

Ramanessin Brook Greenway Trails Project

Friends of Holmdel Open Space / Holmdel Township

Final Report, April 1, 2019

Abstract

In February 2016 the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the Federal Highway Administration awarded a \$10,000 Recreational Trails Grant to Friends of Holmdel Open Space (FOHOS) for our Ramanessin Brook Greenway Trails Project, with a final Grant Agreement (15-1320-1) approved on September 20, 2016. This final report describes what has been accomplished with the grant funds.

The major goals of this project were to improve public awareness of, access to, and utilization of the Township's extensive Ramanessin Brook Greenway trail system. Much of the work to achieve these goals was the physical renovation of existing trail sections and the addition of a trail section that extends the reach of this Greenway. To increase awareness, we added roadside signs (both "hiker symbol" signs and large "Ramanessin Brook Greenway" gateway signs near trailheads) and informational kiosks to display trail maps and educational/interpretive information at the trailheads. Because of the complexity of the trail system we added signs along the trails with directions and distances to nearby points of interest. We have also added benches to make the trails more welcoming and to create stopping points for people to relax, rest, read, or take in the views.

The work on this project was carried out by a combination of volunteers including Boy Scouts from the local area and other members of the community, along with the Holmdel Township Recreation Department and Department of Public Works.

We have complemented the physical work with a series of walks along the trails, led by FOHOS members and advertised on the township website. These are intended to provide residents with better knowledge of the local trail system and the pleasures it can bring.

The funding provided by the grant was used almost exclusively for materials that the volunteers used for trail improvements and for skilled work that was beyond the capabilities of the volunteers. Several substantial trail improvements were carried out by local Eagle Scout candidates as community service projects coordinated by FOHOS. Thus, the funding from the grant was highly leveraged by several hundred hours of volunteer labor and labor provided by the Holmdel Township DPW.

The following pages give specifics of how the funding was used, how the trail system was improved, and how our efforts are making local residents more aware of how they can enjoy these natural resources.

Background: The Ramanessin Brook Greenway Trail System

Holmdel Township is fortunate to have a substantial amount of state, county and township open space and parks as seen in

<http://www.holmdeltownship-nj.com/DocumentCenter/View/1183/Map-of-Holmdel-Township-Parks>.

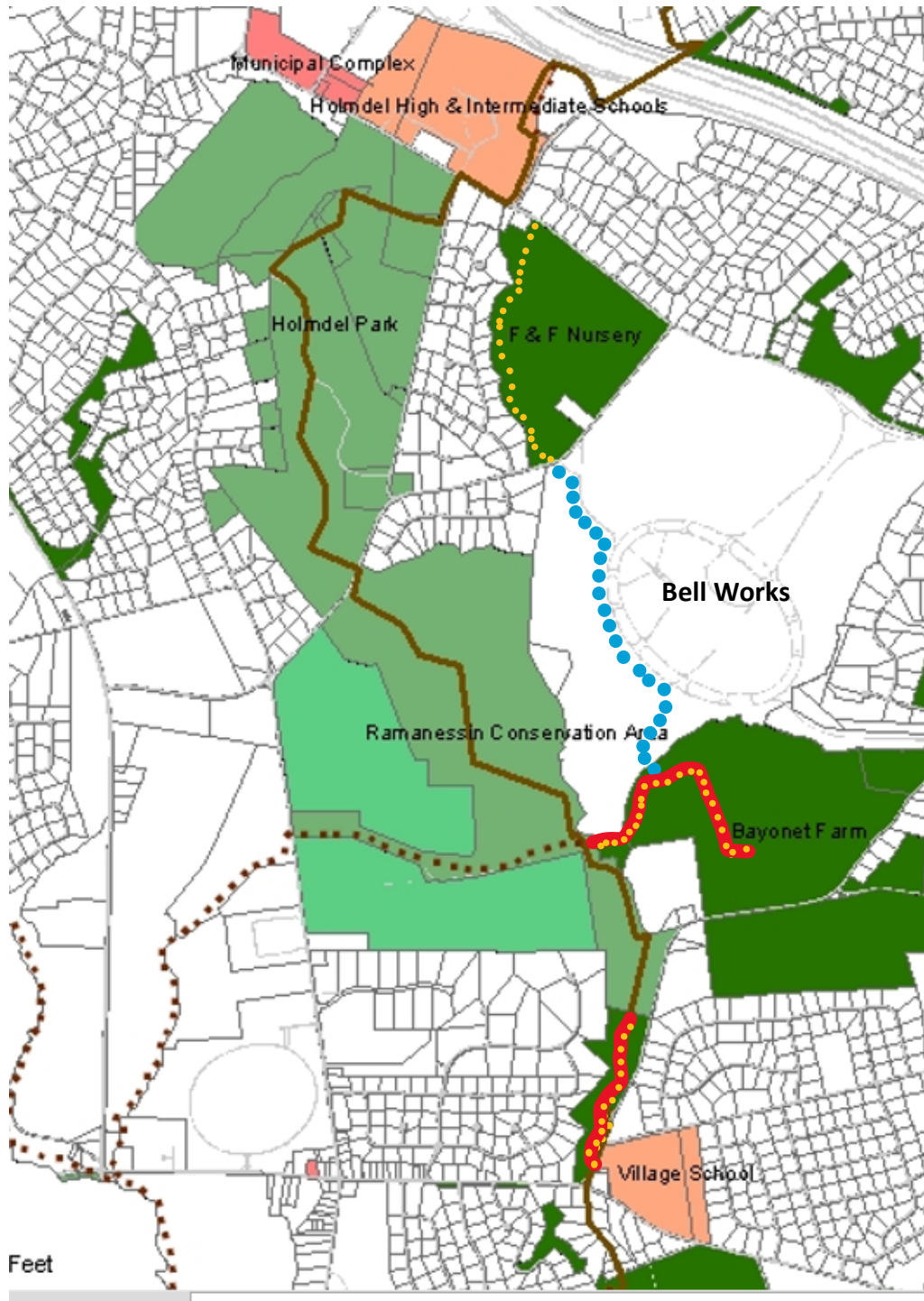
We are doubly fortunate that much of this open space is connected, or has parts separated only by short, walkable distances; much of this is along the Ramanessin Brook, also known as Hop Brook. This connected open space contains trails that allow one to walk the length of the Ramanessin Brook from its source in Phillips Park, in the northern part of Holmdel, all the way to the point where the Ramanessin enters the Swimming River Reservoir.

Our goal in using this trails grant has been to develop new trails for this Greenway system and to upgrade existing trails along or connecting to the Greenway. Trails that had been developed over the past decades were in need of renovation and part of our grant has been used to bring them back to their desired state. In addition, the purchase over a decade ago of a large tract of land in central Holmdel (formerly the F&F Nurseries) provided the opportunity to add a trail that would connect to others.

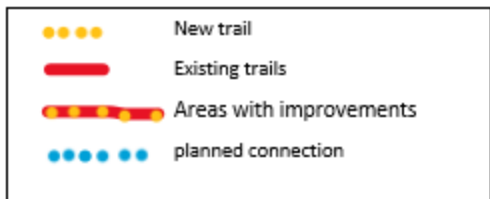
Figure 1 shows the portion of Holmdel that contains these trails. Much of the continuous public open space along the Ramanessin Brook corridor is township owned and much of the remainder is part of the Monmouth County Parks System. Trails in the Ramanessin Section of Holmdel Park (a Monmouth County Park) connect seamlessly to the Holmdel Township-owned Bayonet Farm and Ramanessin Brook Greenway. As the map shows, three of the township's public schools are close to the trails, which are used by students. Holmdel High School and Satz Middle School are next to Holmdel Park, which is used by the High School's Cross Country team and enjoyed by students after school. The Village Elementary School is next to the Ramanessin Brook Greenway Trail; although the students are too young to use the trail by themselves, it has a set of interpretive signs and is sometimes used for teaching. Thus, even before we began the current work these trails were already a resource for young people in Holmdel.

All of these trails have been used year-round by walkers, runners, bike riders, and horseback riders, and in winter by people on snowshoes and cross-country skis.

Changes in the township have made it both possible and desirable that additional trails be developed. A large 400+ acre property formerly owned by Bell Labs has now been bought and redeveloped, and is now known as Bell Works. What had been the Bell Labs building now hosts numerous companies, the township library, several restaurants, and coffee shops as well as a Montessori School and a health club. The developers have committed to connecting their property to the existing Bayonet Farm trails, and have already surveyed the area where their trail will be built. The new trail we have built on the former F&F property connects the Bell Works complex to the area near the High School and Middle School and thus will provide a connection to Bayonet Farm and the adjoining Greenway trails.



Feet



Map of area on which trails are being improved

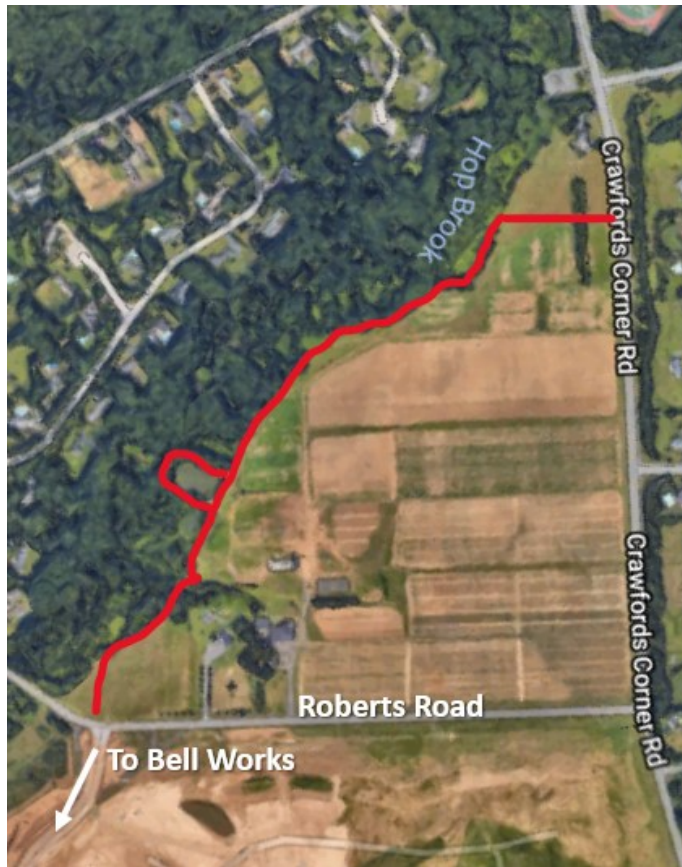
What we have accomplished with the Trail Grant

Work on the trails has been done primarily in three areas what can be seen on the map on page 3.

1. Former F&F Nurseries.

A new trail has been built on a section of the former F&F Nurseries. This had been a working farm, and was purchased by Holmdel Township in 2007. The bulk of the property is deed restricted with only farming permitted, but a portion of the property, purchased using Green Acres funding, is available for recreational use. It is on this portion, seen below, that the trail has been built.

A fence encloses the farmed area. Our trail starts at Crawford's Corner Road, follows the fence, goes around the pond, the location of new benches, and ends at Roberts Road, across from the entrance to the Bell Works complex.



Thus, this trail provides an off-road pedestrian path from Holmdel High School to Bell Works, where the township's library is located. It is also a potential recreational area for people living in the nearby Falcon's Ridge neighborhood and those moving into the new Toll Brothers development adjoining Bell Works.

From the Robert Road terminus of the trail, sidewalks lead to the large Bell Works building. It is also possible to walk around the oval road that surrounds the former Bell Labs building, and access a planned trail connecting to the Bayonet Farm trail system. The developers of Bell Works are committed to building that connector, which will include a footbridge, and have already begun the initial steps, including surveying the area and applying for permits. The approximate location of this connector trail is shown on the map on page 3 using blue dots.

Construction of the F&F trail was almost entirely the work of Boy Scouts, who cleared the area, built benches, removed large amount of trash, and designed, built, and installed signs. Lettering on the signs was done by the Monmouth County Park System.



Trail clearing



Entry to the trail, with a new Ramanessin Brook Greenway trail sign.

An inaugural walk held on December 8, 2018 marked the official opening of this new trail section.

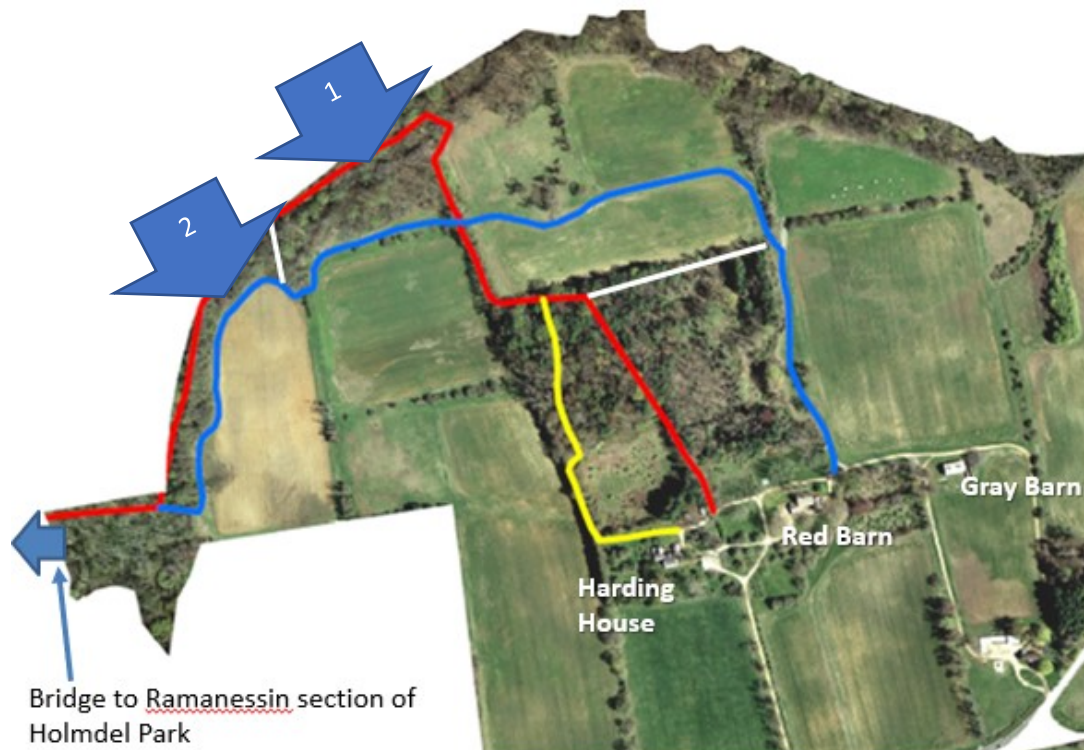
2. Improvements on the Bayonet Farm Trails

The area shown just below the Bell Works property on the page 3 map is the Bayonet Farm Park, approximately 140 acres of woods and fields. Originally a working farm, in 1936 it became the country home of Laura Harding, a Philadelphia-born heiress who grew up in Rumson, a town not far from Holmdel.

In 1985, Laura Harding sold a part of Bayonet Farm, which had by that time expanded through several land purchases to a bit more than 140 acres, to the township for \$1.6 million. It was to be used for purposes of “recreation, health, horticulture, public and gardens to preserve and conserve open spaces, bird sanctuaries, arboretums, nature and equitation trails and to allow pasturing of farm animals and growing of farm crops.”

Miss Harding retained life rights to the farm and lived there until her death in 1994. Even during Miss Harding’s lifetime local residents were welcome to walk the trails of this property, and it was sometimes visited by employees at the adjacent Bell Labs, who could reach Bayonet Farm via a short path. Since then it has become a popular choice for those who enjoy its serenity.

The current trails on the property can be seen on the map below.



Marked Trails on Bayonet Farm. In addition, most field perimeters are mowed and can be used as trails. The locations marked with blue arrows are the sites of new boardwalks.

Our work at Bayonet Farm has been almost entirely on the popular Red Trail. At the beginning of the trail, near the Red Barn, wood chips provided by Holmdel Township were added to smooth and define a well-worn path. In the same area, immediately before the start of the trail, a new information kiosk was built, replacing one that was falling apart.

The kiosk was built by an Eagle Scout candidate and a group of scouts and adults he recruited. All materials were paid for using the grant funds.



New information kiosk at Bayonet Farm

At the beginning of our work, portions of the trails were blocked by downed trees, many of them the result of Hurricanes Irene and Sandy. (After those storms volunteers cleared much of the trails, but not all could be removed.) Most of the remaining ones were removed by the Township's DPW, at no cost to the grant. However, a particularly large tree was beyond the capabilities of their equipment and we used some of the grant funds to have a tree service remove it. This restored the connectivity of the trails.

Additionally, boardwalks were constructed in several locations close to the tributary stream that parallels the Red Trail; these are marked on the page 6 map with large blue arrows. One already had a boardwalk, constructed many years ago. However, it was quite old, badly deteriorated, and had become a hazard. Using grant funds for the materials, scouts redesigned the boardwalk, and rebuilt it with sturdier lumber. As part of the redesign, it was raised so that water could flow below it.

Other areas were also chronically wet, and scouts built additional raised boardwalks to make the trail more usable. This is especially important to bike riders, who are frequent users of these trails.

The illustration at the right shows the rebuilt boardwalk, and the township's recognition of the scout who organized the work. The pictures at the bottom of this page show the transformation of a slippery area with the construction of another boardwalk.

Trail users have shown appreciation for the improvements.

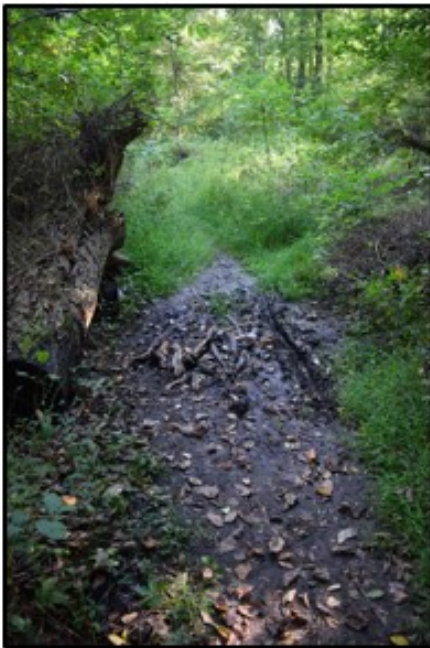
Boy Scout Recognition

Congratulations to Jeremy Bodycomb of Boy Scout Troop 131 on the completion of his Eagle Scout project! Jeremy received a Proclamation from the Holmdel Township Committee for replacing the damaged boardwalk and improving the trail system at Bayonet Farm. A huge undertaking, this project required strategic planning, countless hours of hard work, and true teamwork amongst the members of Boy Scout Troop 131. Thanks to Jeremy's vision, dedication, and leadership, he has ensured that residents will continue to enjoy the beautiful trails at Bayonet Farm for years to come!

Jeremy's boardwalk replacement project at Bayonet Farm



*Pictured left to right:
Committeeman Greg Buontempo
Mayor Thomas Critelli
Boy Scout Jeremy Bodycomb
Committeeman Mike Nikolis*



Transformation of a chronically muddy trail section

A final improvement on the Bayonet Farm trails is the installation of wayfinding signs at a number of trail intersections. These signs were fabricated by an outside shop, based on drawings by scouts, and will be installed by the scouts as soon as the ground conditions allow.

3. Ramanessin Greenway Nature Trail

This nature trail was built in the 1990's as the original section of the Ramanessin Brook Greenway. It has a small parking area at the trail head, with additional parking across the street at Holmdel's Village School. The trail is an extension of Holmdel Park's Ramanessin Trail and at its north end it crosses a small side stream into Holmdel Park. Along the trail are interpretive signs, describing the geology, water flow, plants, and animals of the area.

The trail itself was in relatively good condition, but the entrance and the interpretive signs were badly in need of attention. Using the grant funds, one scout group improved the entrance, clearing away debris, rebuilding a fence, installing "hiker crossing signs" at the street, and mulching the trail entrance. Another group rebuilt and reinstalled the interpretive signs. The pictures below illustrate their work.



Above: Scouts working on the trailhead.



Right: The new trail entrance.

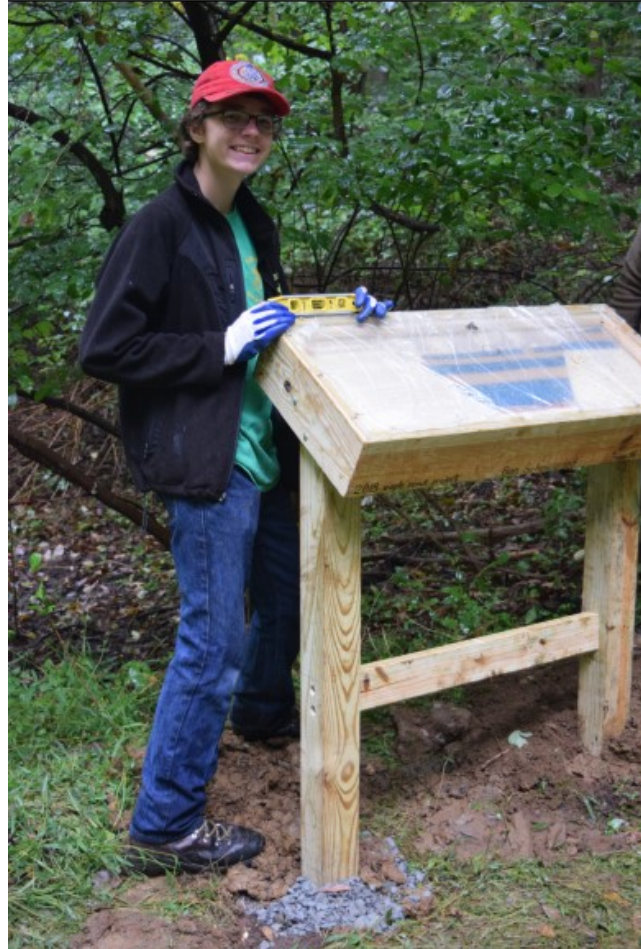


Left: The old signs had become unreadable.

Below: The replacement signs are sturdy and attractive.

This trail is now more attractive and inviting.

This trail is used frequently by fossil hunters, who search in the Ramanessin stream bed for shark's teeth. It will be used this Spring for a FOHOS sponsored fossil hunt designed to bring young school-aged children into the parks.



Summary: Costs and Results

Costs: Except for the tree removal done by a commercial service, all costs so far are for materials and supplies or for the services of an outside shop doing the sign lettering.

PROJECT	COST
Tree Removal at Bayonet Farm	\$400.00
Bayonet Farm Boardwalk 1*	\$1,760.00
Ramanessin Brook Greenway Gateway Signs*	\$2,475.83
Lettering on signs done by Monmouth County Park System	\$578.94
Ramanessin Brook Nature Trail Interpretive Sign Restoration*	\$442.93
Bayonet Farm Trailhead Kiosk*	\$703.64
Boardwalks 2&3 at Bayonet*	\$1,079.09
Trail Signs at Bayonet Farm*	\$2,698.76
Benches at F&F Pond*	\$185.11
Nature Trail Entrance Rehabilitation & Crosswalk Signs*	\$252.02
TOTAL COST	\$10,576.32

* Denotes Eagle Scout community service project.

Friends of Holmdel Open Space is covering the costs beyond that of the grant. In addition, we will be continuing the work in much the same way, using volunteer labor and paying for the materials needed.

Our matching requirement was satisfied early in the performance period with volunteer labor providing considerably more than the required matching.

Results: Two popular trails were repaired and upgraded, and a new trail was constructed. The new trail connects to a promised trail on private land which in turn will connect to one of the repaired trails. The result will be continuous connectivity from the Holmdel High School and Middle School area to the Village School in the south of Holmdel.

Beyond the improvements in our trail system, this grant has helped involve a large number of students, Scouts, and Scout leaders in the process of trail building. Several substantial trail improvements were carried out by local Eagle Scout candidates as community service projects coordinated by FOHOS. We hope this will spread interest in the trails and encourage their use.

Addendum:

In addition to building the trails, we have engaged in a campaign of popularizing them. FOHOS has carried out a series of trail walks, with Holmdel Township providing advertising for the walks on the township website.

In 2018 the walks included:

- A New Year's Day walk
- A Daffodil Walk in early spring
- A set of long and short Earth Day walks
- An end-to-end walk of the Ramanessin Greenway on National Trails Day
- A Fossil Hunt for children following the end of the school year
- A Summer Saunter in one of our smaller parks
- A Fall Foliage walk

We have announced similar walks for the first half of 2019 and will continue walks through the year. (See Appendix for schedule and walk descriptions)

Appendix: Trails walks for 2019

Spring 2019 FOHOS Trail Walks in Holmdel

The Friends of Holmdel Open Space (FOHOS) is a nonprofit organization that has been active with the Township in preserving, developing and maintaining open space in Holmdel. We have helped with the acquisitions of the Chase Tract (now the Ramannessin Section of Holmdel Park), the Neil Waackaack Preserve (adjacent to Allocco Park), and the Callan Farm. We have supported the maintenance of the Harding House, the barns, and the trails at Bayonet Farm. We as a group and as individuals have been instrumental in developing and maintaining walking/hiking trails throughout Holmdel.

All walks are "Show and Go"; that is, there is no need to register. Just show up at the meeting time and place. The pace will be moderate and most will be for just a few hours. All are welcome: couples, singles, families, seniors, dogs on leashes, ...

Daffodil Walk



Sunday, April 14, 1 pm- 3 pm: Meet at 1:00 pm at Bayonet Farm (off Middletown Road) for this 2.5-mile walk to see a host of golden daffodils. First, visit the Daffodil Memorial Beds planted by volunteers at our Town's Bayonet Farm. Then, wander into the Ramannessin Section of Holmdel Park and see spring's first wild greens and the extensive daffodils planted over 60 years ago along the brook's edge. Return to Bayonet Farm.

Join the Earth Day Celebration at Bayonet Farm

Sunday, April 28: Springtime is here at last, and everyone is ready to welcome warmer days and enjoy the annual celebration of Earth Day. All are invited to join family, friends, and neighbors at the 21st Annual Holmdel Greenway Walk & Bayonet Farm Festival! The celebration will begin with the traditional **Earth Day Greenway Walk** through the Ramanessin Section of Holmdel Park for about 2.5-3 miles, beginning at **10:00 am** and continuing to Bayonet Farm arriving about noon in time for the festivities. Suitable for walkers of all ages, the hike will follow the scenic bridle paths and old farm roads of the former Chase Tract. We should see a number of spring wildflowers such as Trout Lily. Meet at the small parking lot on Roberts Road across from the Holmdel Park Arboretum.

The **Festival** will take place at **Bayonet Farm** on Middletown Road in Holmdel from **12:00 to 5:00 p.m.** As in past years, there will be a variety of activities and presentations planned for young and old alike, including nature crafts, music, refreshments, and sales of homemade baked goods. Many local community groups will be present, offering useful and important information on recycling, composting, backyard gardening, conservation and tours of the Harding house..

For those who can't take part in the morning greenway walk, there will be shorter walks around the Bayonet Farm woods and fields during the Earth Day Festival.

National Trails Day -- Ramanessin Brook Greenway Hike



Saturday, June 1, 10:00am to 2pm: Celebrate National Trails Day with us and hike a portion of the Ramanessin Brook Greenway. Meet at 10:00 am in the Holmdel High

School Parking Lot near the Duncan Smith Theatre. Walk along sections of the Ramanessin Brook Greenway to Village School. Bring day-pack with lunch and rain gear. The overall distance will be about 4-5 miles and we'll go at a moderate pace. Shuttles will be used so that this can be a one-way hike. *Please note: You can help us plan the shuttles by registering for this hike (not mandatory). Please call Ralph, one of the trip leaders, at: 732-264-8482.

Fossil Hunt



Saturday, June 22 from 10:00.m – noon. Meet at the Village School front parking lot and hunt for fossils in the Ramanessin Brook, which was part of an inland sea during the last ice age. Ancient shark's teeth are frequently found in our brook. See if you can find one! This short walk is especially suited for children who must be accompanied by a parent/guardian at all times. As we'll be wandering in the brook, wear water shoes and clothes that can get wet. The walk is approximately 0.25 miles.