



## **A Walk in the Woods**

By Jim Alexander    Photos by Jim and Jo Ann Alexander

Looking for a new place to take a walk? Are our trails and places like Smithville Park's paths seeming a bit tame? Give nearby Vincentown's Eagle Walk a try!

You may not know where it is, but you've probably passed it driving into the village of Vincentown. Heading out Lumberton's Landing Street, you make a left on to Race Street, which is an extension of Church Road coming in from Kirby's Mill in the Medford area.

Eagle Walk's name has nothing to do with birds, although you may encounter some, and it's not related to Austria's famous mountainous Eagle Walk. It's on a parcel of land that Southampton Township acquired some years ago through the state's Green Acres program. A substantial wooded property, it follows the Southwest Branch of the Rancocas Creek as it heads north from downtown Vincentown before turning westward across the fields toward Lumberton.



The Grist Mill that was

For those familiar with the lake in the park to the south of town by Race Street, down toward the old marl pits, the incoming creek drains a substantial area from deep in the Pinelands, and then splits into two streams at the lake's northern end. The right branch carries the main course, having once served a saw mill, while the left branch is a smaller waterway that once powered a grist mill located near the entrance to Eagle Walk. Long gone, both mills were part of the fascinating history of this small town. The lake area is named Sawmill Park, while Mill Street got its name from the grist mill.



The parking lot and entrance to Eagle Walk, on Mill Street

The entrance to the Walk is through a small parking lot, which features a seating area and several signs. A weathered orientation display provides information, mentioning that the area was at one point referred to locally as Camp Hill. An adjacent sign posted by the Grand Army of the Republic commemorates a reunion held there on Decoration Day in 1889 by New Jersey Civil War veterans. It had also been known as Dobbins Camp Woods, a local picnic area.

Passing on into the trail, the walk is relatively smooth, and very quickly you're in the woods, the sounds of civilization having receded, the small waterway initially down to your right.



The channel before it returns to the main creek

As you walk along looking down at the creek, the path becomes a challenging tangle of roots. An overhead canopy is provided by trees, some younger and others larger and older, seemingly not touched in decades. Some of the latter present unusual visual effect, such as one massive tree that reaches to the heavens from its multiple huge trunks.



Soaring upward

You may be so focused on keeping your footing on the web of tree roots that cover parts of the trail that you can miss out on the majesty overhead.

Creation of the walk has involved several decades of work by the Eagle Scouts of Boy Scouts Troop 31, chartered by the Vincentown Methodist Church, thus the name Eagle Walk. They have developed the parking area, cleared the walkways, built bridges, set up benches, and mapped out two trails, the Blue and the White. While both are marked by colored trail blazers (some missing or hard to notice), the White trail (a left turn at a fork) features a series of posts, each denoting one of the characteristics of the Eagle Scout Code: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

The Blue trail, staying closer to the Rancocas, is longer. Several connecting trails exist, so make sure you know your heading. You won't get lost, but it may feel like it: take a friend for reassurance.



One of 12 guide posts on the White Trail

Once in there, you may feel far from civilization, although you really aren't. Since the trail can be challenging, sturdy shoes are a must, plus an ability to sense direction on the multiple pathways that have been created. Depending on your choice of direction, you eventually encounter an unexpected vista across a large farm field extending toward Landing Street, and your location clicks into place. On our initial one-hour walk, we encountered only three people. One, driving a small motorized cart, pulled over to let us pass, and explained that there was a "small project" being undertaken up ahead.

At one point we thought we heard them, but never did see the Eagle Scouts as they continued their good work.

This unexpected Gem of Nature calls for a return visit, and it's not far from home!



One of several benches; trail marker