little Vista. On clear days, the views are incredible. The trail winds its way back and forth between the exposed western side of the ridge and the more protected eastern side, which is characterized by grasses, ferns, and shrubs rather than rocks.

Near Greenwood, the trail begins its descent down the mountain to the park, and emerges in a parking area across State Route 305 from the park office. While you're at the park, check out the historic iron furnace, church, blacksmith shop, and other remnants of the iron-making village it once was.

For more information on the Standing Stone Trail, visit www.hike-sst.org.

Helena Kotala is a writer, outdoor enthusiast, and former outings chair for the Moshannon Group of the Sierra Club.