

Pine Barrens Trails Information Center / El's Trail

0.75 mile loop—blue blazes

Why:

If you haven't yet walked in the Pine Barrens and want an easy introduction, there's a perfect place waiting for you in Manorville: El's Wampmissick Trail. The Trails Information Center, a joint effort of Suffolk County Parks and the Greenbelt Trail Conference, is open seasonally and mostly on weekends, but the trail behind it is open every day. The Center is equipped with a fat-tire wheelchair, allowing those with disabilities to access the unpaved but hardened surface of the loop; the surface makes the trail great for kids, too. The Center also features a large map of trails in the Pine Barrens, photos and artifacts. The trail system here also connects with the Paumanok Path.

Directions:

Take the L.I.E. to Exit 70 and go north a quarter mile to the Center. The Trail begins at the back door of the building.

Description:

The Long Island Greenbelt Trail Conference and the Suffolk County Department of Parks officially opened the trail on June 3, 1995 and called it the Wampmissick Loop, a Native American name for extensive swamps two miles west of Manorville. On June 2, 2001, the path was dedicated as "El's Trail," in honor of M.E. "El" Burton, longtime member of the LIGTC's Board of Directors. It was El's idea to improve the surface and grade of the trail to make it more accessible for visitors who experience some difficulty walking or use wheelchairs.

A part of the loop follows an abandoned railroad bed, then circles through classic Pine Barrens terrain. Stop at one of the benches along the way and soak up the atmosphere—and maybe the sound of towhees, chickadees and warblers. Side trails connect El's trail to the nearby Paumanok Path, a long-distance hiking route. The Trails Information Center truly is at the center of what's happening in the Pine Barrens.

The trail is marked with blue paint blazes. The first third of the route runs concurrently with the yellow blazes of the spur trail link to the Paumanok Path. The beginning of the trail passes not through Pine Barrens but through a slowly maturing old field. Sun-loving red cedars, pioneers in old fields, are giving way to taller cherry, locust and red maple trees. Wild rose, Virginia creeper, garlic mustard and lily of the valley, typical in places of past human activity, appear in the understory. **Beware:** so does a little poison ivy, which is suppressed in the Pine Barrens proper by more frequent brush fires.

The path turns right onto an abandoned railroad bed. Here once ran the Long Island Railroad's "Scoot" train, which ran from Greenport to a "wye" junction here in Manorville, then south to Eastport and on to Amagansett. The line succumbed to the Depression in the winter of 1931. The trail then turns left off the roadbed into classic Pine Barrens, with pitch pines and white, scarlet and black oak in the canopy and an understory of highbush blueberry, low-bush blueberry and black huckleberry.

To distinguish blueberry from huckleberry, examine the underside of a leaf in the sunlight; blueberry will have a matte finish, while huckleberry will reveal glistening resin dots.

At 0.29 mile the yellow-blazed side trail diverges left to Mill Road (see below). Continue on El's Trail by following blue blazes to the right. A large glacial erratic, a boulder transported here from New England by the glaciers of the last Ice Age, sits to the left of the trail.

Shortly after, take time to relax on benches shaded by large white pines. Listen for rufous-sided towhees, with their distinctive, three-note, "drink-your-tea" call. Among many other species present are catbirds, migratory warblers, cuckoos, flycatchers, orioles, towhees, chickadees and red-tail hawks. At 0.48 mile the path rejoins the old railroad bed. Look for the triangular fronds of bracken fern; the pointed, fragrant leaves of sweet fern (actually a woody-stemmed shrub, not a fern); and striped wintergreen, a low, dark-leaved plant with lighter centers.

Turn right to return to the Center.

Options:

The Trails Information Center offers convenient access to the Paumanok Path. From the T.I.C., begin the loop trail, continue to the railroad bed, and follow yellow blazes instead of the blue. This spur trail reaches Mill Road and the Paumanok Path in 0.67 miles. From here you can turn left toward Wading River-Manor Road and Schultz Road, or right to Halsey Manor Road and beyond, for hikes of any length.



Watch for towhees like this one when you're on El's Trail.

**Happy Hiking
from the
Long Island Pine
Barrens Society!**



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El's Wampmissick Trail And Connecting Trails to Paumanok Path

KEY

-  Kiosk
-  Parking
-  Wetlands

