



Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

Location: 1700 Hawk Mountain Rd
Kempton, PA 19529
Phone: (610) 756-6961

URL: <http://www.hawkmountain.org/>



SITE DESCRIPTION:

A 2600 acre Sanctuary in Pennsylvania which offers:

- Incredible scenic views
- World's first refuge for birds of prey
- 8-mile trail system
- [Visitor Center](#) and [Mountain Bookstore](#) open year-round
- [Native Plant Garden](#) and trails open daily dawn to dusk

Directions From I-78:

- Take I-78 to Hamburg
- To Exit 29 (Rt. 61 NORTH)
 - Go 4 miles & turn RIGHT onto Rt. 895 EAST
 - Go 2 miles; RIGHT at blue Hawk Mountain sign (Dreherstown)
 - Cross railroad tracks and Little Schuylkill River
 - GO 2 miles to top of mountain; turn RIGHT into parking lot

REVIEW:

We have visited Hawk Mountain twice in the last two years. Last year we originally scheduled a visit in September but a broken ankle meant I had to change our plans and we ended up going in November. The mountain and countryside was beautiful but we only saw one solitary hawk from the North Lookout on the mountain. We had a lovely visit though and enjoyed talking to the intern from Nigeria and the one from Australia (or was it New Zealand?). Both were knowledgeable and very friendly.



North Lookout: Last year, I was recovering from joint replacement surgery (knees) and I was determined to make it up to the North Lookout. I did manage it slowly but surely. While we were advised it was a difficult hike that shouldn't take more than 30 minutes or so, it took us more than an hour and I stopped anywhere possible to rest. The first part of the trek is relatively flat but does have lots of rocks sticking out of the soil and one must take care in walking even on the path. The latter part of the path is a more strenuous undertaking with steeper areas along the path and a set of steps to climb. I would rate it as a medium to hard trail. But if you can make it, it is worth the trek to get there. The "official count" of hawks, raptors, buteos, etc. is made from the North Lookout and there is a greater chance to see more birds from this vantage point. One thing you should consider is that there are no benches or comfortable places to sit at either lookout point. There are only the rocks and footing can be treacherous because of the rocks. But if you take it slowly and carefully, you can find a spot to sit and enjoy the scenery and to look for the hawks riding the thermals along the ridges and down the valley. As noted above, we only saw one solitary sharp-shinned hawk on our first visit to the mountain.

South Lookout: This year, we opted not to try the North Lookout and to focus on the South and the native plant garden near the visitor center. The South Lookout is a short, relatively flat stroll from the Visitor Center. The view of the valley and the "River of Rocks" below is spectacular. The weather was cool and just right for walking or hiking but not too cold to sit for a spell on the rocks. There is a single bench at the South Lookout but most folks opt to sit on the rocks. There are interns and volunteers at both lookout points to spot and identify the hawks. They also can provide binoculars on loan for you to use on your visit there. Everyone at the Sanctuary was courteous, knowledgeable, and helpful regardless of where you encountered them. We visited the site on Saturday afternoon and, although there was an art show going on at the Visitor Center, the lookout itself was not





too crowded. We left and came back later in the late afternoon and pretty much had the place to ourselves and enjoyed the peacefulness and beauty of the valley as it got dark. We also came back early Sunday morning and it was mostly quiet although there were quite a few people who stopped at the South Lookout on their way to the North. Although September is supposedly the “absolute best” month to visit the Sanctuary, again, we did not see more than a handful of hawks – a couple sharp-shins, a few broadwings, some vultures, and a single osprey.



Visitor Center: The Visitor Center at the Sanctuary is a very nice one. It is large and spacious with exhibits of interest related to the history and scientific studies of the hawks. There is a souvenir shop where you can buy nature themed items and, of course, t-Shirts, hats and socks all emblazoned with the Hawk Mountain logo. Who wouldn't need a new t-shirt? Because I

had forgotten my walking/hiking stick, I purchased a new one at the site and will add it to my ever-expanding collection of walking sticks. I think maybe my better-half is getting suspicious that I keep forgetting to bring my walking sticks along with me on these trips. And a new pair of socks is always a good thing to have. There is no snack bar but there are vending machines where you can purchase juice, soda, water, and some snacks. There are indoor restrooms but the toilets are the newer greener composting types. They are a little off-putting at first use but are much preferred to the porta-potties and they are clean and there is plenty of toilet tissue and a place to wash up (only cold water) so no real problems with the bathrooms. I did note that there is a bathroom off the trail to the South Lookout but I didn't check it out – I assumed it was also a composting type toilet. We did not see any kind of facility at the North Lookout.

The Sanctuary runs a variety of nature type programs and learning opportunities during the spring, summer, and fall months that may be of interest to those staying overnight in the area. The calendar of events can be reviewed and downloaded at the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary website included above.

Generally, there is plenty of parking at the Sanctuary unless there is some sort of event that is attracting more than the usual bird-watchers to the site. As noted, there was an art show going on when we last visited and, although it was crowded at times, we did not have trouble finding a parking space. There are also volunteers who will direct you to the parking areas during regular visiting hours. Note though that if you elect to go back to the mountain in the late evening or outside regular visiting hours, the parking areas are closed and blocked. We did note that people were parking on the roadside which is not really allowed during regular hours.

There is a trail fee for visiting the Sanctuary but it is minimal. People who donate to the Sanctuary can visit the site anytime during the year at no charge.



Native Plant Garden: The native plant garden is just to the left of the visitor center and is a gem which would probably be at its best during spring or summer. Most of the plants were past bloom when we visited but the overall garden and the water features made up for the lack of blooming plants. And, we saw more birds here than anywhere on the mountain. We saw more catbirds together in one place than I have even seen – most of the times that I see catbirds, they are in singles or maybe couples but here we were seeing 6 or 7 at a time. Also, there was a nice flock of cedar waxwings working a tree in the distance overlooking the garden area. And there were golden finches, nuthatches, chickadees, and cardinals throughout the garden and area around the visitor center. We also spotted an eastern phoebe near the South Lookout.



Accommodations: Last year, we stayed in a B&B on the eastern side of the mountain. It was okay and was located in a beautiful valley near a clear running stream. The rooms were okay but in need of a little updating. The B&B’s location ruled out much in terms of technology – although the owner said wi-fi was available, the coverage was spotty. There was no cable television so only two blurry channels were available for entertainment in the evenings. Also, there was no telephone in the room. This was not a problem since, like everyone else, we travel with our cell phones. Unfortunately, the location had an impact and the coverage was not good. But it is nice to get off the grid every once in a while and the visit was a pleasant one. There are numerous B&B’s listed in the area if that is the type of accommodations you prefer.

This year, we elected to stay on the western side of the mountain near Hamburg at a Microtel Hotel. The accommodations were as expected for a franchise hotel and the amenities were all available to include free wi-fi and cable TV. There is a giant Cabela’s just across the highway which provides some of the best shopping anywhere for anything associated with hiking, hunting, camping, birding, or anything nature related. New hiking shoes were a must-have on our first visit. There are also several franchise type restaurants in the local area.



We tried a mix of “home-grown” type restaurants and standard franchise restaurants on our two visits. We weren’t as pleased with the local establishments as we had hoped to be. The food was pretty much Pennsylvania Dutch working class sausage and potatoes and not very good at the few restaurants we visited. The franchise restaurants served about what you’d expect – pretty good quality but missing the local and original flare. So there are no recommendations either way for this location.

One thing we did enjoy immensely was the countryside and driving up mountain roads just to take a look. And there are plenty of these on both sides of the mountain. And there were numerous creeks in the valleys. Again, some of our better birding times were when we were just poking along at 5-10 MPH on little back roads checking the hedges and creek banks.

Site Amenities:

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|-----------------|---|----------------|---|-------------|---|
| Boardwalk | | Visitor Center | ♪ | Fee | ♪ |
| Paved Paths | ♪ | Bathrooms | ♪ | Vending | ♪ |
| Difficult Paths | ♪ | Porta-Potties | | Snack Bar | |
| Benches | | | | Parking Lot | ♪ |

UP Side: Beautiful scenic mountain area with a nice visitor center with good amenities. The paths range from easy paved paths by the Visitor Center to difficult rock paths up to the North Lookout. The Native Plant Garden is worth a second look and there is plenty of parking.

Down Side: The North Lookout is not really accessible except for those in good physical shape and the seating is mainly rocks at both lookouts.

BirdingBoomer Rating: 