A Pennsylvania Recreational Guide for Norristown Farm Park

Norristown Farm Park

Norristown Farm Park is a working farm in continuous use since colonial times. This 690-acre park is home to a wide range of plant and animal species. Within this country setting you will find hiking trails, a cooperative trout nursery, picnic areas, forests, flood plains, fallow and working farm fields, wetlands, and two stocked trout streams along with a number of historic structures dating back to the late 1700s.

Popular activities include walking, jogging, hiking, dog walking, bicycling, roller blading, picnicking, birdwatching, fishing, photography, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and sledding.

Under a 1992 lease agreement with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Montgomery County is responsible for the development, operation, maintenance, and administration of the park.

# Directions

Norristown Farm Park is located in Montgomery County just north of Norristown.

From the Pennsylvania Turnpike, take Exit 333 (Norristown) and follow signs for Germantown Pike West. Travel west approximately 4 miles on Germantown Pike to the intersection of Germantown Pike, North Wales Road, and Barley Sheaf Drive (ﬁrst light after railroad tracks). Turn left at light, onto Barley Sheaf Drive. Stay to the right to go through the main gate and follow signs to the park ofﬁce/visitor center.

# Reservations

For pavilion reservations, contact the park at 610-270-0215.

# Recreational Opportunities

TRAILS: **8 miles**

♿ The park has nearly 8 miles of paved trails and several miles of marked nature trails. All paved trails are designated as “shared use” and are primarily used for walking, roller blading, and bicycling. Many of these trails are accessible by wheelchair. Bicyclists in particular are reminded to observe the posted speed limit of 15mph and are to provide advanced notice when attempting to pass others. The nature trails are open for foot traffic only. Dog walkers are reminded to keep their pets on a 6’ leash and under control at all times. With the exception of a small portion of Upper Farm Road (between the main entrance and Lot 3), internal park roads are closed to vehicular traffic with the exception of park vehicles and farm equipment. Equestrian use is prohibited within the park.

♿ PICNIC AREAS: There are several small picnic shelters located throughout the park and two accessible picnic pavilions, both of which are located in the main day use area on Upper Farm Road. Each pavilion can accommodate 84 people. Restrooms, charcoal grills, volley ball nets, and horseshoe pits are available for public use. Those interested in using the pavilions must first contact the park office to confirm availability and complete the necessary paperwork. Note: certain rules apply to the use of the pavilions and are prominently posted on the structures themselves.

FISHING: Two stock trout streams, Stony and Kepner creeks, meander through the park, eventually making their way to the Schuylkill River in Norristown. In addition to trout, anglers may catch a variety of panfish as well as the occasional bass, catfish, or eel. All Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission rules and regulations apply. A Pennsylvania fishing license and trout stamp are required for persons 16 years of age and older. Fishing is restricted to the parks hours of operation (sunrise to sunset). Camping, campfires, and overnight fishing are prohibited.

BIRDWATCHING: Due to diverse habitats, over 170 species of birds have been recorded in the park. Area birdwatchers are continually drawn to the park in hopes of catching sight of a new species, or rare bird to add to their personal life list. In conjunction with park staff, volunteers monitor and maintain a number of song bird nest boxes throughout the park. Data collected by the monitors is reported to Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s NestWatch. The statistics provided are used to track the diversity of species, nesting success rates, and population trends. The park also participates in Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count and Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Project FeederWatch.

A one-acre farm pond sits at the top of the Hay Barn Hill. While not stocked, or suitable for fishing due to its limited depth, the site is popular with both resident and migratory bird species. The enclosed viewing blind allows for close up observation and photography.

Please note that while much of the park is open to exploration, the agricultural fields are off limits during the growing season (April through October).

# Learn, Experience, Connect

The park’s naturalist offers a wide range of educational programs and activities throughout the year. Information on upcoming events can be found by visiting the park office, checking the park’s social media sites, or at [www.montcopa.org/874/Norristown-Farm-Park](http://www.montcopa.org/874/Norristown-Farm-Park). Most programs are free, however, some carry a nominal fee to help cover the cost of materials or supplies.

# History

The Farm Park was once part of a larger tract of land owned by William Penn. Known as the Manor of Williamstadt, it encompassed some 7,000 acres. While away in England, Penn’s son, William Penn Jr., sold the land to Isaac Norris and William Trent, after whom present day Norristown and Trenton, New Jersey were named. The land was further subdivided and in 1744, a portion was sold to James Shannon, who built the Shannon Mansion and a nearby springhouse in 1764. The Getty Cottage, located directly behind the Shannon Mansion was built in 1802.

In 1777, the British army marched through this area burning at least one gunpowder mill and several homes along the way.

The Castner House was built by John Castner, a cordwainer (shoemaker), in 1802. In addition to its date stone, the house features a boot symbol made of stone, which is located on the south facing gable of the house.

In 1876, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a law giving the state permission to buy land on which to build hospitals. Norristown State Hospital was built as one of the mandated facilities. The institution was nearly 1,000 acres in size and included much of the present day park. The facility was used by the state for both agricultural and therapeutic purposes. Patients worked on the farm growing crops and raising animals as part of their treatment program. Further, the hospital farm served to train would be farm managers, and also as an “Alternative Service Program” for conscientious objectors who, because of their religious beliefs could not participate in armed military conflicts.

It was commonly believed that patients who worked the farm recovered more quickly. In 1975, the state changed its policy, stating that farm work did not help patients recover more quickly. They also found that it was less expensive and more practical to buy food than to grow it themselves. So while the hospital continues to operate to this day, the farm that once supported it, was eventually phased out.

The Department of Agriculture took responsibility for the land when the farming operations ceased. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Bureau of State Parks, took over the property in 1987 thanks to the legislative efforts of Senator Edwin G. Holl. In 1992, Montgomery County leased 690 acres from DCNR and created the Norristown Farm Park. The park was officially dedicated in 1995. Montgomery County continues to maintain and operate the park as a passive recreation facility in partnership with DCNR. Today, some 400 acres are actively farmed by a tenant farmer, allowing visitors to see an unusual site in the midst of this urban environment.

THE MILLENNIUM GROVE: Adjacent to the park office is the Millennium Grove, one of two sites in Pennsylvania selected by the American Forest Foundation and the White House Millennium Grove Council to promote the planting of historic tree groves in each state.

These trees have been propagated to continue the lineage of trees touched by important figures

in our nation’s history. The American Forest Foundation provided the initial 100 seedlings to SmithKline Beecham for donation to the Millennium Grove project at the park. Planted in the year 2000 by park staff, these seedlings are from 21 parent trees of historic significance. Representative trees have a plaque at their base which identifies the species and its history.

# Nearby Attractions

Information on nearby attractions is available from **Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board**. 610-834-1550. www.valleyforge.org

**Evansburg State Park** is located between Norristown and Collegeville. The park offers a signiﬁcant area of green space and relative solitude in an urbanized area. Its main natural feature, the Skippack Creek, has dissected the land into ridges and valleys that create feelings of enclosures and provides scenic views. 610-409-1150

**Fort Washington State Park** consists of 493 acres in eastern Montgomery County. It takes its name from the temporary fort built by George Washington’s troops in the fall of 1777, before heading to Valley Forge. 215-591-5250

Rich in modern recreational facilities and historical significance, Fort Washington blossoms with flowering dogwood in the spring. The park is popular with hikers and picnickers. Other recreational activities include fishing, disc golfing, softball, and camping.

# Protect and Preserve Our Parks

Please make your visit safe and enjoyable. Obey all posted rules and regulations and respect fellow visitors and the resources of the park.

• Be prepared and bring the proper equipment. Natural areas may possess hazards. Your personal safety and that of your family are your responsibility.

• Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

• Because uncontrolled pets may chase wildlife or frighten visitors, pets must be physically controlled, attended at all times, and on a leash, caged, or crated. Electronic fences and leashes are prohibited.

• Please recycle. Place trash accumulated during your stay in proper receptacles, or take it home with you.

• Prevent forest fires by having a fire in proper facilities and properly disposing of hot coals. Do not leave a fire unattended.

• Do your part to keep wildlife wild! Enjoy wildlife from a safe distance and do not feed or approach wild animals.

• Please park only in designated areas and obey all traffic regulations.

# Access for People with Disabilities

♿ This symbol indicates facilities and activities that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible for people with disabilities. This publication text is available in alternative formats.

If you need an accommodation to participate in park activities due to a disability, please contact the park you plan to visit.

# In an Emergency

Call 911 and contact a park employee. Directions to the nearest hospital are posted on bulletin boards and at the park office.

**NEAREST HOSPITAL**

Einstein Medical Center Montgomery

559 W Germantown Pike

East Norriton, PA 19403

484-622-1000

From the park’s main exit (intersection of Germantown Pike/North Wales Avenue), turn left to head west on Germantown Pike. Turn right at the first traffic light onto Einstein Way and follow signs to hospital/emergency room.

# For More Information Contact:

Norristown Farm Park

2500 Upper Farm Road

Norristown, PA 19403

610-270-0215

ParkRegion4SP@pa.gov

# Information and Reservations

610-270-0215

www.montcopa.org

www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

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