



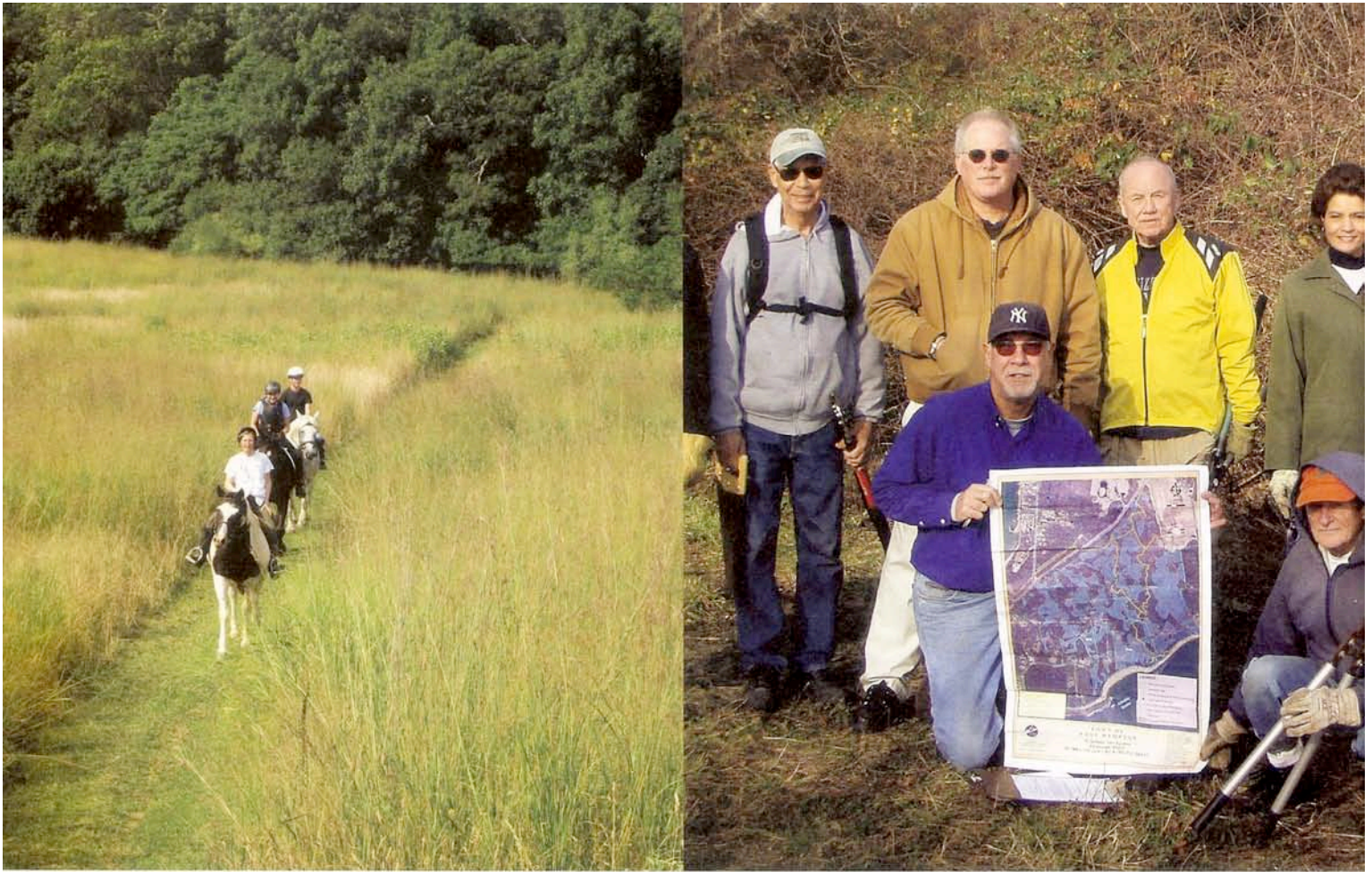
A path at Shadmoor State Park,
near Ditch Plains Beach in Montauk

The 'Road' Less Traveled Gets Longer

A SHORT HISTORY OF EAST END TRAILS

By Mike Bottini





From left: horseback riders use some of the East End trails; volunteers gather after a trail maintenance session; trails are marked with “blazes.”

The Hamptons, a region spanning the townships of East Hampton and Southampton, is widely known as a playground of the rich and famous, some, no doubt, attracted to the area for one of its best-known natural resources: the beautiful ocean beaches.

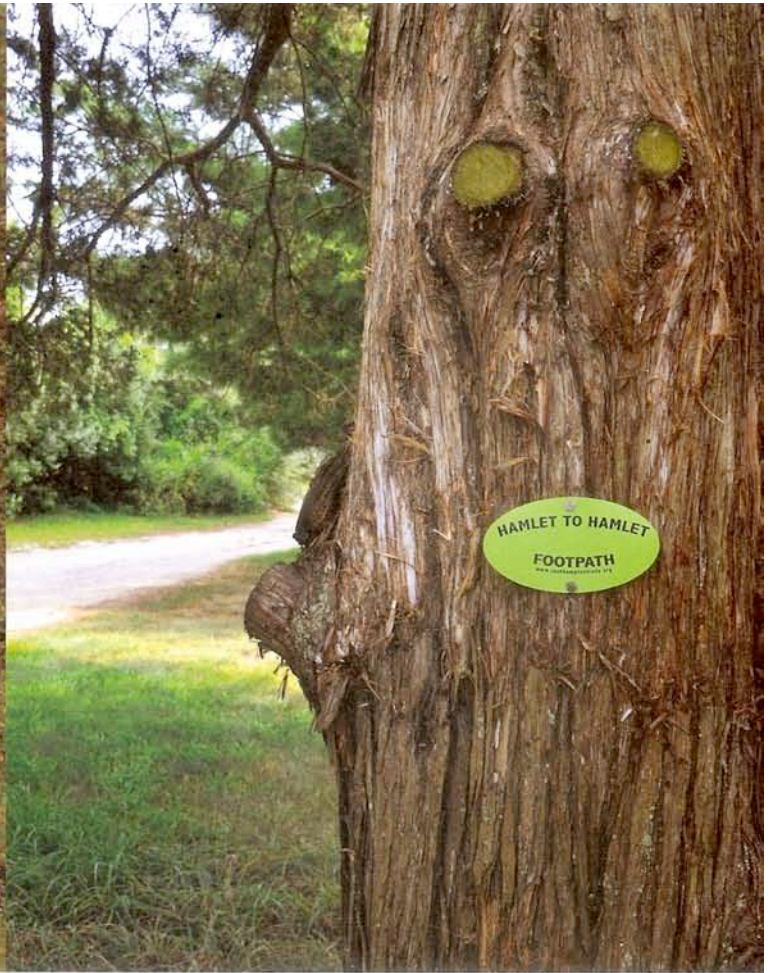
Less well known—to all on the East End—are its nature preserves and extensive greenbelt trail system.

The linear miles of trails here may surprise many who have witnessed firsthand the intense development pressure that the area has been subject to over the past half century. While development brought dramatic changes to our once-rural landscape, several key environmental

initiatives and dedicated organizations, individuals and public officials have enabled the acreage of preserved lands in the Hamptons, and its public trail system, to greatly expand during that time.

Into the late 1970s, most of the Hamptons consisted of privately owned, vacant land crisscrossed with footpaths and old woods roads. A few of these, especially in the Montauk area, probably date back to the Montauketts, one of our region’s Native American tribes. Others—for example, the Grace Estate and Barcelona Neck trails—were originally horse-drawn wagon roads dating back to the 1700s.

Many trails along our forested, morainal ridge-top preserves are abandoned



wood-cutting roads dating back to the era when the East End supplied New York City and Connecticut with firewood shipped out by schooner.

This web of largely privately owned trails was used by horseback riders, and it was this user group that first brought attention to the gradual loss of these trail linkages as the area became subdivided and developed.

One of those horseback enthusiasts was George Sid Miller Jr. of Springs—and he happened to have a position on the East Hampton Town Planning Board in the 1970s. He managed to diplomatically persuade developers to create easements between lots to protect trail corridors, and,

even after a newly elected Town Board abolished the East Hampton Planning Department in 1981, Mr. Miller managed to convince the board to re-hire one of the recently fired professional planners to prepare an East Hampton Town Trails Plan.

That planner was Lisa Liquori. She set about mapping more than 100 miles of existing trails and possible new trail linkages. The report provided guidance on trail standards, maintenance and responses to concerns raised by private property owners, such as liability.

The Town of East Hampton Trails Plan was completed in 1983 and adopted by the Planning Board as part of the town's

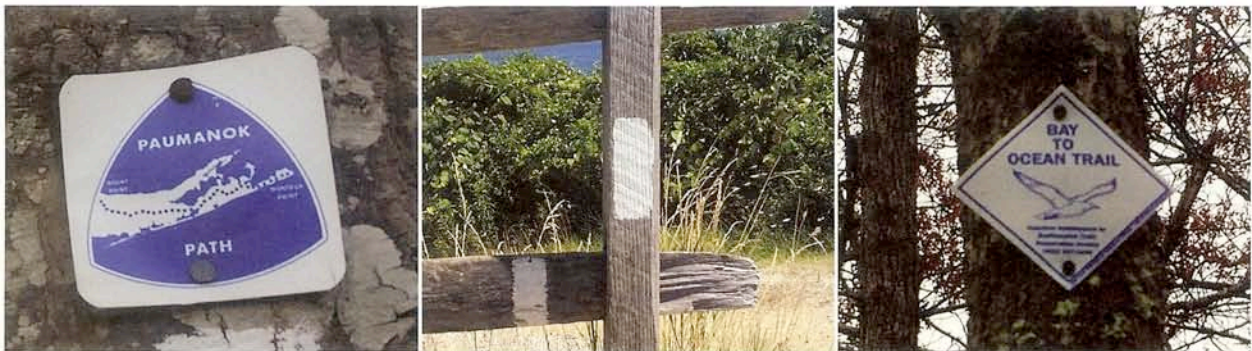
Comprehensive Plan. It provided the foundation for the legislation, subsequently adopted, requiring protection of trails as part of every new development. Not long after, Ms. Liquori became the director of East Hampton Town's Planning Department.

A decade later, a similar campaign to protect trail corridors and linkages from development was launched in Southampton. Again, it was the horseback riding community, led by Dai Dayton, who brought the issue to the forefront. Working with then-Suffolk County Legislator Fred Thiele and staff from the Group for the South Fork (now known as Group for the East End), an amendment to the Southampton Town code requiring the

to be named the Northwest Path.

But that was just the beginning of a much larger trail project that Mr. Whalen envisioned: a 50-mile-long trail spanning the entire town, from Town Line Road in Wainscott to the Montauk lighthouse. And if that was not ambitious enough, he wanted to have the trail in place for the town's 350th anniversary in 1998!

Before that project was even close to completion, we had joined forces with Ray Corwin of the Long Island Greenbelt Trails Conference, who had an even more ambitious proposal: a proposed 130-mile-long regional trail to be called the Paumanok Path, extending from Rocky Point in the Town of Brookhaven to Montauk Point.



Left to right: the Paumanok Path blaze; some portions of the Paumanok Path are still marked with a white stripe of paint; another blaze marking a local trail.

protection of trail linkages was passed.

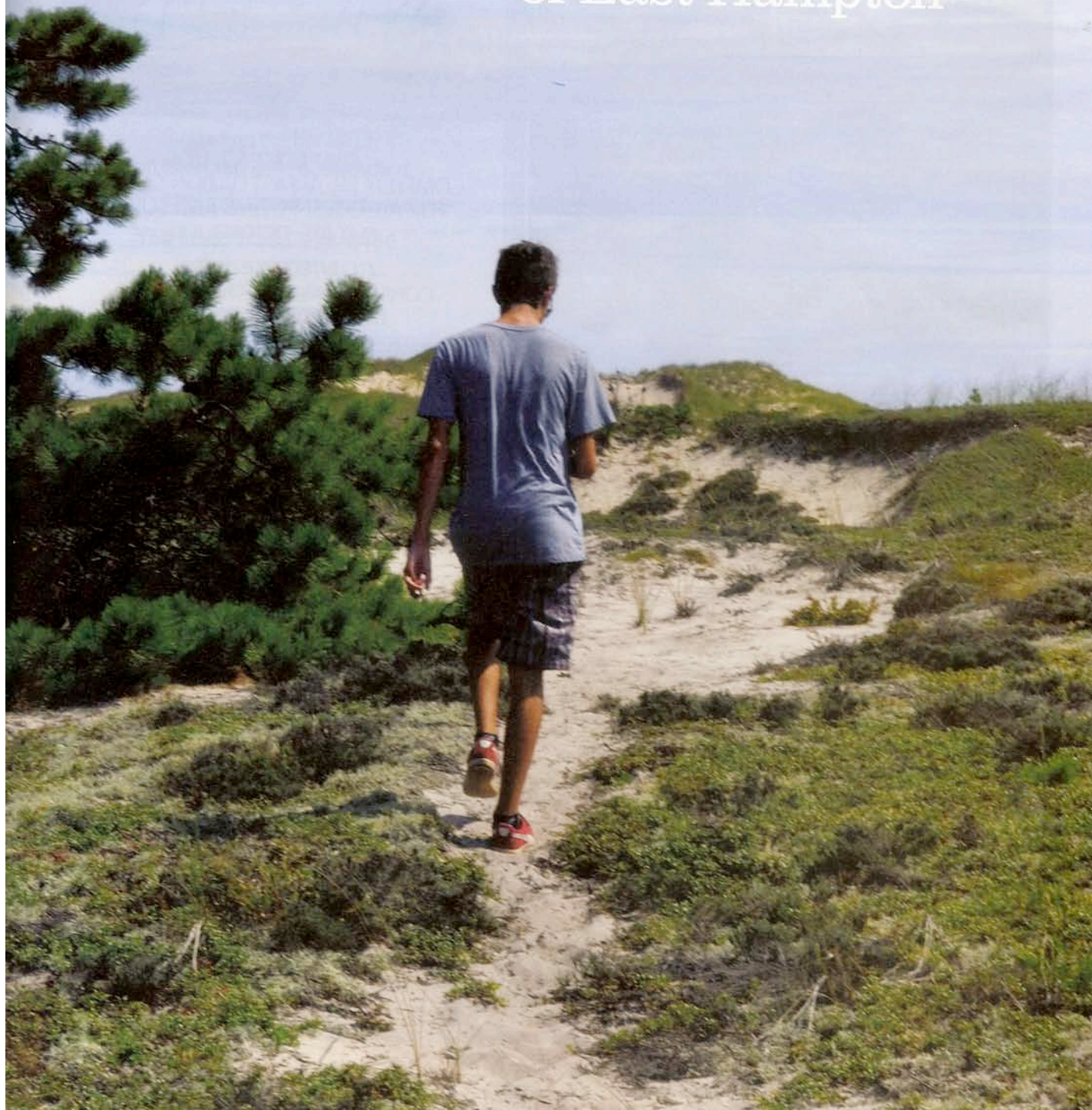
My introduction to the East End's trails protection advocates occurred in 1988, when I took a position with the Group for the South Fork. While sitting in East Hampton's Town Hall, waiting for a Town Board session to begin, I felt a tap on the back. The "tapper" inquired if I was Mike Bottini, and then motioned me to the hallway to talk.

His name was Rick Whalen, and he was recruiting volunteers to help cut and blaze the town's first greenbelt trail, later

Sometime in the early 1990s, I found myself giving a presentation on the potential for the 90-mile-long South Fork section of that regional trail.

In more recent years, the biggest boost our trails network received was the passage in 1998 of a real estate transfer tax, called the Community Preservation Fund, to provide money for open space purchases. Since its implementation, more than \$1 billion has been raised for open space acquisitions. The result was a twofold increase in the size of our marked and

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maintained public trail system.

Today, there are 200 miles of blazed (marked) trails in the Town of East Hampton. The Town of Southampton reports having 300 miles of publicly owned trails, but only about a third of those (93 miles) are blazed. West and north of Southampton, there are additional trails linked to the Pine Barrens trails network in Riverhead and Brookhaven townships.

The East End's landscape has been referred to as a horizontal affair. While we lack mountains, many of our trails offer breathtaking vistas over marshes and tidal creeks, and rolling dune lands. And the view from the ocean bluff trail in Montauk east toward Block Island is as spectacular as any mountaintop vista in the Catskills or Adirondacks.

Our trails wind through state, county and town parklands, as well as several preserves owned by The Nature Conservancy and the Peconic Land Trust. Today, I doubt that there are any homes in the Hamptons that are more than two miles from a public trail.

"The trails traverse some of the most beautiful and remote parts of East Hampton, providing a magical pathway for people to connect with nature," Ms. Liquori said in a recent interview. "The trails system has developed into one of East Hampton's major assets with ecological, social and economic values. But protecting and maintaining the trails requires constant vigilance, and new challenges will require innovative solutions."

Two of our hardest-working trail maintainers, Richard Poveromo and Ken Kindler, concur. Mr. Poveromo, who recently stepped down after a very long tenure as the head of trails maintenance for East Hampton Town, points out, "From my perspective, the greatest challenge to the trail system is the ability of our local land



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managers to actually keep the trails open and accessible. Few of the people who use the trail system realize that the trails are cut, mowed and kept clear of deadfall by a small group of state and local employees, along with a few dedicated volunteers.”

He added, “A few years, I scoffed at the idea of an organization like East Hampton Trails Preservation Society hiring workers to supplement its volunteer force—but I’m not so dismissive anymore. Given my experience, I now believe that two or three paid employees, dedicated to trail maintenance and working eight-hour days, would have no trouble keeping the entire trail system perfectly groomed. If a volunteer organization such as the East Hampton Trails Preservation Society were provided with a steady source of grant money, it could hire a two- or three-man crew and coordinate efforts with New York State, Suffolk County, the Town of East Hampton, and the Peconic Land Trust to keep the system open.”

This is exactly the direction that the Southampton trails organization is headed, having hired Ken Kindler to organize and coordinate trail building and maintenance

tasks. Mr. Kindler, who is active in all aspects of trail work in all three major trails organizations on Long Island, has worked tirelessly on trail issues for more than 25 years.

In addition to trail maintenance, Mr. Kindler points out that damage to the trails from illegal ATV use, and dumping, are big problems in several areas.

Over the years we’ve learned that trail design and building requires some expertise in order to minimize future maintenance issues. Mike Vitti of Concerned Long Island Mountain Bikers (CLIMB) first introduced us to the nuances of building low-maintenance trails, pointing out problems in our existing trail routes and helping us mitigate them or re-route the trail. Today, Mr. Kindler teaches those techniques to new volunteers.

I agree with Lisa Liquori’s point that our greenbelt trails have grown into one of our community’s greatest public assets. And there’s another plus to the trails preservation movement: Over the years of spending time in the field hiking and working on trails, many great lifelong friendships have developed. ■