

The Raymond P. Corwin Pine Barrens Trail Center 8 Mile Hike

Directions:

Heading east on L. I. E. take exit 70. Turn left (northwest) onto Eastport Manor Rd. /Rte. 111. After a short distance (you pass a Church and a driveway), find the Trail Center on the right side of the road.

The Raymond P. Corwin Pine Barrens Trail Center houses many interesting displays and informational brochures about the local trails, land managers, trails groups, and ecology. It sits right on the edge of a vast area of unbelievably beautiful protected open space with many lovely trails running through it. Behind the Trail Center you'll find picnic benches and barbecues. El's Wampmissick Trail begins here. Look for the trailhead sign marked with blue rectangular painted blazes. The blazes are on the right side of the trail, and at turns there are two blazes, the top one offset in the direction of the turn. The Wampmissick trail tread is hardened and leveled to make the trail more accessible to the physically challenged; it's especially friendly to those in wheelchairs or strollers. You'll find eight benches along this 0.8 mile loop trail.

Unfortunately, The Raymond P. Corwin Pine Barrens Trail Center is currently closed. It has no mailing address, no wide band access, and no potable water. It does have two functional bathrooms but since the building is locked they are not accessible. The Trail Center has a phone number ([631-852-3449](tel:631-852-3449)) but there is no one there to answer the phone or to retrieve messages and so no one to answer your trails related questions. This is a Suffolk County Parks property meant to provide a human presence in the Pine Barrens. Ray Corwin felt very strongly that there should be a trails information center in the Pine Barrens to provide trails access and information. Information should be available at all times by Trail Center staff and through a comprehensive trails website. It is beyond sad and insulting to Ray's memory that the Trail Center has been closed. Many trails enthusiasts are lobbying the Suffolk County Parks Department to get the Trail Center reopened and staffed once again. Please join us!

When you hike, always wear a hat, and bring along water and insect repellent. Picardin based repellents are quite effective against mosquitoes and flies. Be sure to dress in light colored pants with white socks tucked in; spray Permethrin on your sneakers and socks to deter ticks. Bring along your cell phone, map, and compass. Have fun exploring!

8 Mile Hike Description:

Follow the blue blazes to the beginning of the loop. Turn left onto the loop, then soon turn left again onto the orange blazed trail. The trail tread is no longer hardened here, instead there is a soft duff underfoot. None-the-less, you have to lift your feet a bit to avoid tripping on roots and pinecones. Note all the usual pine barrens plants; pitch pine, oak, bayberry, wintergreen, high and low bush blueberry, huckleberry, bearberry, mosses, hay fern, sweet fern, sheep laurel, and Indian pipe. See if you notice the chestnut tree along this trail. You might see a box turtle eating a mushroom, a black racer sunning itself on the trail, and dragon flies all around. In season, there is a plentiful supply of ripe blueberries and huckleberries along the trail. The ripest

blueberries have a dusty appearance. All this food may be one reason why the air is filled with bird song.

After a short walk turn left onto a yellow trail. The beginning of the trail is marked by three rectangles. Follow it across the LIPA Right-of-Way. Soon, you will arrive at Mill Road, walk diagonally across the road and the RR tracks. This is where the Paumanok Path zigzags to cross the tracks at grade. Facing across Mill Road you can see where the Paumanok Path runs back into the woods on either side of the tracks. To the right the PP will take you east, back to the other leg of the orange loop, we however, are following the white rectangles west towards Jones Pond. Walk up a short steep incline onto a wide level, woods road. Soon another short steep incline takes you up almost fifty feet above the train tracks to the left of the trail. It is exciting to have a train pass by below you. As the trail veers north, you'll see sweet pepperbush and swamp maple, and hear much more bird calls. The trail takes a couple of sharp turns and soon it is so close to the Peconic River that at one point you can see some cattails sticking above a riot of green. There is a lot of activity in the brush layer to the right of the trail, especially as the trail veers closer to the water.

Now you're in a wetland area - step over a small bog bridge. The sound of the wind in the tree canopies is much akin to the sound of waves crashing on the shore. You may hear the sound of two trees groaning or shrieking as they rub against each other in a wind. The trail comes out of the woods at Wading River Manor Road (by the corner of River Road). Turn right, cross over the culvert for the river (grass-cement-grass), then cut across the road (beware of fast moving traffic). As you enter the woods (to the left of the road sign) there's a small, clean, brook-fed pond - alive with movement and sound and water lilies. Be aware that private property is only a few feet to the right of the trail. Follow a narrow fern-lined trail to a bridge over a brook. The bridge is an old Eagle Scout project that someone once tried to burn, but County Parks Environmental Crew repaired it. The name of the troop on the placard on the bridge railing is no longer legible. Moving out of the wetlands roughly parallel to the river (on your left) the trail enters a mature pine oak wood that rapidly begins to show the impact of the huge aggressive, hot fire in 1995. Even after all these years you can see the black bark 75 feet up these huge old pitch pine trees with their thriving round canopies. The thick spongy bark enabled these few majestic old giants to survive. Most of the oak died to the roots. But these roots are now sending out rounded profusions of questing green branches. I encountered another very mature box turtle here, and soon after, scattered egg shells and a hole, where a raccoon dug snapping turtle eggs right out of our trail. The scarce shade means a thriving brush layer. That translates into lots of blueberries. When you cross over two horse trails you know that Shultz Road isn't far away. Crossing the road and continuing on the Paumanok Path a turn to the left allows you to walk the pond's edge.

Heading back, cross over Shultz Road, across the Scout's bridge and Wading River Manor Road and culvert, then look for the white rectangular beacon calling you back into the woods. The Peconic River is to the left, and a red tail hawk circles overhead. Head back towards the railroad tracks. The fastest way back is the way we came: across Mill Road to yellow, to orange, to blue. A longer, yet more picturesque adventure lies directly across the train tracks, following the Paumanok Path east, to the other leg of the orange trail.

Look for a white blaze on a yellow metal pipe. Entering the woods you are now seeing the train tracks below you to the left. This is a well-engineered side slope trail, with expertly executed grade dips. If this trail isn't damaged it will last forever. Some very special people worked together on this segment of trail. When I walk it, it brings back fond memories.

After walking parallel to the tracks for half a mile, the trail turns right, following the Paumanok Path in a westerly direction. Follow the corridor of cut grass across the LIPA Right-of-Way into some old pine/oak wood. When you reach the orange loop, continue straight onto a trail with both the white blazes of the Paumanok Path and the orange blazes of the loop trail. If you were to turn right on the orange loop you would discover a charming trail segment with a glacial erratic that would take you back to Mill Road near the crossing at grade.

Cross Mill Road, walk around a metal gate, walking to the right on what was once a circular driveway. Walk the orange trail through the mature pine oak forest, back to the blue loop. If you decide to turn left and take the longer way back around the loop, you will find a pretty picnic area in a copse of white pine. Either way El's Trail will take you back to the Raymond P. Corwin Pine Barrens Trail Center, and the end of your journey.

Kenneth Kindler
www.facebook.com/trailskeeper
kenLITLC@gmail.com