The gateway is open. The New England Trail has finally reached the water, officially. Join the Connecticut Forest & Park Association for the opening and dedication of the NET’s southern terminus in Guilford’s Chittenden Park on June 8 from 4 to 6 p.m.

Five years ago, two Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails, the Mattabesett and Metacomet trails in Connecticut, and the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail in Massachusetts, were designated as a national scenic trail known as the New England Trail (NET). Volunteers for CFPA worked with landowners to create a new 16-mile trail, the Menunkatuck Trail, completing the route from the New Hampshire border to Long Island Sound. In conjunction with National Trails Day events and the town of Guilford’s 375th anniversary, CFPA will open the NET’s southern gateway.

Chittenden Park, a Guilford town park situated on the shore of the Long Island Sound, offers a totally different atmosphere from what visitors experience at other, more-developed beaches on the sound. And this makes the park a special place to begin or end a journey on the NET.

In downtown Guilford, the blue blazes marking the NET’s path through town reside on utility poles. A blue/green side trail has also been blazed and leads hikers to the historic Guilford Town Green. But the Guilford Green is not the only significant historical stop way to the NET that is representative of the trail’s tremendous recreational and scenic significance. An undeveloped beach on the Long Island Sound, designated as an Estuary of National Significance by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is a most-worthy entrance to a 215-mile hiking journey through New England.

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INTERACTIVE BLUE TRAILS MAP ONLINE
http://www.ctwoodlands.org/BlueTrailsMap

Whether you’re a devout hiker of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails or a walker looking for a local escape, the Connecticut Forest & Park Association’s new online trails map will help you plan your outing before your boots hit the ground. As a companion tool to the Connecticut Walk Book, this map allows you to zoom in and see the latest trail locations, learn trail names and distances, and fully discover all that Connecticut hiking has to offer.
on the new trail route. The trail links to other landmarks such as the Henry Whitfield State Museum (the oldest stone house in New England and a National Historic Landmark), the Hyland House, the Thomas Griswold House, the Guilford Fairgrounds, and the Guilford Covenant. Hikers and walkers are now able to accent their longer hikes on the NET with a walk back through time among the deep and rich colonial history of the town.

Originally known as Chittenden Beach, the park was purchased by the town in 1945 and became the first public beach for Guilford residents. In the 1960s, the town bought the surrounding land that now hosts a ball field, soccer games, and bocce courts. Although the beach has always been used more for sunning than for swimming, it remains an attraction for beachcombers, birders, and anglers. No drive-in access to the water exists. The park remains a quiet connection to the water.

The NET will follow a 107-foot elevated boardwalk, over the dunes to an overlook platform. From the open platform, walkers can view Falkner Island, Chaffinch Island Park, and the West River. The hope is that these recreational improvements at Chittenden Park will invite the public to experience and appreciate the sound and the surrounding habitat in a new and sustainable way. What more appropriate place for hikers to begin or end their journey on the NET than at such a scenic spot overlooking the sound?

Thanks to committed funding from CFPA, private donors, the Guilford Foundation, the National Park Service, the Town of Guilford, and the state’s Department of Community & Economic Development, these improvements will soon become a reality.

Clare Cain is the trail stewardship director of CFPA.