

New Jersey's Rancocas Creek Watershed Mount Holly and Arney's Mount Cuestas



High Tide
New Jersey's North Branch Rancocas Creek
Rancocas Natural Area/Long Bridge Burl Co Park
Photograph Joe Pluck's Hot Air Ballon, July, 2024



Hainesport

Tug *Minevra* tethered sand barge

Background (sand) train

Tied off Haines Landing

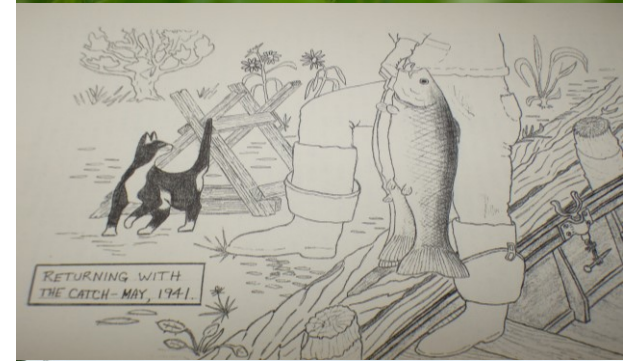
Rancocas Creek South Branch

Early 1900's

Ethos of Cast Away Island Tidewaters

Cast Away Island Environmental Resource Inventory (E.R.I.) is dedicated to preserving, celebrating, and sharing the rich history of New Jersey's Rancocas Creek and the surrounding area. Through slides, archival collections, research, field trips and community this E.R.I. connects residents and visitors with people, places, stories, and traditions that have shaped the Rancocas Creek over generations.

Explore wonderful, enchanting, expansive parks and preserved open spaces. Boat on tidewaters, float on Pine barrens waters. Visit natural way-points, trace your family roots here in the Rancocas Creek's 360 square mile watershed. Examine historic and heritage landmarks, learn about local industry and culture, we welcome you to take part in keeping our shared history, heritage and communities alive.



Who's that knocking ?

Rancocas Creek Water Trail

**Naturally, here we find a peaceful,
tranquil symmetry of nature, tides,
history, heritage, people, and
community that
strengthens public stewardship.**



Cast Away Island Ethos



Photo by
ks337



Art by Luke



Gateway Natural Resource - Fidelity - Environmental Resource Inventory

North Branch Rancocas Creek - Stewardship - Rancocas Creek Water Trail



Unless noted:

All Photos from Cast Away Island Way Point



Conservation's Fidelity - Habitat Description Cast Away Island Way-Point

Cast Away Island is a 15-acre, nonprofit-owned freshwater tidal island located on the North Branch of New Jersey's Rancocas Creek. Surrounded by Rancocas State Park, the Rancocas State Natural Area, and Burlington County's Long Bridge Park, the island sits within a largely protected ecological corridor at the center of the 360-square-mile Rancocas Creek Watershed. Accessible only by watercraft, the island remains uninhabited and ecologically intact.

Cast Away Island is embedded in a landscape shaped by historic sand, marl, and clay mining, early American tide meadow farming, and 19th-century wharf activity.

Cast Away Island supports one of New Jersey's largest remaining freshwater tidal marsh systems, experiencing 4–6 feet of daily tidal fluctuation. Tides fusion with the western outflow of the Pine Barrens sustains a high-quality mosaic of marsh, mudflat, and tidepool habitats. The island forms the apex of the state's most extensive wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*) marsh, a keystone food source for migratory waterfowl and marsh-dependent species.

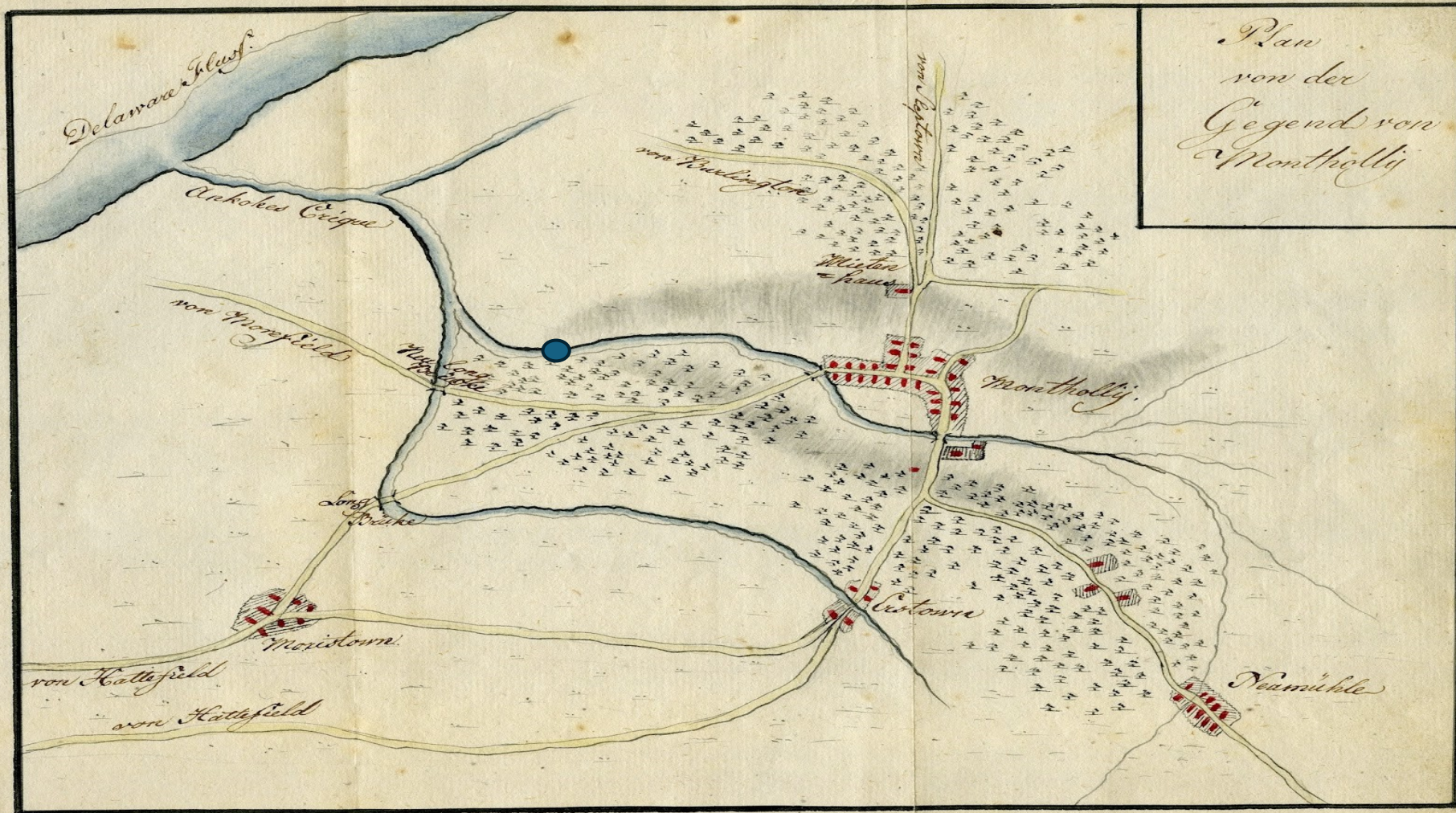
Surrounding tidewater channels function as nursery habitat for freshwater and estuarine fish. Native vegetation includes arrow arum, tickseed sunflower, water hemp, sweet flag, and other freshwater tidal specialists. Tidepools formed by natural drift and detritus provide year-round feeding habitat for fish-eating birds and mammals.



Bittersweet Nightshade*
Cast Away Island, Rancocas Creek

* Symbol of Nature's Fidelity

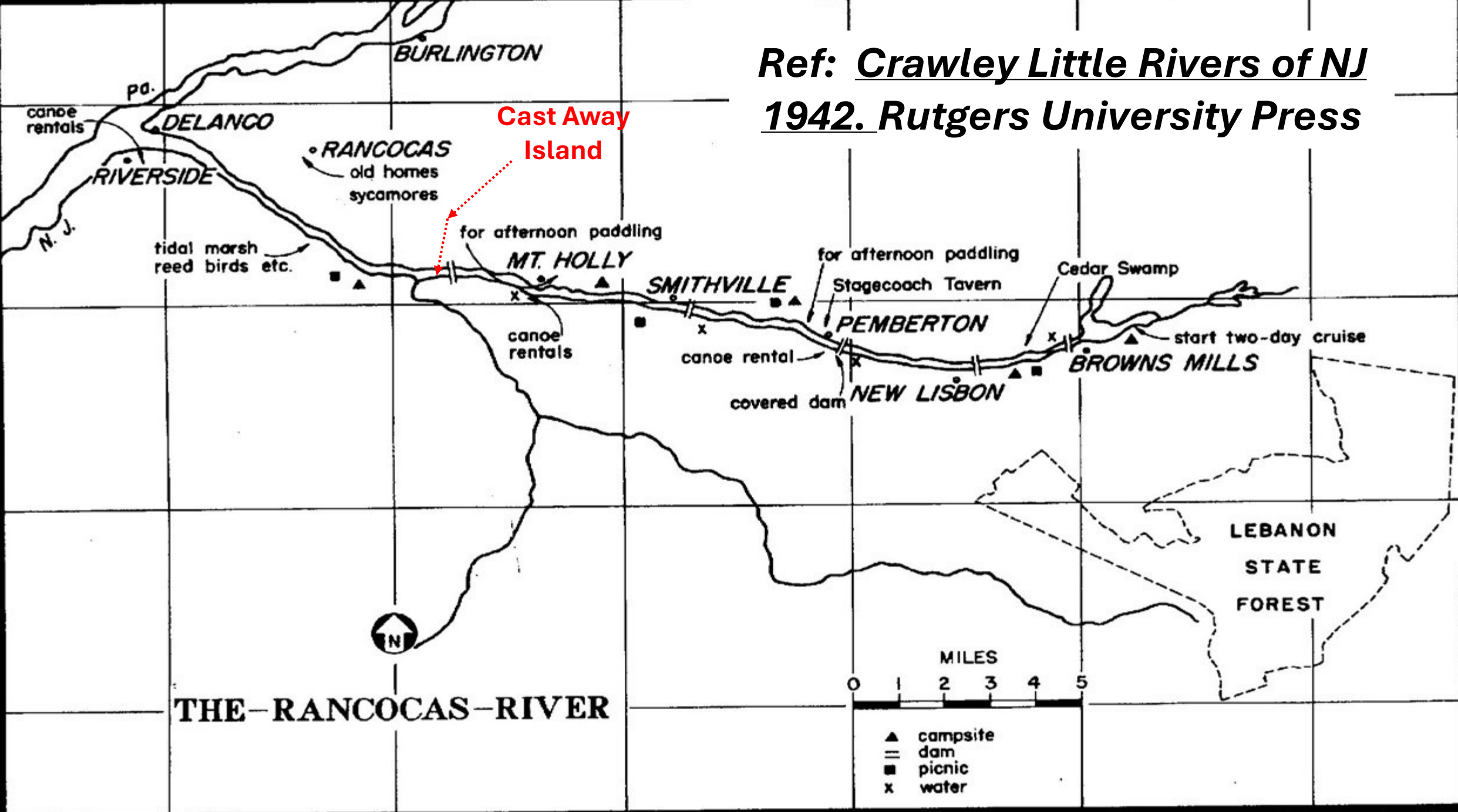
1776 Ewald's Hessian Map of Rancocas Creek, Mount Holly and surrounding Area

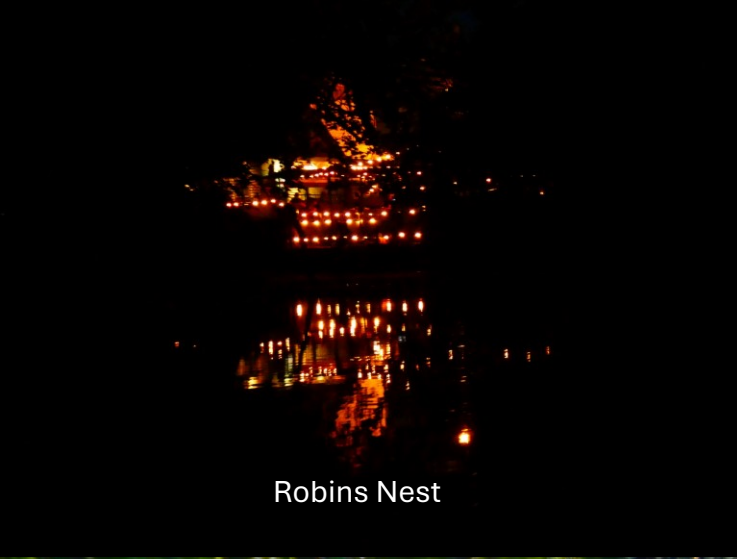


Present Day
● Location
Cast Away
Island

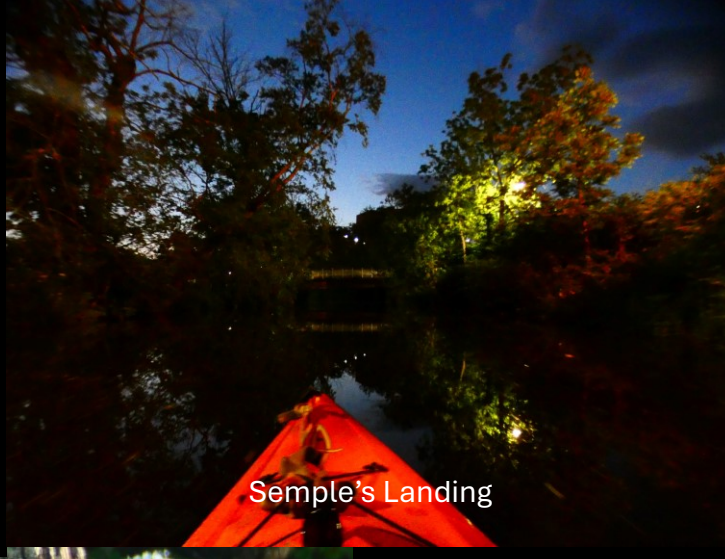
22 December 1776. "On the morning of the 23rd at five o'clock Colonel Donop set out toward Mount Holly with the 42nd Regiment of Scots, the two grenadier battalions, Linsing and Block, the twelve mounted jagers under Captain Lorey, and my jager company. I formed the advanced guard, supported by Captain Lorey and a company of Scots."

*Ref: Crawley Little Rivers of NJ
1942. Rutgers University Press*





Robins Nest



Simple's Landing



Canoeing 1912



Pileated Woodpecker Mill Dam Park



Mt. Holly founded 1677

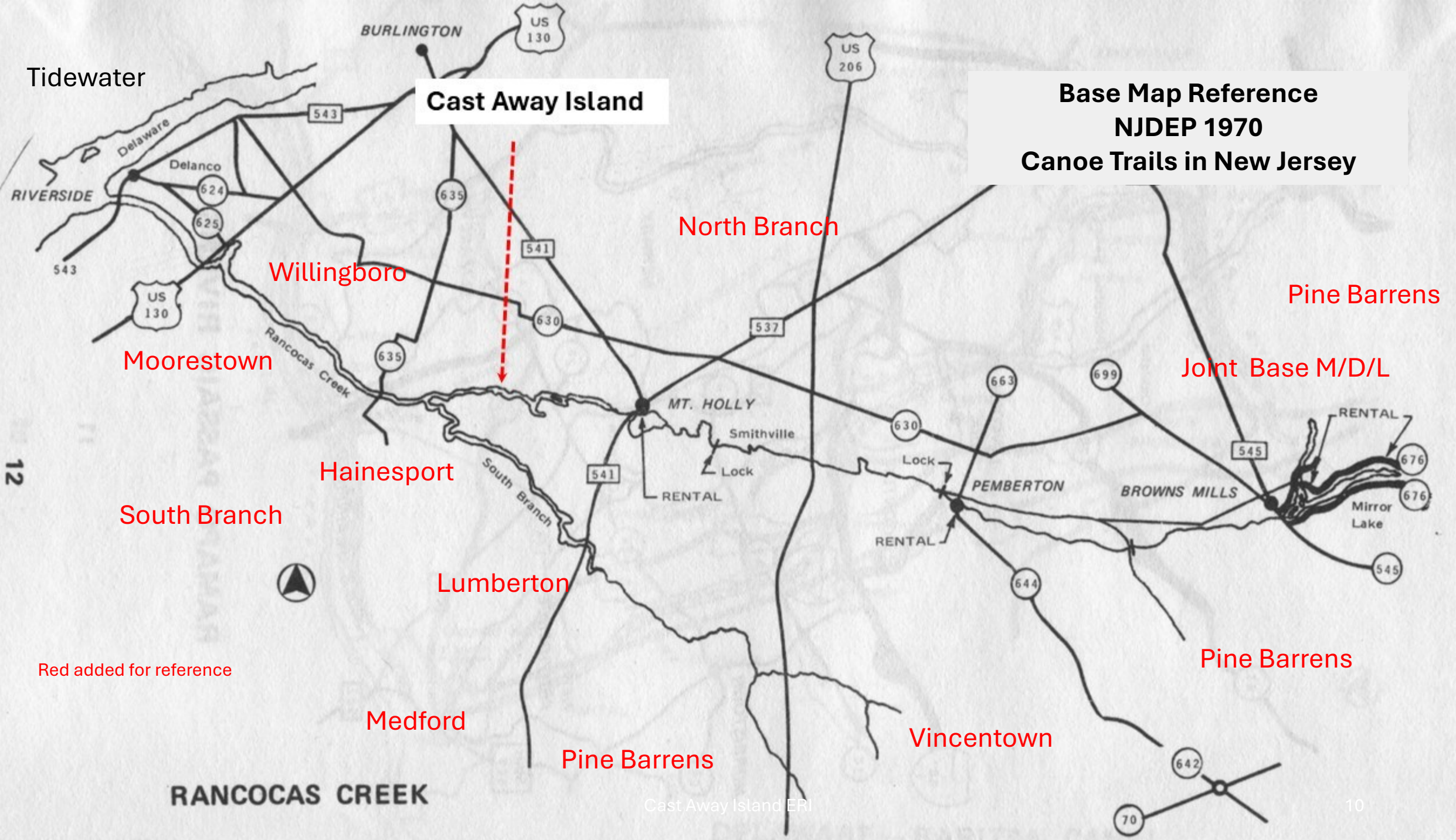


N Branch Oxbow Channel



Old Train Station

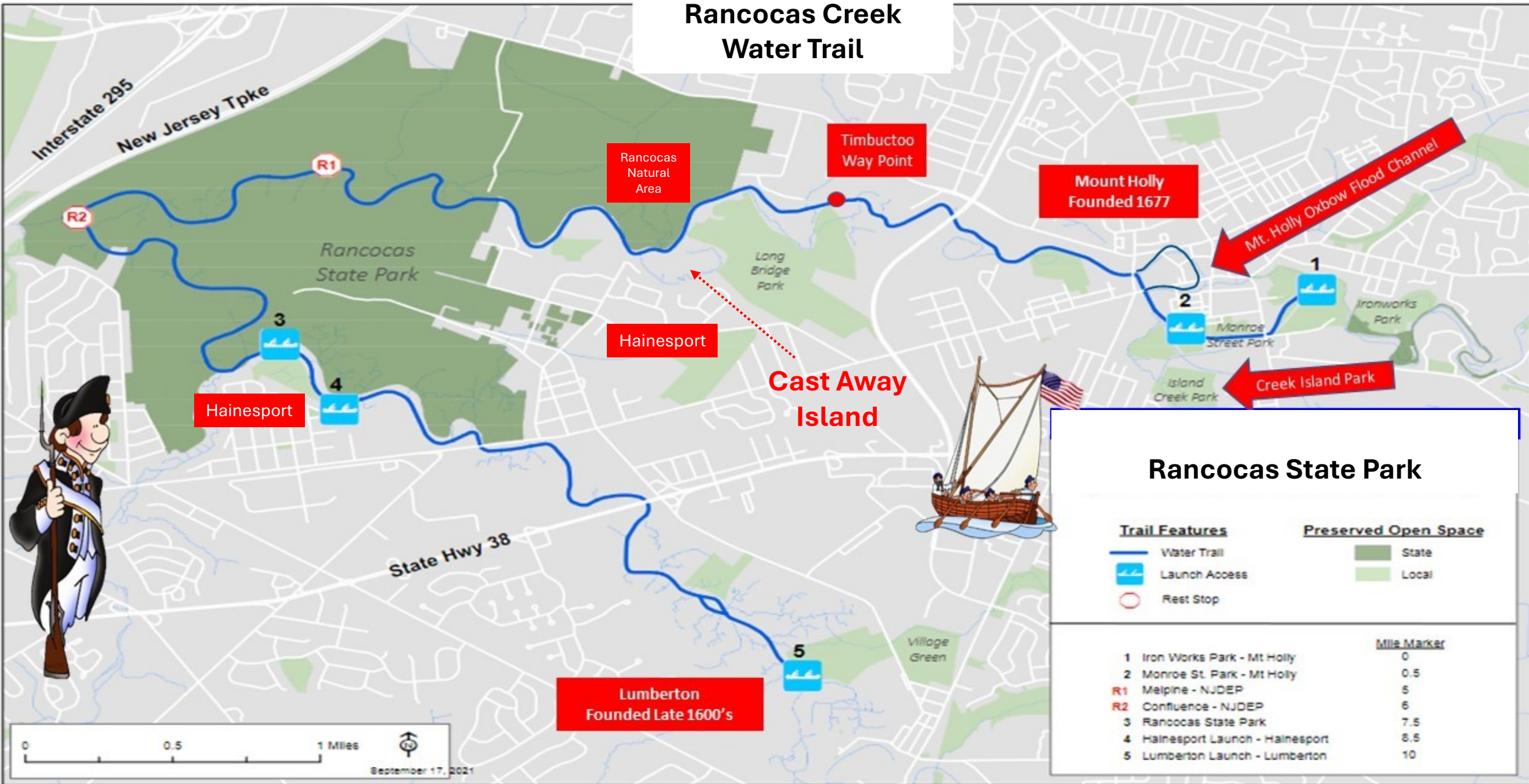
**Base Map Reference
NJDEP 1970
Canoe Trails in New Jersey**



RANCOCAS CREEK

Cast Away Island ERI

Rancocas Creek Water Trail



Rancocas State Park

Trail Features		Preserved Open Space	
	Water Trail		State
	Launch Access		Local
	Rest Stop		

	Mile Marker
1 Iron Works Park - Mt Holly	0
2 Monroe St. Park - Mt Holly	0.5
R1 Melpine - NJDEP	5
R2 Confluence - NJDEP	6
3 Rancocas State Park	7.5
4 Hainesport Launch - Hainesport	8.5
5 Lumberton Launch - Lumberton	10



Rancocas Creek
North Branch

Rancocas State Park State of NJ Natural Area

Rancocas Creek
North Branch

Rancocas Creek
Timbuctoo



Burlington County
Long Bridge Park

Burlington County
Long Bridge Park

Portal



Cast Away
Island

Cast Away Island

Way Point, Rancocas Creek Water Trail

Block 12 - Lot 1

Hainesport Township



Conservation

Cast Away Island Bald Eagle

Stewardship-Fidelity-Ethos



Naturally, Rancocas Creek freshwater tidal wetlands are important habitats of New Jersey’s 360 Square Mile Rancocas Creek Watershed.

These fresh-water tidal marshes are highly valued for their biodiversity, natural flood control, food web support, and nutrient cycling.

Cast Away Island Kayak Path

Yellow Paths: Scientific Access.

Blue Paths: Tidewater Access.

Leave No Trace

Ranococas Creek Water Trail

Ranococas Creek Water Trail

Portal

1

12

11

10

9

2

8

3

7

4

6

5

Tidewater Lagoon

Leave No Trace

Inside the Cast Away Island “Bowl”



1. Cast Away Island



2. Expansive Interior



3. East border Long Bridge Burlington County Park



4. Open Channel



5. Base of South Buffer - Sand Bluffs

Cast Away Island Ethos – “Think Small”



6. Tidewater Pool

Rancocas Creek Cast Away Island “Duck Potato”
Sagittaria



“ Think Small ”

High Tide - Inside the Cast Away Island "Bowl"



7. Terraced Sand Barge Tie-Off



8. North viewshed - Rancocas Natural Area



9. Beaver Lodge



10. Sand Bluffs elevation 40 feet



11. Cast Away Island (South)



12. "Portal"

Summary: Suspended in Time

Historic maps and navigation charts reveal how deeply the Rancocas creek influenced the development of New Jersey's interior, connecting diverse landscapes and communities through a shared tidal waterway. Cast Away Island, though small, sits at the heart of this story. Its isolation has preserved its ecological richness; its location has preserved its cultural resonance.

Native American's traversed these waters. As colonial settlement expanded, the creek became a corridor of trade, transport, and at times, intrigue. During the era of the Underground Railroad, the Rancocas served as a discreet passageway for those seeking freedom. By the 19th century, industrialization left its mark on the region, with navigation routes, wharves, and extraction sites shaping the surrounding landscape - traces of which remain visible today

Today, the island stands as a rare convergence of natural and historical heritage: a place where wild rice marshes flourish beside the echoes of centuries-old human movement. Fidelity and stewardship offers not only ecological value but also an opportunity to visit the layered histories of the Rancocas Creek watershed. With its tides, wildlife, and stories intertwined, Cast Away Island remains a living testament to the enduring relationship between people, water, and the land.

Enroute Timbuctoo

North Branch - Rancocas Creek Water Trail

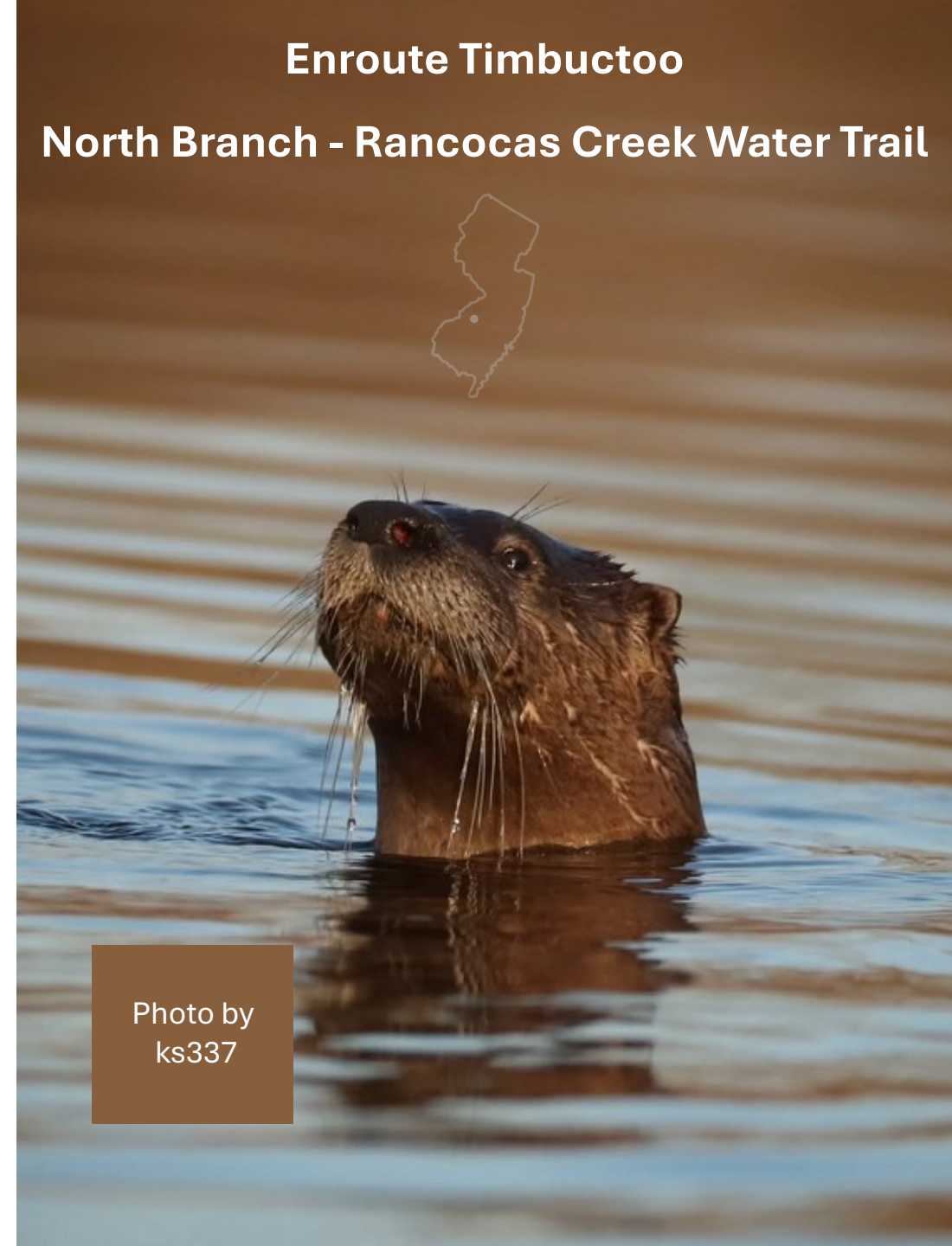


Photo by
ks337

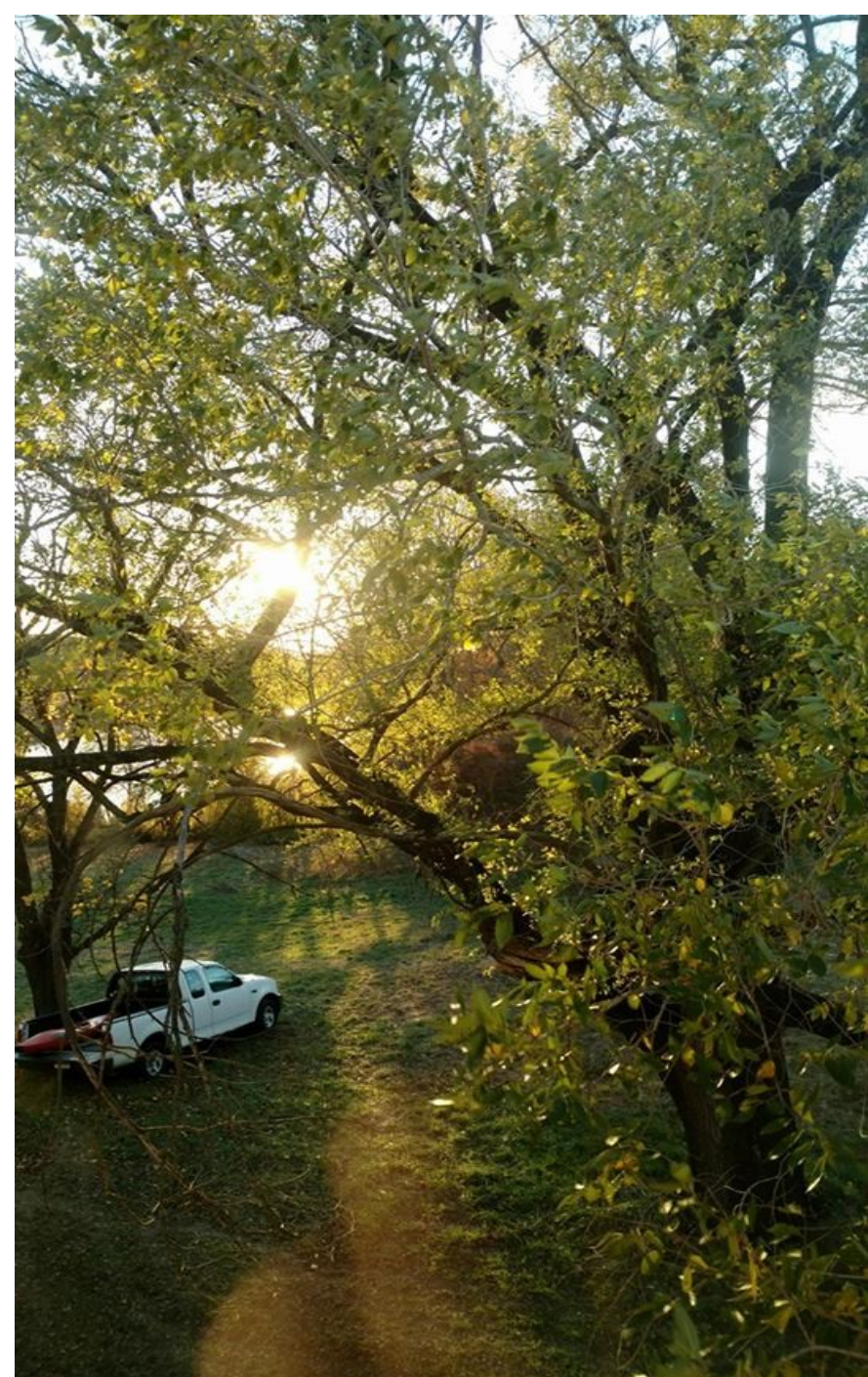


Cast Away Island Ethos

Acknowledgement to Local Knowledge.

Cast Island ERI was curated through a multi-year grass-root very informal community collaborative infusion of people with diverse and at time opposing interests enjoying a common ground: stewardship, conservation and public access to NJ's gateway, the quintessential natural-resource, NJ's Rancocas Creek. Respect multi-use access regulations and the privacy of land-owners.

Thank-you and Much Obliged



Cast Away Island Buckle of Rancocas Creek's



“Green Belt”

Stewardship
Heritage

Conservation
Public Access

Cast Away Island ERI - Introduction



Burlington County



Cast Away Island ERI



Enhanced Awareness

Welcome to Cast Away Island on a Rancocas Creek Tidewater Wild Rice Marsh. Cast Away Island is privately owned by a legally registered 501c3 organization.

Cast Away Island is located 10 miles East of the Delaware River Federal tidal navigation channel. It is 2 miles west of Burlington County's County Seat, historic Mount Holly. Guarded against urban development to the North and West by Rancocas State Park and the State of NJ Rancocas Natural Area. Cast Away Island is flanked on the East and South by Burlington County's Long Bridge Park. Cast Away Island, sentinel of isolation preserves, protects and restores a natural ecosystem, naturally.

Here among "green-sand" Cast Away Island is sculpted by expansive seasonal quilts of yellow flowering Begger-ticks, bounding to life after the natural life cycles of a 1,700-acre wild rice tidewater marsh. NJ's largest remaining colony of wild rice.

Here as bald eagle snap up ducks a plenty, where eels and fishes spawn and migrate to the sea, here where hummingbirds call, here is where we find a peaceful, tranquil symmetry of nature, history, heritage, people and community.



Cast Away Island's ERI is an interdisciplinary integrated fusion of natural and social sciences, conservation and public access.

This ERI emphasis is the importance of getting incentives right in both the public and political sectors.



**Rancocas Creek Watershed Inner Coastal Plain
Fresh Water Spring**

Rancocas Creek watershed fresh-water source springs correspond into NJ's unique inner-coastal plain complex capillary hydrogeologic matrix . This vibrant natural history is associated with Cast Away Island tidal resources

**Delaware River
tidewater
In-flow**

**Burlington County's
Rancocas Creek Greenway**

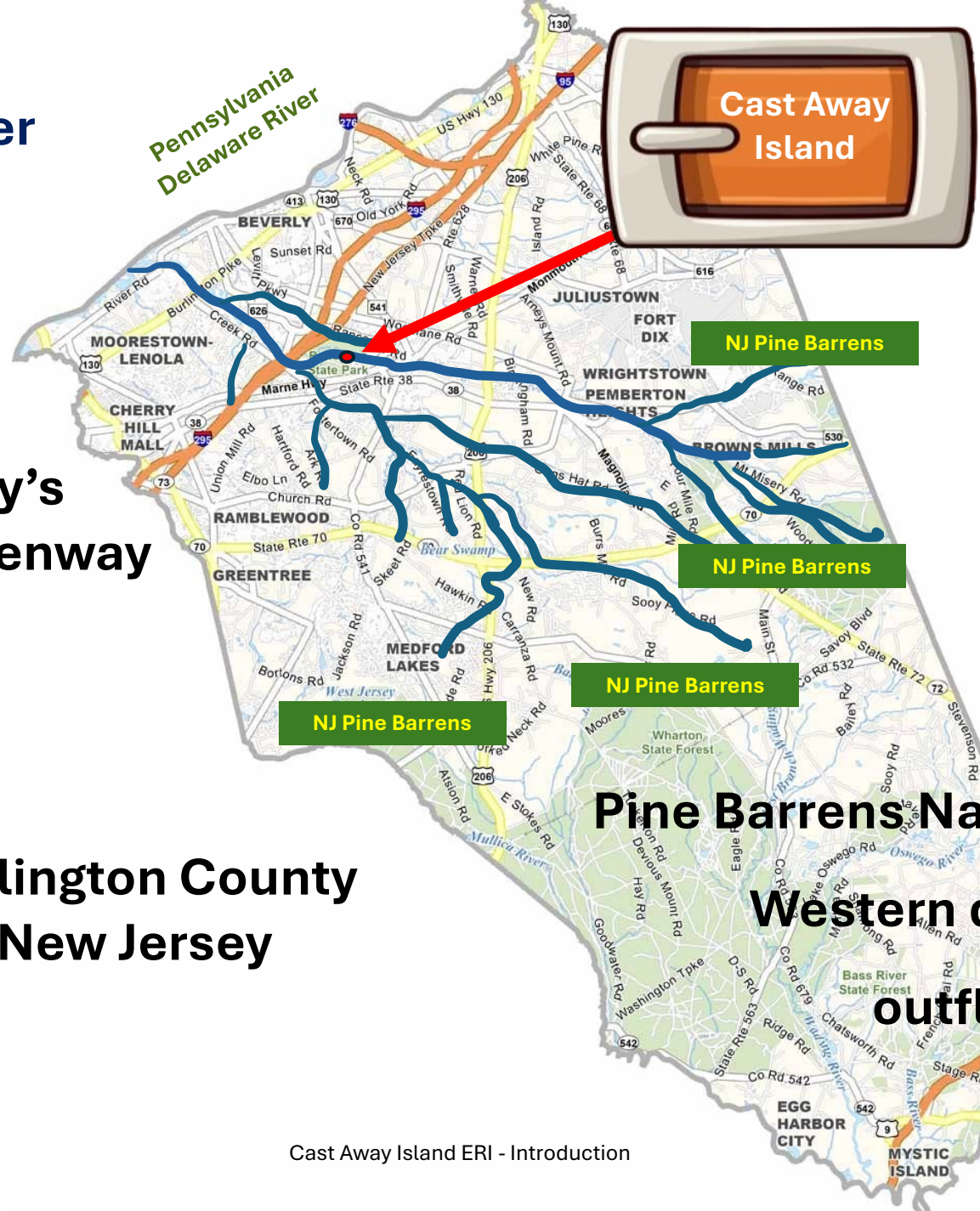
**Burlington County
New Jersey**



**Buckled
Green Belt**

**360 square mile
Rancocas Creek
Watershed**

**Pine Barrens National Reserve
Western drainage
outflow**



**Cast Away
Island**



Wood Duck

Photo by
ks337

Introduction to the Cast Away Island ERI

This ERI seeks not to plot every detail of the island. Rather this ERI is snapshot of the lay of the land. The purpose of the ERI is to provide a window, a portal into the heart of New Jersey’s natural beauty. This ERI promotes elements of multi-use conservation that we catalogue by eye. These we should not overlook. The ERI is meant to share the knowledge from those who know the wonders, mysteries, the tides, currents, winds , the open spaces and communities of New Jersey’s Rancocas Creek, from the Pinelands to the Delaware River tides.

Growth in South Jersey, in Burlington County and in the Rancocas Creek Watershed expands as populations and communities grow. Pressure is placed on all areas and manner of open space. Sometimes however there is a space, there is a spot, there is a location, 6 miles from the nearest public boat launch that say’s “hold yer horses”.

We seldom wonder if a creek, a tidewater, a marsh, has its own history, its own story, its own connections to people, place and community. Cast Away Island ERI presents an agreeable variant of multi-use year-round activity that is a path for those who have yet to learn, to see, listen and study field, forest, the water, the tides, the marsh, the creek and ourselves.

Cast Away Island ERI connects a relaxing sociability that is worth knowing.

All Photos Unless Otherwise Noted from Cast Away Island



Cast Away Island ERI - Introduction

On the “Buckle”



Cast Away Island

Cast Away Island ERI - Introduction

Rancocas – Clay Marl is exposed at the abandoned brickyard on the northwestern bank of the Rancocas Creek, north of Borton Landing, West of Rancocas. An extensive plant was abandoned.

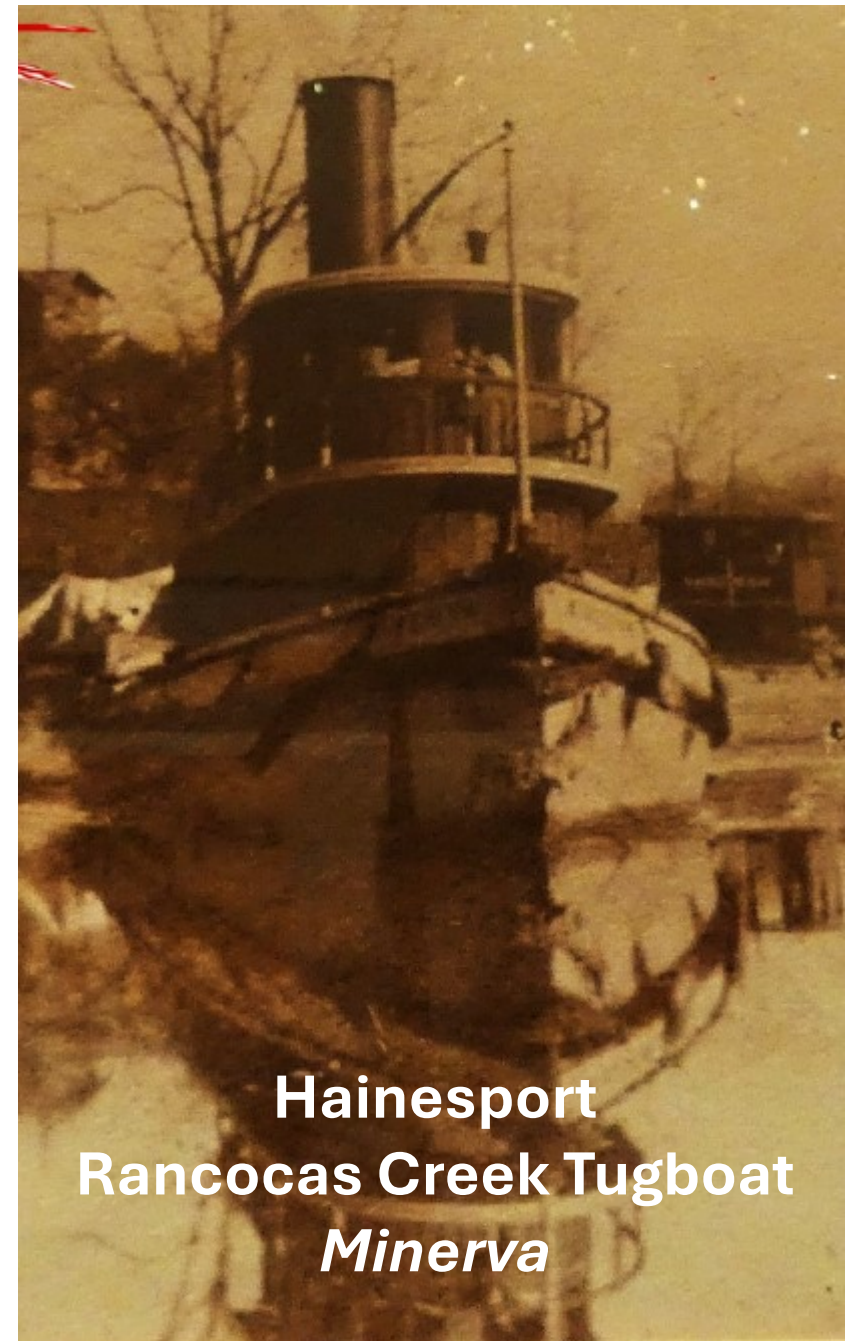
Clays of NJ. Henry B. Kümmel, 1904



First, however is location. Maps and Charts of the Cast Away Island

The first step in this ERI is to define the precise location of the North Branch Rancocas Creek's Cast Away Island. These maps and navigation charts set the foundation of the Cast Away Island ERI. The brevity of these maps and navigation charts help the reader ascertain location.

The Cast Away Island ERI opens your immersion into NJ's Rancocas Creek amber flowing pine barrens waters emptying into tidewater dynamics fusion with, natural history, ecology, conservation and a more personal inquiry. The ERI is geared to people of all walks of life who want to know more about what happens why, how and when the last remaining hidden niches of New Jersey are exposed.



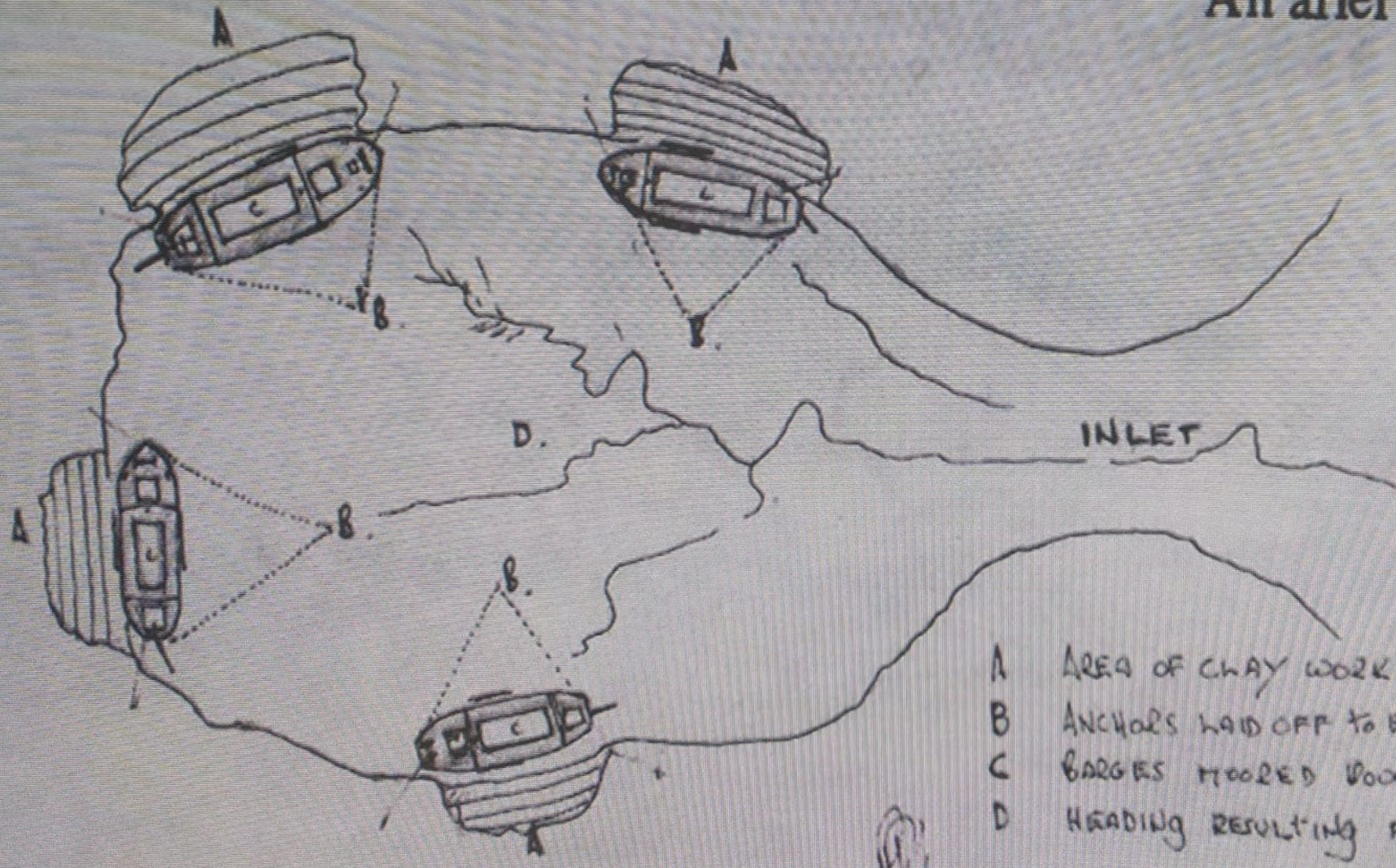
**Hainesport
Rancocas Creek Tugboat
*Minerva***

Mud and Muddies

1851

Extraction Method for Clay/Sand Holes Along a Tidewater Creek/River (as an example)

An ariel view of a clay hole.



- A AREA OF CHAY WORK
- B ANCHORS LAID OFF TO BARGE WORK START ON TIDE
- C BARGES MOORED ROUND MUD HOLE
- D HEADING RESULTING FROM WORKING & FLOODING AT HIGH WATER.



Cement, mud, and "muddies" : Willmott, Frank G

Hainesport

**Paradise Hill
Lumberton Creek**

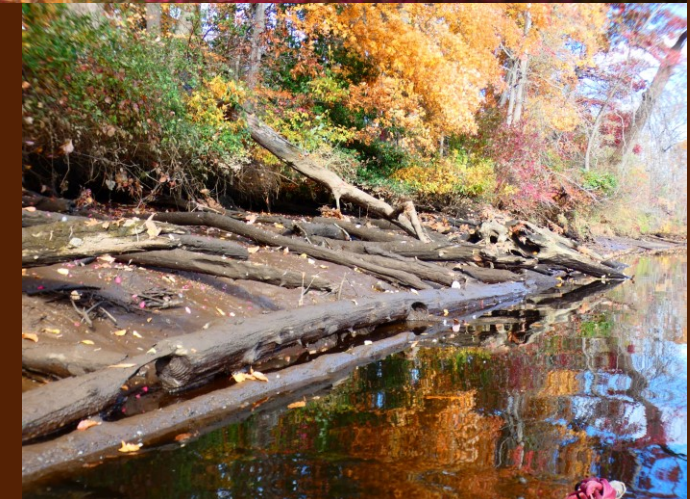
**SSW Cast Away
Island**



Cedar Water/Low Tide

1870's Sand Mine Piers

Rancocas State Park







Cast Away Island ERI - Introduction

Conservation



High Tide - Cast Away Island

Looking East, Up North Branch, Rancocas Creek

Cast Away Island ERI - Introduction

**Cast Away
Island**



Photo by
ks337

Confluence of the Rancocas River, 1880 Report to Congress

1875 Stokes Riparain and Navigation Chart of the Rancocas River

Canal >>>

Mount Holly Creek

Melpine

Wharf

Wharf



Sand Mine Landing

Leeds Wharf

Wharf

Paradise Hills

Wharf

Confluence

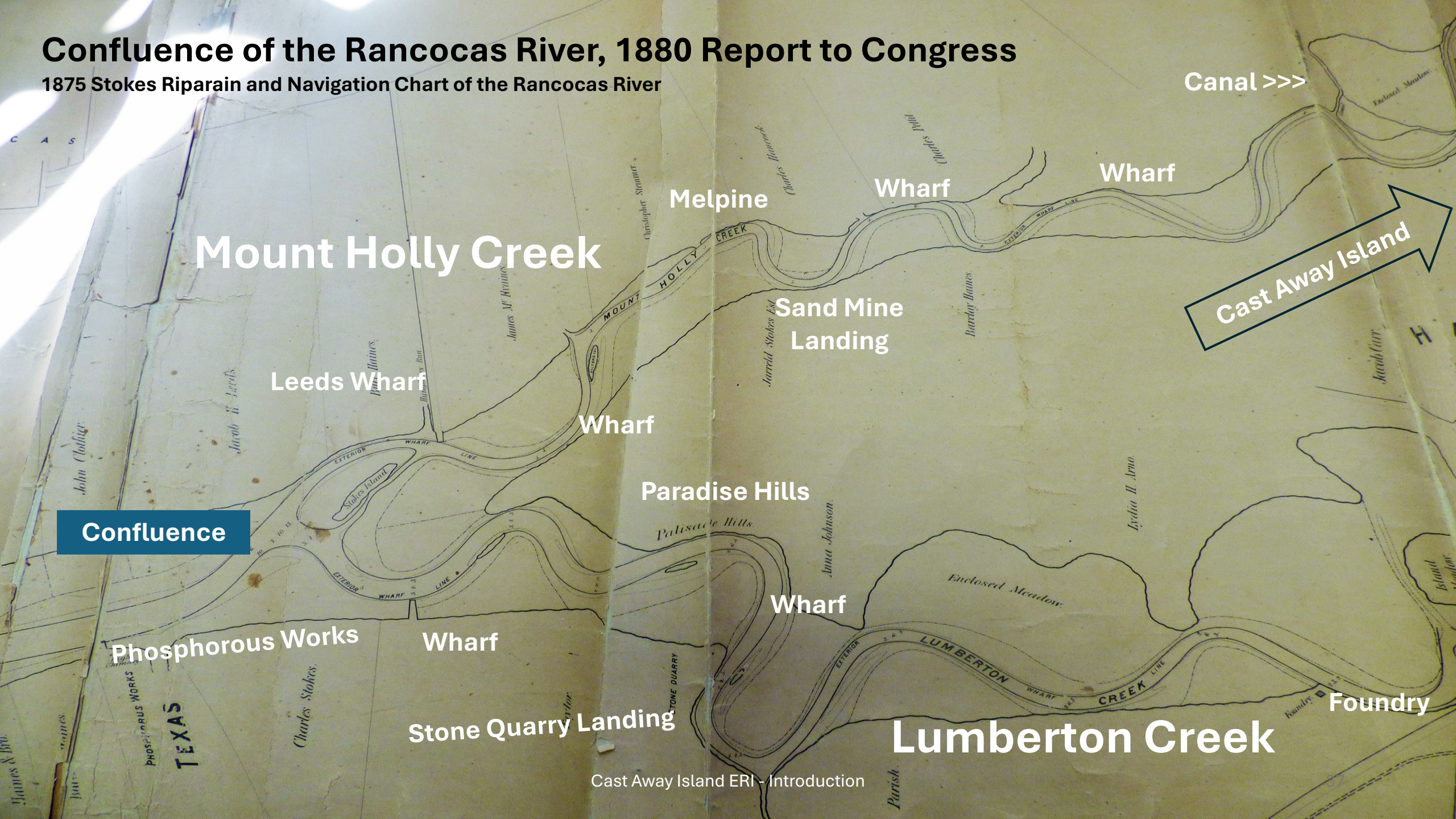
Phosphorous Works

Wharf

Stone Quarry Landing

Lumberton Creek

Foundry



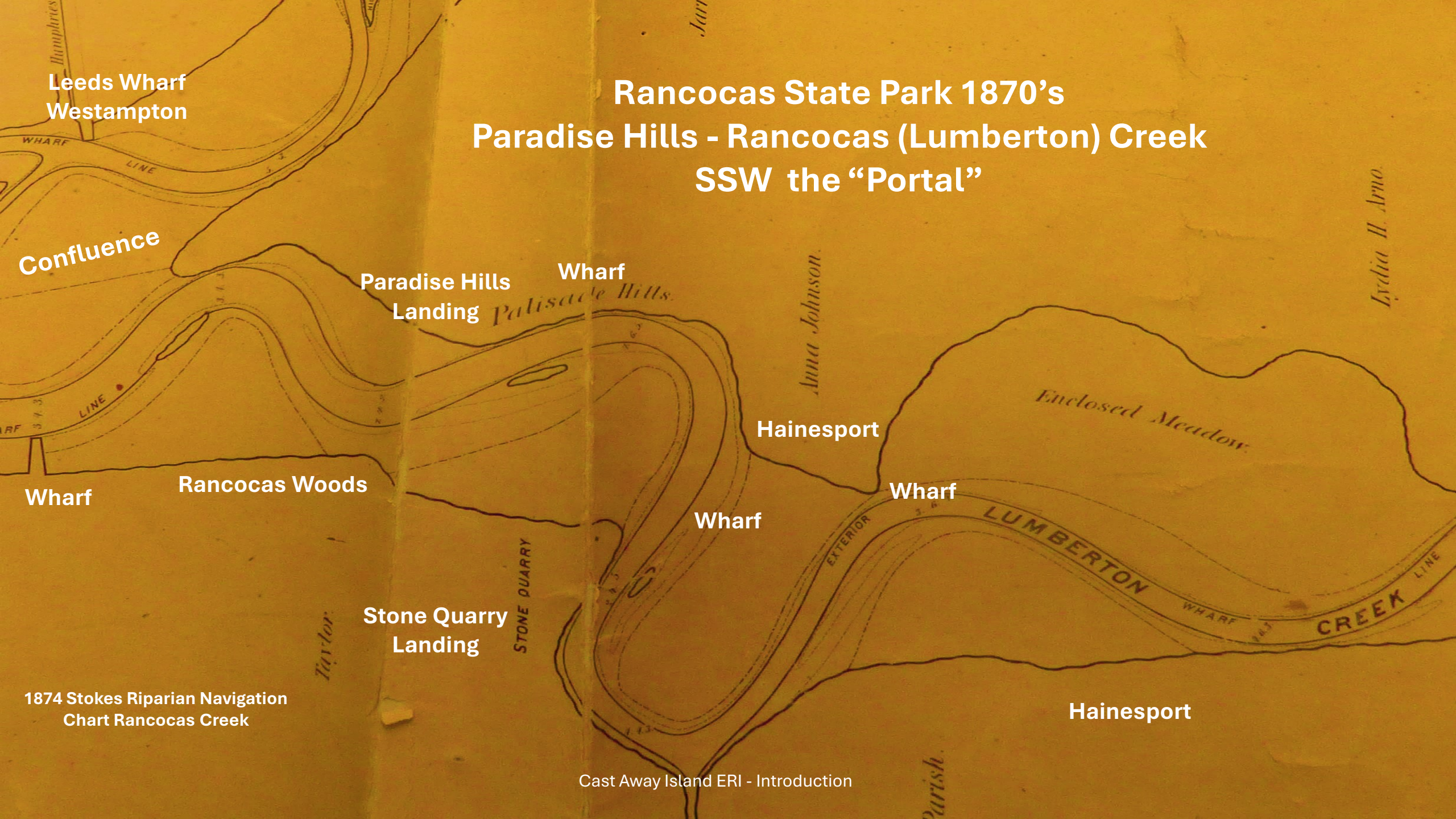
Access

Mt. Holly Creek
North Branch

Lumberton Creek - South Branch

Confluence - Rancocas Creek - Rancocas State Park

Rancocas State Park 1870's
Paradise Hills - Rancocas (Lumberton) Creek
SSW the "Portal"



1874 Stokes Riparian Navigation
Chart Rancocas Creek

Cast Away
Island



Photo by
ks337



Philadelphia

Rancocas Creek

Main Stem

Forks of the Rancocas

Rancocas
State
Park

Exit 5 >>>

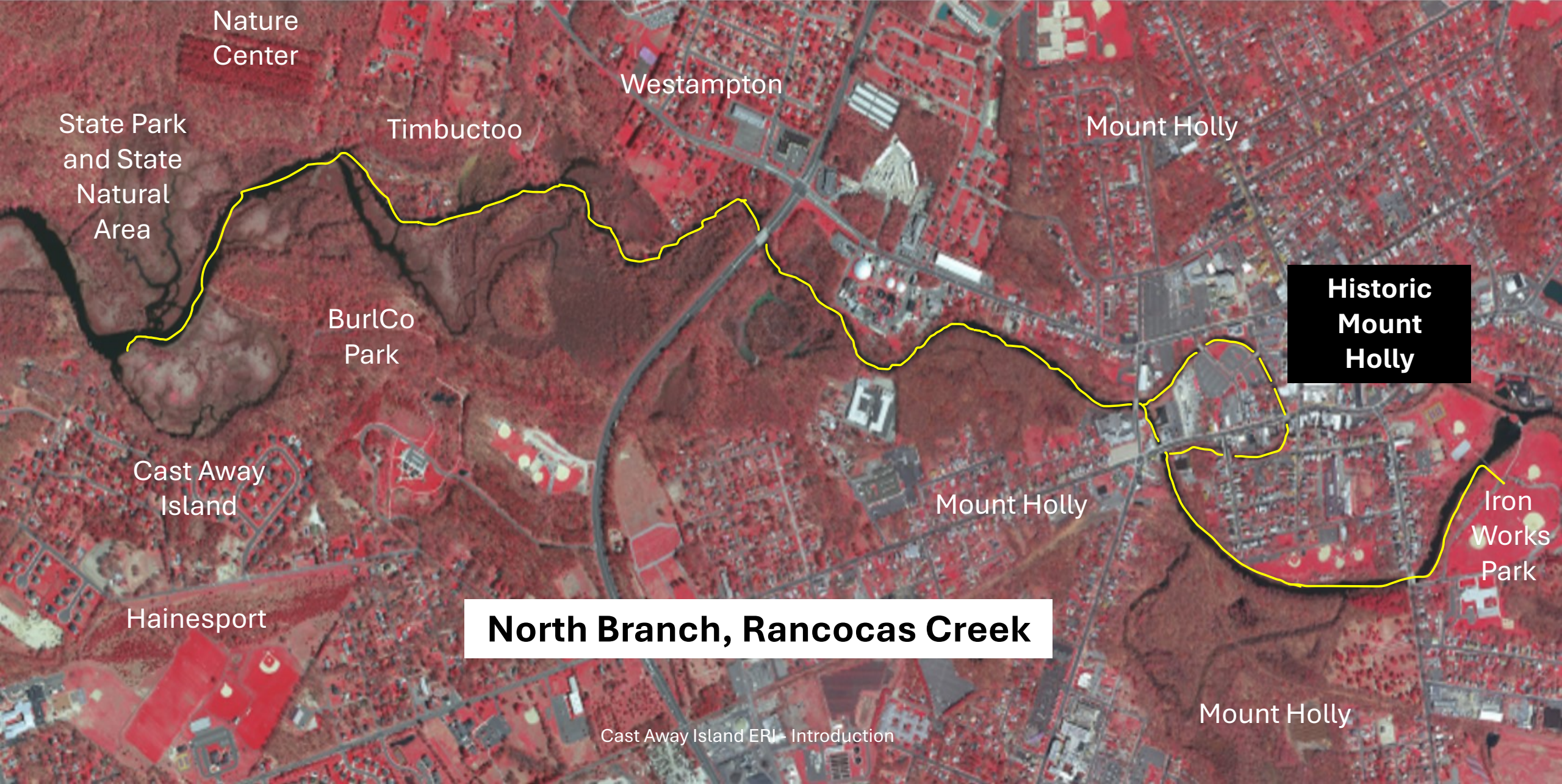
Lumberton Creek
South Branch

Rancocas
State
Park

Mt. Holly Creek
North Branch

Photo Credit R. Ben

Cast Away Island is not accessible by car or foot. To protect the fragile tidewater ecology access is permission only



State Park and State Natural Area

Nature Center

Timbuctoo

Westampton

Mount Holly

BurlCo Park

Historic Mount Holly

Cast Away Island

Mount Holly

Iron Works Park

Hainesport

North Branch, Rancocas Creek

Cast Away Island ERI - Introduction

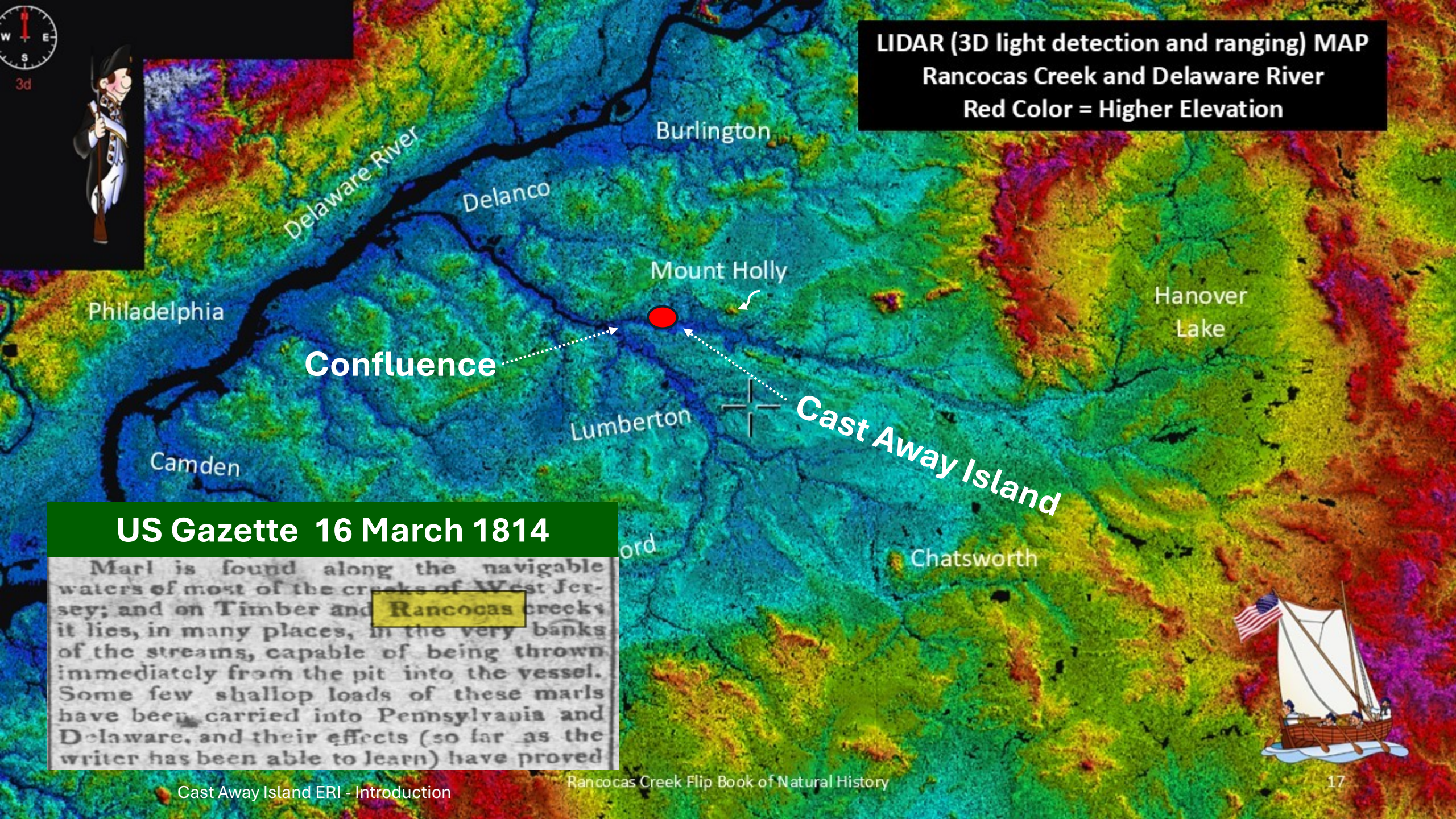
Mount Holly

Rancocas Creek
tidewater marshes
are bordered by tidal
water downstream
and upstream pine
barrens cedar water
western outflows.





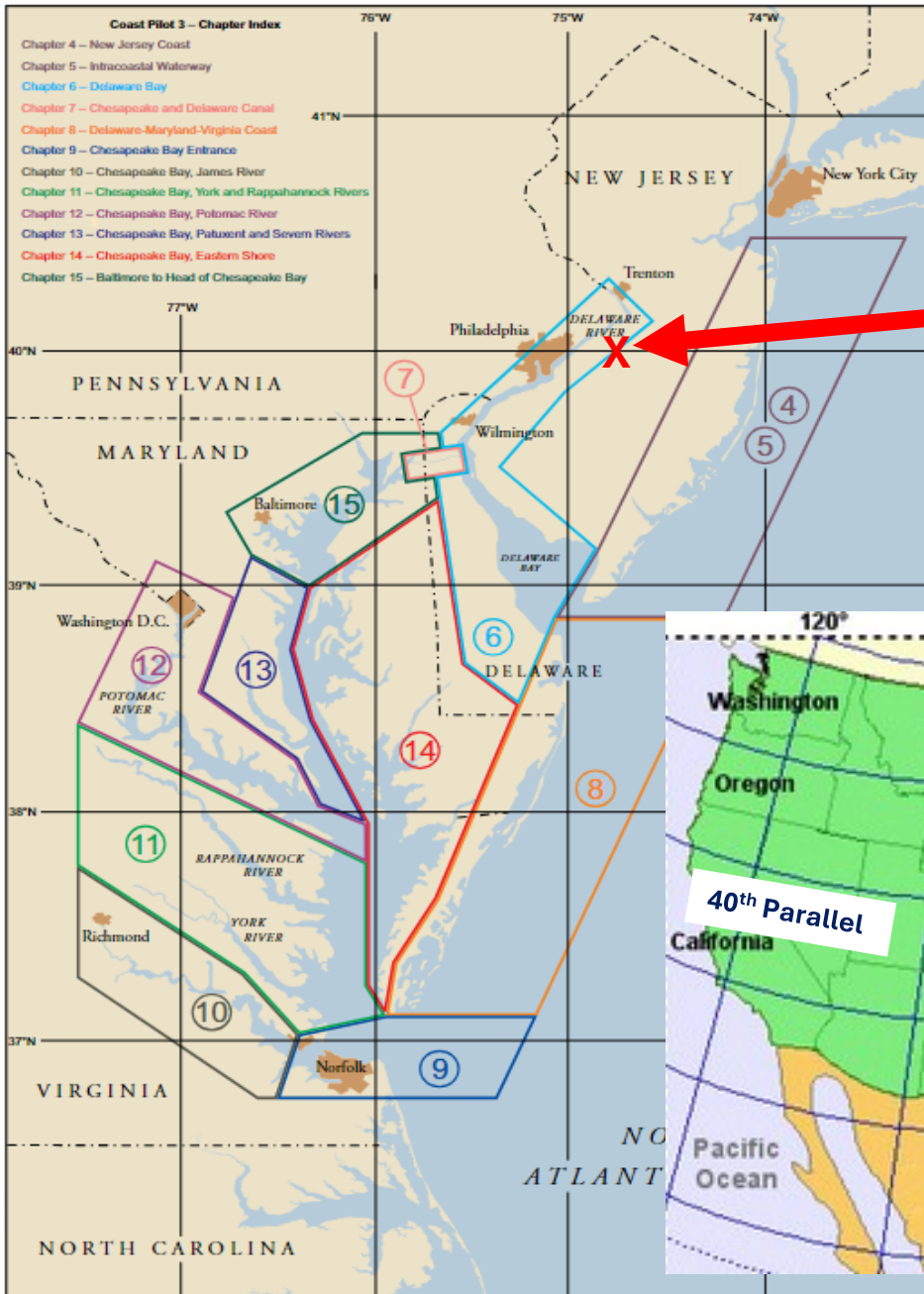
LIDAR (3D light detection and ranging) MAP
Rancocas Creek and Delaware River
Red Color = Higher Elevation



US Gazette 16 March 1814

Marl is found along the navigable waters of most of the creeks of West Jersey; and on Timber and **Rancocas** creeks it lies, in many places, in the very banks of the streams, capable of being thrown immediately from the pit into the vessel. Some few shallop loads of these marls have been carried into Pennsylvania and Delaware, and their effects (so far as the writer has been able to learn) have proved





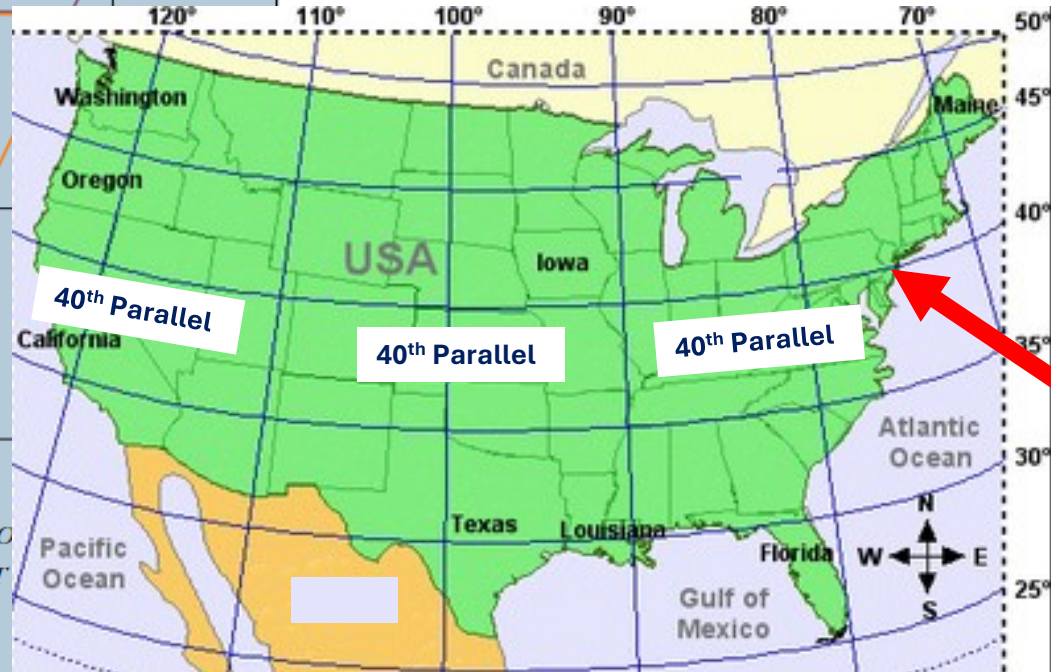
“X” Marks the Spot

Coast Pilot Local Knowledge

Rancocas Creek

40th Parallel

Ref: US Coast Pilot 3



Rancocas Creek

Indigo Bunting

Cast Away
Island



Stewardship

J.B. VanSciver, Sr. was born in Hainesport, 14 May 1861. He and his brother George developed the Hainesport Mining and Transportation Company and the DeFrain Sand Company.

These companies consolidated into the VanSciver Sand Company. Mr. Van Sciver was also a director at Knickerbocker Lime Company.

By the 1920's these were the premier manufactures and distributors of building material in South Jersey and NE Pennsylvania.

In WW1 VanSciver supplied sand, gravel and concrete to build the Emergency Fleet at Hog Island . In 1929 VanSciver was sold to the Warner Company.

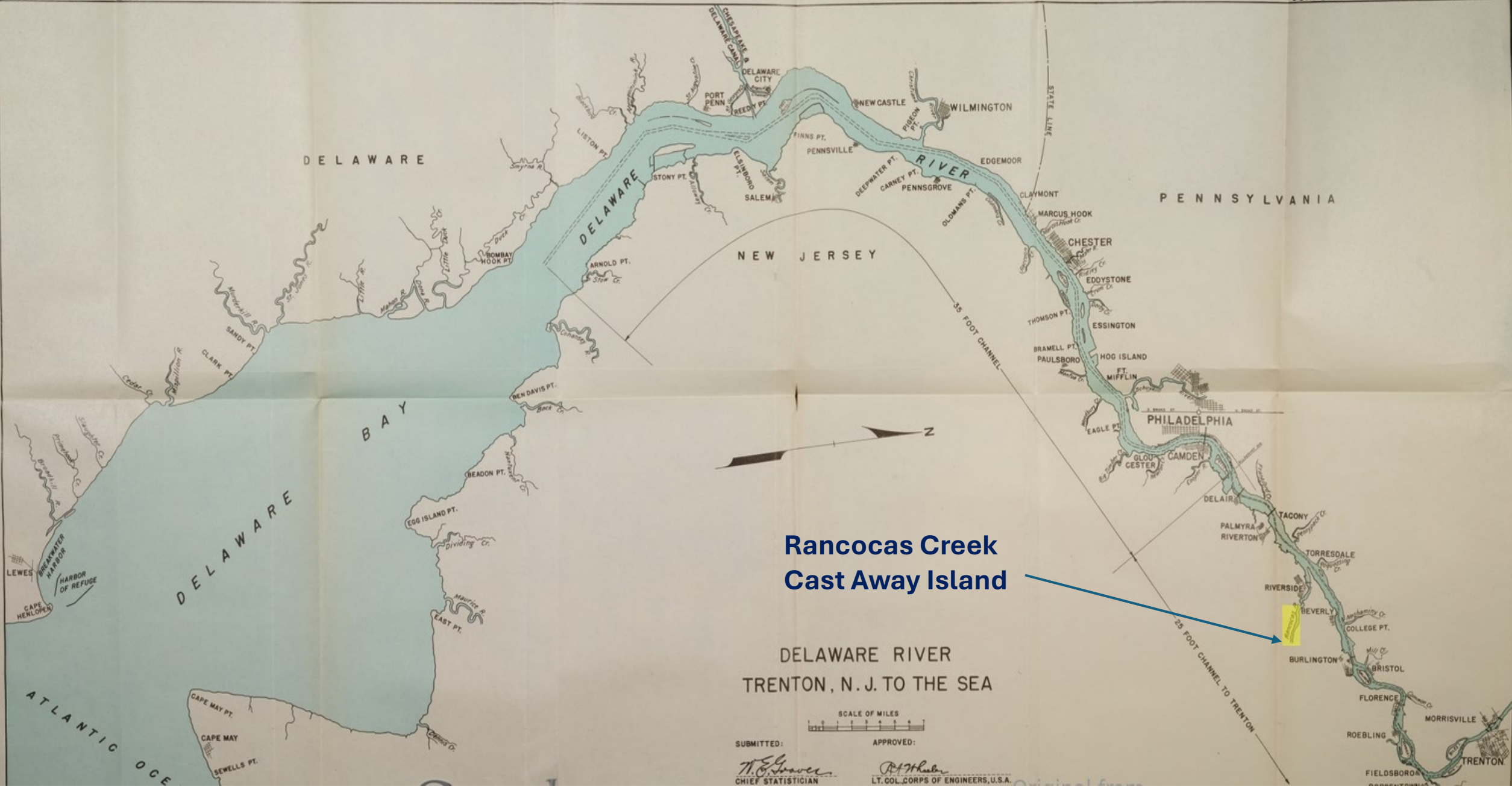


VanSciver Sand Mine and Barge Ops

Logistics of Rancocas Creek Sand Tug and Barge Operations: End use market - Philadelphia

Philadelphia - Pier 67

Reference: Hagley Library



**Rancocas Creek
Cast Away Island**

DELAWARE RIVER
TRENTON, N. J. TO THE SEA

SUBMITTED: *N. E. Graves*
CHIEF STATISTICIAN

APPROVED: *R. H. Wheeler*
LT. COL. CORPS OF ENGINEERS, U.S.A.

Tidewater Marshes Around Cast Away Island Come Alive in April

Red Wing Blackbird

Tidewater migratory, seasonal visitor

By fall migration the wild rice marshes that make the fabric of Cast Away Island tidewater ecology are covered in quilts of red wings, bobolinks, meadowlarks, grackles.

A natural crescendo.



Rancocas Creek
North Branch

Rancocas Creek
North Branch

Rancocas State Park
State of NJ Natural Area

Cast Away Island

Block 12 - Lot 1

Hainesport Township

Portal

Landing

Block 12 Lot 1

Burlington County
Long Bridge Park



Not Passable at Low Tide

30 - 45 Foot High Sand Bluffs

County Park
Trail System



Cast Away
Island

Fall Migration



Red Wing Blackbirds



**Wild Rice draws flocks of
Red Wing Blackbirds**





Tidal freshwater wetlands (TFWs) are important habitats that support a variety of ecosystem services for diverse food webs, storm surge protection, carbon storage, and nutrient removal. (Xu et al. 2020).



- **Rancocas Creek Navigation Channel**
- **1890's Navigation Channel Wing Dams**
- **Note: height of wild rice tidewater marsh**



**Low -Tide Snapping Turtle
Cast Away Island**

Stewardship



Sections

Introduction: Fidelity-Stewardship-Ethos

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Section Seven: Multi-Use Public Access

Appendix: Industrial Statistics, Reading and Activity Lists

Conclusion



Cover Photo: Looking East. Cuestas poking up from the mist
High Tide. N Branch Rancocas Creek Water Trail . State of NJ Rancocas Natural Area , left.
Cast Away Island, right. Timbuctoo, Mt. Holly, center. Arney's Mount, upper right.
Photograph Joe Pluck's Hot Air Ballon, July, 2024.

TY

Think-Small

Text 609-456-9344 for “beta”