

# VAN CORTLANDT PARK

## Map & Guide



## Friends of VAN CORTLANDT PARK

**Van Cortlandt Park** in the Northwest Bronx is New York City's fourth largest park. Its 1,146 acres have many trails which allow a visitor access to the park's ridges, valleys, forests, wetlands, and lake.

The first known inhabitants were the Weckquaesgeek Indians. Their village stood on what is now the Parade Ground. In 1639, they sold much of what is now the park to the Dutch West India Company. The property passed through several private landowners including the Van Cortlandt family. It was eventually purchased by the City of New York in 1888.

With approximately 2.5 million visitors a year, Van Cortlandt Park needs friends. Home to many of New York City's wildest and most rugged natural areas, 14 miles of hiking trails, the country's oldest municipal golf course, a cross-country running course, a horse stable, a house where George Washington really did sleep, and bike and pedestrian paths that connect to other NYC parks and to the Westchester County trail system, Van Cortlandt Park holds a special place in the city's world-class constellation of parks and open spaces.

### Forest & Trails

Approximately half of Van Cortlandt Park is forested. Urban forests are important because they help reduce air and noise pollution, provide habitat for wildlife, and increase the quality of life. In urban areas, the large numbers of vehicles increase the amount of carbon dioxide in the air. Because leaves absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, they help improve air quality. Leaves also absorb sound and reduce noise. When leaves fall to the ground, they enrich the soil, conserve water, and provide a habitat for wildlife. Trees provide shade which lowers the temperature and also conserves moisture. Urban forests provide areas for passive recreation such as walking, bird watching and nature study. Take a hike on the following trails to visit our forests:

**JOHN MUIR NATURE TRAIL** (1.5 miles) established in 1997 with the help of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park summer interns, is the park's only east-west path. This trail traverses steep terrain at the park's center.

**CASS GALLAGHER NATURE TRAIL** (1.4 miles) serves the Northwest Forest. In 1984, it was named in memory of a Bronx environmentalist dedicated to the park's protection.

**CROSS COUNTRY RUNNING COURSE** (3 & 6 miles) is a nationally renowned course. It begins on the Parade Ground, winds through Vault Hill, and forms a loop through the Northwest Forest.

**BRIDLE PATH** (1.6 miles) forms the outer loop of the Northwest trail system. Along the western part of the forest, the trail follows a portion of the old Yonkers branch of the Putnam Division Railroad. Between 1888 and 1943, this commuter route ran from High Bridge to Getty Square.

**PUTNAM TRAIL** (1.5 miles) serves as a primary wildlife corridor as it passes through wetlands and divides the Van Cortland Golf Course. It is what

remains of the New York Central Railroad's Putnam Division. It ceased passenger operations in 1958, but carried occasional freight until 1981. This is the main bike path through the Park.

**JOHN KIERAN NATURE TRAIL** (1.25 miles) is named for the famed naturalists and newspaperman. This trail begins and ends near the Van Cortlandt Golf House and journeys through the park's lake area and freshwater wetlands.

**OLD CROTON AQUEDUCT** (1.1 miles) runs through the center of the Croton Woods. This segment is part of the 41-mile-long aqueduct that brought water from the Croton Dam to New York City. Built in the 1830s as the city's first extensive water supply, it was used until 1897 when the New Croton Aqueduct replaced it. The large stone building along the route is a weir which maintained the flow of water and controlled air pressure.



### Safety & Remember

- Poison ivy is common throughout Van Cortlandt Park. Stay on the trails to minimize contact with poison ivy.
- Motorized vehicles are not allowed in the park as they destroy trails and vegetation and disturb wildlife.
- Please stay on the trails, cyclists should stay on the Putnam Trail and the Bike Path.
- Don't litter! Please carry out all that you carry in with you or use garbage cans.
- Graffiti ruins the outdoor experience for others and is illegal.
- To preserve our natural surroundings for future generations to enjoy, please do not collect or disturb live plants and animals.

**The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park (FVCP)** was founded in 1992 by a committed Bronx resident in response to a New York Times article describing the impacts of declining NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks) budgets on parks like Van Cortlandt that lacked wealthy benefactors or an organized network of local support. She brought together neighbors and friends, and from a small beginning, FVCP has grown to play an increasing role in maintenance of natural areas and community programming for Van Cortlandt Park. Each year FVCP generates thousands of hours of volunteer support for forest and trail maintenance, trains thousands of young people in environmental stewardship, and offers community programs to promote fitness and environmental action.



From an initial project involving a small group of students who helped pick up litter and clear brush, FVCP now provides a wide variety of educational, stewardship and community benefit programs.

Over the next several years, in addition to our usual programming, FVCP will be dedicated to complete implementation of projects in the 2034 Van Cortlandt Park Master Plan, which will guide the City's restoration of Van Cortlandt Park's natural beauty and provide solutions for the needs of all neighboring communities. In the Master Plan are two signature initiatives for FVCP, (1) The completion of our 2009 Trails Plan, which was drafted by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference; and (2) The continued implementation of our newest initiative: "Wetland Stewardship for a Healthier Bronx," which will improve the health of the existing wetlands and highlight the need to daylight Tibbetts Brook both inside and south of the Park.

### FVCP offers the following programs in the park:

- Van Cortlandt Adventures
- School Programs
- School Year Environmental Internship
- Teens Outside: Green Summer Internship
- Youth Run Farm Stands
- Trail, Forest, Wetland and Garden Volunteer Projects
- Teacher Workshops Series
- Community Programs such as Hikes, EcoCrafts, Trail Runs



### Contact Friends of Van Cortlandt Park!

General information: 718.601.1460  
Program information: 718.601.1553

Email: [info@vancortlandt.org](mailto:info@vancortlandt.org)

Mailing address:  
80 Van Cortlandt Park South, Suite E1  
Bronx, NY 10463

[www.vancortlandt.org](http://www.vancortlandt.org)



### Directions:

**By Car:**  
The Major Deegan Expressway has two park exits: Van Cortlandt Park South, which serves the south and west portions of the park, and East 233<sup>rd</sup> Street, which serves the north and east. The Henry Hudson Parkway's Broadway exits also serve the park. Mosholu Parkway links Van Cortlandt Park with the Bronx River and Pelham Parkways.

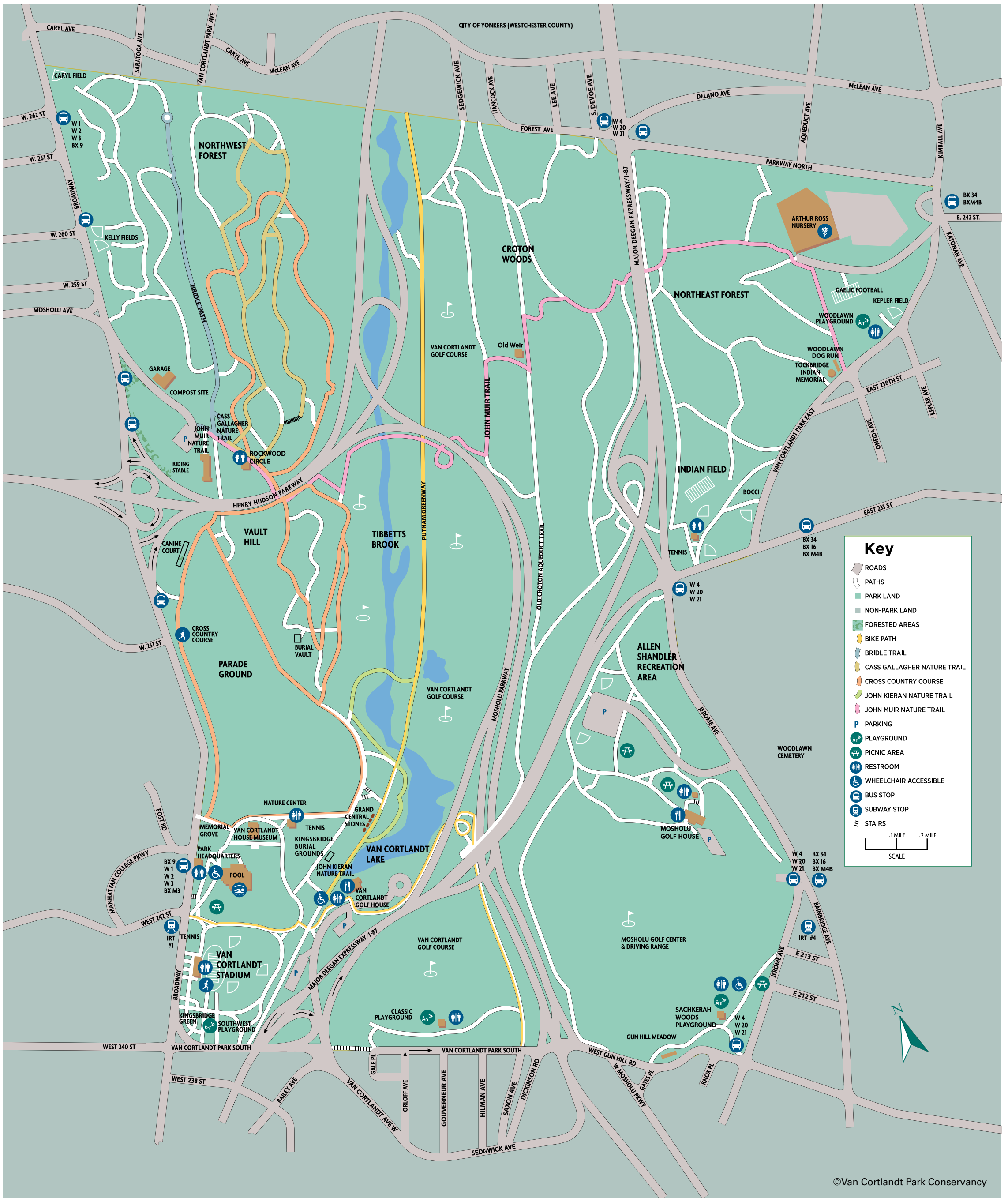
**By Subway:**  
The northern terminus of the IRT No. 1 train at W. 242<sup>nd</sup> Street is just south of the Parade Ground. The IRT No. 4's last stop at Woodlawn serves the park's south-eastern area.

**By Bus:**  
The Bx9 travels along Broadway on the western edge of Van Cortlandt Park. The BxM3, an express line serving Manhattan, also offers access to the park's western border. The park's east side is served by the Bx16 and the Bx34. Westchester bus lines Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 20 and 21 also serve the park.

Brochure produced by  
**PARTNERSHIPS for PARKS**  
*A joint program of City Parks Foundation and NYC Parks.*  
Design: Anne LaFond Photos: Asa Aarons, John Butler and Enrique Ortiz  
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## Phone Numbers

Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy  
& Park Administrator's Office  
718.430.1890  
Mosholu Golf Center  
718.655.9164  
Park Enforcement Patrol  
718.430.1815  
Riverdale Equestrian Center  
718.548.4848

Urban Park Rangers  
718.548.0912  
Van Cortlandt Golf Course  
718.543.4595  
Friends of Van Cortlandt Park  
718.601.1460  
Van Cortlandt House Museum  
718.543.3344

Permits - Special Events  
718.430.1890  
Permits - Sports  
718.430.1840



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