



No. 20 | Make a grand return.

California's San Miguel Island used to have explosive scenery. Literally. Before it was added to Channel Islands National Park in 1980, the 14-square-mile isle was a bombing range. Hiking on its 18 miles of trail was actually allowed up until 2014, when officials realized that the prospect of unexploded bombs was probably not compatible with recreation. Since then, the U.S. Navy removed 125 pounds of munitions and, as of this past May, deemed the westernmost Channel Island safe for hiking. Try the 16-mile out-and-back to Point Bennett—and consider these other hiking destinations that were once off-limits for unlikely reasons.



Mt. Ellinor, Olympic National Forest, WA

Mountain goats were getting too close for comfort on this trail (they were likely going for salty urine when hikers went about their business), so officials closed it for three months in 2012. After a few months dealing with paintball guns (true story), the goats are apparently good with people once again.



Windsor Locks Canal State Park Trail, Suffield, CT

Being an only child has its perks. This 4.5-mile path was closed earlier this year by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection so a pair of bald eagles could "efficiently" and "successfully" rear their single eaglet. Fledging was successful, so hikers are permitted once again.



Waterton Canyon, Littleton, CO

Visitors were approaching black bears as close as 10 feet to document their megafauna encounters. Higher-ups were forced to close the trail for three months last year so the bruins could prep for hibernation in peace.



Alum Rock Park, San Jose, CA

After more than 7,500 marijuana plants (valued at \$16 million) were seized from this park last summer, it was closed for a week. The resulting manhunt didn't yield anything, so the biggest losers had to be the summer campers who were evacuated (well, besides the farmers).



Blue Mountain Lake, just off the Northville-Placid Trail

LIFE LIST

21

The Great Northern Quiet

String together the best of the Adirondacks—including new friends—on the Northville-Placid Trail.

BY RYAN WICHELS

LOUNGING ON THE ROOF crest of the lean-to, I look downriver to a vista of green and amber peaks of every height and shade, jumbled and falling away

into the horizon. Some are just starting to turn, and from here, it seems like I can see every single, infinite one. A fork of the Sacandaga River bends between slopes, narrowing into one final turn before it disappears into the green. I need to remember to thank the elderly, bearded hiker who recommended this spot next time we cross paths.

We will—eventually. The 133-mile Northville-Placid Trail is like the Appalachian used to be: lonely green tunnels. It's so seldom visited, we can't help but develop relationships with the half a dozen or so people we encounter. It's only a matter of time before we yo-yo past the old hiker again. When my best friend and I landed in the Silver Lake lean-to on night one of our two-week thru-hike, we shared floor space with a thru-hiker, a couple of drunk fishermen, an 81-year-old trapper (who tossed an entire chicken onto the grate over the fire), and the aforementioned trail nomad. The latter reviewed our itinerary and assured us we were making a big mistake by bypassing the Carry lean-to, so, on his word, we changed plans. Trails like the NPT always allow—and call for—a little flexibility.

The NPT, which splits New York's Adirondack Park up the middle like a logger's axe blade, was originally created in the 1920s to link two of the region's historically major railroad hubs, a necessity for thru-hiking before cars were widespread. (Hardcore Northeasters still link the stations.) Since lean-tos line the route, we outline a preliminary plan for which ones we'll stop at. But occasionally rain holds us back. Other times, we spend more time wandering through backwood hamlets than expected, before diving back into the dark, deciduous forests.

We connect mountain lakes through birch and maple woods and past high summits to the crude log lean-tos. For mile-long stretches, we don't see anybody on the singletrack, and then periodically we reunite with members of night one's motley crew in the wooden shelters.

We're the first to arrive at the Carry lean-to. When we pull up, we know we were given good beta. As I sit there, gazing downriver with my feet dangling from the roof, I am satisfied. I appreciate the nights spent with colorful strangers, but this is the solitude I was imagining. Then again, if we had gotten all the remoteness that we'd expected, we wouldn't have known where to find the best of it.

DO IT The 133-mile NPT starts at the Upper Benson trailhead in the Silver Lake Wilderness, roughly 1.5 hours from Albany off NY 30 in Northville, and ends just south of Lake Placid. **SEASON** May through fall; foliage is best in October **PERMIT** None; all lean-tos are first-come, first-serve. **CONTACT** nptrail.org