WALK TO WAVE HILL

Wave Hill is one of the most magical places I have ever been. What makes it even more special, in my opinion, is that you can get there on public transportation. However, neither the Metro-North Train to Riverdale nor the 1 Train to Van Cortlandt Park-242nd Street will drop you off at the front gate. From either station stop you can wait for a shuttle or walk. I highly recommend taking a lot of time. When you arrive at Riverdale, do not leave the station. Walk up and over the bridge to the New York City-bound side and walk all the way to the north end of the platform. There is a fairly new * access point that allows you to step out onto the water’s edge and fisherman to reach the edge of the Hudson River.

The view here is captivating. Across the river stands the canyon wall of the majestic Palisades, where every once in a while, there is a * dash of brighter, yellowish stone visible south of your current vantage point. Another point of interest is an actual point. On the trackside, just north of where you are standing, there is a * small tuft of green that sticks out from the rip rap. At low tide you can get down to the water’s edge and walk out to this little spit of land. At high tide it is best viewed from the station. I once spent a full day there picking up garbage. There is a little shelter made of flotsam and jetsam. You might meet a fisherman, but likely you will have your own private hideout at the edge of everything. The * large gray stones used at the water’s edge are full of fossilized bivalves and crinoids. Seeing the bodies of creatures from 300 million years ago now serve as infrastructure always give me pause.

Once you finally wrest yourself away from the Hudson, the walk to Wave Hill is quick. Take the steep right along the tracks and turn left onto 254th Street, unless you are a member of the Riverdale Yacht Club, in which case you are welcome to cross the bridge and enjoy yourself. The surrounding neighborhood was designed in the nineteenth century to be a “villa community” and it has since changed little since. The forest on your right side is actually * Riverdale Park. A small parking lot obscures a break in the fence, which is actually the unmarked trailhead to a mile-long system of paths. For now, stick to the pavement and take a right onto * Sycamore Avenue and enjoy listening to the sound of your footsteps as you climb the hill. The road is one big pothole. The air, the vistas, the estates, the view, the stone walls, the gardens, the moss-covered gates; the only thing missing is a herd of sheep. Sycamore runs right through Wave Hill but you must follow the garden’s perimeter until you get to the * main entrance at 249th Street.

When you leave Wave Hill, it is not necessary to follow the same path you took to get there. Instead, turn right out of the front gate, down Independence Avenue, which bends into Spaulding Lane. Before descending the hill, stop and listen for the sound of running water. The cluster of homes at the corner is called Alderbrook named for * Alder Brook, which emerges alongside Spaulding and runs into Riverdale Park. It is one of the few natural streams remaining in New York City. Spaulding runs into a parking lot for Riverdale Park and as you enter the main trailhead you can go one of three ways. Left takes you on a meandering walk through the park, and when the park ends you can continue on Palisade Avenue to the Metro-North Spuyten Duyvil Station. There are more reasons to say yes to this than to say no. If you go straight, the trail splits in a few directions that all end near the railroad tracks. Go right to get back to Riverdale Station. Now you will be on the old Riverdale Street grade of Wave Hill gate. Paying attention to the trees clear that the adjacent private properties once extended down to the water’s edge. Some of the estates had private docks and used their own private hideout at the edge of everything. Agree the trail, the largest * Japanese maple I have ever seen is losing the fight for canopy space against an invasive black cherry. There is also a * glade of white pines, and not far from the end of the trail is an * enormous, fallen oak that must have been over 200 years old. The last time I was here I photographed it against a bright, yellow sky. And then in a few paces you are back at Riverdale Station. If you timed it right, you will have just missed the train and will return to the shoreline of the Hudson to patiently wait, while watching the light change on the Palisades and listening to the waves lap near your feet.