

# Fairmount Park: Philadelphia's Sanctuary in Penn's Woods

By Jeff Drinnan

Fairmount Park comprises two sections of parkland maintained by the city of Philadelphia: a strip stretching from Chestnut Hill to Henry Avenue along the Wissahickon Creek, specifically called Wissahickon Park, and a parcel on either side of West River Drive. The former is the subject of this article, and is a safer place to visit than the latter.

On one side of the Wissahickon Creek is a road through the park where motor vehicles are forbidden. This road stretches for two miles to a parking lot entrance by Valley Green Restaurant and continues another 2.9 miles to the Henry Avenue entrance. On the other side of the creek is a hiking trail with many branch trails.

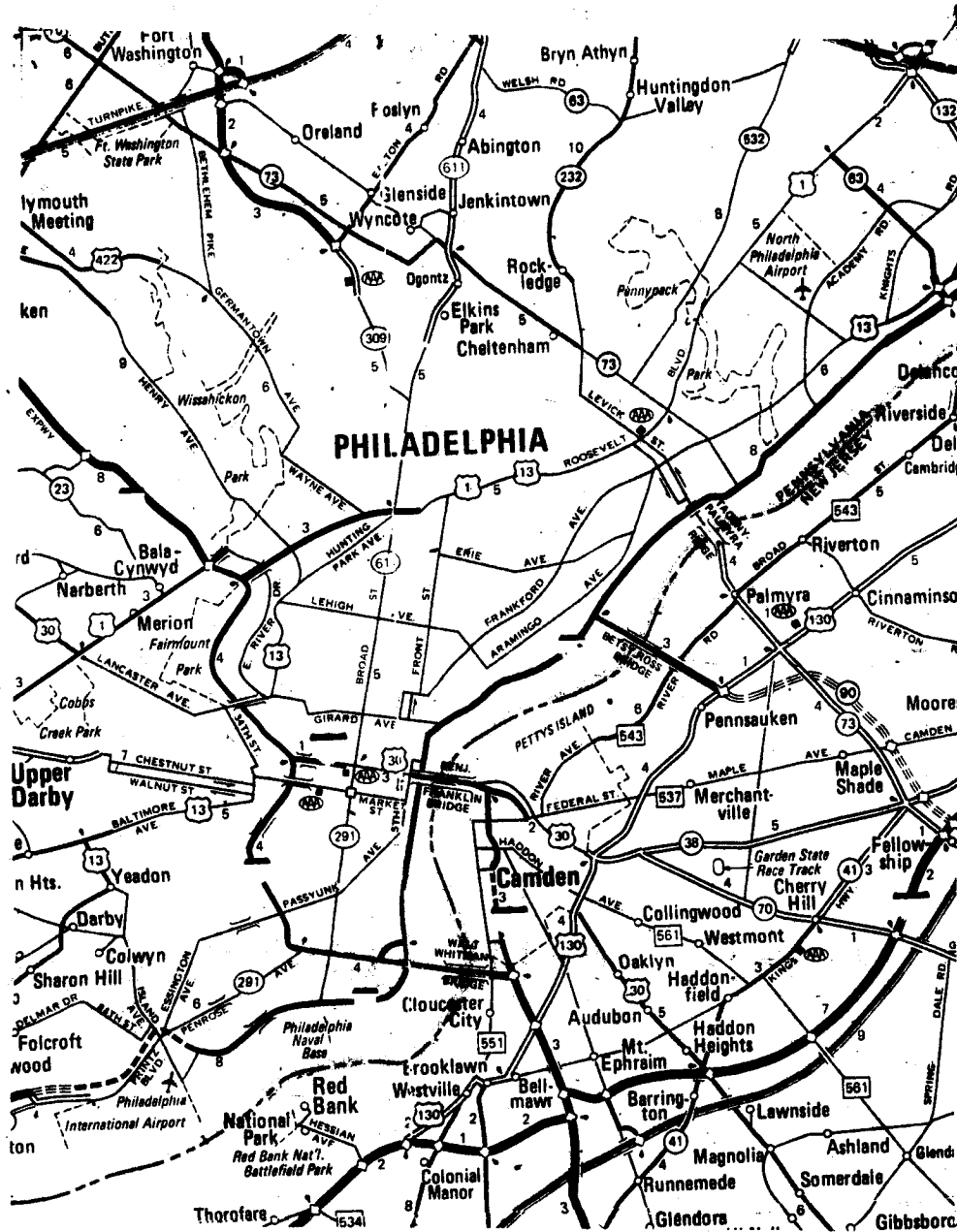
I parked in a gravel parking lot on the side of Bells Mill Road, about half a mile down the road from commercial districts in either direction.

Standing by the road, I watched people clad in sweat outfits and sneakers cross the stone bridge over the Wissahickon Creek and head to their mecca—a gravel road about the width of a football field which runs parallel to the creek.

I crossed the road and followed a much narrower and less travelled dirt trail along the other side of the creek. The trail rises steeply, descends, and winds around the woods, skirting the creek. Clusters of 50 foot tall pine trees and equally tall sycamores and other hardwoods dot the landscape. The creek below is visible through clearings as the trail zig-zags through the woods.

At the bottom of a hill I followed a trail that leads to a covered bridge that crosses the creek. There is some graffiti, mostly memos of who loves whom—but not so flagrant that it is an eyesore. Beneath the bridge the water picks up speed as it rushes between and over rocks.

I walked back to the trail and climbed another hill. The trail descends, then levels off about halfway up an escarpment. Perched on top,



Photos  
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looking over the Wissahickon, is a marble statue of the Indian Teddyskum. Teddyskum has been here since 1902, the year Mr. and Mrs. W. Henry donated it.

Throughout the park there is much stonework, mostly of Roman design. Stone stairways take visitors up and down steep grades along the trail; stone bridges take them across the Wissahickon to the road so popular with runners. Aqueducts and ruins of stone buildings can be seen from the main hiking trail.

"Pro Bono Publico, Esto Perpetua" reads a stone memorial in the park. Roughly translated, this means that the park is for the public to enjoy, so keep up the good work.

The Wissahickon, which begins as a trickle of water near Allentown, PA, opens up to about a stone's throw in many places as it meanders through Fairmount. On a typical day one would not know the water is moving unless one might see a leaf float downstream (except where there are mild rapids). These waters are favored by fishermen and ducks. Occasionally a dog splashes