

Ashokan Reservoir

(Turn Left out of the parking lot, after 7.5 miles, turn right onto Reservoir Rd. Follow Reservoir Rd to its end over the bridge, and then make a left. After ¼ mile, turn left onto Rte. 28A. The next left will lead to the parking area.)

The Ashokan Reservoir is a beautiful and functional body of water formed by the damming of the Esopus Creek. Consisting of two basins separated by a concrete dividing weir and roadway, it holds 122.9 billion gallons at full capacity and was placed into service in 1915. Including the water it receives from the Schoharie Reservoir, the Ashokan supplies about 40% of New York City's daily drinking water needs in non-drought periods. Water enters the Ashokan's West Basin and, after a settling period, is withdrawn from its East Basin. It is carried southeast under the Hudson River via the 92-mile Catskill Aqueduct, which has a maximum depth of 1,114 feet.

There are two **Reservoir Promenades (1, 2)** that have exceptional views of the reservoir and the mountains and are popular among walkers, runners, cyclists, and bird watchers. The first promenade begins on the eastern border of the town of Marbletown at terminus of a circular cul-de-sac, locally known as **"the Frying Pan(3)"**. The open, paved path runs westerly along the edge of the reservoir for approximately 1.25 miles. Here it ends to allow vehicular traffic to pass from Reservoir Road along a NYC Board of Water Supply Road to Route 28-A. The second

promenade begins immediately west of the intersection with Reservoir Road and continues for approximately 1.35 miles where it terminates at a parking area and the junction with Route 28-A. This promenade goes along the reservoir and then enters a wooded section passing a monument dedicated to J. Waldo Smith, engineer of the New York City water supply system. The former road continues across a dam under which water can be released into the no-longer-dammed Esopus Creek.

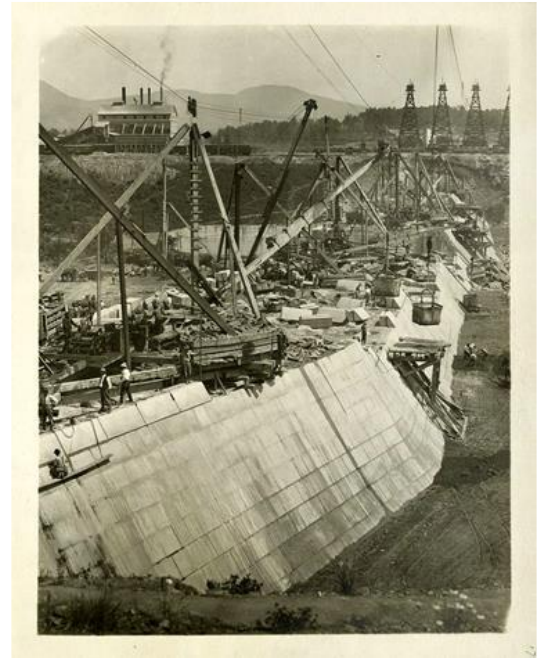
The **Dividing Weir (4)**, atop which Reservoir Road crosses the reservoir, functions to abate sedimentation that occurs in waters that enter the upper reservoir basin. The weir slows the flow between the basins so that the sediment is allowed to settle before the less turbid water is released from the lower basin to begin its journey to the taps of New York City. The dividing weir offers spectacular views of the reservoir and the backdrop of forested mountains.

The **Spillway (5)**, seen from Route 28-A near the junction with Stone Church Road, allows water to exit the reservoir as it exceeds capacity. Stone Church Rd leads to Beaverkill Rd which crosses the Spillway Gorge, a long rock canyon that enables water to pass from the Spillway to the Esopus Creek.



In 1905 the New York State Legislature enacted legislation that created the New York City Board of Water Supply and allowed the city to acquire lands and build dams, reservoirs and aqueducts in the Catskills. Local opponents of the reservoir cast doubt on its soundness, saying it could never hold enough water (it would be one of the largest reservoirs in the world at the time), but when it was filled from 1912 to 1914, they were silenced. Residents of the area to be flooded did not take kindly to the idea, and fought eminent domain proceedings bitterly.

The Ashokan Reservoir was constructed between 1907 and 1915, by the New York City Board of Water Supply, by impounding the Esopus Creek. Thousands of acres of farmland were submerged. The impoundment covered twelve communities located in a valley where farming, logging, and quarrying prevailed. The area that became the West Basin of the reservoir contained 504 dwellings, nine blacksmith shops, 35 stores, 10 churches, 10 schools, seven sawmills and a gristmill. Several of these communities were re-established in



nearby locations. The dam was mainly built by local laborers, but also attracted an influx of itinerant workers from outside of the Hudson Valley, including a number of Italian immigrants. In addition to construction, these laborers also did the job of razing most of the trees and buildings in the area. A police force was formed to keep watch over the construction site, which would later become the New York City Department of Environmental Protection Police, an agency that today is charged with protecting and preserving the New York City water supply system.

The dam was constructed with Rosendale cement, which at the time was the world's strongest cement. When the dam was completed, giant steam whistles blew for one hour, signaling to people in the valley to evacuate immediately. The resulting body of water is the oldest New York City-owned reservoir in the Catskill Mountains, being placed into service as long ago as 1915. The reservoir is one of NYC's largest according to its surface area and volume.

The Ashokan Reservoir has supported a nesting pair of Bald Eagles for the past ten years and hosts up to six Bald Eagles during the winter. The reservoir also serves as a stopover site for waterfowl, including an estimated 325 American Black Ducks and 50 or more Common Loons. Surrounding woodlands support an estimated 20 pairs of breeding Red-shouldered Hawks, as well as other breeding at-risk birds, including American Black Ducks, American Woodcocks, Whip-poor-wills, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Willow Flycatchers, Wood Thrushes, Blue-winged Warblers, Prairie Warblers, and Worm-eating Warblers. Migrating at-risk species include Pied-billed



Grebes (potential breeder), Ospreys, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, and Peregrine Falcons. In the fall, when the reservoir is low, the site also supports shorebirds, including American Golden-Plovers, Pectoral Sandpipers, White-rumped Sandpipers, and Baird's Sandpipers. Flocks of Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs also use the site during the fall.

Take note that recreational users of NYC DEP trails are required to closely observe usage limitations and may incur fines for non-compliance with posted rules.