

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

A Passport To The East End's Hidden Wonders

Forty miles of trails from Shinnecock to Montauk

BY CARISSA KATZ

In a place with so many natural gems, the South Fork's vast system of hiking and biking trails is a treat that even some locals are barely aware of. Winding through centuries-old forests and still-forming sand dunes, passing hidden ponds and curious boulder fields, the trails are the best way to appreciate what makes this part of the Island so special.

In the new book "Trail Guide to the South Fork," Mike Bottini offers readers a passport to those wonders. With detailed entries on more than 40 trails from Shinnecock Hills to Montauk, the book is an excellent resource for those who already know their way around the trails and those just beginning to explore them.

Mr. Bottini, a naturalist who worked for many years as an environmental planner with the Group for the South Fork, knows his subject well. He brings to the book his knowledge of the South Fork's history, geology, botany, ecology, and even politics, for often, as he explains, it takes both private and governmental will to complete new trails.

Working with the Group for the South Fork, Mr. Bottini helped to plan, blaze, and advocate for a number of the paths he writes about. The book was adapted from his weekly column in The Southampton Press, "South Fork Outdoors."

I tend to wax poetic when I think about the trails he describes. Their beauty is transformative and it's hard for me not to get carried away by a certain lovely tree, an enveloping arc of mountain laurel, or a heart-stopping view of the bay pecking through a break in the woods. Mr. Bottini is more literal. He sticks to the facts, describing the trails by their natural characteristics.

But he is so well-informed that you come

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away feeling you have read snippets of all the wonderful guides he must have in his personal library. His "Trail Guide to the South Fork" is a sort of trail lovers' equivalent of "The Way Things Work."

Curious about why the sand at the edge of Napeague Bay by the Walking Dunes is a deep rusty orange? Mr. Bottini tells us exactly why:

"This is the result of ferrous iron ox-

idizing and precipitating out as a solid, coating the sand and rocks. The large woodland east of here lies above a tremendous aquifer whose water is high in soluble ferrous iron. This freshwater, flowing underground toward the coastline in all directions, eventually seeps out of the sand and is exposed to oxygen, changing the water-soluble ferrous iron to ferric hydroxide, a solid which precipitates out and gives the shoreline its rusty tinge."

"Trail Guide to the South Fork"

Mike Bottini

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The book includes basic maps of each trail and directions to their starting points. And lest you think that the hiking season is over, think again. As Mr. Bottini writes, "These hikes can be done at any time of year. Different seasons, and even different times of the day, offer a uniqueness that makes a hike worthwhile."