



Up the Hill and Around the Fields

Visiting Arney's Mount

By Jim Alexander

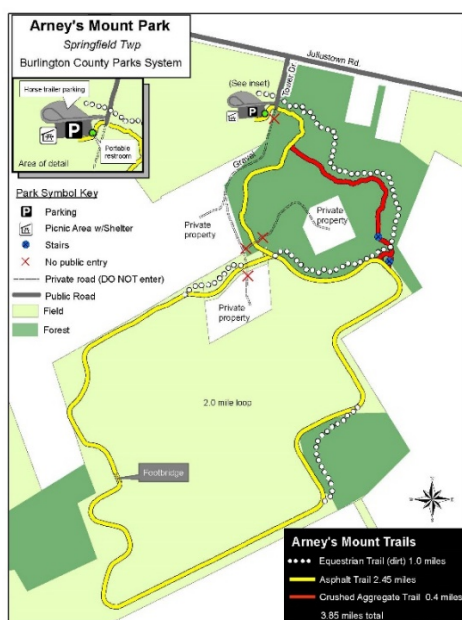
Photos by Jim and Jo Ann Alexander

With spring upon us, it's time to think about longer walks! We actually started exploring Burlington County's latest trail one nice day in December, and returned twice more. The walking path is nicely paved, but does involve some initial uphill effort. How much depends on your interest, but it's not like our own mostly-level campus perimeter walk. And it's longer too!



The park includes both an extremely large open meadow area, some upgrades, and walking, walking, walking. Essentially a 2.5-mile loop, its wide, smooth surface is new. The park was just dedicated last year. Facilities are minimal, with one port-a-potty, a few picnic benches by the entry parking area, and a few benches, unfortunately not evenly spaced out along the trail.

Did we say a lot of walking? It's mostly not hard, but once on the loop, there's no short way back. The view provides a welcome opportunity to focus the eyes on distant skylines and fields. Arney's Mount itself is at one side, and because of its elevation and surrounding trees, one can walk right by it and be unaware, but mostly around the large loop it comes into view and out, sometimes on the left, sometimes on the right.



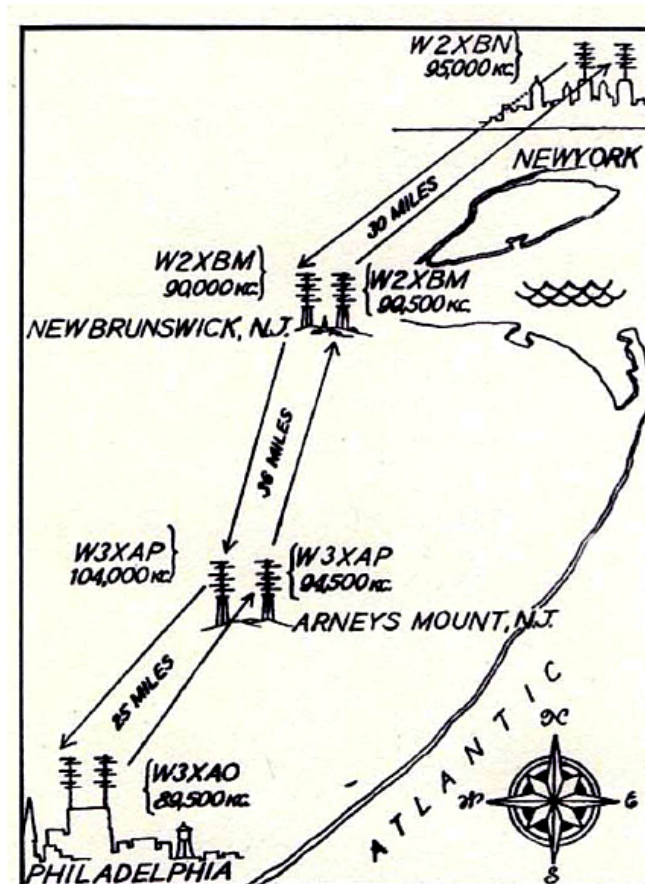
One crushed stone side trail actually goes around the base of the Mount, with its tall transmission tower currently owned by Comcast. The Mount is technically an erosional remnant of the New Jersey Coastal Plain. The land around was once much higher, but as the oceans receded and weather washed away massive amounts of soil from parts of Burlington County, several high points remained, including Arney's Mount, the smaller mount for which Mt. Holly is named, and similar structures in Mt. Laurel and Cherry Hill. While hard to believe now, the top of the Mount was actually the base of a creek millions of years ago. The reason for its resisting erosion was that it was an outcropping of sandstone with a high iron content. There are actually several smaller mounts visible around the trail.

At 243 feet above sea level, Arney's Mount is about 150 feet higher than the surrounding land. There's not an official trail up to the top, but there is a narrower paved pathway marked "This Is Not A Trail," which does lead up. For the venturesome hiker with strong legs and lungs, the upward trek first provides a hint of what awaits when walking over a manhole cover in the asphalt, marked "Cable TV." In fact, Comcast now owns the property atop the Mount, where its tower receives and transmits signals. It's the Mount's height as the highest point in south Jersey that makes it important.



At the top of the Mount, the current tower is fenced off, and features several buildings to house equipment, as well as large emergency generators. Signs warn of electronic dangers to those entering without proper training.

One source indicates that prior to the establishment of telegraph lines between Philadelphia and New York, shortly after Professor Morse's invention in 1844, there was a line of signal towers across the state by which messages could be sent quickly from city to city. These were owned and controlled by Wm. C. Bridges & Co., stock brokers and merchants of Philadelphia. One station was located on Mount Laurel, the next on Arney's Mount. Initially, ropes and pulleys were used to control "finger and signal boards" (something of a semaphore system) on the tower to show the coded messages that were read by staff with binoculars on the next high point, and then passed along across the state.



Later, when Ultra High Frequency (UHF) signal transmission was being developed, a station atop the Mount called W3XAP received and retransmitted signals coming between New York City and Philadelphia.

More recently, prior to Comcast's acquiring the mount in 1989, it was owned by the New York Times during its foray into cable TV services.

Where did Arney's Mount get its name? It was originally called Shreve Hill or Shreve's Mount, for the Quaker Shreve family who moved into the area in the 1700s and owned a lot of land in the area. By the early 1800s, Arney Lippincott had become the major landowner, and the new name came into use.

But the glory of a visit is in the walk at ground level. Uninterrupted views of distant horizons abound. The sky is wide. Surrounding land consists of open farmland, some wooded areas, and a handful of large houses set back from the park. In the park itself, several privately owned parcels feature old farm buildings.

The latest addition to Burlington County's impressive park system, there are plans to connect the park over contiguous county-owned land to the County fairgrounds on Rt. 206, and on to other walking trails.

An available long list of birds in the park gives hope to summer entertainment, and wildlife includes gray squirrels, chipmunks, groundhogs, red foxes and white-tailed deer. Being largely unshielded from the sky, the sun may be strong, so do prepare. It's a wonderful place to enjoy nature, oxygenate the system, and calm the soul.

