

PASSAIC RIVER WALK, STATION-TO-STATION

The Passaic River winds through a wide range of scenic, historical, industrial, and residential landscapes on its ninety-mile course to the sea. Exploring the river in its entirety is nearly impossible on foot because only small sections have accessible parks or trail systems. A pedestrian must be ready for a journey that offers only occasional glimpses of the river, usually from bridge crossings, while moving through the neighborhoods that line its banks. This walk visits three majestic and moving places contained in a single day of walking: the Great Falls, the city of Paterson, and a precolonial stone weir.

The Walk: When you arrive at Paterson Station, walk to Market Street and take a left toward the one tall modern glass building. As you walk down Market Street, foot traffic increases and historical architecture abounds. Market Street bends at Washington Street, and in the distance you can see the start of the mill district and Garret Mountain. Where Market Street ends on Spruce Street, take a right and you are just a few blocks from the Great Falls of the Passaic. At the corner of McBride Avenue there is a small National Parks Headquarters with a few vitrines, postcards, and well-informed parks staff. Across the street is the parking lot and picnic area facing the Great Falls. A hundred years ago, when the falls were a wildly popular tourist destination, this was the vantage point used for the postcards. Before heading up and over the falls, consider walking a block down McBride Avenue and taking a left onto the trail along the dry canal. The trail has several footpaths that lead to a batch of factory ruins with very impressive street art. Remove the garbage piles and it is a ready-made outdoor museum. The footpaths lead back to the picnic area. Continue up the hill and over the falls. The pedestrian bridge over the falls is a fantastic vantage point and has been one of the main attractions since the falls became a destination. The newly redesigned park on the top of the falls also lets visitors get close to the edge. Continue on toward the street and bear right down the paved bike path. There is a short dirt path that leads to the Passaic River and if the water level is low enough, you can edge around for a view of the base of the falls. The paved bike path continues along the river and through the Valley of the Rocks, which is now overgrown but still holds true to its name. The path turns into Ryle Road and the first intersection is at Ryle Avenue.

- Walking Route
- City Street or Path
- Passaic River
- Train Station

Take a right here and then shortly another right onto West Broadway and over the Passaic River. After passing Memorial Drive, turn left onto Broadway, and after one mile turn left onto Madison Avenue. The city of Paterson is built on a hill rounded on three sides by the Passaic River. Walking down Madison Avenue gives you an understanding of the topography. There are also buses frequently running down Madison if you want a lift. After about a mile, at Fourth Avenue, turn right and walk down the hill toward the Home Depot. The Passaic River runs along McLean Boulevard. To visit the precolonial stone weir in the river, go left one block to Third Avenue, cross the road toward the river, step over the barrier, and traipse down to the water's edge. The visibility of the weir changes with the seasons. During the spring you might see only a few ripples from the larger stones but by summer it becomes very apparent. The fall months usually bring very low water levels and one can walk out to the center of the river where the two arms of the weir channel the water through a narrow passage. It is a true monument of the Passaic. Back on McLean, walk toward the Home Depot and take a left over the bridge onto Fair Lawn Avenue. The ironwork on the bridge is fantastic and so are the views of the river from the pedestrian walkway. Fair Lawn Avenue is a straight shot to the historic Radburn Train Station, just over a mile from the bridge.



SANDY HOOK WALK, PORT-TO-PORT

Sandy Hook is one of the dreamiest places to walk: quiet light, warm fields, holly forests, two shores, dunes, architectural wonders, empty spaces, and wildlife that changes with the seasons. Prickly pear cacti grow everywhere. Despite being part of Gateway National Park, access to the landscape presents seasonal challenges. During the summer, the Seastreak Ferry docks at Fort Hancock twice in the morning and once in the afternoon. The next stop is the town of Highlands, where the ferry makes routine and frequent stops all year round. What most people do not realize is that the walk from Highlands to Sandy Hook is short and the experience is as rewarding as starting from Fort Hancock.

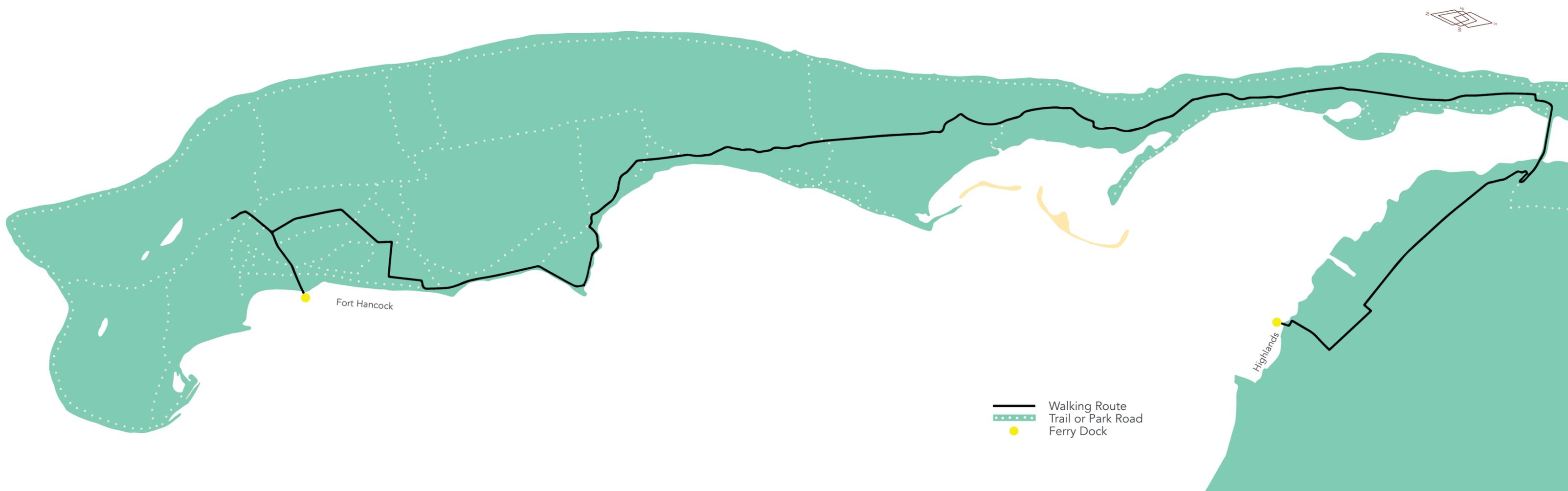
Peak: When the Seastreak is running to Fort Hancock, almost everyone disembarking is headed to the beach. Beachgoers, with their overstuffed bags, chairs, and coolers, board a school bus that drops them off at the beach parking lot. Remaining near the dock, you will be among the buildings of Fort Hancock—just you and the bike-rental guy. Decisions need to be made. If you walk

away from the water and follow roads and paths that lead to the left, you will head toward the northernmost point of the hook. It is beautiful, quiet, and offers amazing views of New York Harbor. This sidetrack is an extra mile each way. If you continue straight instead, you will end up at the Atlantic. Everyone loves a long walk on the beach but the rocky sand here never firms up and makes the trek slowgoing. At the very least, be sure to visit the Nine Gun Battery, Battery Potter, or the Sandy Hook Lighthouse. The parking lots near the beaches have food trucks during the summer months; otherwise, pack what you need.

At some point you must head south toward Highlands. The walk is about nine miles of meandering paths, roads, and shoreline and a map really is not necessary. Standing at the ferry dock you are among the historic buildings of Fort Hancock. Head south along Hartshorne Drive and the yellow-brick buildings of Officers' Row. One of these buildings functions as a house museum and is occasionally open; the others are boarded up and full of dreams. Hartshorne Drive continues along the bay and eventually

the roads and lawns converge at a cluster of memorials and scale models of Nike missiles. Hartshorne Drive is the central road for driving, and is flanked by a bike path and foot trails. The shore on the bayside has a number of crumbling military installations, which can lure you off trail. The bayside landscapes have names like Skeleton Hill Island, Spermaceti Cove, and Plum Island. The distance from Missile Monument to the pedestrian bridge over the Shrewsbury River is five miles as the crow flies. Not being a crow, you will want to follow the many footpaths leading to points along the bay, through the holly forests or over to the Atlantic side. At the pedestrian bridge, cross the river, enjoy the views, and descend on the right-hand side toward the marinas. Shore Drive and Bay Avenue run parallel to each other, but Bay Avenue has most of the historic buildings and local establishments. At Waterwitch Avenue (if you have been on Bay Avenue), cut left through Huddy Park to Shore Drive. Continue up Shore Drive a few blocks and the Seastreak port is on the right.

Off-peak: There is nothing off-peak about the landscape here. Spring and fall are the best times to walk, but starting at Fort Hancock is not an option. Do not be deterred! Disembark at Highlands (not Atlantic Highlands), head out of the parking lot, and take a left onto Shore Drive. At Waterwitch Avenue—which offers great, packable food and coffee—take a left, and then a right onto Bay Avenue to walk down through town. As you approach the one and only bridge, head up and over the Shrewsbury River and, like magic, you are on Sandy Hook. At this time of year, there are no afternoon ferries to greet you at Fort Hancock, so you should pick a midway point or a time limit and eventually double back. The advantage of this starting point is that you can detour up the hill to the Twin Lights Historic Site and Hartshorne Woods Park before crossing the Shrewsbury River to Sandy Hook.



GREAT SWAMP WALK, STATION-TO-STATION

Many features make the Great Swamp special, but what might make it "Great" is that it is one of the first landscapes in the United States saved from development by citizen action. If the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey had gotten its way, the Great Swamp would currently be an international airport. Thankfully, instead of a network of tarmacs, the soggy landscape is a lattice of streams and brooks that converge to give the Passaic River a fresh start. For its size, the enormous land mass has comparatively few trails and is bisected by only one road. Few people access the landscape solely on foot but maybe that will change; the trails of the Swamp can be used as a long "short cut" between the Madison and Gillette Rail Stations.

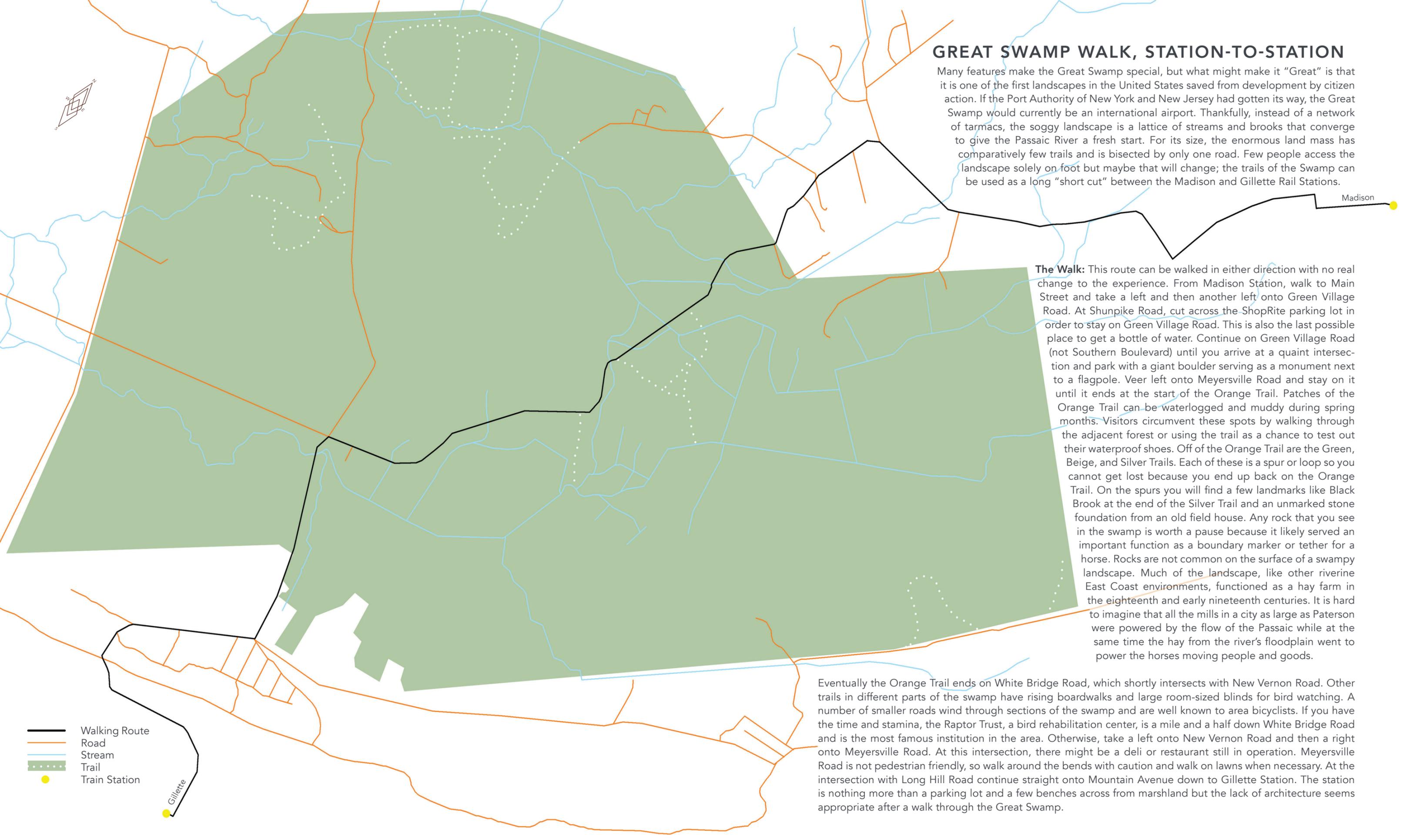
The Walk: This route can be walked in either direction with no real change to the experience. From Madison Station, walk to Main Street and take a left and then another left onto Green Village Road. At Shunpike Road, cut across the ShopRite parking lot in order to stay on Green Village Road. This is also the last possible place to get a bottle of water. Continue on Green Village Road (not Southern Boulevard) until you arrive at a quaint intersection and park with a giant boulder serving as a monument next to a flagpole. Veer left onto Meyersville Road and stay on it until it ends at the start of the Orange Trail. Patches of the Orange Trail can be waterlogged and muddy during spring months. Visitors circumvent these spots by walking through the adjacent forest or using the trail as a chance to test out their waterproof shoes. Off of the Orange Trail are the Green, Beige, and Silver Trails. Each of these is a spur or loop so you cannot get lost because you end up back on the Orange Trail. On the spurs you will find a few landmarks like Black Brook at the end of the Silver Trail and an unmarked stone foundation from an old field house. Any rock that you see in the swamp is worth a pause because it likely served an important function as a boundary marker or tether for a horse. Rocks are not common on the surface of a swampy landscape. Much of the landscape, like other riverine East Coast environments, functioned as a hay farm in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is hard to imagine that all the mills in a city as large as Paterson were powered by the flow of the Passaic while at the same time the hay from the river's floodplain went to power the horses moving people and goods.

Eventually the Orange Trail ends on White Bridge Road, which shortly intersects with New Vernon Road. Other trails in different parts of the swamp have rising boardwalks and large room-sized blinds for bird watching. A number of smaller roads wind through sections of the swamp and are well known to area bicyclists. If you have the time and stamina, the Raptor Trust, a bird rehabilitation center, is a mile and a half down White Bridge Road and is the most famous institution in the area. Otherwise, take a left onto New Vernon Road and then a right onto Meyersville Road. At this intersection, there might be a deli or restaurant still in operation. Meyersville Road is not pedestrian friendly, so walk around the bends with caution and walk on lawns when necessary. At the intersection with Long Hill Road continue straight onto Mountain Avenue down to Gillette Station. The station is nothing more than a parking lot and a few benches across from marshland but the lack of architecture seems appropriate after a walk through the Great Swamp.

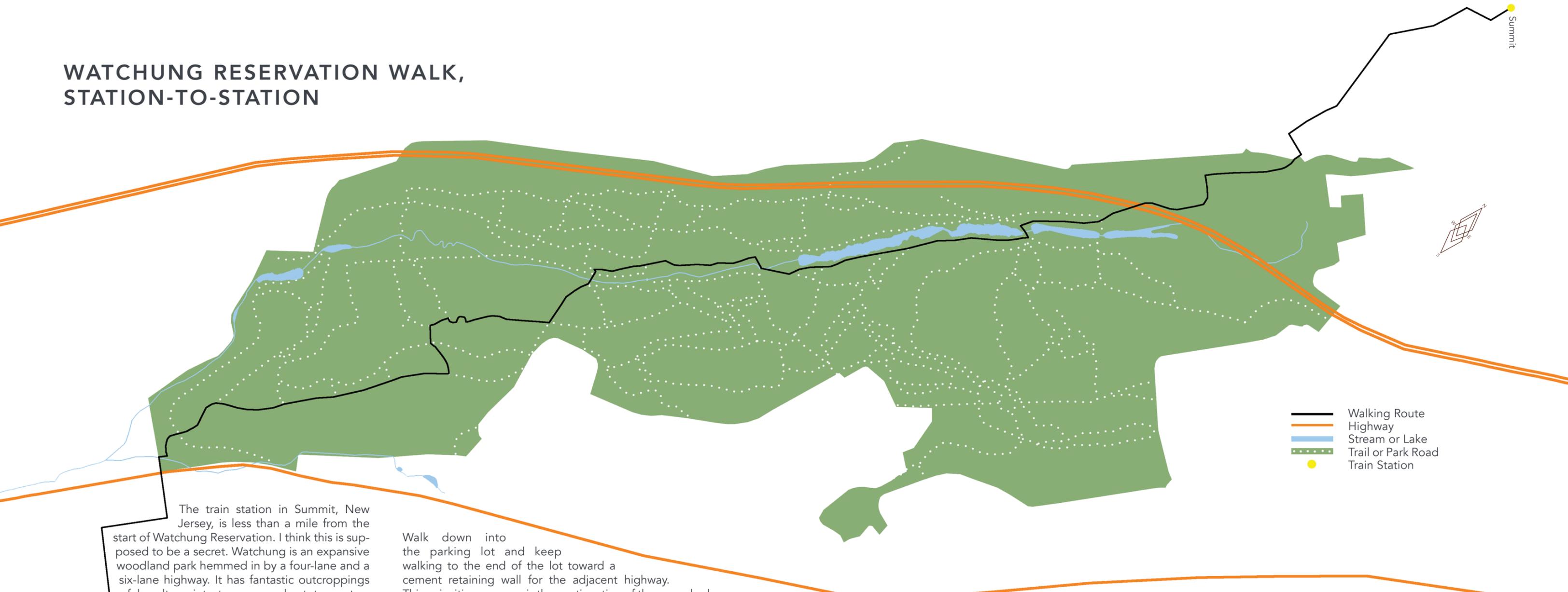
- Walking Route
- Road
- Stream
- Trail
- Train Station

Gillette

Madison



WATCHUNG RESERVATION WALK, STATION-TO-STATION



- Walking Route
- Highway
- Stream or Lake
- Trail or Park Road
- Train Station

The train station in Summit, New Jersey, is less than a mile from the start of Watchung Reservation. I think this is supposed to be a secret. Watchung is an expansive woodland park hemmed in by a four-lane and a six-lane highway. It has fantastic outcroppings of basalt, quiet streams, a ghost town, two museums (history and natural), horse stables, and miles of meandering trails. This walk cuts through Watchung Reservation at an angle from Summit Station to Fanwood Station.

The Walk: When you arrive at Summit Station exit toward downtown if you need food or supplies. Otherwise, exit the side that faces the Village Green. Veer right through the grass to Maple Street. Stay on Maple Street until it runs into Mountain Avenue. Continue forward on Mountain Avenue and take a left onto Primrose Place, which ends at Oak Ridge Avenue. You are, in fact, on a ridge with oaks. There is a plot of forest at an angle from the street sign with an unmarked trail into the woods. Take the trail down through the sloping hillside. It will end on Glenside Avenue and you will see a Watchung Reservation sign at the edge of a soccer field.

Walk down into the parking lot and keep walking to the end of the lot toward a cement retaining wall for the adjacent highway. This uninviting passage is the continuation of the unmarked trailhead into Watchung. Signage in the park is plentiful. This entrance, however, is kept on a need-to-know basis. Follow the trail down to Surprise Lake and continue right, following the trails along the lake. Scattered throughout the forest, closer to the highway, are a number of old lean-tos and outhouses from a scout camp that was discontinued when the highway was put in. The wooden structures have been collecting inscriptions, declarations, and marks since the early 1960s. Surprise Lake was once the site of much more seasonal activity, with swimming, boating, picnicking, and camping drawing thousands of people all summer long. The biggest surprise I have had along the lake was a hawk striking the ground a few feet from where I was standing. There are trails on both sides of the lake and it does not matter which side you choose. Eventually there is a dam and Blue Brook continues on from its base. Blue Brook might not seem like a mighty river, but in the mid-1800s it was strong enough to power a mill that supported a community of 175 residents. The trail along the right side of the brook rises up and offers great views through the tree

canopy and across the valley. If you're traveling on the west side of Blue Brook, you will eventually reach the "ghost town" of Feltsville. There is a small history museum, with bathrooms, and two of the historic homes are residential, so there is hardly room for many ghosts. A few structures have been given over to time and pincushion moss. Find one of the trails behind the houses and cross Blue Brook on the wooden bridge. There is one accessible gorge near the brook that is a great place to look at ferns, mosses, and lichens and to listen to the quiet trickle of water that flows through the rocks. Continue past the gorge and up toward the Sierra Trail and veer right. Eventually the Sierra Trail runs through a picnic area and then crosses Sky Top Drive. Two attractions in the opposite direction are the Trailside Nature Center and the Watchung Stables, which are some of the most picturesque horse arenas and barns in the state. Fifty years ago there was also an installation of Nike missiles at Watchung and the launch control site was adjacent to the stables. Continue on the Sierra Trail to the scenic overlook. The view offers a chance to see the contours of the landscape;

the precarious edge is lined with oak trees that have formed around the basalt trap rock. Continue in the direction leading away from the vista. As the trail approaches residential neighborhoods take one of the spurs and you will exit the park on Scotland Street across from "The Reserve" condominiums. The other spur will spit you out alongside Route 22 not far from Scotland Street. Either way you are abandoned as a pedestrian. You are on the wrong side of the Jersey barrier and have two choices. If you look to the right, up ahead, you will see a bridge going over Route 22. If you walk to the bridge and follow the off-ramp you can swing up and over Route 22 and land on Park Avenue. Or you can wait for a long pause in traffic and scoot over the barrier to the other side of Route 22. Either way, go left (you can only go left) onto Park Avenue, which becomes the main drag of Scotch Plains. Park Avenue turns into North Martine Avenue and eventually runs into Fanwood Station, about a mile and a half from the intersection of Route 22 and Park Avenue. Trains leave every hour, so chances are you will have a few minutes to catch your breath.

Fanwood

Summit