

America's State Parks

New York's *Bear Mountain State Park*

Bear Mountain State Park is a 5,205-acre state park located on the west side of the Hudson River in Rockland County, New York. The park offers biking, hiking, boating, picnicking, swimming, cross-country skiing, cross-country running, sledding and ice skating. It also includes several facilities such as the Perkins Memorial Tower, the Trailside Museum and Zoo, the Bear Mountain Inn, a merry-go-round, pool, and a skating rink. It is managed by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

The park opened in June 1913. Steamboats alone brought more than 22,000 passengers to the park that year. Camping at Hessian Lake (and later at Lake Stahahe) was immensely popular; the average stay was eight days and was a favorite for Boy Scouts. By 1914 it was estimated that more than a million people a year were coming to the park.

In the 1930s the federal government under Franklin D. Roosevelt was developing plans to preserve the environment as part of the Depression-era public works programs; the Civil Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration spent five years on projects at the park. Pump houses, reservoirs, sewer systems, vacation lodges, bathrooms, homes for park staff, storage buildings and an administration building were all created through these programs.[citation needed]

The park continued to grow after its creation. The Palisades Interstate Park Commission began purchasing nearby Doodletown in the 1920s and completed the acquisition with eminent domain in the 1960s.

Facilities include: Originally completed in 1915, the Bear Mountain Inn is an early example of the rustic lodge style influenced by the Adirondack Great Camps and later used extensively in the National Park System. It closed in 2005 for extended renovations, reopening in 2011.

The Perkins Memorial Drive is a scenic road to the summit of Bear Mountain. It provides a view of four states and the skyline of Manhattan, 40 miles to the south.

The Trailside Museums and Zoo are located at the former site of Fort Clinton. The zoo began as a bear den in 1926 and is the home of a wide variety of local injured or rehabilitating animals. The Reptile and Amphibian House has many species of fish, turtles, snakes and frogs. The Nature Study Museum was formed in 1921. The Geology Museum covers the Hudson Highlands and other local geology.

