

The Penokee Range

Picture a high rock balcony where some of northern Wisconsin's finest vistas stretch to the horizon. To the south, the broad forested flanks of the Gogebic Range rise above the winding, brook-trout-dimpled waters of Alder Creek. To the northwest, on a good day, the headlands of the 40-mile-distant Bayfield Peninsula brush the skyline.

Now imagine having those views all to yourself.

Welcome to the Penokee Range, a remote escarpment where airy cliff tops and intriguing nooks and crannies are the norm, and the sight of another hiker is something of a rarity. There, above the gurgling springs and clear-running headwaters stream of Sullivan Creek, a sun-splashed rock outcrop offers memorable views. I've been there twice, each time finding a panorama that seemed transported from another era. Sleeping there, watching the morning and evening light touch far-off ridges, was the icing on the cake. After dark, I could spot a mere two lights, miles away. At dawn, a cheerful chorus of birdsong rose from the forest canopy below.

Of course, you do have to walk in to this ledge, but that part of the outing is hardly a disappointment. Hemlock groves accent the way, pileated woodpeckers flash by in the open forest, and a feeling of timeless well-being seems to grow with every step along the winding trail.

I savor outings that allow my senses to wander between the micro and the macro. This hike, chock-full of shady glens, lush fern garden, and lofty views, does just that. ■

Eric Hansen is the author of Hiking Michigan's Upper Peninsula (Falcon Press).



DON'T MISS: Memorable views from the Sullivan Creek overlook.

THE DRIVE: From Hurley, head 8.9 miles west on Wisconsin 77 and turn right (west) onto Iron County Route E. After 2.6 miles stay straight as County Route E turns left (south). The trailhead is about 100 yards from this intersection, on the north side of this unnamed road. Park at Weber Lake County Park (on the south side of this road).

THE HIKE: 5 miles round-trip. From Weber Lake, walk 1.9 miles east on the North Country Trail (blue blazes). At an intersection marked for the vista, turn right (south). Follow that path for 469 paces, then turn right (west) on an old, eroded jeep trail. Hike 288 paces to the Sullivan Creek overlook.

GUIDES: *Hiking Wisconsin* (Falcon Press, 2002), a guidebook authored by yours truly, contains a hike description and map. Alternatively, see the North Country Trail Association's website, northcountrytrail.org/htg/maps.htm, for a trail map.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: As my hike wound down, I noticed an ATV route near the hiking trail. The quiet ambience I experienced might not hold true on a holiday weekend.

CAMPING: This hike runs through Iron County Forest lands. Backpack camping is allowed 100 feet away from the trail or water.

OPTIONS: Energetic hikers can follow the North Country Trail 3 miles farther east through pleasant hardwoods to Smith's Meadows.