

Scenic Hudson – Parks & Preserves: Poets' Walk

Poets' Walk celebrates the free verse of Walt Whitman while it exhibits, too, the formal structure of Robert Frost. Pacing up the graveled path from parking lot to pavilion, you march the metered rhythm of Frost. From there, as you venture through the fields and then into the woods where only hints of the Hudson River are visible, you encounter the ruggedness of Whitman.

Robert Frost, who composed in rhyme and metered rhythm, once remarked of the Civil War era poet, Walt Whitman: "I'd rather play tennis without a net than write in free verse." Walt, who

is loosed of limits and imaginary lines, if given the opportunity would reply: "I'd rather play tennis without a net – or a racquet!" Poets' Walk is Whitman's playground: no swings for children, no tables for picnics, no tennis court for Robert Frost, but ample opportunity to be afoot and lighthearted strolling the long, brown path through field and forest.

Poets' Walk, while a brief ramble of less than three miles of trail, offers many benches and two gazebos for contemplation and meditation. Originally a farm and then estate of the 1800's, most of Poets' Walk is still pasture. This open landscape, partitioned into rustic rooms with stands of trees, rock walls, and curvaceous paths which keep secret what lies beyond the next knoll, begins as a pastoral walk, then opens up to high-bank views of the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains which dominate the horizon.

"Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains," writes Washington Irving of the Catskill Mountains in the opening verses of Rip Van Winkle, "they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory." This same glorious view from these grounds experienced by Washington Irving awaits our exploration.

A mile and a half south of Poets' Walk is the more rugged Ferncliff Forest. Like Poets' Walk, Ferncliff Forest has its roots with the Astor family. A mere mile walk and 200 feet of elevation gain lead to a fire tower. Atop in the tower cabin, while just a height of 450 feet, because of its proximity to the Hudson River and being above the tree canopy, is the most grand view in Dutchess County. A mesh of trails meanders through the woods for those wanting a few more miles of hiking. A paucity of parking assures solitude for those sauntering further.

As repast, just north of Poets' Walk is Bard College whose cafeteria offers nutritious, organic, farm fresh food. Just south, at the intersection with Route 199, is a substantial fruit and vegetable stand.

Maps of Poets' Walk and all the Scenic Hudson parks are available at ScenicHudson.org. Information on Ferncliff Forest is available at FerncliffForest.org. These parks coupled with lunch make for an ideal day trip.



Poets' Walk trellis



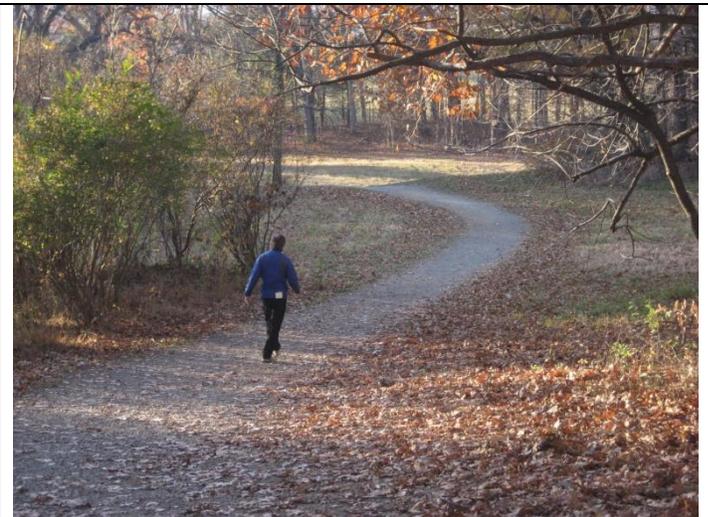
Poets' Walk gazebo



Poets' Walk map



Overlook Pavilion



Poets' Walk pathway



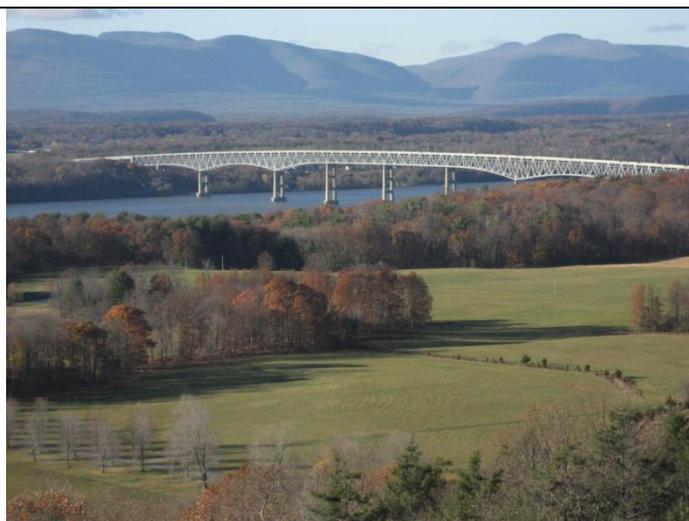
Poets' Walk bluebird house



Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge



Ferncliff Forest fire tower



View from Ferncliff Forest fire tower