

## A WALK IN MEADOWLARK PARK

*by Karl Milde*

In the summer of 1824 Heinrich Heine took a walking vacation in the Harz mountains near Goettingen, Germany, where he was a student. He wrote a book, called *Die Harzreise* ("The Harz Journey"), with such freshness and wit it's become a classic in German literature. As a reader, you saw what Heinrich saw; his thoughts became your thoughts. You *were* Heinrich as he followed mountain roads and trails and encountered places and people along the way.

It was with this spirit of adventure, 200 years later almost to the day, that I took a walk in Meadowlark Park in Somers, NY. My plan was daunting, at least to me. I wanted to trek upwards to the top of the very highest hill. Once there, I could walk leisurely downhill across a pasture and hook up with the they call the "Warren Trail." Following this trail, I'd circle back in more or less a bee line until I returned to my place of departure: Park Place. Here's my story:

I entered the Meadowlark parking lot and got out of the car. I immediately saw a forbidding sign, "NO VEHICLES BEYOND THIS POINT" in red letters. This was a *park* for gosh sakes, but there were in fact roads for the maintenance crew. To stop other drivers from entering, there was a chain across the entryway, just in case they missed the sign.

I stepped over the chain, walked in, and looked around at the great green expanse. Except for one family on the children's playground way off to the left, I saw no one. Great! I had the place to myself. I was loving it already BUT, I still had to climb an enormous hill.

There was a paved path straight in front of me so I followed it until I realized it went nowhere. After thirty feet it just ended. I took a photo.

Looking around I spied a nearby path lined with a row of young cherry trees on both sides. It aimed straight for the highest hill in the park so I joined up with it. As I walked on I looked left and spied a grove of maples. They looked so perfect I snapped another photo.

Continuing up the path I passed a flower garden on my right and then another larger one. The flowers blended in so well with the landscape I knew they were perennials, adding texture and color to the pathway.

Just at this point the path forked. I had to make a choice: Go left and walk straight up to the top or go right on an incline about as steep as an ADA walkway. I chose right.

I followed the path around a bend and darn! I saw that it turned sharply upward.

I gazed way up the hill. There was a park bench up there with a man sitting, facing my way and watching what I was doing. I'd better get cracking, I thought, or whomever that was would get a laugh on me for my procrastination. No pressure! I continued walking. On the way up I walked over to snap a photo of two beehives. I could see bees buzzing around them, hard at work.

From the distance I couldn't recognize the person on the park bench. But as I came closer the man smiled and I saw it was Mike McBride. Terrific guy. We got to talking about different subjects including some upcoming Ten-a-Men meetings. He'd invited me to speak there. I didn't want to disappoint, but I'm a writer not a talker.

We bid goodbye and I was again alone. I kept going up, slower this time. I must admit I struggled. As I climbed higher and higher I imagined trudging up a steep mountain, footstep after footstep. This hill was not a mountain at all but, when the path finally levelled off at the top, I was overcome with exhilaration. Wow! I was *here*, where I'd wanted to be when I started.

I looked to the right and took in the great expanse of pasture. I could envision cows and sheep grazing - cows on one side of the field, sheep on the other. I grew up on a dairy farm and our childhood images are always with us. Others may not understand how I felt but I'm sure the peaceful nature scene would affect them in some similar way.

I walked slightly downhill across the field, the grass under my shoes cushioning each step. In the middle of the pasture, I paused to take in the beauty all around: the tiny yellow flowers and the red berries underfoot, the green expanse and fragrance of the newly mowed grass, the maple trees that lined the edges. The late day sun cast a golden glow in the nooks and crannies between the trees.

I spotted the Warren Trail at the base of the pasture near the lower right corner. I joined up and followed it to the left corner where it forked, one side going straight to nowhere (once a path for golf carts that ended at a tee box) and the other turning left in a direction parallel to the nearby Warren Street. I chose the left branch which skirted the side of the high hill I had climbed.

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Although hidden in the trees and underbrush to my right, I knew a river – a big brook really – ran through the woods between the park and Warren Street. I also knew there was a bridge across it somewhere. I left the trail and walked over to see if I could find it.

All I saw at first were dense bushes that demarcated the side edge of the park closest to Warren Street. I looked for an opening but the bushes seemed to have completely taken over. If there were a way across the river at one time, nature had filled it in with plant growth due to lack of use. That's what I thought, at least, until I found it. There it was: a narrow path through the brush leading to a wooden bridge.

I walked up to the bridge and stepped on it gingerly, not at all sure it was still structurally safe. It seemed strong so I walked a bit further and stomped on the surface. Satisfied that it was still sturdy, I walked all the way over and continued on through the woods until I reached Warren Street. There was a time, I thought, when golfers could ride their carts between the eighteen-hole golf course on the West Hill and the nine-hole golf course on the East Hill. I looked across the street and saw only a forest. If there were a path there at one time, it had long since disappeared. How fast nature works!

I turned around and recrossed the bridge, returning to the park. As I headed uphill toward the Warren Trail, I heard a “glug” from the nearby pond. Then “glug” again, this time in a different voice. Two frogs were singing to each other, probably unaware that I was there. How sweet the sound! I reached the Trail and looked down toward the water’s edge, but the amphibians were nowhere to be seen. I continued on in the direction of the park entrance.

Looking ahead I saw the same grove of maples that caught my eye when I started my walk. They were just as lovely to look at from this opposite side. I snapped another photo.

Walking past the grove, the Warren Trail finally brought me back to the parking lot from where I started. As I climbed into my car I couldn’t help noticing: I was in a great mood. I remembered *Die Harzreise*, a book my German language teacher assigned us to read when I was a junior in high school.

*I must agree with you  
Herr Heinrich Heine,  
A walking tour,  
Could not be finer.  
When I think about  
The many things I’ve tried,  
My favorite is  
To walk the countryside.*