

Paumanok Path: Pleasure Drive to Spinney Road

4 miles one way—white blazes

Why:

Although our Long Island Pine Barrens are famous for their ability to withstand light brush fires and even regenerate after major ones, they are not immune to other forces of nature. Along a fairly pristine section of the Paumanok Path hiking trail, you'll find evidence of such changes as you traverse the rolling hills of the Ronkonkoma Moraine, deposited during the last Ice Age. Maple Swamp, Birch Creek and Owl Pond add scenic interest on what is an especially pretty hike in fall and winter.

Directions:

Just north of Exit 64 on Sunrise Highway (NY 27), turn right off C.R. 104 onto Pleasure Drive. A short distance ahead, where the road takes a sharp left turn, park on the wide shoulder on your right. You'll find the white blazes of the trail, heading east into the woods, at an opening in a guard rail ahead of you.

For a one-way hike, a buddy system with two cars works well here. Park one at the end of the hike at NY 24 and Spinney Road, where there is a closed, gated road on the south side of the highway near Birch Creek Road. This wide parking area is a safe place to leave a car. Drive the other car south east on NY 24 to NY 27, and get on 27 heading west. Take the next exit, 64 north onto county road 104. Follow the rest of the directions from the paragraph above.

Description:

After a level start, the trail soon climbs a low hill of the Moraine and then descends to cross a power line right of way within a half mile. The sunny, sandy r.o.w. harbors prairie grasses, bracken fern, indigo and bayberry. Returning to the woods, you'll pass through classic pine-oak barrens with an understory of blueberry, huckleberry, wintergreen and other heath plants. Reindeer lichen and pixie cups also appear.

The trail traverses a dry kettlehole, a bowl-shaped remnant of the Ice Age, and then some denser vegetation near wetlands, where you'll find swamp azalea in the early summer and highbush blueberry. After a left turn onto a wider fire road, 1.5 miles from the start, you'll find Maple Swamp on your left. This kettlehole isn't dry. Maple Swamp's bottom dips below the water table, which is thus visible as the surface of the pond. Red maple and water willow abound here.

Just beyond the swamp the trail takes a sharp right turn onto more rolling terrain, and soon you'll notice many dead oak trees. These had once outstripped the pines here, as there hasn't been a significant brush fire here in many years. Now they have succumbed to the double whammy of tiger oak worm and gypsy moths, which ravaged the trees for at least three years in succession in the early years of this century. Grasses now thrive under the thin canopy, and pitch pines are slowly reasserting themselves, all part of the dynamic landscape that forms the Pine Barrens.

After crossing three fire roads on undulating terrain, at about 2.7 miles into the walk the trail reaches a ridge where the land visibly falls off to the east into the Birch Creek-Owl Pond drainage—a good spot to catch a refreshing breeze. Beyond, the trail bears right and passes a dry patch of nutrient-poor soil where bearberry and Pine Barrens heather survive.

The route reaches a junction with a yellow-blazed side trail that runs along the west side of Birch Creek Pond 0.4 mile to NY 24, a quick exit if you need one. However, we suggest staying on the white trail as it briefly heads south, with Birch Creek barely visible on your left and sheep laurel and inkberry all around you. You'll cross a small earthen dam and immediately turn right through wetlands featuring sphagnum moss, inkberry, skunk cabbage and a few magnificent, tall Atlantic white cedars.

At 3.25 miles, you'll find a fine view of peaceful Owl Pond, ringed with sweet gale, leatherleaf, swamp azalea and other wetlands shrubs. A few yards to the left of the viewpoint, an old concrete duck blind sunk into the soil is mostly filled with water and harbors frogs in warmer weather.

At the pondside clearing you'll spot the yellow blazes of another side trail. This one offers a flat, easy walk of a little more than half a mile out to a parking area at Spinney Road and NY 24. Again, poor soils and a relatively sunny trail allow bearberry to thrive.

Options:

- 1) From Owl Pond you may continue following the white blazes of the Paumanok Path, first southward and then eastward to the closed Spinney Road and then turn north on Spinney to the parking area. Avoid this route in hot weather!

Total mileage: about 4.5.

- 2) Continuing across Spinney instead of turning onto it will take you farther east on the Paumanok Path, again on rolling terrain, past Sears, Division, House and Grass Ponds, ultimately to a turn northward to NY 24.

Total mileage: 6.3.

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



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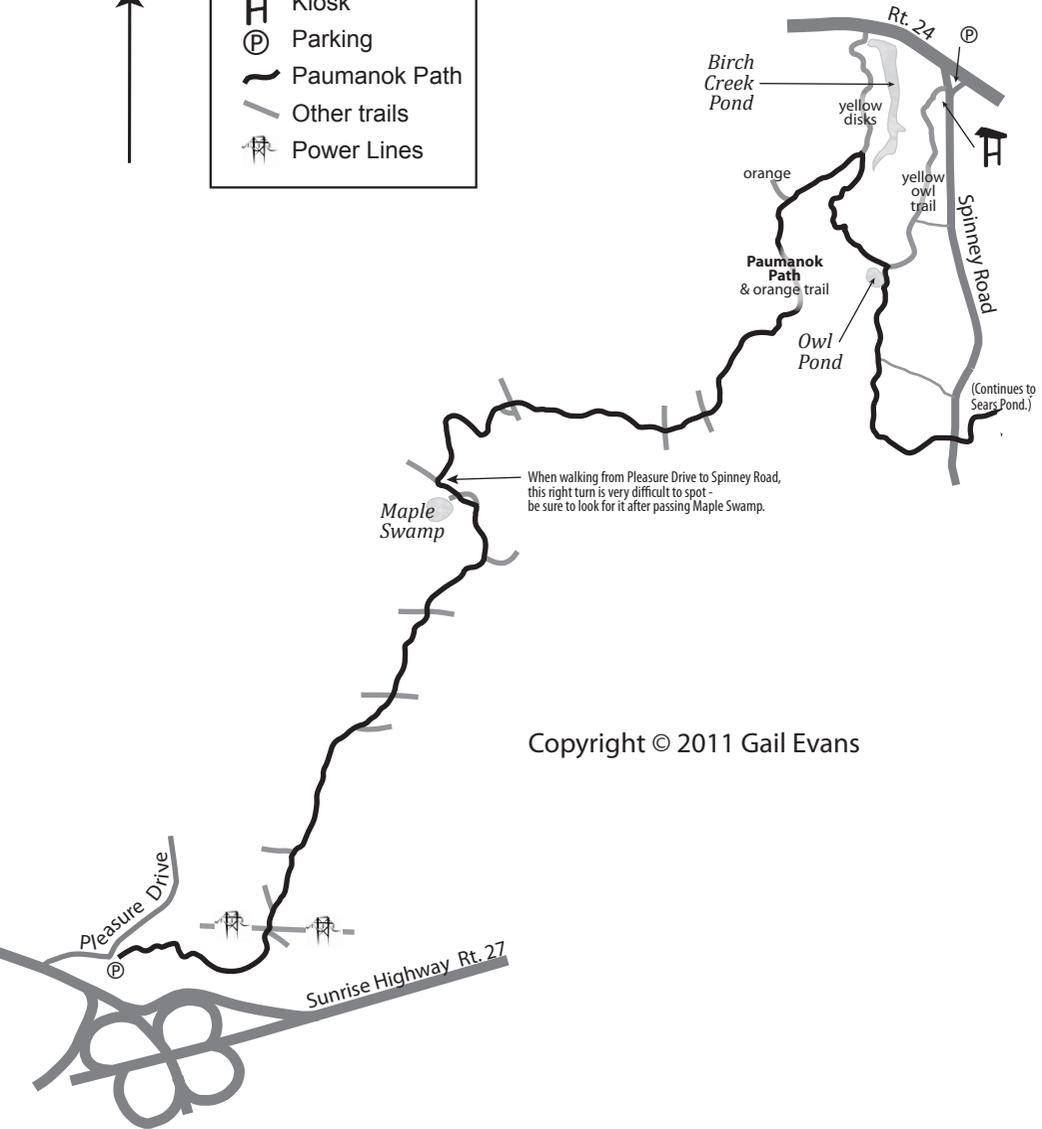
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KEY

- Kiosk
- Parking
- Paumanok Path
- Other trails
- Power Lines



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