



Troop 49, The Pathfinders
Camp Alpine/ Palisades Historic Trail Trip Report
March 12-13, 2011

Saturday, March 12, 2011

Once again we lucked out in terms of weather. After a brutal week of rain and cold temperatures, campers were greeted to a Saturday morning sporting clear skies and seasonably warm temperatures in the low 40s. Our adventurous Scouts and parents mustered at the OLPH parking lot at 7:00 a.m. on March 12, 2011 and, after some brief instructions from Mr. Richards and a roll call, the group rolled out toward Camp Alpine at 7:04. Mr. Burns had the trailer in tow and several adults graciously donated firewood (thanks to all!), which the Scouts later put to good use by building a blazing cairn that put the other Scout troop at the camp to shame...

It took everyone about forty minutes to arrive at Camp Alpine. Once there, the Scouts selected specific sites to pitch their tents, and gear was shifted to make room in vehicles to transport our intrepid hikers to the trailhead. After some additional remarks from Mr. Richards concerning safety issues, a final roll call was taken and we were off to experience the wonders of the Palisades. The group circled up outside of the Visitor's Center at the Fort Lee Historic Park at 8:43 a.m. (Note to the reader: this report purposefully contains exact times and distances in order to provide some metrics for future planning purposes). After a quick inventory of water, food, snacks and boots, the group consisting of 19 Scouts and 9 adults headed north to pick up the beginning of the Long Path. The Long Path is one of the two main hiking trails that start at the Fort Lee Historic Park and was designated as a National Recreation Trail by the United States Department of the Interior on September 19, 1976. The portion of the Long Path that our Scouts hiked is marked by light blue blazes and stretches along the top of the Palisades Cliffs between the George Washington Bridge and Camp Alpine.

The hike progressed without incident as we worked our way toward our first predetermined rest area, approximately 3 miles into the hike. After only a short distance, we were treated to many breathtaking views of the Hudson River from heights in excess of 500 hundred feet above the water – often looking down on three or four hawks circling about 100 to 200 feet below us. Scouts and adults also diligently picked up trash along the trail in an effort to follow the tenets of Scouting's Leave No Trace doctrine. We certainly left the trail in better condition than we found it and adults carrying garbage bags were soon looking for our first rest area to unload their burdens – including parts of exhaust pipes, mufflers and other assorted detritus. We arrived at our first rest stop a little more than an hour and a half into the hike and met up with two adults, who had volunteered to drive to pre-determined points with water, rations and first aid supplies (thankfully not needed). A heart felt thanks to Mr. Mellone and Mr. Busker for volunteering to act as our rabb...I mean mules. After a brief rest and short exploration of the Rockefeller Lookout, the Scout's refilled their water bottles, tightened their laces and we were off. Next stop, the Alpine Lookout at the seven mile mark of the Long Path.



The day progressed with many hikers opting to doff outer layers of clothing as the weather continued to cooperate. Eventually, after winding our way between the top of the Palisades Cliffs and the Palisades Parkway and making way for the many hikers and joggers sharing the trail, we arrived at the Alpine Lookout at 12:04 p.m. This was our designated lunch stop and transfer point for the 13 new Scouts ending their day of hiking and returning to camp to work on advancements. A special thanks to Mr. Dishian and two of our senior Scouts for overseeing the camp and helping the new Scouts with their rank advancements. As a group, we travelled approximately 7 miles at an average moving speed of 2.5 miles per hour, with an overall average of 2.1 miles per hour when factoring in breaks. This was a fantastic achievement for the group – which remained together nicely (no turtles here!). Thanks also to Ed Rosjford for acting as our “sweeper” and making sure no one got separated from the group.

At 12:37, after a well earned lunch and a chance to refill water stores, the remaining six Scouts and five adults set off northward toward our final destination – Camp Alpine. Along the way, the stalwart hikers dared each other to stare down sheer cliff faces (much to the chagrin of the adults), explored old abandoned buildings and oddly situated foundations, all the while ticking off miles like water off the back of a duck. We reached the Alpine Picnic Area and Boat Basin overlook (approximately mile 9) at 1:34 p.m., followed by Ruckman Point at 2:12 p.m. At that point, the group was moving at 2.2 miles per hour, with an overall average of 1.6 miles per hour when you factored in the breaks and spontaneous exploration of various items of interest, including sun bleached bones and recognizable carcasses of some unfortunate deer. Eventually a visibly tired, but determined group of young men arrived at the Women’s Federation Monument. This monument was erected in 1929 and commemorates the local women's clubs and organizations that helped preserve the Palisades Cliffs from being destroyed by granite quarrying and establish the historic park for generations to come. The monument looks like a small castle, which the Scouts quickly climbed to enjoy an even higher view of the Hudson river and sparkling buildings dotting the far shore of New York.

Meanwhile, back at Camp Alpine, the new Scouts were busy setting up camp and, with the help of some senior Scouts, working on achieving their totin’ chit and firem’n chit. Congratulations to all of the Scouts who earned their totin’ chit card!

The group then made its way across two foot bridges over the Palisades Parkway and Route 9W and into the parking lot of the New York side of Camp Alpine. There, the Scouts enjoyed some ice cream and dug through boxes of patches, hoping to find that one very special addition to already burgeoning collections. The adults, being the practical members of the group, made efficient use of the indoor plumbing before complaining to each other that the Scouts had taken the last remaining orange creamsicle. However, we soon discovered that our trip was not yet complete: we still needed to cut through the New York side of the camp, blaze a trail through a short section of woods, and pick up Ruckman Road in order to finally arrive at our destination. Finally, at 4:26 p.m. our expedition was complete. We arrived at a well organized campsite, with wood toted and stacked by the fire ring, tents erected and gear stored. We couldn’t help but be grateful for all the work that the two senior Scouts



and the young Scouts had done in organizing the campsite and making everything ready for our arrival. They even took pity on Mr. Fern and set up his tent for him – albeit about a hundred yards away from the campsite on the other side of a river...

Dinner was fantastic! The cooks looked up an old Scouting recipe, which called for slicing Yukon Gold potatoes and yellow onions and placing them in foil packets along with hamburger meat to cook on a grill placed over the campfire. The aroma wafting out of the fire along with the sizzling sound of the onions roasting was enough to make everyone's mouth water. An extra hearty "thanks!" to Mr. Mellone and son for providing such a delectable meal, including rolls and salad. The rest of the evening was spent organizing gear, playing games and generally relaxing into an evening by the fire. It was great to see many of the senior Scouts pairing up with newer Scouts and going over advancement requirements in the Scout handbook. In the end, with no more than a few blisters on some very sore feet, the group managed to complete the Long Trail at an average moving speed of 2.3 miles per hour and an overall average of 1.7 miles per hour, including breaks, time spent exploring ruins and monuments and, of course, eating ice cream. Everyone eventually retired to their tents and Mr. Richards doused the fire shortly after midnight.

Sunday, March 13

Robbed of a precious hour of sleep by the daylight savings thieves, the Scouts awoke to a thirty-three degree but clear and sunny Spring morning. Earlier, at 6:10 a.m., Mr. Burns and Mr. Fern drove to the Fort Lee Historic Park center to leave a car for use after the remaining Scouts completed the Sunday hike. While there, these two men amongst boys reconnoitered the Shore trail exit, verified the hike, marked emergency exit areas on maps and generally reconfirmed the route for the day – all while the Scout Master in Charge continued his peaceful slumber back at camp. Thanks guys! At 7:00 a.m. the camp slowly came to life, with sleepy Scouts making their way to the breakfast table for muffins, yoghurt and fruit. The process of packing tents, loading the trailer and sweeping the camp began in earnest thereafter. At 8:45, Mr. Dishian led a discussion on lessons learned with the Scouts, giving everyone an opportunity to express what they thought was most memorable about the trip, what worked well and what could be done better on our next excursion. After a final role call and words of congratulations from Mr. Richards, all but three adults and four Scouts quickly piled into their assigned cars to return, with all due haste, to the warmth of their homes, with thoughts of long, hot showers dancing in their heads. Congratulations are in order for our newest Scouts for successfully completing their first tenting trip as Boy Scouts and for having hiked seven miles without even breaking a sweat!

The Shore Trail

The remaining three adults and four Scouts drove to the New York side of Camp Alpine to begin their trek along the Shore Trail. At 9:25 a.m., after paying our respects to the Camp ranger and securing permission to park the cars and trailer in his lot while we hiked, the somewhat diminished but determined group was off. The Shore Trail is marked by white blazes and stretches along the shore of



the Hudson River from near the Alpine Camp to the southern tip of the Palisades Interstate Park. Our day-two hike began with the group quickly marching back toward the Women's Federation Monument and veering left toward our first challenge: a 520 foot descent over switchbacks and meticulously constructed rock stairs, well worn by decades of weather and hiker's booted feet. At 9:58 a.m. the group made it down to the river level and began to hike south along the river's edge. This portion of the hike was very smooth and a quiet sense of comfort and determination quickly settled about the shoulders of the hikers as the beauty of the surroundings and the isolation from civilization infused us with purpose and freedom. At over five hundred feet below the cliffs, with no easy exit points and certainly no car access for at least the next four miles, we were committed.

At 10:37 a.m. a happy and only slightly sore group arrived at Point Comfort, which is an area set back from the river with some old foundations of buildings where people had to have arrived at by boat to enjoy a day by the Hudson. After a short break and some exploring, we headed back out. At this point, the terrain became much more difficult to traverse. Portions of the trail had been eroded and we were often reduced to playing the old game of "which rocks to I put my feet on next" in an attempt to avoid taking a spill. By 11:43, the steady septet made it to Closter Dock – the first area with car access. The Dock area was covered with shrink wrapped boats, waiting for Spring and a return to their native waters. Many of the boats had humorous names, like "Pointless" and "Second Impulse Buy III", which helped keep our minds off of our increasingly barking feet and leaden legs. After stopping for lunch and rehydrating, the group started yet again down the path toward the Fort Lee Historic Park.

The remainder of the trek was, quite frankly, a bit of a slog, as the miles put in on Saturday and the increasingly rough terrain quickly sapped the hikers of any remaining stamina. Nevertheless, the group kept at it, with smiles on their faces and with enough fortitude to pass Bloomer's Beach at 1:52 and then the Ross Dock Picnic area at 2:55 – now only about 3 to 3.5 miles to go. At some point along this stretch, the Scouts noticed some movement among the leaves by the side of the trail. Closer inspection revealed a nest of garter snakes each about two feet long, writhing over themselves and generally having a good time in the sun. After a lost period of snake watching, we came back to our senses and continued on our way. The George Washington Bridge had been in view for quite a while by then – but it just didn't seem to want to get any closer. Then it happened: we were proudly walking underneath the GWB, gawking like foreign tourists at the immensity of its architecture. Now all we needed to do was head around the southern tip of the Palisades Interstate Park and overcome what was sure to be the biggest test of the entire trip: the ascent.

After hiking over 12 miles -- or 26 miles over two days – the group faced a 340 foot climb back up rock steps and switchbacks. With faces set, every member of the group took a deep drink and began to climb, and climb, and climb. Success! We did it: almost. We still had to walk around a block, up a hill with wind suddenly howling in our faces, into the Fort Lee Historic Park, and around additional paths that eventually led to the most beautiful site that any of the seven hikers had ever seen: Dan Fern's silver steed. At 3:30 p.m., after sharing celebratory portions of Mrs. Burns' famous banana bread and



brownies, we all gratefully lowered somewhat weary backsides into the plush goodness of Mr. Fern's truck and cruised back up to Camp Alpine, with promises of Vienna Fingers that, for some reason, never materialized. The trip officially ended when the group said a hearty good-bye to Camp Alpine at 3:50 to make their way back to good ole Oakland New Jersey. Arrival in Oakland occurred at about 4:30 p.m. on March 13 – actually being able to lever myself out of the car occurred somewhat later.

Respectfully submitted,

Tendai Richards, Assistant Scoutmaster

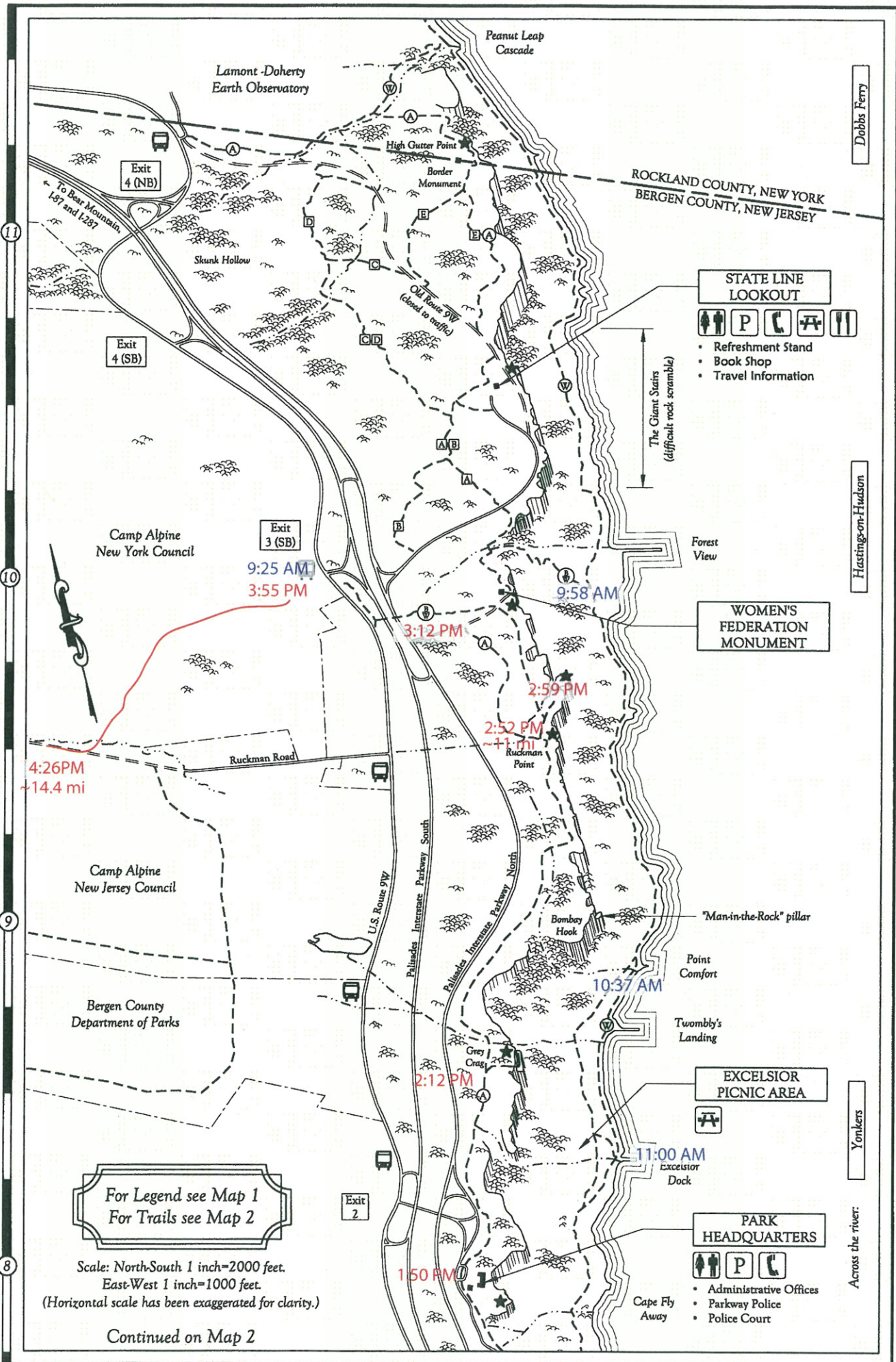
Lessons Learned

1. If you only have one day to hike, travel south along the Shore Trail. It is more interesting, there are many fewer people and you don't have to contend with the constant traffic noise from the Palisades Parkway.
2. The south end of the Long Path has the easiest terrain and is the most comfortable to hike. Heading north along this trail was a good call for new Scouts with little to no prior hiking experience.
3. The north end of the Shore Trail, while not easy, has the best footing and most interesting scenery.
4. If you are traveling from South to North, the Long Trail is preferred as it is relatively level and there are many car-accessible exit or meeting points that are clearly marked on maps, which can be downloaded from the Fort Lee Historic Park website.
5. If you want to hike the Shore Trail, it is preferable to go from the north to the south. The terrain is gentle once you reach the GWB near the end and the 320 foot ascent at the southern end is much preferable to the 520 foot ascent waiting for you at the north end of the trail.
6. As noted, the Long path has easy car access. The Shore Path does not. Hikers should be properly equipped, with plenty of water and should have at least some hiking experience before attempting the Shore Trail.
7. Hiking these trails this early in the spring has advantages and disadvantages: the lack of foliage does nothing to dampen the noise from the Parkway that runs along the entire length of the Long Path, but it does afford terrific and unobstructed views through the forest and across the Hudson River to the New York skyline. Of perhaps greater benefit was the cooler temperatures and lack of bugs (when you factor out ticks at least).
8. The fact that snow had recently and rapidly melted away left some interesting and undisturbed animal remains that fascinated the Scouts and adults alike.
9. If staying at the New Jersey side of Camp Alpine, try to secure campsite number 1 as it is right off of the back of the dirt parking lot and you can back the trailer up to the edge of the lot for easy transfer of material. There is also a nice brook running along the back side of this



campsite, which acts as a white noise and is quite pleasant to sleep to. We were originally booked into campsite 3, which is only a short distance up a hill from the parking lot, but would have required carrying material a longer distance uphill from the trailer in the lot.

10. Repeatedly instruct Scouts and adults to check for ticks – even though it was cold out and we didn't think ticks would be around, at least four different hikers later reported finding ticks on them after they returned home.
11. The trail is also rife with poison ivy. Scouts need to be able to recognize this plant even when the leaves are not out and should be repeatedly told not to leave the trails unless an adult gives the OK.
12. New Scouts need to be indoctrinated into the concept of the “buddy system” as they often wandered off by themselves to go to the bathroom or just to wander off. It is apparent that, as a group, they do not see the import of this concept.



PALISADES INTERSTATE PARK COMMISSION - NEW JERSEY SECTION
Northern Part of Park (Map 3 of 3)

Continued on Map 3

TRAILS

- (A) Long Path (aqua blaze)
Level (except near State Line)
- (W) Shore Trail (white blaze)
Level (except for The Giant Stairs)
- (B) Carpenter's Trail (blue blaze)
Steep: 300 ft. climb
- (Y) Dyckman Hill Trail (yellow blaze)
Moderate: 340 ft. climb
- (R) Huyler's Landing Trail (red blaze)
Moderate: 440 ft. climb
- (O) Closter Dock Trail (orange blaze)
Moderate-steep: 460 ft. climb
- (W) Forest View Trail (blue-and-white blaze)
Steep: 520 ft. climb

See Map 1 for legend.

Scale: North-South 1 inch=2000 feet.
East-West 1 inch=1000 feet.
(Horizontal scale has been exaggerated for clarity.)

Graphic Scale in Miles

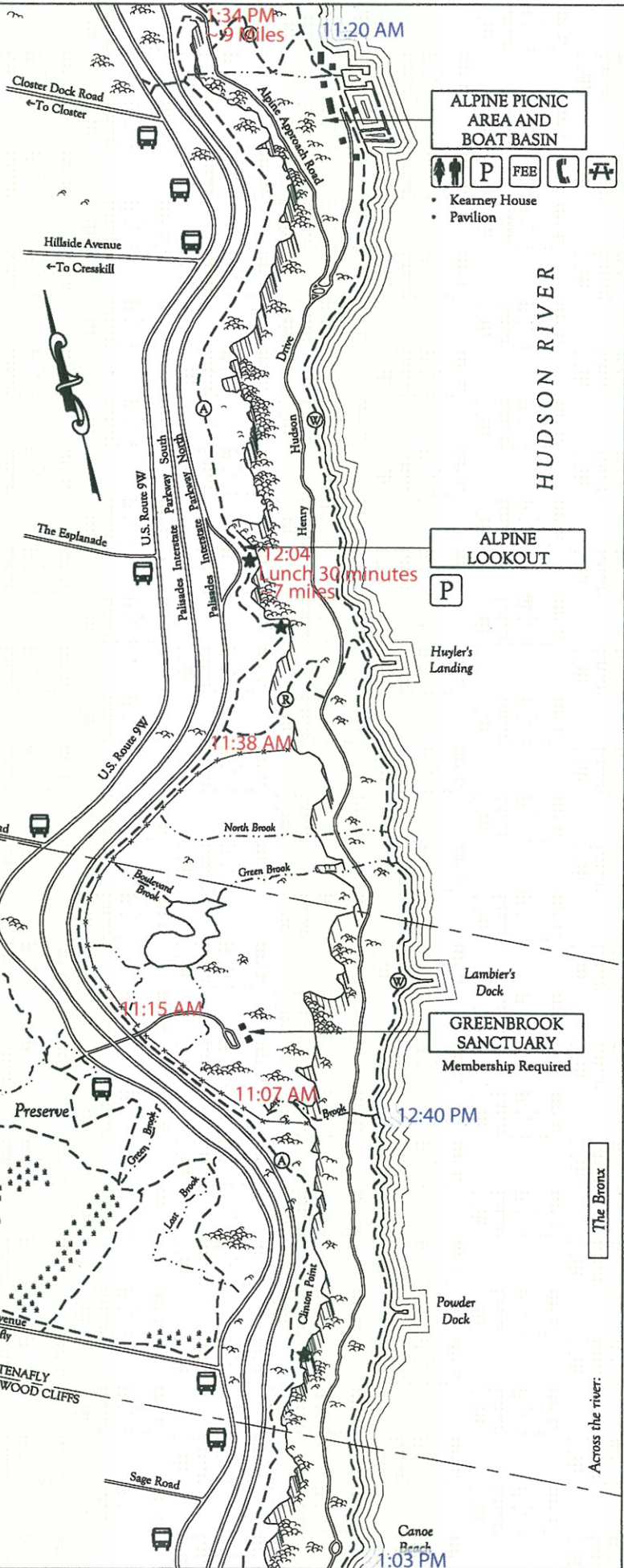
7

6

5

4

Continued on Map 1



ALPINE PICNIC AREA AND BOAT BASIN

• Kearney House
 • Pavilion

ALPINE LOOKOUT

GREENBROOK SANCTUARY

Membership Required

HUDSON RIVER

The Bronx

Across the river:

PALISADES INTERSTATE PARK COMMISSION - NEW JERSEY SECTION
Central Part of Park (Map 2 of 3)

Continued on Map 2

LEGEND

- Public Restrooms
- Parking Area
- Fee Charged In-Season
- Pay Phone
- Picnic Area
- Food, Drinks and Snacks
- Building or Structure
- Hiking Trail
- Cross-Country Ski Trail
- View Point
- Bus Stop
- Improved Road
- Unimproved Road
- Hiking Trail
- Stream
- Boundary
- Fence
- Cliff Edge

See Map 2 for trail descriptions.

Scale: North-South 1 inch=2000 feet.
East-West 1 inch=1000 feet.

(Horizontal scale has been exaggerated for clarity.)

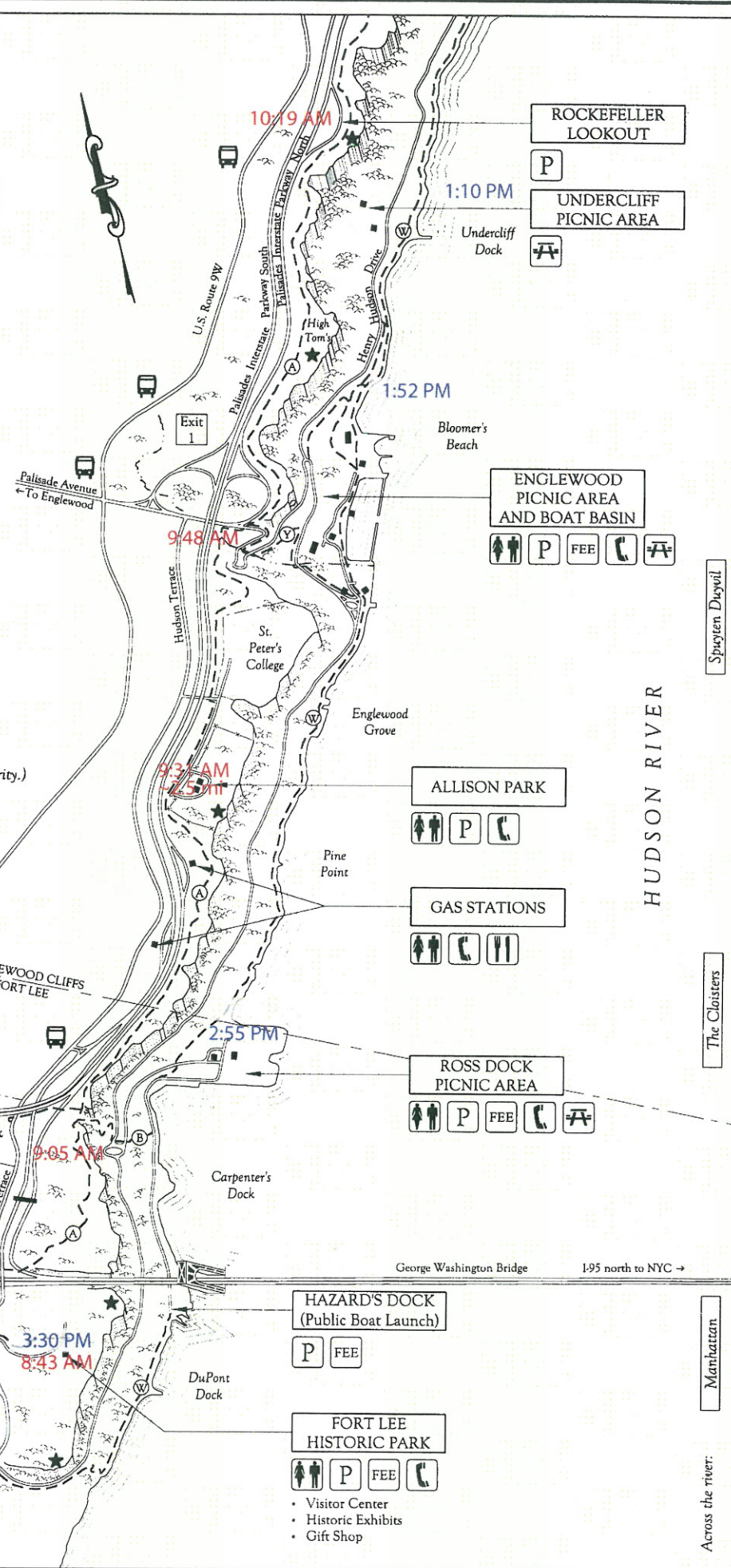
Graphic Scale in Miles

3

2

1

0



ROCKEFELLER LOOKOUT

P
UNDERCLIFF PICNIC AREA

1:10 PM

Undercliff Dock

1:52 PM

Bloomer's Beach

ENGLEWOOD PICNIC AREA AND BOAT BASIN

9:48 AM

9:32 AM
2:55 PM

ALLISON PARK

GAS STATIONS

ROSS DOCK PICNIC AREA

9:05 AM

3:30 PM
8:43 AM

HAZARD'S DOCK (Public Boat Launch)

FORT LEE HISTORIC PARK

- Visitor Center
- Historic Exhibits
- Gift Shop

Sprayten Duvoyl

HUDSON RIVER

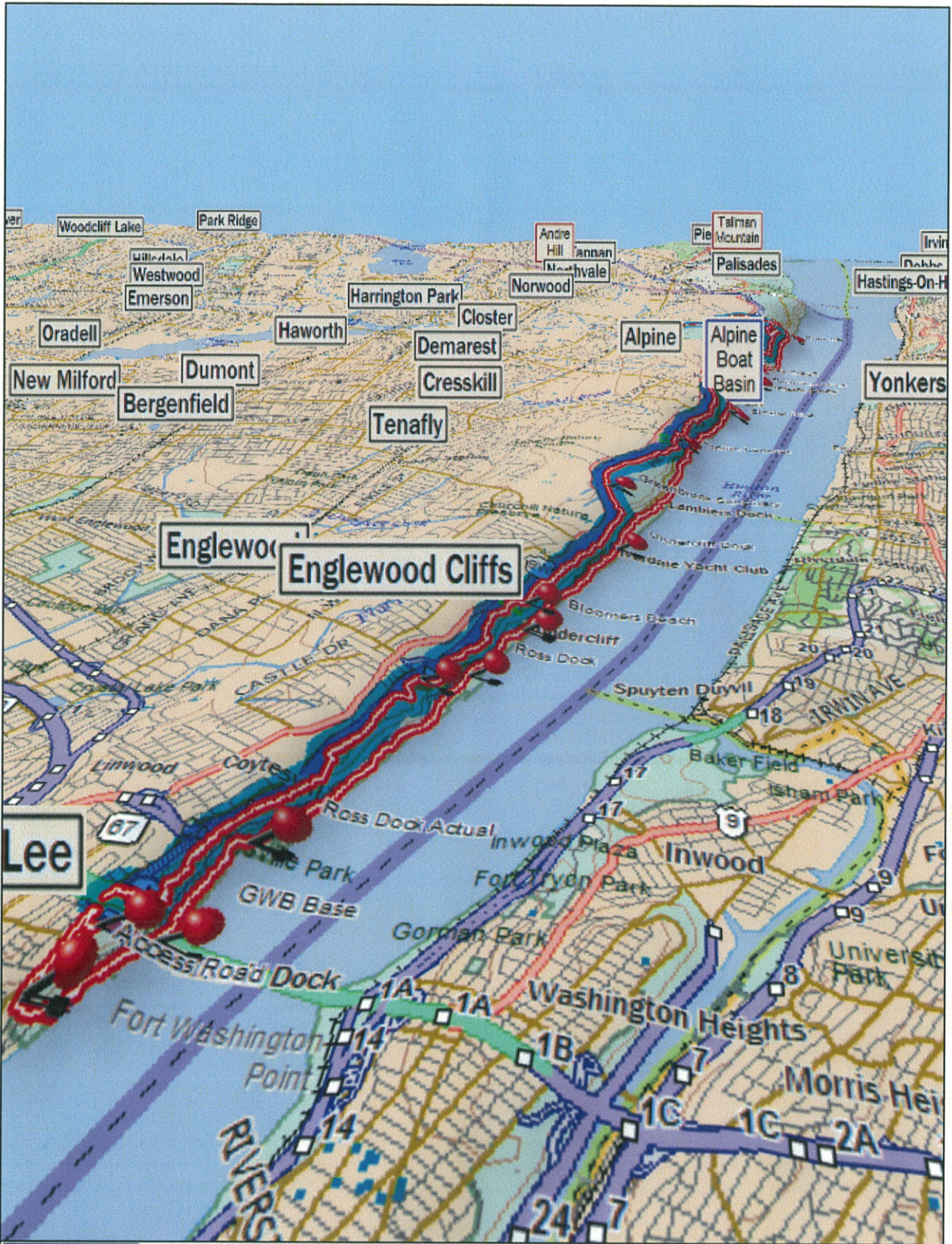
The Cloisters

Manhattan

Across the river:

PALISADES INTERSTATE PARK COMMISSION - NEW JERSEY SECTION
Southern Part of Park (Map 1 of 3)

Red is Northbound. Blue is Southbound. Data captured by BSA Troop 49, Oakland NJ on March 12 and 13, 2011. Moving average speed 2.3 mph. Overall average



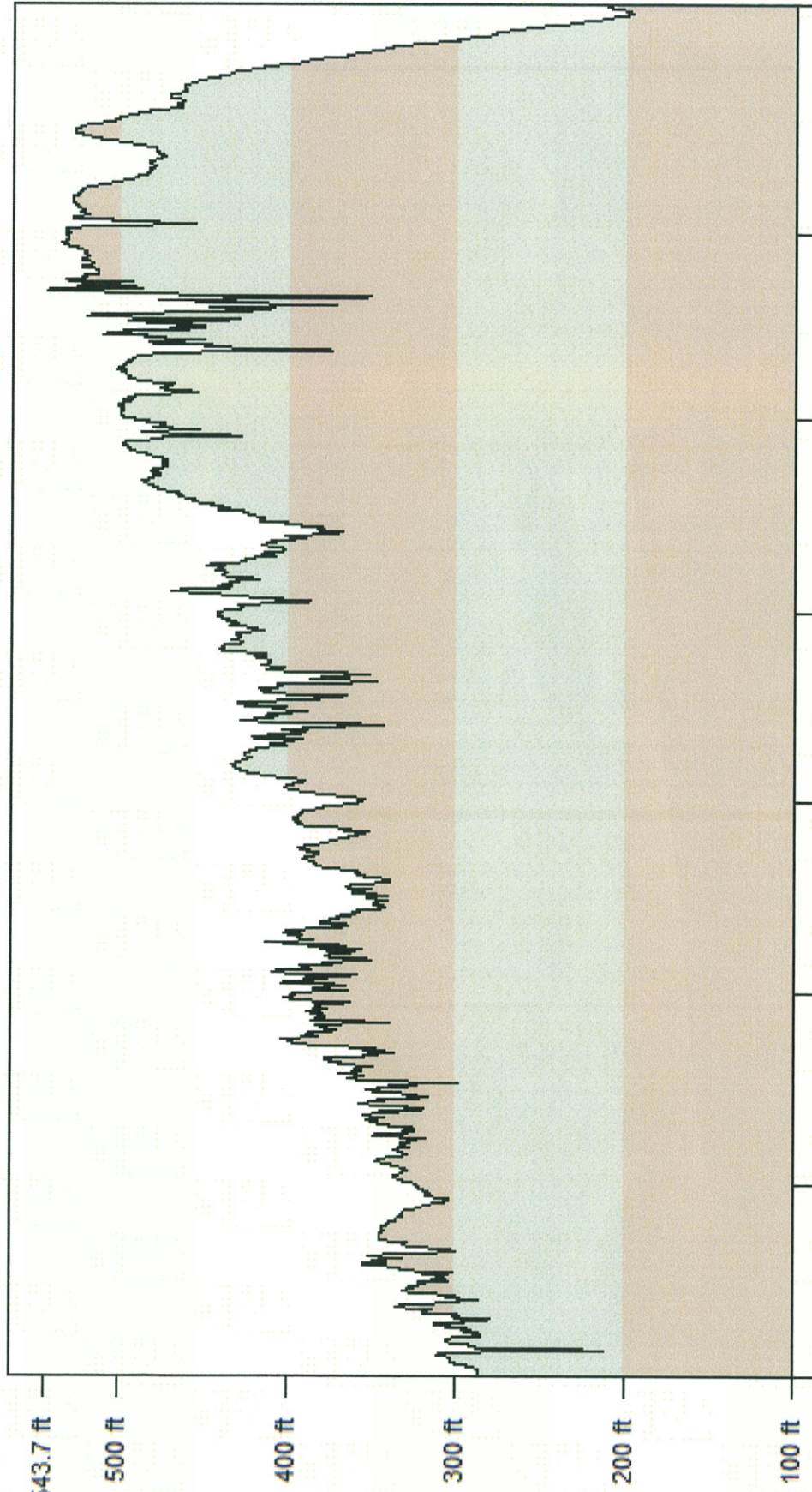
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Saturday Track, starting at Fort Lee and ending at NJ Camp Alpine

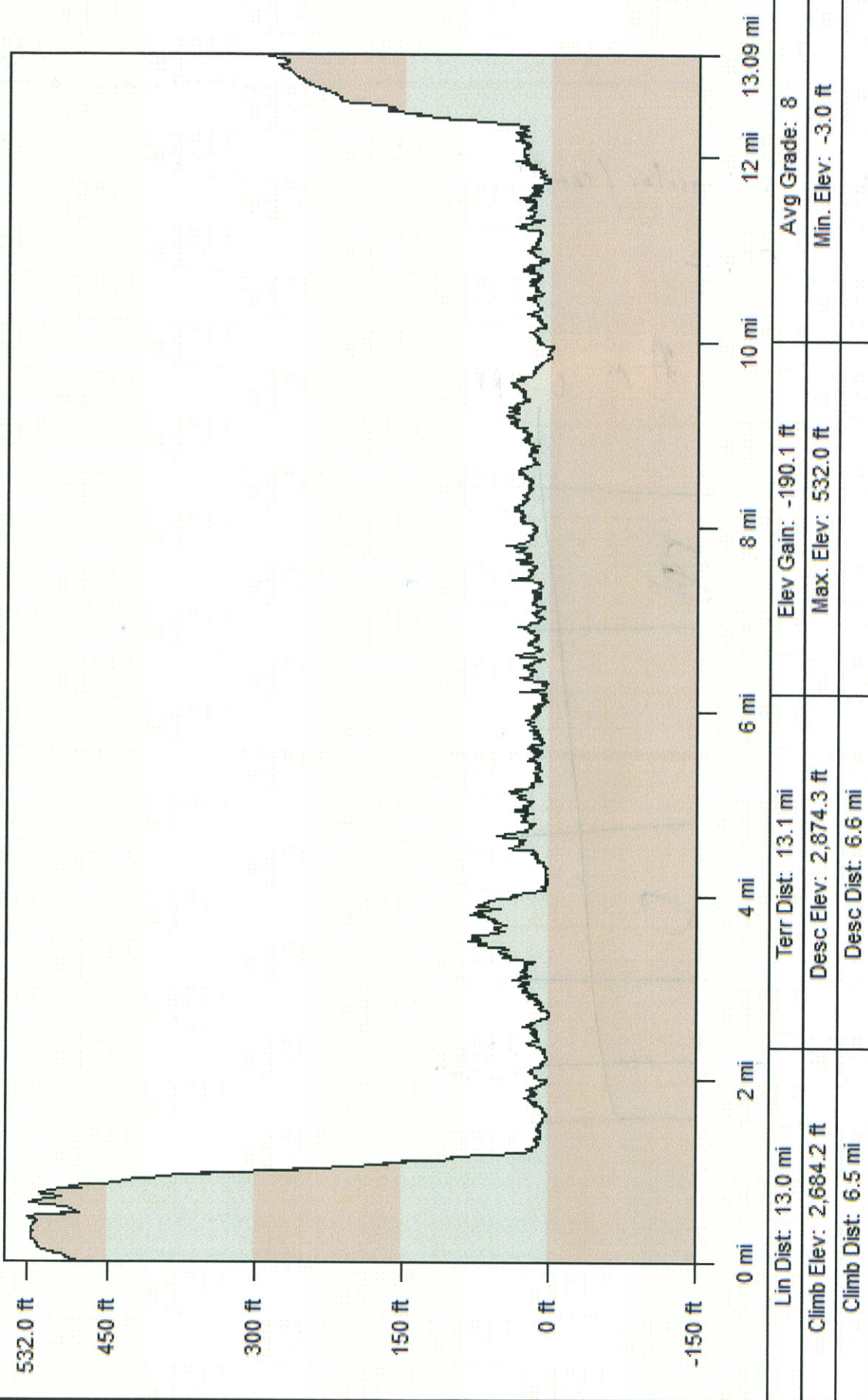


0 mi	2 mi	4 mi	6 mi	8 mi	10 mi	12 mi	14.36 mi
Lin Dist: 14.1 mi		Terr Dist: 14.4 mi		Elev Gain: -78.3 ft		Avg Grade: 12	
Climb Elev: 4,215.4 ft		Desc Elev: 4,293.7 ft		Max. Elev: 543.7 ft		Min. Elev: 196.7 ft	
Climb Dist: 7.1 mi		Desc Dist: 7.3 mi					



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Sunday Track, starting NY Council Camp Alpine and ending at Fort Lee Historic Park



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