

REGARDING ITHAN VALLEY PARK

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**By
The Friends Of Ithan Valley Park**

Introduction

The Friends Of Ithan Valley Park is dedicated to a great future for our Park, a future of expanded awareness, utilization, education, recreation and possibilities yet to be imagined. The Park is deeply rooted in the life of Radnor Township. We are equally devoted to its reinvention and its conservation, convinced it can become a better and different place with its essence uncompromised.

That essence is multi-faceted. The Park's value as a recreational, environmental and historical resource is high, not to mention its value as a storm-water-control and open-space asset.

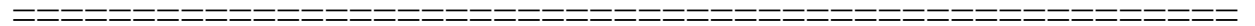
From the Park's late-19th century stone entryway built by the Olmstead Brothers to serve the estate of copper magnate W. Hinckle Smith...to extant living specimens and other artifacts from John Evans' world-famous arboretum of rare species established in 1828 on his own land, now located inside the Park boundary...to even older remnants of its days as the site of a hydro-powered grist mill serving the Welsh farmers who founded Radnor...Ithan Valley Park's 19 acres have unique historic merit that must be protected.

The Park is also an environmental treasure in an increasingly built-out Township. Most of it has been undisturbed for decades and the land boasts an extraordinary variety of native and naturalized plant species. Forested areas contain native hardwoods like red oak, tulip poplar and American beech. The hillsides and flats display a stunning variety of spring-blooming wildflowers. The Park also includes a thriving wetlands ecological zone. Native deer, fox, raccoons, and squirrels among other animals are drawn to Ithan Valley Park's undeveloped space and this thriving, balanced system deserves vigilant conservation.

Recreational use is frequent and varied. Residents enjoy peaceful walks along the creek and more adventurous end-to-end trail hikes, with or without the family dog. Picnicking, running, mountain-biking, birding, fishing in the creek and swimming by the waterfall are also popular.

Ithan Valley Park is a rare slice of unpolished, ungroomed public open space. It is a reminder to all, especially to children, that while it may seem the purpose of land is to serve the needs of people, the opposite is equally true and equally important in the long run.

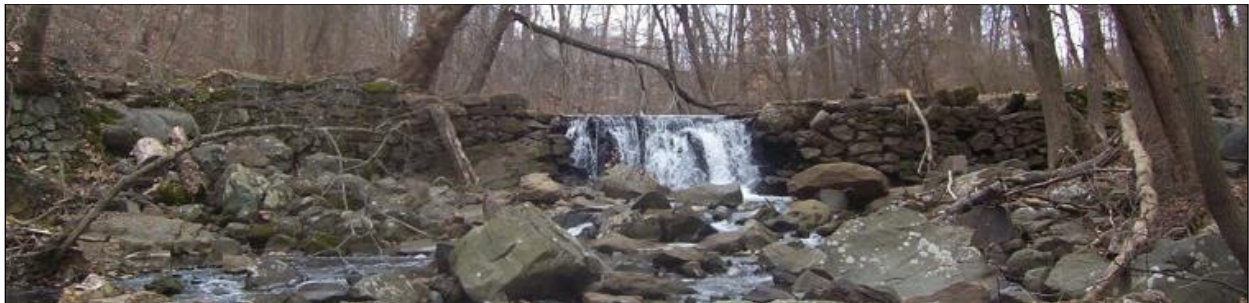
About The Park



The Friends Of Ithan Valley Park are united in support of the Park by our shared interests and passions: historical, ecological, recreational, and developmental.

We are motivated to explore any means to advance these interests including responsible commercial development inside the Park, and ask to be included in all relevant discussions.

The attached pages provide information to support our belief in the importance of preserving and improving the Park to better serve the people of Radnor Township.





HISTORICAL

Radnor Township was founded in 1682. Sixteen years later a land transfer along Ithan Creek was recorded including a grist mill and saw mill. The property is now called Ithan Valley Park.

Historic Evans Arboretum, located within the Park, was begun in 1828 by world-famous botanist John Evans (**left above**). It was one of the earliest gardens of its type in the United States, placing rare and significant species imported from around the world side-by-side with native plants and trees. In its day Evans Arboretum was of comparable renown to Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia. "In the number of distinct species of trees and shrubs it was doubtless unrivaled in his [Evans'] day, while in herbaceous plants it had few equals." (J.W. Harshberger, Garden and Forest Magazine, May 12, 1897).

W. Hinckle Smith purchased the land in the early 1900s and built the mansion 'Timberline' (**right above**) along with vast formal gardens in the European style, encompassing, preserving and enhancing the original Arboretum. With his passing in 1943, however, both the mansion and the grounds began an era of neglect. Smith's estate is now the site of Ithan Elementary School, the Ithan Mills development, Interstate 476 (the Blue Route), and Ithan Valley Park.

Remains of numerous buildings and structures can be seen in the Park: John Evans' house (**center above**); saw mill, grist mill and hydro-power structures including 15-foot stone dam, mill race and sluice gates; two stone bridges; and a macadam road that served as Timberline Estate's driveway.

(below: The Gardens of Timberline)





ECOLOGICAL || BOTANICAL / ZOOLOGICAL

Ithan Valley Park, situated between South Ithan Avenue and the Blue Route, parallels Ithan Creek, a tributary of Darby Creek and part of the Delaware River Watershed. The park contains highland and lowland temperate deciduous forest, and significant acreage of natural wetlands.

The park features an array of spring-blooming wildflowers, both native and naturalized non-native species. Naturalized species include Winter Aconite (a phenomenal early spring display), snowdrops, snowflake, Siberian squill and buttercup. Native species include Spring Beauty, Dutchman's Breeches, trout lily, Virginia bluebell, jack-in-the-pulpit, mayapple, and you might even catch a glance of rare native Trilliums.

For the woody plant enthusiast, the park offers the region's native hardwood assortment of Red Oaks, Tulip Poplars, and American Beeches. There are also fully mature specimens of rarer cultivated trees from John Evans' Arboretum. Numerous species of native and naturalized shrubs abound.

The fauna of the area are well represented. Visitors may see white-tailed deer, red fox, gray squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons and others. The park also attracts bird species including mallards, wood ducks, kingfishers, and Great Blue Herons plus native and migratory songbirds. Sightings of Red-tailed Hawks and Cooper's Hawks are not uncommon.

Reptiles like snapping turtles, ring-necked snakes, garter snakes and Northern water snakes are seen, as are amphibians including Eastern leadbacked salamanders, other salamander species, American toads, and myriad species of frogs.

Ithan Creek is stocked with brown and rainbow trout in the spring, and many native and naturalized species of fish like sunfish, largemouth bass, fallfish, creek and hornyhead chubs, shiners, carp, and catfish are year round residents.

The list could expand almost indefinitely to include fungi and insect species, but there is no substitute for exploring the park on foot and experiencing its amazing natural profile and history in person.



The Big Trees

As noted, Evans and Smith were dedicated to collecting and preserving tree and plant species from North America and the Old World. A group of knowledgeable volunteers recently identified trees old enough to have been part of the original Evans collection, or seedlings of them. Yellow tape and numbers were placed on 22 specimens (listed below).

1. White Oak *Quercus alba* (possibly a Burr Oak, *Q. macrocarpa*), 52".
2. Fir *Abies Sp.* several trees near the above oak.
3. Fir *Abies sp.* on the right side of the drive.
4. Black Walnut *Juglans nigra*
5. Tulip Tree *Liriodendron tulipifera*, 40".
6. Sugar Maple *Acer saccharum*, 12' to left.
7. Magnolia acuminate - Likely the largest *M. acuminata* in the area, probably part of the original estate plantings. Though native to North America, it is not native to this area.
8. Yellowwood *Cladrastis Kentukea*, lean out over drive; The original Yellowwood would have been part of the estate plantings. It is native to North America, but not this area. There are several smaller Yellowwood on the property.
9. Oak, (Red?) *Quercus Sp.* 40+". Large "widowmaker" hanging on it.
10. Scarlet Oak *Quercus coccinea*, 48+". Tall straight tree, 80' to the first crotch.
11. White Oak *Quercus alba*, 20".
12. Buckeye *Aesculus glabra*, Native to North America, but not this area.
13. California Incense Cedar *Calocedrus decurrens*, 60". Left side of drive towards the Blue Route. Incense Cedars are native to the west coast and are rarely planted here.
14. False Cypress *Chamaecyparis pisifera 'squarrosa.'* In the same group as evergreens. Native to Japan.
15. Elm *Ulmus sp.* Not Asian, poss. American?
16. Rhododendron *Rhododendron sp.* Possibly Asian species or hybrid. Top right side of drive.
17. Tulip Tree *L. tulipifera*, 45+". Over top of drive and 20' downhill of chain link fence.
18. European Linden *Tilla cordata*. Native to Europe and western Asia. Right side of millrace.
19. Sycamore leaf Maple *Acer pseudoplatanus*. European species, right side of millrace path.
20. Tulip Tree *L. Tulipifera*, 72+".
21. Cork Tree *Phellodendron amurense*, Asian.
22. Zelkova *Zelkova serrata*. Next to gravel parking area, eastern Asia.

There were many other interesting woody and herbaceous plants in the park. To list a few: Smaller Buckeyes, American Beech, ferns, native ginger, Snow Drops and Winter Aconite.

Wildflower Census – Spring 2011

- Trillium grandiflorum in bloom and in bud - patch on "street-side" of creek.
- Cream colored violet - *Viola striata*.
- Yellow violet - *Viola pensylvanica*.
- Winter aconite, blooms in February (extremely rare)
- Dutchmen's Britches (rare to see)
- Wood Anemone
- Phlox
- Sanguinaria
- Trout Lilies

RECREATIONAL

Ithan Valley Park is a prime spot for leisurely walking, hiking, even mountain biking and swimming when conditions permit. Year-round, it attracts residents of all ages looking for a pure, unpackaged nature experience.

In addition, the banks of Ithan Creek inside the park are a popular fishing location, prized by fishermen because it is public property open to all.

The Park is extremely valuable as open space in an increasingly developed Township, a place where kids and adults can “get away” close to home.



Villanova University Day Of Service volunteers 9/28/13



EXPANDED ACCESS & ENJOYMENT || THE FUTURE

Enjoyment of Ithan Valley Park will be maximized by trails thru five zones:

- Macadam Path (**green**) – unique trees, beautiful vista of the park and stream
- Northern Slope (**red**) – winding down through beautiful spring flowers
- Stream Path (**yellow**) – along Ithan Creek and waterfall
- Mill Race Path (**orange**) – following the original mill race
- Southern Path (**blue**) – winding path along lower portion of park and Ithan Creek

A communication kiosk at the entrance displays illustrated descriptions of park features:

- the unique collection of trees and flowers and their placement throughout the park to take advantage of available sun, shade and water
- the story of John Evans, miller, who collected the seeds from around the world
- Evans' use of water power from Ithan Creek to run his saw and grist mills

Signage throughout will inform visitors on Park history, ecology, and species diversity.

The Friends are currently engaged in the following projects:

- Clearing the Macadam Road path
- Clearing the Mill Race Path
- Clearing the Stream Path
- Clearing between the two bridges

Future projects include:

- Clear path and vines in the southern portion of the park
 - Clear path going north toward Clyde Road
 - Build North Slope Path to link the Macadam Road and Stream Paths
 - Establish park stewardship according to principles of professional forestry
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Development Recommendations

In regard to current discussions with cellular communication tower companies, we are concerned with the following six development issues.

1. LOCATION. We ask that any tower be built in the rear of the parking lot. The area is instantly accessible, eliminating the need to remove trees to build impervious roadways for equipment and personnel, as other sites within the Park would require. Placing the tower on the only existing accessible, flat, cleared area of the Park shortens the construction cycle and drastically reduces the destructive impact on irreplaceable environmental and historic resources. There is no higher priority.

2. APPEARANCE. While it is impossible to fully conceal such a major installation, we request dense plantings of appropriate native species on all four sides to minimize the visual impact. Industrial-looking construction and fencing materials are to be avoided in deference to the forested location. Friends Of Ithan Valley Park looks forward to consulting on these esthetic issues.

3. MAINTENANCE. Technical maintenance of the equipment is assumed, and should be accompanied by formally established site maintenance tasks and schedules. We strongly encourage retaining a local landscape firm to tend the installation site and its plantings.

4. ENGAGEMENT. Friends Of Ithan Valley Park expects ongoing engagement in the life of the Park and the surrounding community by corporations privileged to build inside its boundaries. In this regard, corporate level Community Relations representatives empowered to support future initiatives should join our Board and attend regular meetings in an advisory capacity.

5. ENHANCEMENTS. We are interested in exploring adjunct provisions for repairs and improvements to Park structures including but not limited to the bridges, stone walls in various locations, the dam and waterfall area, the wrought iron fencing along Ithan Avenue, signage, and historic and trail markers.

6. ADMINISTRATION. Friends Of Ithan Valley Park looks forward to cooperating in the creation of permanent administration and control policies. We anticipate a bright future for the Park, in partnership with Radnor Township and prospective leaseholders.

*(Roy Perry for)
F. O. I. V. P.*