History of the Columbia Trail

Completed in 1875, This former rail line was established by the Central Railroad of New Jersey as the High Bridge Branch. The line ran from High Bridge to Port Oram, currently known as Wharton, in Morris County. The line accommodated passengers, but was highly regarded for its shipments of iron ore from the mines in Morris County. The most spectacular wreck occurred on April 18, 1885 when Engine #112 (known as The Columbia), was pulling 45 cars and plummeted off a 60' wooden trestle into the South Branch of the Raritan River. The wooden trestle was replaced by steel piers in 1930 and is now known as the Ken Lockwood Gorge Bridge. The last passenger excursion occurred in 1935 and the last freight train ran on April 1, 1976.

In the mid 1990s, the Columbia Gas Company of West Virginia constructed a gas line under the rail bed. The surface rights were then transferred to the Hunterdon County Division of Parks and Recreation for use as a recreational trail. Today the trail spans seven miles from High Bridge to the Morris County line. It provides passive recreation to the surrounding communities through hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing.

Bike rider on trail

(Revised 3/2016)

The Hunterdon County Division of Parks & Recreation is dedicated to preserving open space and natural resources, providing safe parks and facilities, and offering educational and recreational opportunities, all contributing to an enhanced quality of life for present and future generations.

The Columbia Trail

Location: *The trail is located in portions of High Bridge and Califon Boroughs, Clinton, Lebanon, and Tewksbury Townships. The trailhead is located across from the High Bridge Commons parking lot at 79 Main Street, High Bridge 08829. The terminus is located at 40 Vernoy Road, Califon 07830, at the County border with Morris County.*

Directions from Clinton to Parking in High Bridge Boro: Proceed north on Route 31 for 1.7 miles to Route 513 North. Turn right and follow Route 513 into High Bridge. Go about 1 mile, pass under the train tracks, and turn left into the center of High Bridge. One block beyond the church, turn left into the municipal parking lot, marked by a "The Commons" sign.

Direction from Clinton to Parking at Valley Brook Road: Proceed as above to High Bridge. Stay on Route 513 and proceed through Califon. Vernoy Road is on the right about 1 mile north of Califon. Turn onto Vernoy Road and travel another mile. After the river, continue straight on Valley Brook Road, and the parking area is on the right.

Recreational Opportunities

The relatively flat trail curves along the mountainside above the South Branch of the Raritan River for seven miles between High Bridge and the Morris County line. Two bridges carry the trail over Cokesbury Road and the South Branch of the Raritan River. The second bridge is elevated approximately 80 feet and spans a length of 260 feet over the river. Several roads bisect the park making for easy pedestrian access.

The trail's natural surface allows visitors to enjoy the park in several ways. Hiking is probably the most popular. The trail is wide enough to provide a great opportunity for biking as well as cross-country skiing in the winter.

Connecting Trails

Several other trails connect to the Columbia Trail. The Taylor-Wharton Steelworkers Historic Greenway splits off to the southeast about 1/3 mile from High Bridge. This 7-mile trail was created by the Union Forge Heritage Association to showcase several historically significant properties in High Bridge. To learn more, visit http://www.unionforgeheritage.org.

At about 2 1/2 miles, the Highlands Trail branches off to the west of the Columbia Trail. The Highlands Trail extends 150 miles from Storm King Mountain on the Hudson River in New York south to Riegelsville on the Delaware River in New Jersey. Visit the New York - New Jersey Trail Conference's website, http://www.nynjtc.org/region/highlands-trail.

The Columbia Trail continues over eight miles into Morris County, and is managed by Morris County Parks Commission. Contact them at 973-326-7600 or http://www.morrisparks.net/aspparks/columbiamain.asp.

Wildlife and Habitat

The Columbia Trail travels through both deciduous and evergreen forests, providing a natural corridor for wildlife such as deer, raccoon, coyote, and fox.

Reptiles and amphibians have also been found throughout the trail. Paralleling the South Branch of the Raritan River, the trail provides a refuge and breeding habitat for these animals. Herptiles that have been observed include the Northern Water Snake and Eastern Spadefoot.

The Columbia Line offers an excellent view of Lake Solitude, which provides a sanctuary for various waterfowl including Common and Hooded Mergansers and Great Blue Herons. Pileated Woodpeckers also inhabit this area.

Columbia Trail

Train on the old line. Photo courtesy of Bob Pennisi.

County of Hunterdon

Division of Parks and Recreation

Office Location:

1020 State Route 31, Lebanon, NJ 08833 *(Clinton Twp.)*

Mailing Address:

PO Box 2900

Flemington, NJ 08822-2900

Phone: (908) 782-1158 * Fax: (908) 806-4057

E-mail: parks@co.hunterdon.nj.us

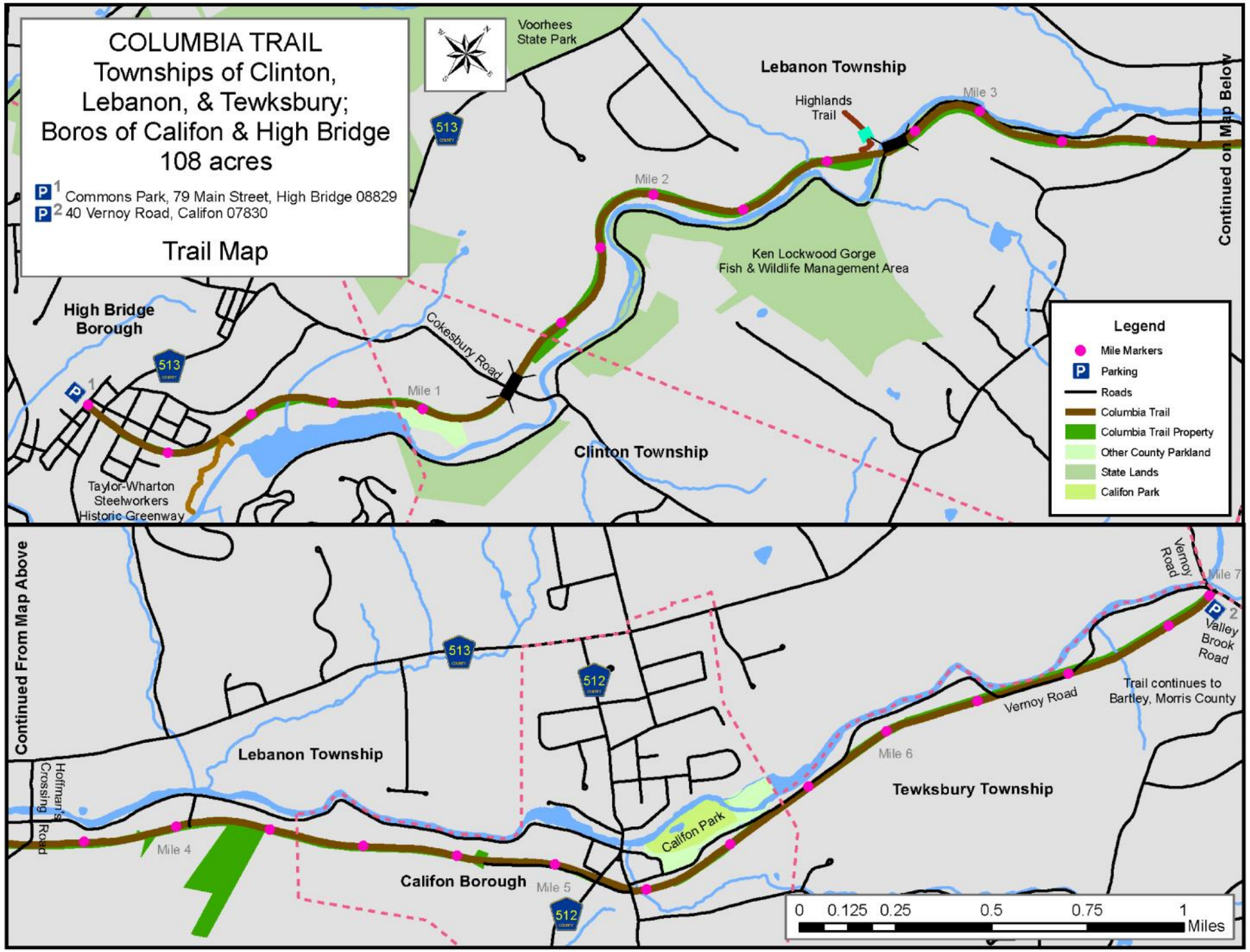
Website: www.co.hunterdon.nj.us

(click on "Parks & Recreation")

Office Hours:

Mon.-Wed, Fri. 8 AM to 4:30 PM

Thur. 8:00 AM to 6:30 PM



SUMMARY OF RULES AND REGULATIONS

The rules and regulations governing use of facilities or properties administered by the Hunterdon County Division of Parks and Recreation are promulgated in accordance with provisions of the N.J. Statutes Title 40:32-7.12, which reads as follows:

"The Board of Chosen Freeholders may by resolution make, alter, amend, and repeal rules and regulations for the supervision, regulation and control of all activities carried on, conducted, sponsored, arranged, or provided for in connection with a public golf course or other county recreational, playground or public entertainment facility, and for the protection of property, and may prescribe and enforce fines and penalties for the violation of any such rule or regulation."

These rules and regulations have been promulgated for the protection of our patrons and for the facilities and natural resources administered by the Hunterdon County Division of Parks and Recreation.

Permits: A fully executed Facility Use Permit, issued by the County of Hunterdon for any activity shall authorize the activity only insofar as it may be performed in strict accordance with the terms and conditions thereof. The State of NJ, County of Hunterdon, or the local municipality may require additional permits.

Prohibited Acts: The violation of any Municipal, State, or Federal law. Advertising, solicitation, ice skating, ice fishing, and any other on-ice activities, downhill skiing, bathing, fuel powered modeled aircraft, the release of any animal, explosives of any kind, poisons of any kind, after-hours use, alcohol without a permit in a non-designated area, controlled dangerous substances, weapons, posting of signage, inappropriate attire, and climbing on, or rappelling from any cliff, rock face, or boulder, with, or without the use of specialized equipment.

Regulated Activity: The sale of merchandise, aviation, boating, cross-country skiing, bicycling, and sledding. Battery powered modeled aircraft, and horses must be in designated areas, dogs must be restrained with a leash not exceeding six feet, pet waste must be removed, camping/fires are by permit only. All groups of 15 or more must obtain a permit for use of any Park area.

Prohibited Acts for the Protection of Property: No person shall make, excavate on, destroy, paint, fill in, cut, remove or tamper with any property, organic or inorganic.

Prohibited Acts for the Protection of Natural Resources: No person shall disturb wildlife or vegetation in any manner. No person shall pollute waters, litter, dump debris, or release helium balloons in any property. It is illegal to remove any natural resource from, or introduce any plant material, bulbs, or seeds to any property without a proper permit or license.

Prohibited Acts for the Protection of People: No person shall obstruct a county employee/official, interfere with a visitor, conduct any unsafe act, or cause a hazardous condition.

Vehicles: All the provisions of the N.J. State Motor Vehicle Act apply. Vehicles are not allowed in unauthorized areas. Parking is allowed in designated areas only. **ATV's, dirt bikes, and snowmobiles are prohibited on County Park lands.**

Enforcement: The rules and regulations of the County shall be enforced by duly authorized Rangers or representatives of the County under the provision of N.J.S.A. 40:32-2. thru 40:32-7.13. Any person who enters into a County Park for any purpose whatsoever has a duty and is presumed to be aware of the provisions of these rules and regulations governing the use of the facilities and properties administered by the Hunterdon County Division of Parks and Recreation.

Penalties: Any person violating any of the provisions of these regulations shall, upon conviction before a court or other adjudicative body of jurisdiction, be liable for the replacement, repair or restoration of damaged property, if any, and shall pay a penalty of not more than one thousand dollars ($1,000.00) or other amount in the discretion of the court or other adjudicative body or may be sentenced to imprisonment in the County jail for the term not exceeding ninety (90) days, or both, provided that this section shall not supersede any applicable penalty provision for specific offenses, which may be set forth in the New Jersey Code of Criminal Justice, N.J.S.A. 2C:1-1, et seq., or in any other applicable state or federal law.

NOTE: County Park Rangers of the Division of Parks and Recreation have the authority to issues summons, and make arrests for violations of rules and regulations governing the use of facilities and properties administered by the Division of Parks and Recreation. This is only a summary of the rules and regulations. Rules applying to special conditions, activities, or situations may be supplemental to these rules and regulations. When special rules apply, they will be posted at affected areas. The complete text of regulations is available for inspection at the Park administration office in Clinton Township during regular business hours.