

Hawk Mountain a great weekend getaway

By Joseph Hart

Get away for the weekend. Leave that homework for Sunday night, that's when you usually do it anyway, right? Grab some friends, pile in the car, and take a drive up to Hawk Mountain.

Why Hawk Mountain? Where else can you spend all day for \$1.50, see beautiful scenery, watch hawks and eagles up close, and make brownie points with your humanities professor. (Pretend you are going to Mount Olympus and tell the prof. you saw visions and received an omen from one of the migrating eagles.)

When the weather is nice on the mountain, the hike is worth making for the scenery alone. The trees are ablaze with the reds, greens, and yellows of autumn and the air has the crisp tingle of oncoming winter.

Being on the mountain when the weather is overcast and windy doesn't sound like much fun but this is the best time to spot hawks. During windy days the birds ride the deflected wind currents down close to the ridge line, coming within a stone's throw of Hawk Mountain's North Lookout.

If you visit the mountain this week or the next the majority of birds you will see are the red-tail and red-shouldered hawk, the marsh hawk, and the goshawk. The golden eagle which migrates out of the north can be seen as it flies past North Lookout during the windy days of November.



A golden eagle seen up close is really impressive, having a six to eight foot wingspan and weighing close to fifteen pounds. This is a big bird. A hawk, for example, has only about one third the wingspan and weight of a mature eagle.

If you want to see an eagle up close before you go up to the North Lookout, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has a lodge with exhibits of the various birds of prey that pass by each year. The lodge also sells spotting guides, T-shirts, and other memorabilia.

Feathers in the Wind or A Field Guide for Hawks Seen in

the North East are two pamphlets you can use on the mountain as guides for spotting various types of hawks. Both works are available at the Sanctuary lodge.

From the lodge it is just a short walk to the South Lookout where you can see part of the Great Valley system and the River of Rocks. The trail after leaving South Lookout begins its ascent towards the North Lookout. For the next mile the trail becomes steeper and occasionally rocky in places. After reaching North Lookout sit down and take it easy, the hard part of the trail is over. Going back is all downhill. At the lookout sit back, enjoy the panoramic view of the valley, have some lunch and chat with your friends while the hawks and eagles soar past.

Eating lunch will probably make you wonder where the toilets are. You might not have noticed them but there are two sets of outdoor facilities placed along the trail for those afraid of bears in the woods.

A pleasant day on the mountain can be had, even in bad weather, if you know what to bring. Since the sanctuary doesn't sell food, bring a lunch along and don't forget something to drink. Hiking robs your body of water through your sweating and exhaling.

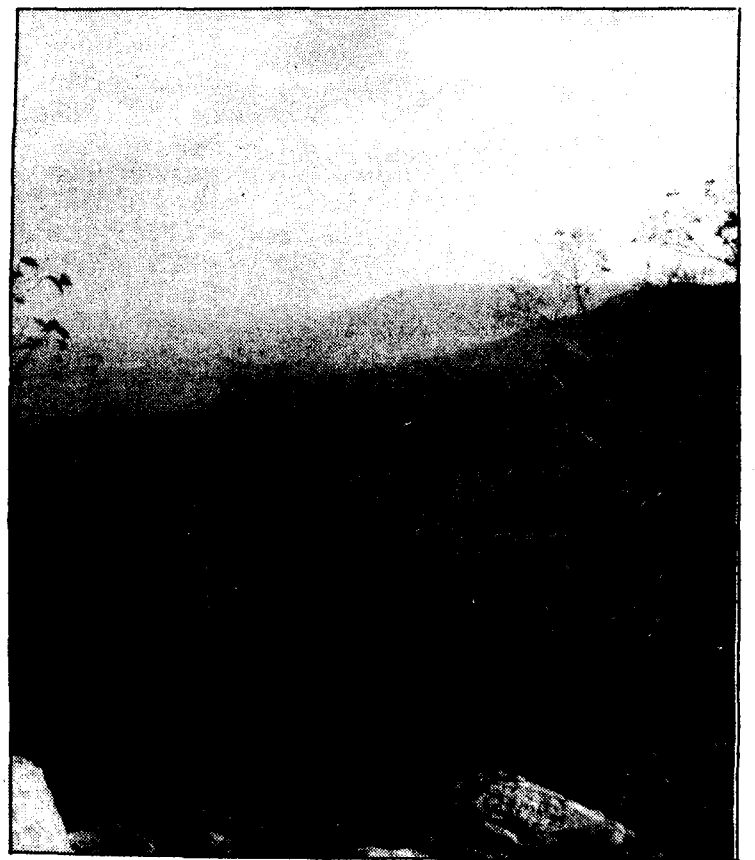
Dress according to the weather conditions. If it is cloudy, bring a water-repellent jacket. A knit cap and some gloves are also nice to have while sitting for any length of time. Wear shoes with thick soles. Don't wear sneakers as the stones will bruise your feet and bang up your ankles.

If you know someone with binoculars, bring him along so you can use his glasses. A camera is nice to bring for pictures of friends and scenery but don't expect to get a picture of a flying hawk or eagle unless you have a telephoto lens. (The lodge sells postcards.)

A trip to Hawk Mountain in the fall can be an exciting day away from the boredom of school if you dress properly and bring something to drink. You could even bring something to read (heaven forbid a school book), if you just want some place quiet to read for a while.



Photography by Joseph Hart



When the weather is nice on the mountain, the hike is worth making for the scenery alone.

For in depth information A Guide to Northeast Hawk Watching is available in the library. Information is also available from:

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association
RD2
Kempton, Pennsylvania 19529