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# Ten Terrific Rail & Canal Trails in New York



**Parks & Trails**  
NEW YORK





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*Published by*



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[www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org)

## Rail trails are a new twist on an old concept.

At the turn of the century, locomotive transportation was the lifeblood of a thriving and expanding America, with almost 300,000 miles of tracks linking all corners of the United States. With the advent of the automobile and air travel, the economic viability of the once-mighty iron horse plummeted, leaving thousands of miles of abandoned rail lines. These lines are now being resurrected as trails.

Rail trails are multi-season, multi-use paths linking urban, rural and residential areas. These flat or gently graded paths are user-friendly (and family-friendly) and are popular for both recreation and transportation. New York state boasts one of the nation's most extensive rail trail systems, and also one of the longest canal trail systems.

Parks & Trails New York has helped more than 275 communities and municipalities create rail and canal trails, greenways, heritage areas, and more than 1,200 miles of multi-use trails. Parks & Trails New York is the only statewide nonprofit organization working to expand, protect and promote a network of parks, trails and open spaces throughout the state for use and enjoyment by all.

For information about other rail and canal trails in New York, please call us at 518-434-1583 or check out our on-line guide to 90 multi-use trails throughout the state – Trail Finder Maps – at [www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org).

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## WALLKILL VALLEY RAIL TRAIL

**Endpoints:** New Paltz - Rosendale town line  
to Gardiner-Shawangunk town line

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**Location:** Ulster County

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**Length:** 12.2 miles

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**Surface:** Original Ballast (Cinder, Fine Gravel)

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**Contact:** Rush Elwell, President  
845/255-3842  
Wallkill Valley Rail Trail Association, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1048  
New Paltz, NY 12561  
[www.gorailtrail.org](http://www.gorailtrail.org)  
**Map available**

The Wallkill Valley Trail combines history and natural beauty. Located in Ulster County (approximately 100 miles north of New York City), the trail is somewhat of a local phenomenon, championed and maintained by area volunteers. Parking on either end of the trail is limited, so starting in the quaint village of New Paltz is wise. This route boasts many attractions, some just a short hop off the beaten path. New Paltz has many historic sites, including a former train station, cannery and creamery building. It also boasts one of the oldest streets in America, Huguenot Street, with a fine array of 17th and 18th century homes. The trail itself is a rural paradise, passing farms, orchards and shale outcroppings via several bridges. Of special note is the beautiful Wallkill River and the awesome crags of the Shawangunk Mountain Range. Trees and songbirds abound.

**Endpoints:** Dresden to Penn Yan

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**Location:** Yates County

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**Length:** 7 miles

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**Surface:** Asphalt and Original Ballast (Cinder)

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**Contact:** Lynda Rummel, Past President  
Friends of the Outlet  
P.O. Box 65  
Dresden, NY 14441  
315/536-9484

[www.keukaoutlettrail.net](http://www.keukaoutlettrail.net)

**Detailed map & guidebook available  
from Friends of the Outlet.**

The Outlet Trail takes you on a fascinating trip back in time in both the historical and natural sense. The trail parallels the Keuka Lake Outlet which formed to connect Seneca and Keuka Lakes some 10,000 years ago. Along the trail are shale and limestone rock walls, formed 350,000 years ago (Now that's history!). Indians fished the Outlet until the 19th century. New settlers developed an extensive mill network using the "dammed power" of the Outlet waters. Along the Outlet Trail, signs of the former Industrial Age of the 1800's and 1900's are ubiquitous: there are remnants of gristmills, sawmills, tanneries, distilleries, a chemical plant, stone canal locks, and even an abandoned bridge connecting the trail to the once vibrant, now vanished town of Hopeton. Additionally, the prism of the Crooked Lake Canal runs along the north side of the Outlet and stands as mute testament to the former thriving industrial towns down in the gorge. Although the industrial theme is apparent, the Outlet Trail still maintains its rustic wooded appeal with good bird watching areas and parklands along the route. Most of the trail is built on a railroad trackbed, which in turn was built on the canal towpath.

**Endpoints:** Rochester to Mt. Morris; Nunda to Letchworth State Park; Caneadea to Rockville Lake

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**Location:** Monroe, Livingston, Wyoming, Allegany, Cattaraugus counties

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**Length:** 90 miles

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**Surface:** Cinders and dirt

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**Contact:** Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway  
P.O. Box 42  
Mt. Morris, NY 14510  
585/658-2569  
[www.fogvg.org](http://www.fogvg.org)  
**Map available**

Western New York's Genesee Valley Greenway follows two historic transportation routes, the former Genesee Valley Canal and Pennsylvania Railroad, which was built on the canal towpath. It begins in the City of Rochester's Genesee Valley Park, where it intersects with the Erie Canalway Trail and the City's Genesee Riverway Trail. From the park, the Greenway heads south following the Genesee River for more than 70 miles before turning southwest to follow the Black Creek valley to Cuba in Allegany County and then on to Hinsdale in Cattaraugus County. Along the way, the trail passes old cut stone canal locks, woodlands, farm fields, wetlands, river and stream valleys, historic villages and hamlets, and the spectacular gorge of Letchworth State Park. Almost 60 of the corridor's 90 miles are open with more than 30 continuous miles of trail available between Rochester and the Livingston County Village of Mt. Morris.

**Endpoints:** Albany to Rotterdam Junction

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**Location:** Albany and Schenectady Counties

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**Length:** 41 miles

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**Surface:** Asphalt

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**Contact:** Stephen Feeney, Planner  
Schenectady County Planning Department  
107 Nott Terrace, Suite 303  
Schenectady, NY 12308  
518/386-2225  
**Map available at [www.cdtcmpo.org](http://www.cdtcmpo.org)**

Perhaps one of the most intricately joined trail routes in the state, the mostly paved, off-road Mohawk-Hudson Bikeway wanders through the two eastern counties of the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor in a myriad of streetscapes, suburbs and countrysides. Like the giant segments of a jigsaw puzzle, the bikeway was assembled through the efforts of five different sets of planners, making for a diverse, visually interesting trail with frequent views of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. The trail starts in the heart of the Capital City of Albany at the Corning Riverfront Preserve, then continues 40 miles along the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. The trail passes through RiverSpark Heritage Area, including Watervliet (housing the oldest continuous use arsenal), Cohoes (a vigorous mill town at the turn of the century), and across the river from Troy (home of Uncle Sam). Past this juncture, the trail becomes more serene, passing through quiet suburbs and leading you right to the heart of the “Electric City,” Schenectady. Check out the historic Stockade district as you wend your way back to the river. The last leg of the 41 mile journey returns you to the rural peace of Rotterdam along the Mohawk River. A final treat awaits as you pass scenic Lock 8 of the Erie Canal and end your journey on the original Erie Canal Towpath.

## OLD PUTNAM TRAIL

# 5

**Location:** Bronx County

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**Length:** 1.25 miles

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**Surface:** Dirt and Gravel

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**Contact:** Marianne Anderson  
Van Cortlandt & Pelham Bay Parks  
1 Bronx River Parkway  
Bronx, NY 10462  
718/430-1890  
**Map available**

Located in Van Cortlandt Park in the Borough of the Bronx, the Old Putnam Trail offers an intriguing and unique combination: a rich history steeped in revolutionary and railroading lure and a strong natural appeal. The path starts at America's oldest public golf course, at the golf house by the southwest corner of Van Cortlandt Lake. Areas to explore include the old railroad station, the John Kieran Nature Trail (an adjacent 1 mile loop), an open area called the Parade Ground and a series of 13 mysterious stone pillars with a railway chronicle all their own. As you progress along "Old Put," fresh water wetlands come into view, replete with the sights and sounds of egrets, herons, wood ducks and red-winged blackbirds amongst the reeds and cattails. A surprising variety of trees can also be seen, including sassafras, maple, mulberry, hickory and tulip. The "Old Put" links to the North Country Trailway, a paved bicycle and pedestrian path stretching 22.1 miles in Westchester County from Eastview in the town of Mt. Pleasant to Baldwin Place in Somers.

**Endpoints:** Fair Haven to Cato

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**Location:** Cayuga County

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**Length:** 14 miles

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**Surface:** Grass and Dirt

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**Contact:** Cayuga County  
Parks & Trails Director  
6914 E. Lake Road  
Auburn, NY 13021  
315/253-5611  
[www.co.cayuga.ny.us/parks](http://www.co.cayuga.ny.us/parks)  
**Map available**

Nestled in the Finger Lakes Region of central New York, the Cayuga County Trail provides a peaceful respite for all-season enjoyment. Located near the shores of Lake Ontario, the multi-use trail provides three-season hiking, biking and horseback riding opportunities, with cross-country skiing and snowmobiling in winter. The route is lined with dense stands of sumac, beech, maple and aspen trees, making the travel corridor a delight for the senses. The more rural sections pass through several farms. For an added diversion, the Hojack Trail (another former rail line spur), provides an alternate 8-mile stretch of trail. The beginning and endpoints of the Cayuga Trail add interest to the journey. The trail endpoints are in the Village of Cato, the Town of Sterling and the Village of Fair Haven. Fair Haven State Park provides camping and swimming opportunities. Also in the area are Sterling Park and Nature Center as well as West Barrier Bar.

## DRYDEN LAKE PARK/JIM SCHUG TRAIL

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**Location:** Tompkins County

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**Length:** 4.0 miles

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**Surface:** Original Ballast (Cinder) and Grass

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**Contact:** Department of Public Works  
Town of Dryden  
65 East Main Street  
Dryden, NY 13053  
607/844-8654  
**Map available**

What the Dryden Lake Trail lacks in length (4.0 miles), it more than compensates for in natural scenic beauty. With an extensive lake and wetlands, the area plays host to an impressive array of birds, one of the best such sites in the Finger Lakes Region. All along the route, interpretive signs inform you of the abundant wildlife and historic significance of the area. Dryden Sedge Meadow attracts warblers, swallows and ospreys; another pond has an extensive beaver population and features an 80-yard-wide dam. Cross one of the multiple wooden bridges to glimpse a little green or great blue heron, or view a family of mallards or buffleheads. Additionally, glacially formed Dryden Lake has a rich Native American history and prime fishing access. Signage alerts the trail traveler to the “railroad ties” of the route, including an old Borden Milk Plant and lake ice house. Plans are in the works for a 2-mile extension on this beauty of a trail.

**Endpoints:** Newark to Lockport

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**Location:** Wayne, Monroe, Orleans  
and Niagara Counties

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**Length:** 90 miles

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**Surface:** Stone Dust and Asphalt

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**Contact:** New York State Canal Corporation  
200 Southern Blvd.  
Albany, NY 12209  
800/4CANAL4  
[www.nyscanals.gov](http://www.nyscanals.gov)

**Map available**

For a diverse and extensive outing, the Erie Canal Heritage Trail is hard to beat. Traversing four counties, the 90-mile bicycling and walking trail takes you through city, town and rural backdrops, paralleling the Erie Canal waterway throughout. This segment of trail is the longest part of the 524-mile State Canalway Trail System, currently under development, linking various travel corridors for bicycle and pedestrian use. The trail has either a stone dust or asphalt surface. The city of Rochester lies midway between the endpoints of this east-west trail and side trip opportunities for shopping, eating and sightseeing abound. Since the canal is always in view, you can catch glimpses of pleasure boats and barges along the way, as well as numerous locks. Take a side trip to Genesee Valley Park, designed by renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, and the Genesee Valley Greenway trail, which will eventually connect to Letchworth State Park and beyond. Once you leave Rochester's grasp, the trail once again regains its pastoral flavor, with a wide variety of bridges spanning the canal. The further west you travel on the trail, the more lightly traveled and agricultural it becomes. An attraction of note is Culvert Road, 8 miles west of Albion. Listed in Ripley's *Believe It Or Not*, it is the only road that passes under the Erie Canal. Check it out!

**Endpoints:** Lake George to Queensbury

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**Location:** Warren County

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**Length:** 10 miles

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**Surface:** Asphalt

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**Contact:** Paul Butler  
Warren County Parks and Recreation  
Department  
4028 Main Street  
Warrensburg, NY 12885  
518/623-2877  
**Map available**

When heading up north to vacation in the Adirondacks, the Warren County Bikeway is a pleasant diversion. The Bikeway begins in the village of Lake George, a large all-season upstate tourist attraction. If you are staying in the area, water amusements are an obvious choice along with a host of shops and restaurants. The Bikeway was assembled from an old trolley line and railroad bed. Unlike many other rail trails, the Bikeway has its share of ups and downs. The trail starts with a 2 mile steep ascent through pine forests and rocky ledges. Your earned reward for the effort is a majestic view of the Adirondack foothills. Dotted along the route are a mixture of motels, campgrounds and zigzagging power poles along with grassy knolls and idyllic creeks for picnicking. Along the way you pass through a wetlands area (including Glen Lake) and the Glens Falls Country Club. Truly a mixture of manmade and natural wonders, the Bikeway serves both Glens Falls city travelers and north country pleasure seekers. There is a 2-mile connector to the 9-mile Glens Falls Feeder Canal Trail via Platt St. to Warren St. to Shermantown Road.

**Endpoints:** DeWitt to Rome

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**Location:** Madison, Oneida  
and Onondaga Counties

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**Length:** 35 miles

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**Surface:** Crushed Limestone / Stone Dust

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**Contact:** Kenneth F. Showalter  
Old Erie Canal State Historic Park  
Andrus Road  
Kirkville, NY 13082  
315/492-1590

**Map available**

The historic Erie Canal towpath serves as a valuable resource for the New York State trail system. The Old Erie Canal State Historic Park is a prime example of a great recreational opportunity gleaned from an historic transportation corridor. The trail begins in DeWitt, just 8 miles from downtown Syracuse, and ends in Rome, at the site where construction of the Erie Canal first began on July 4, 1817. The trail passes through some of the most beautiful rolling hills in Central New York. Acting as a link between canal era communities in Onondaga, Madison and Oneida Counties, the route connects the 1700-acre Green Lakes State Park, the Chittenango Landing Canal Boat Museum, and the Erie Canal Village.

Green Lakes State Park features camping, rental cabins, a swimming beach, an 18-hole golf course, and trails encompassing spectacular views and vistas of 2 meromictic glacier lakes.

Chittenango Landing Canal Boat Museum features a restored 3-bay drydock, complete with miter and drop gates, woodworking and blacksmith shops, and the remains of a sunken canal boat.

The Erie Canal Village is a recreated 19th century village on the Erie Canal that includes a tavern, blacksmith's shop, canal store, print shop, early 1800's settler's house and a one-room schoolhouse.

## PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK

Parks & Trails New York is the ONLY statewide nonprofit organization that works to expand, protect and promote a growing network of parks, trails and open spaces throughout the state for all to use and enjoy.

The organization's role in making this network a reality is to guide the development of local, grassroots groups and to foster partnerships amongst trail and park stakeholders. To promote a statewide network, Parks & Trails New York published a poster, *Building Community Trails Across New York*; developed an on-line trail resource, *Trail Finder Maps*; promotes the economic benefits of trails through its publication, *Greenways and Trails – Bringing Economic Benefits to New York*; published a handbook, in partnership with the Hudson River Valley Greenway, for landowners considering allowing public access to trails on their land, entitled *Getting Involved: A Community Trail Handbook for Landowners*; and organizes a biennial statewide greenways and trails conference.

As part of a statewide effort to improve the health of New York's citizens, in 2003 Parks & Trails New York launched a five-year program to help localities develop more "active community environments" through the creation of shared-use trails. With support from the NYS Department of Health's Healthy Heart Program, Parks & Trails New York presents public workshops, provides technical assistance, and helps build the vision, constituencies and local support that are so critical to the long-term success of trail projects.

As a partner in the Canalway Trail Partnership, Parks & Trails New York is working to create a continuous 524-mile trail along New York State's historic canal system. Since 1998, Parks & Trails New York has organized Cycling the Erie Canal, a cross-state bicycle trip along the Erie Canal to promote completion of the Canalway Trail and bicycle tourism.

We also offer a six-day bike tour through the beautiful Hudson River Valley between Albany and New York City.



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**Mail to: Parks & Trails New York  
29 Elk St. Albany, NY 12207**

A copy of Parks & Trails New York's latest annual financial report may be obtained from Parks & Trails New York or the NYS Office of the Attorney General, 120 Broadway, NY, NY 10271.

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