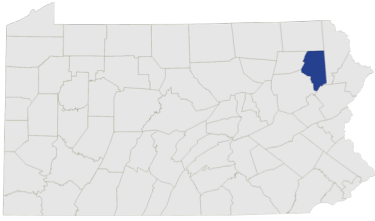


My Story



Exploring Moosic Mountain

Eales Preserve

By Jeff Mitchell, Hiker

“Moosic Mountain is unique in that it is close to an urban area, yet still provides impressive scenery and biodiversity.”



Only seven miles from downtown Scranton is one of the most unique habitats in Pennsylvania--the Moosic Mountain Barrens. The Nature Conservancy's Eales Preserve protects 2,250 acres of the barrens, considered to be among the largest and best preserved in the eastern United States. The barrens are composed of lowbush blueberry, huckleberry, stunted oak, and pine, and cover a broad ridgetop with thirty-mile views. It is home to eighteen rare species, particularly moths. There are now about twenty miles of trails maintained by volunteers. Some visitors have compared it to West Virginia's famous Dolly Sods.

Moosic Mountain is also unique in that it is close to an urban area, yet still provides impressive scenery and biodiversity. Located between the Endless and Pocono Mountains, with many parks, preserves, and state forests that cover hundreds of thousands of acres,



Keystone Fund Investment: \$2.2 million

Total Public/Private Investment: \$9.3 million

Scranton is one of the most underrated outdoors towns in the country.

The Eales Preserve was slated to become a business park, and some infrastructure, such as gravel road beds, drainage ditches, and culverts, were put in place before it was protected. I had visited

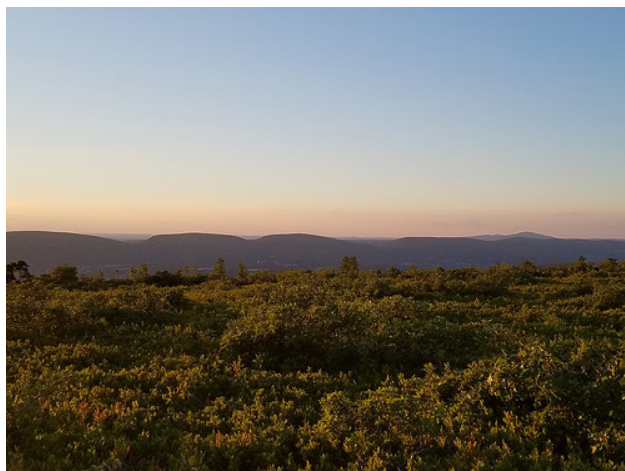
the preserve a few times before, but despite it being unique, hiking felt underwhelming due to the initial infrastructure and the segmented, incomplete trail system. This visit, however, proved to be different. Vegetation had begun to grow over the gravel roads, ditches, and culverts. The trail system is also complete, making it an excellent hiking experience.

Learn more at [KeystoneFund.org](https://www.KeystoneFund.org).

I decided to do a grand loop around the perimeter of the preserve's trail system; it was roughly 10 or 11 miles. From the parking area I walked the gravel road to the kiosk and then turned left onto the Bruised Ego Trail. This trail meandered through an

oak forest with some rock slabs and small meadows. Overall, it was a nice, fairly easy trail. I crossed a gated forest road and followed Gene's Trail. This proved to be a very diverse and scenic trail. It went through a meadow, crossed a small stream, and explored mature hardwoods with ledges and slabs. I descended to a reservoir, which the trail encircled. I could hear traffic in the valley below. The trail became even more scenic with a meadow of cotton grass and stunted pine forests with rock slabs and red blueberry meadows.

I then reached a powerline swath, along which I climbed to the right with some very nice views. Next was the High Voltage Trail, which was a little hard to locate, but some small cairns to the north of the swath helped guide the way. High Voltage is a highlight and is not to be missed. It reveals some of the more undeveloped views along the trail system. I returned to the powerline swath and continued to climb it until I reached the Waterfall Loop to the left. This trail explored mature woodlands and small meadows. It was completely different from the exposed High Voltage Trail. I reached a small stream and turned left onto a trail that only allowed



hiking as it followed the bottom of a small ravine with hemlock and the curving trunks of mountain laurel bushes. The forest was more stunted as I reached an obvious, un-signed trail juncture. I turned left to continue on the Blueberry Trail.

For many, the Blueberry Trail is the highlight, and I would agree. It explores vast meadows and barrens on the broad ridge with non-stop views in all directions. Looking down the ridgeline to the southwest was beautiful. Some views exceed thirty miles. Sometimes it was hard to believe I was close to an urban area. There are even some views to the east. A few stunted pine trees inhabit the barrens. I could see a snow squall approach from the west and pass to the south, consuming the ridges, hills, and towns underneath it. From miles away, I could see draperies of snow fall from the bottom of the clouds. The clouds passed and the blinding light of the setting sun returned to the barrens, electrifying the red blueberry meadows. Impressed by the hike, I returned to my car.

This was an excellent and diverse hike with unique scenery and superb views. The Eales Preserve is a beautiful place that we are lucky to have protected and opened to the public. This is a place you need to explore.